Finding *une place pour toutes et tous* [a place for everyone]: Changing Landscapes of Art and Politics in Aubervilliers

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Introduction

“...in conversational encounters, brief and lengthy alike, individuals exchange accounts and observations of the landscape that consistently presuppose mutually held ideas of what it actually is, why its constituent places are important, and how it may intrude on the practical affairs of its inhabitants. Thus, if frequently by implication and allusion only, bits and pieces of a common worldview are given situated relevance and made temporarily accessible.”


After arriving at the Paris Charles de Gaulle airport, I decided to Uber directly to Aubervilliers, where I would make my home for the summer. I knew that Aubervilliers was accessible via the RER train, but with two suitcases in tow the prospect of avoiding stairs and crowded train cars won me over. I spoke with the driver, a younger man, comfortably in French, small words and short phrases, and he did not seem to think anything was particularly foreign about me. I thought my name, avec son “i-grec” [with its letter “y”],¹ would have immediately marked me as an English speaker. This thought ran through my head as I watched the bleariness of the morning sky dissipate as the sun cracked through the clouds and commuters clogged the roundabouts. Stuck in a traffic circle, I became more aware that he was playing music from his phone, rap mostly, and after seeing a familiar name or two flash on the screen I found the courage to ask him about it.

“C’est qui ça? [Who is this?]”

¹ Throughout this work, I provide bracketed English translations directly following the italicized original French.
He lit up, mentioned the name, and then followed-up with, “tu aimes le rap conscient? [you like political rap?]”

I responded that yes, I did. Though I understood the words in his question, I had never heard that particular phrase before—not even explicitly in English and even though I was a fan of rap music. As we chatted about artists, I asked if he knew American rappers—he smiled, saying that he knew some but expressed that he was not an expert. I asked about my personal favorite French rap duo, Bigflo et Oli. He said “en France il n’y a que Bigflo et Oli. [In France, there’s only Bigflo et Oli.]” I felt validated in my appreciation of them, and this interaction seemed to affirm that I could, in fact, do fieldwork centered around music and politics.

Our conversation dwindled until he asked where in Aubervilliers I lived. Hearing that I did not live there, he looked back at me through the rearview mirror with an "oh" as I explained I was on vacation from the States “ou quelque chose comme ça. [or something like that.]” My mind drifted as I wondered what the mention of Aubervilliers meant to my driver. What imaginings and particularities might he overlay when he noticed this place, my destination?

My ruminating waned in the soothing rhythm of traffic, the hybrid car’s engine purring and falling to a hush in time with the driver’s foot on the gas and brake. As the sky continued to lighten I looked out at the landscape, noting that I did not yet have a sense of how Aubervilliers would really look and feel. To ground myself, I glanced out the car windows, taking in the squat two- and three-story buildings that lined the roads, a sharp contrast to the iconic Haussmannian apartment buildings that are seemingly synonymous with the inner city of Paris. Construction trucks and sites speckled between
them, I pondered what they were making, or remaking, and for whom. I monitored the map directing my driver and as our blue dot drew near the area labeled “Aubervilliers,” I knew that only a short distance remained before my arrival. Interspersed along the roads were billboards advertising the town of Aubervilliers’ summer events and programming with well-designed images and eye-catching fonts. While the billboards flew out of sight before I could discern the events’ specifics, I was eager to learn more. If I attended these events, whom might I meet? Would I belong?

I was roused from my musing as we turned abruptly on to a narrower road, flanked on either side by small plastered houses with the same russet-colored roofs I had seen earlier in the ride. When we reached the end of the street, where there was some combination of a dead end and cul-de-sac—the driver asked me if “ici [here]” was okay. I gave a confident “oui [yes]” in reply despite my internal doubts. He helped me sort my suitcases, and I reminded him to listen to Chance the Rapper before he drove away.

The gate at the address was open, and a small set of three stairs led down to a narrow and overgrown path culminating with an open door. As I began the shuffling dance of moving my suitcases down the stone flagged steps and path, I noticed Pauline, my Airbnb host, walking in my direction to greet me. We spoke in French, as I told her I was bilingual when we arranged the accommodations. She was tall, with a pleasantly asymmetrical salt-and-pepper mop of hair and funky rectangular frames perched on her nose. She happily grabbed one of the suitcases and jostled it inside. I followed. We sat down in the small living area, where she let me know that Adam, her partner who stayed at the house sometimes, was still sleeping, so we should not be too loud.

Before I could sit down, she chimed at me, smiling, “un café? [coffee?]”
I smiled back, eager for something to break the staleness of airplane food still lingering on my palate. Pauline began hand-grinding the coffee as the sound of footsteps foretold Adam’s entrance. A tall man with dark eyes sporting short-clipped gray hair, Adam introduced himself with a timid English “hello” before Pauline said excitedly, “elle parle français [she speaks French].” Adam gave a small “ah bon? [oh really?]” before asking me more about the purpose of my stay in Aubervilliers. I explained that I was an anthropologist studying the relationship between music and politics in Aubervilliers. As he listened, with sleep still clouded around him, his eyes widened slightly and eyebrows raised when I shared the line of inquiry for my project. They were both keen to hear more; Pauline, in between turns of the coffee grinder, rattled off the names of people—from politicians to neighbors to local dance instructors—with whom she suggested I speak.

Setting down the coffee before us, she also produced a map of Aubervilliers, whirring into a description of its communist history, and how the commune [township, municipality] of Aubervilliers and the many quartiers [neighborhoods] within it (Landy, la Plaine, la Maladrerie, Quatres chemins and others) exist under the broader umbrella of the département de la Seine-Saint-Denis [the county of Seine-Saint-Denis]. As she began to distinguish the different areas of the city, she also marked and plotted the distances of two métro [metro] stations, a few bus and Vélib’ [city bike] stops, and drew out the walk to the nearby RER train station.

Pauline paused, turning to Adam, and exclaimed how fortunate my timing was. Aubervilliers was undergoing vast change as more people moved to the banlieue [suburb] and the construction of new houses and buildings accelerated to match the growing
demand. As she ground fresh beans for another pair of coffees, she gestured with her elbow through the window, across the street, where she explained that an older woman who is Portuguese was going to move out of Aubervilliers, where her family had lived for generations, prompting an aside about the effects of the influx of newcomers on housing prices and social dynamics. I noted the parallels between Aubervilliers and Washington, DC, where new investments and developments are also altering long-standing status quos for a number of neighborhoods and their populations. Pauline nodded at this, her mind and speech quickly shifting back to mentioning other people with whom I should connect.

Pauline spoke liltingly, leaping from one idea to the next as I attempted to scribble on the map my own notes about music, neighborhood names, historical asides, and commentary on Chinese investors’ burgeoning interest in the area. Small circles, scribbles, and arrows littered the map as she marked places that I should visit or contact to speak with the musicians and politicians she mentioned. She seemed to be speaking in double time, and whenever I thought a pause signaled a break to tour me around to my room, she would instead offer me “un café? [another coffee?]” and continue anew her mapping and mentioning.

Five cups of coffee and three book recommendations later, Adam seemed to pick up on my growing fatigue and suggested aloud that I was probably tired after my travels. I asked if my room was upstairs, and Pauline confirmed. I began moving one suitcase down the short hall before Pauline insisted she carry them both up the narrow stairs, which she explained were haphazardly constructed in the sixties when the former farmhouse was expanded. Pauline shuffled around the room, and as she ran her hand
through her short hair she gestured out the bedroom window to explain that a family across the street was building a new home and that there would be occasional construction noise in the morning. As if on cue, a jackhammer began to rumble. She demonstrated how to open and close my front-facing window, and I nodded mindlessly as she showed me the room’s closet, where the linens were stored. I thought about who would move into the new house across the street, and when she left, I slept.

Arriving in Aubervilliers, I imagined myself interviewing countless politicians and musicians and employing participant observation at political meetings and concerts. I expected to produce an ethnographic work that would demonstrate, on a micro-scale, the texture and dynamism that exists within music and politics of Aubervilliers as a northern banlieue of Paris. As I interviewed and attended events, however, it became clear that music alone was too confining of a category; it was too often discussed in relation to—or physically located alongside—other artistic efforts. Thus, I expanded my inquiry to a broader array of art alongside politics. Furthermore, as I filtered through my recollections—my first day Uber driver’s questioning of my “vacances [vacation],” the way in which Pauline mapped out pinpointed art and music locations, and other subsequent interviews—I began to understand that for my interlocutors and in my fieldwork more broadly, meanings and subjects of art and politics were repeatedly framed in terms of how people and entities interpret, interact, and move within places, shaping landscapes. My first field notes entry also reflected this centering of the arts within landscape, stating “the art comes from the edges, banlieues.” As I attended events and noticed maire [mayor] Mériem Derkaoui’s, and other politicians’ repeated emphasis on Aubervilliers as a commune in where there is une place pour toutes et tous [a place for
everyone], I recognized that this word choice was strategic, demonstrating the necessity of couching understanding, and belonging, in terms of place. So, after many conversations and experiences, I determined that art and politics, unattached to place—the meanings that underlie (Fredette, 2014, p. 127) space—were too simplistic in relation to the complex and diverse commune they engage within and too flat in terms of the analyses they could prompt.

Working to understand messy interactions of art and politics in particular places in Aubervilliers, this project is an expansion of research I conducted throughout my undergraduate program and first half of my graduate program, in which I examined how media discourse constructs the suburbs—of Paris, specifically—as sites of inherent disorder that house problematic populations, much like how the media in the United States constructs a public understanding of inner-cities (Fredette, 2014, p. 127). My academic work began to parse out how Parisian suburbs are rendered political subjects via political interventions, and how, as the works of Milne (2010) and Oscherwitz (2004) note, musical performance and expression in suburbs wield the political purpose and power to counter these imposed interventions and imaginings of suburban disorder and flatness.

This project, then, originated as a way to illustrate how one northern Parisian suburb, Aubervilliers, uses art as a political tool to challenge monolithic conceptions of banlieues as unremarkable locales bereft of culture and complexity. I selected Aubervilliers for its cultural diversity and history, which disrupt the typical mediated image of a Parisian banlieue. Indeed, Nadia Kiwan (2009), a faculty member of the French Department at the University of Aberdeen who also conducted fieldwork in
Aubervilliers, notes that “[Aubervilliers has]...a certain sense of itself as a historical entity. It is a banlieue populaire, with a communist tradition, as opposed to being an isolated and soulless zone of tower blocks” (p. 79). Out of a total population of roughly 84,000, the municipality has a diverse population composed of nearly 40 percent foreigners (NAT1 - Population par sexe, âge et nationalité en 2015, 2018), and, as I would later learn from Aubervilliers’ Directeur de la vie associative et des relations internationales [Director of community organizations and international relations], 108 nationalities and 160 languages represented (C. Semedo, personal communication, January 4, 2001). Aubervilliers caught my eye when I began my research as it was often flagged as an up-and-coming banlieue “just north of Paris’ nineteenth arrondissement” (Kiwan, 2009, p. 78). These factors, along with the fact that housing was easier to find in the area, prompted me to set Aubervilliers as my field site.
Central Argument

This interdisciplinary and sensory “ethnography of landscape” (Mathews, 2018, p. 389) challenges simplistic readings and constructions of Parisian banlieues. I strive to parse out the ways in which art and politics in Aubervilliers are intermingled, entangled, messily constructed, and multi-layered, and how these interminglings are exhibited in and dramatically reconfigure specific relationships between places and people in Aubervilliers. Like Shannon Lee Dawdy’s (2016) Patina, my work is inspired by the urban landscape analysis of Walter Benjamin’s Arcades Project (2009). Following Benjamin, I often recalled the image of an urban flâneuse [wanderer], as I walked within and observed the layers and palimpsests of history and relationships that exist within places in Aubervilliers. My work contributes to a family of analyses and dissertations that have touched on topics surrounding artists and geography in and around Paris, urban renewal and gentrification in the Seine-Saint-Denis, and landscapes of changing populations and affiliations in and around Paris (Bacqué and Sintomer, 2001; Billier, 2011; Clerval, 2011; Demoulin, Alsaint, Bellavoine, Fol, & Fuzier, 2016; Laister, 2015; Maschio Fioravanti, 2015; Newman, 2011; Newman et al., 2011; Roche, 2011).

Throughout my ethnographic analysis, art is delimited, and I consider art to be inclusive of all “artistic practices…‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility” (Rancière, 2013, p. 8). I acknowledge the arts of curating coworking and studio spaces, music, jam-making, guitar-making, painting, dancing, and the posters used to promote events and places, among others. I allow politics to encompass practices relating to “the making of...decisions which affect
how people order their affairs and control their resources. How such decisions are arrived at and by whom; how those who make them are appointed, controlled and replaced; the limits within which they act; the nature of their authority and power” (Lewis, 1985, p. 282). This framing of politics is therefore not confined to governmental structures or officials; it is also applicable to private companies and entities, individuals, and initiatives. In this sense, politics lives in places. This politics becomes visible in terms of who is able to engage in particular art places, who has control over those art places, and who feels included and able to belong in these art places as part of a larger shifting urban landscape.

Furthermore, this work’s examination of art and politics is fundamentally interdisciplinary. To understand the conversation and relationship between art and politics in place, I pull from geography, social science, art, and anthropology literatures. Specifically, I engage the concepts of “place-making” (Basso, 1996, p. 5)—how people imagine and build upon past events and, I add, the present and future, in places—gentrification, and “culture of belonging” (hooks, 2009, p. 13), in order to grapple with the layered landscapes and experiences that undergird the dynamic relationship between politics and art in particular places in Aubervilliers. I contend, like other scholars, that grounding this work in specific places enables me to situate my analytical lens more directly in terms of the quotidian, dynamic, lived practices and experiences of placemaking, gentrification, and belonging this project tackles (Wynn and Yetis-Bayraktar, 2016). Situated in places and bolstered with these analytical concepts, I seek to engage in a discussion of how, to what extent, new art places contribute to an Aubervilliers in which there is une place pour toutes et tous.
To engage these interdisciplinary concepts and demonstrate the relationship between art and politics in Aubervilliers, I present three ethnographic vignettes from my summer 2018 fieldwork. Each vignette centers on and is couched in events and moments I experienced in newer art places recently recontextualized over the past twenty years within the landscape of Aubervilliers. These vignettes—of Fort d’Aubervilliers, la Ferme Mazier, and la Villa Mais D’Ici—interlace my place-centered experiences and individual interviews with layered histories and contexts. This structure allows me to acknowledge my positionality—both the partiality and particularity of my involvement and lens (Haraway, 1988)—and provides the grounds for a depth of thick sensory description and analysis. A storied approach enables me to better understand how the complexity, movement, and intimacy of the events and moments in each place—and how they connect and intertwine—are shaped by interminglings of art and politics. Ultimately, this project demonstrates how these interminglings of art and politics, occurring in and around newer art places, are evidence of an evolution playing out in art places in Aubervilliers and thus changing its landscape. In that evolution, newer art places are engaging in exclusive placemaking that, while contributing to gentrification, also exerts a politics in which places and belongings are contextualized and shaped to prioritize white, privileged individuals who do not always live in Aubervilliers, and not necessarily to accommodate and center the diverse population of Aubervilliers’ inhabitants.
Vignette I: *Fort d’Aubervilliers*

As I slowly began to sleep off my jet lag over the days following my arrival in Aubervilliers, the map from Pauline became my reorienting tool. In my first week, I spent days walking around the *commune* to bring the flatness of the map to life, surrounded by people and things in place, I was immersed in “the mundane practices through which I learned to perceive multiple ontologies, histories” (Mathews, 2018, p. 406). Between walking and observing, I also began to make note of the places in Aubervilliers I had researched long in advance and planned to visit.

Early in my research process, I flagged *Fort d’Aubervilliers* as one of these places. The Fort entered my frame of reference while I perused Instagram for images that would provide me with a sense of Aubervilliers’ landscape. I found images of *casemates* [military bunkers] in *Fort d’Aubervilliers* that an organization, Fort Recup, transformed into trendy rental coworking, party, and performance spaces (Fort Recup, 2018). The aesthetics and hip appearance of the bunkers caught my eye and pulled me in; they stood in contrast to the images of small, quotidian houses and shops that also populated the results of my Aubervilliers’ Instagram search. Upon further research, I learned that *Fort d’Aubervilliers*, built in the first part of the nineteenth century, has served many roles (FORT D’AUBERVILLIERS, n.d.). In 1870, the Fort was a military outpost during the Siege of Paris before its later use as a scientific testing facility and a site of German invasion and occupation from 1940 through 1944 (FORT D’AUBERVILLIERS, n.d.). It was used as an auto yard, then a dump, and then finally as the location of a street art festival in 2014 (FORT D’AUBERVILLIERS, n.d.). Absorbing these layers of history and growing more curious, I immediately paid the 18.50 euros to register for Fort
Recup’s June afternoon guided tour of Fort d’Aubervilliers, a date roughly one week into my summer fieldwork. I was eager to understand and perceive what relationships between art and politics Fort d’Aubervilliers would intermingle and contextualize in place.

Fort Recup’s website articulates that two founders created the organization in 2016 with the vision to “réactiver des espaces délaissés et leur donner une nouvelle vie en respectant leurs convictions liées au développement durable [reactivate abandoned spaces and give them a new life, respecting their beliefs tied to sustainable development]” and to “créer un laboratoire de solutions locales innovantes et une plateforme communautaire engagée, autour des nouveaux enjeux du développement durable urbain [create a laboratory of local, innovator solutions and an engaged community platform, surrounding new urban development challenges]” (RECUP PARIS PRÉSENTE FORT RECUP, n.d.) at Fort d’Aubervilliers specifically. Further research informed me that Fort Recup was a project under the umbrella of the larger organization, Recup Paris, which “intervenons au croisement de l’art, de la culture et du développement durable. Notre mission consiste à Récupérer, Raviver et Recommencer [intervenes at the crossroads of art, culture, and sustainability. Our mission is to Recover, Revive and Repeat]” (A PROPOS, 2017). Recup Paris’ website also employed language describing the desire “pour développer un lieu et une communauté dédiés à la créativité [to develop a space and a community dedicated to creativity]” (A PROPOS, 2017).

This articulated desire to transform abandoned spaces, indicated by repeated use of the “re-” prefixes, made it clear that Fort Recup was actively placemaking, which Keith Basso (1996) envisions as “multiple acts of remembering and imagining which
inform each other in complex ways” (p. 5). Fort Recup’s placemaking, evidenced in its purpose and mission, was comprised of a decision to remember *Fort d’Aubervilliers*, pre-Fort Recup intervention, as a stagnant place, “*délaisssés [abandoned]***” (RECUP PARIS PRÉSENTE FORT RECUP, n.d.), lacking identity and importance, and choosing to imagine its future as an attraction for presumably young, hip, working people. Still, I could not help but layer political questions over these missions. If the term “Recup” from the organization’s name implied recuperation, Fort Recup was implying, in the context of their vision, that their presence was required in order to re-do and re-create an art place out of the emptiness that they presume existed before their intervention. Thus, Fort Recup and Recup Paris’ placemaking, signaled with the use of “re-” prefixes, centers around the organization’s actions and privilege more than the mentioned “*une plateforme communautaire engagée [community engaged platform]***” (RECUP PARIS PRÉSENTE FORT RECUP, n.d.), and so suggesting the organization’s work was a necessary outside impetus—to provide meaning and validity to the place. This form of placemaking echoes other place development projects that have occurred in “predominately immigrant” (Newman, 2011, p. 192) areas in and around Paris that reinforce “the…expertise and dominance” (Newman 2011, p. 194) of privileged actors, like Fort Recup, and do not imply or engender the involvement of the diverse community of area inhabitants.

Here, place-names have power and demonstrate meaning, as Keith Basso (1996) suggests, and Fort Recup’s particular use of “re-” prefixes is a neocolonial act, whereby “redevelopment is often couched in military language, as a reconquest of ‘sensitive’ [or, in this case, empty or barren] areas….This language is not innocent. It stands in a tradition of treating migrants from the colonies as political risks” (Kipfer, 2015, p. 614).
Therefore, cloaked in language of discovery and renewal, this organization’s place name, Fort Recup, already establishes a sense of outsider\(^2\) presence in the Fort, leaving me to question—in advance of my visit—who was allowed to act within, to control, this place? While Fort Recup and Recup Paris’ messages hinted at connectivity with the local area and community engagement, I wondered if I would find this “croisement de l’art, de la culture et du développement durable [crossroad of art, culture, and sustainability]” (RECUP PARIS PRÉSENTE FORT RECUP, n.d.) truly constructive of a “culture of belonging...in which there is ‘intimate connection with the land to which one belongs, empathic relationship to animals, self-restraint, custodial conservation, deliberateness, balance, expressiveness, generosity, egalitarianism, mutuality, affinity for alternative modes of knowing, inclusiveness, nonviolent conflict resolution, and openness to spirit’” (hooks, 2009, p. 13) in Aubervilliers?

The day before for my Fort Recup guided visit, I scanned the map from Pauline, finding *Fort d’Aubervilliers* at the eastern border of Aubervilliers, a green area that is easy to recognize from the map’s aerial view due to its oddly geometric shape, some variation of a pentagon. Fort Recup provided information regarding where to meet for the guided visit, but I decided to orient myself in advance, just to be sure. It was a sunny afternoon, and as I was preparing to leave I told Pauline where I was going, mentioning my Fort Recup guided visit of *Fort d’Aubervilliers*. She shrugged, understanding that I was speaking about the Fort, but noting that she had never heard of Fort Recup. A simultaneous worry and thrill ran through me. Somehow, her lack of knowledge validated

\(^2\) While writing, I struggled to find an appropriate word, and decided that “outsider,” here, denotes individuals who do not live in Aubervilliers but who nevertheless come to Aubervilliers to take up place, while not necessarily engaging with broader communities in Aubervilliers.
the intrigue of Fort Recup; conversely, this also forced me to question the accessibility of
the organization. The fact that Pauline, living in Aubervilliers for seven years and an
involved participant within local art organizations, did not know of Fort Recup already
flagged the organization’s struggle to develop an inclusive “culture of belonging” (hooks,
2009, p. 13) for Aubervilliers’ diverse and long-term inhabitants. Nevertheless,
mentioning the next day’s date reminded Pauline that the maire’s [mayor’s] office was
hosting a guided tour of Aubervilliers. She passed me the flyer, emphasizing that it would
be a great opportunity for me to get to know the town. The flyer read “À LA
DÉCOUVERTE D’AUBERVILLIERS...Que vous soyez à Aubervilliers depuis de
nombreuses années ou que vous venez tout juste de vous installer, la Municipalité vous
propose une visite guidée en car [DISCOVERING AUBERVILLIERS...Whether you
have been in Aubervilliers many years or you are just settling here, the municipality
offers you a guided visit by car]” (Figure 1). This language signaled a desire for
community engagement not unlike the language of Fort Recup’s mission, and, noting that
the time of the municipal guided visit did not overlap with my Fort Recup guided visit,
my mind was already comparing the inclusivity, and belongings, of the municipality
versus Fort Recup.

My walk from Pauline’s home on the western edge of Aubervilliers to Fort
d’Aubervilliers was about twenty-five minutes. I strolled along Avenue Jean Jaurès, after
filling my métro pass for the week at the Fort d’Aubervilliers métro station just north of
the Fort itself. From my street-level vantage point, the inside, size, and overall existence
of the Fort was practically imperceptible. The area where I imagined there would be a
grand, secured entrance was instead blocked by low cement barriers, beyond which was a
gravel path fading to a wooded area fifteen feet off the sidewalk. Next to this small path was a large, round wooden building that I recognized as the horse theater, Zingaro, that Pauline marked on my map upon my arrival. Making note of the path’s location, I slowly walked back to Pauline’s, thinking about Zingaro and looking forward to the next day’s events.

When I arrived the next morning at l’Hôtel de Ville [town hall], the square outside the front doors was buzzing with activity. Children and adults were assembled, chanting and handing out flyers that warned that the Aubervilliers’ music conservatory was in danger, citing the loss of staff and low number of cultural events as contributing causes, and urging the public to sign an online petition “si vous pensez que l’art n’est pas destiné qu’à un élite [if you think that art is not only for the elite]” (Figure 2). Again, this language flagged how the arts intermingle with politics, specifically who controls the decisions, ordering, and access to art places in Aubervilliers. The assembly marked the desire for art places that are not elite but that provide art access such that there is une place pour toutes et tous. Furthermore, the placement of the gathering in front of l’Hôtel de Ville, at the same time as the start of the guided visit, signaled that residents cite the municipal government as a key player, a maker of decisions related to the arts. I accepted a flyer and walked inside l’Hôtel de Ville, where the atmosphere was equally bustling. I quickly checked in with the reception tables, providing my email before I was offered a welcome bag and told to go upstairs for opening remarks.

Upstairs, I recognized the maire walking around and mingling amongst the crowd of about eighty attendees. The attendees were seemingly representative of Aubervilliers’ population: a diverse mix of ages, genders, and ethnicities. Wandering around the
meeting room, I felt out of place, and with every “bonjour [hello]” I announced to others as a greeting, I was constantly dreading that someone would somehow point out that I was not an authentic inhabitant of Aubervilliers. After about fifteen minutes of settling and shuffling, maire Mériem Derkaoui, a member of the Parti communiste français (French Communist Party, PCF) and maire of Aubervilliers since 2016, began her remarks. She stressed that Aubervilliers was first and foremost “une ville qui bouge [a town that is moving, shifting],” urging that, “tous et toutes ont sa place dans la commune [everyone has their place in the town].” I sensed that with these words she was actively placemaking: using inclusive language to imagine Aubervilliers as “une ville d’avenir [a town of the future],” an area containing places, that we would explore during the guided visit, where “egalitarianism…. [and] inclusiveness” (hooks, 2009, p. 13) construct a “culture of belonging” (hooks, 2009, p. 13) for the multiplicity of cultural identities and backgrounds of individuals living in Aubervilliers (Basso, 1996, p. 5). Consequently, she also confirmed how “the local dimension in cultural policies [in Aubervilliers] frequently translates itself on the ground into a wish to give policies an identity dimension…internally, to encourage the integration of population groups who, for social, spatial, and cultural reasons (often combined) tend to be subjected to varying degrees of exclusion” (Teillet, 2003, p. 184).

Next, we transitioned to the buses that would take us on our guided visit of key places of the commune. As I and the other attendees began to board the buses, Derkaoui, and the other maires adjoints [deputy mayors]—introduced throughout the opening remarks, divided themselves amongst the buses to serve as the visit narrators. I quickly chose to board the bus with maire Derkaoui. I sat next to a young woman who greeted me
with a kind “bonjour [hello],” and after a few moments of small talk, told me she had lived in Aubervilliers for two years. I described that I was on an extended visit and as our conversation ebbed, I was pulled into the narration of maire Derkaoui. As we drove around the town, she mentioned the extensive construction many times, and also mentioned the town’s efforts to support the revitalization of a seventeenth century farm house called *la Ferme Mazier* (La Ferme Mazier, n.d.). As I typed notes on my phone, the bus jolted and jostled as the driver navigated the physical realities—narrow streets, potholes, closed roads—of the vacillation between construction and restoration maire Derkaoui described. Glancing to my side, I realized that my seat companion began to quietly read over the catalog of summer events that was inside the goody bag distributed at the event check-in at *l’Hôtel de Ville*, occasionally taking photos of particular event details to send to someone. Inspired by her, I opened my own canvas gift bag, only to find that I had been given the children’s version of the pamphlet. With cartoon characters and in Comic Sans text, it described different functions, aspects, scales, and politics of a commune. I humphed in amusement, acknowledging that this simpler version was probably more my speed. I continued to jot down notes as the bus meandered down streets to accommodate unexpected street closings and other results of the ongoing construction. Maire Derkaoui confidently announced sites and neighborhood names as we passed by and through them, and at times her words struggled to keep pace with the bus’s movement, instead speedily flashing from one place, one focal point’s description, context, and new development to the next.

After we visited a new city park, *parc Éli Lotar*, we headed, to my surprise, to *Fort d’Aubervilliers*. Until this moment, I had only associated activity in the Fort with
Fort Recup. The municipal identification of the Fort as a site that should be highlighted on a tour “À LA DÉCOUVERTE D’AUBERVILLIERS [discovering Aubervilliers]” (Figure 1) marks the Fort not only as a place subject to explicit political control, but also one in which the municipal leaders—in line with communist maire Derkaoui’s egalitarian message of une place pour toutes et tous—want community members to envision themselves to belong. The buses parked in the lot to the north of the Fort, in a bay near the Fort d’Aubervilliers métro station. As we left the buses, we connected to the gravel path that extended into the wooded area. At a small security station further up the path, Derkaoui mentioned something to the apathetic guards before they allowed the group through the Fort’s high green entrance gate. This interaction, between municipal leader and security officer, appeared to be maire Derkaoui’s performance of place control, while also revealing that public entrance to Fort d’Aubervilliers was not typically granted. Along the gravel path there was a scattering of walls, some with sections of graffiti scrawled along the sides (Figure 3). Once the path opened to a clearing, there was a large area in front of us, with a rectangular pavilion, not unlike something I imagined would cover an outdoor marketplace. The open area was flat and dusted with a light tan rocky soil.

The structure I noticed, as I gazed above, was framed with metal and rusted in many places. As the attendees gathered underneath it, maire Derkaoui spoke about the future construction of an Olympic-size swimming pool that would begin in the next few years. My attention to her explanation waxed and waned as my eyes flitted over the unfamiliar surroundings. She noted that the swimming pool would help increase the proportion of children in Aubervilliers who know how to swim. I wondered if other
attendees were able to envision the pool that maire Derkaoui described, or whether the openness of the place distracted them just as much as it did me. And as maire Derkaoui continued to elaborate on this future addition to Fort d’Aubervilliers, it became clear that she was once again engaging in placemaking, claiming the municipality’s political authority to control the place and meanings that undergird it as she “imagined by delimiting a field of workable possibilities. These possibilities are then exploited by acts of conjecture and speculation which build upon them and go beyond them to create possibilities of a new and original sort” (Basso, 1996, p. 5). Further still, she was also noting a future in which a swimming pool in this place would contribute to a “culture of belonging...in which there is [not only an] ‘intimate connection with the land to which one belongs [read: a better understanding of the Fort], [but also]...egalitarianism...[and] inclusiveness’” (hooks, 2009, p. 13) provided in the creation of more opportunities for a delimited group of the Aubervilliers’ population to develop a skill. We stayed in the covered place for about fifteen minutes before the end of maire Derkaoui’s explanation initiated a return to the buses, and ultimately, back to l’Hôtel de Ville.

At l’Hôtel de Ville, people were no longer handing out flyers and chanting about the music conservatory. Glancing at my phone, I realized that I had about an hour before my Fort Recup guided visit. Knowing that the walk to Fort d’Aubervilliers was about twenty-five minutes from l’Hôtel de Ville, I grabbed a pastry from my preferred bakery just across the street from l’Hôtel de Ville and began to walk back towards the Fort. As I walked, the noise of scattered construction mingled with the music I listened to on my phone. The afternoon sun was bright and while I walked I took off my jacket and put it inside my new canvas gift bag. Between bites I realized that I did not know how many
people would be attending the Fort Recup visit and I hoped there would be others there to chat with so I would not have to traverse security or wait alone. Nearing the gravel path from the Avenue Jean Jaurès, I pulled up the security pass that Fort Recup emailed for entry. I was only slightly early, and yet there was no one else around me as I walked up the beginning of the path. Nearing the security booth I had passed just an hour earlier, I greeted the two men there and showed them the security pass, they nodded minimally and I continued to walk ahead towards the opening gate until I noticed a few moments later I heard someone else speaking with them. I paused, looking back towards the booth as the newcomer neared me, asking “Tu est ici pour la visite? [You’re here for the visit?],” and flashing the green Fort Recup pass on his phone.

Once he was by my side, I confirmed and he shook my hand gently, introducing himself as Daniel, only pulling his hand away to adjust his logoless baseball hat and to push his black digital camera, slung across his body, to his side. We continued to walk along the gravel path, passing the same graffiti I noticed earlier with the maire’s tour. In between the crisp shuffles of our feet, Daniel asked if I was from Paris. Mentally, I felt simultaneously privileged and proud that my accent provoked assumed residence in Paris and curious about why Daniel had assumed I was from Paris and not Aubervilliers. Daniel’s assumption hinted at and marked a particular politics of place attributed to the Fort, a vision in which Parisians are more readily associated with frequenting, controlling, and ultimately, belonging in (Lewis, 1985, p. 282) newer arts places in Aubervilliers. Indeed, Daniel’s initial question also therefore demonstrates a “culture of belonging” (hooks, 2009, p. 13) in which those with a Parisian identity are more welcomed in the Fort’s “geography of place” (hooks, 2009, p. 9). Nevertheless, I
responded to let him know that I was actually a student from the United States doing research about Aubervilliers for the summer. When Daniel followed up, asking where specifically in the United States, I explained, “Madison, Wisconsin,” which I also followed with, “près de Chicago [close to Chicago],” a qualification I was accustomed to make in France to prompt understanding. He gave a sound of comprehension and then stated, “Oh, la ville d’Obama [Oh, Obama’s city].” I affirmed his comment with a chuckle, internally remarking that this explicit and immediate association of place belonging to a particular individual, revealing yet another layered enactment of place politics in Aubervilliers. If places, cities, and, therefore, communes belong to people, I began to consider that Fort d’Aubervilliers seemed to belong to recently arrived Parisians seeking new, creative, trendy places to explore.

We reached the open clearing near the rectangular pavilion and found the remains of a short stone barrier, where we both sat and agreed we should wait for others to arrive. As he tugged at his t-shirt to fan himself, Daniel asked me how long I was in the area. “Un mois et demi, pas très longtemps [a month and a half, not too long],” I replied, to which Daniel agreed but added that he was sure I was enjoying Paris. Daniel’s continued belief that I would be spending my time in Paris, and not Aubervilliers, even after I explained that my research was in and about Aubervilliers, perplexed me. Even after Daniel and I spent a few awkward moments squinting up at the sun and remarking on the niceness of the weather, my mind still swirled around his assumption of not only my Parisian-ness but also my frequentation of Paris and not Aubervilliers. Thinking perhaps this might be because he himself was from Paris, I inquired where he lived. Daniel informed me that he and his partner used to live in the 9ème arrondissement, and while
he still commutes to work in Paris, they have lived in Aubervilliers for two years. A short pause later, Daniel mentioned that he actually visited the Fort earlier in the day with the maire, gesturing over to the pavilion, and recapping the main points Derkaoui articulated.

Still, the combination of Daniel’s assumptions that I was from Paris and would be spending my time in Paris, and his own past as someone who lived in Paris and now lives in Aubervilliers, demonstrates how processes of gentrification are conversationally and physically layered into the landscapes of art places in Aubervilliers. Here, gentrification implies “the combination of demographic and economic changes accompanying sustained reinvestment in...areas. By implication, the social character of the neighbourhood changes, affecting shops, restaurants, places of worship, and public spaces” (Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers, 2013). Daniel’s continued mention of Paris not only implicitly framed Aubervilliers as less worthy of visitor time and engagement, but also framed the Fort, and Fort Recup’s work specifically, therefore, as a place that is attractive to and deserving of the time and engagement of visitors from Paris (as he thought I was) or people who have recently relocated to Aubervilliers from Paris. This framing of the Fort’s appeal to outsiders demonstrates how the Fort is a place that benefits from gentrification—attracting visitors who are new to Aubervilliers—and how it is a place that is seemingly far more accessible to people who are representative of Aubervilliers’ changing demographics, as more people move to the commune from Paris, and not necessarily to Aubervilliers’ overall population.

These inklings about gentrification were reinforced when Daniel and I noticed a group approaching us, a woman who looked about my age, with long hair that she flipped from side to side as she walked, and a young man with wiry glasses. Slightly ahead of
them and, gesturing at the pavilion, was a burly man with short hair, a paunch of a stomach, wearing cut-off jean shorts, a New Zealand sports jersey of some kind, and a rainbow lei. He walked a pastel pink single-gear road bike, and once they were close to us, introduced himself as Giles, the Fort Recup staff member who would be leading our visit. The two individuals alongside him, Henri and Claire, were our only other fellow visitors, from Paris and visiting from elsewhere in France, respectively. Standing in a cluster before we all began to walk along together, I became keenly aware of our whiteness and/or white passing, a reality that contrasted with the diversity of genders, ages, and ethnicities that stood in this place just two hours earlier during the “À LA DÉCOUVERTE D’AUBERVILLIERS” (Figure 1) event.

Thus, Fort Recup’s work in the Fort was marked in a political sense—in terms of who makes decisions, who has control, and who gets access—and productive of a place for Parisians and former Parisians who are newcomers to the neighborhood. In this way, Fort Recup, as it roots itself and reinvests in the Fort, although not necessarily intentionally, has contributed to a process of gentrification whereby Parisians are changing the demographics of the place and shaping economic expectations, as Fort Recup required payment for access to the place (Castree et al., 2013). This demonstrates how gentrification exudes a particular politics of control and access in place, and further demonstrates that Fort Recup contributes to a “culture of belonging” (hooks, 2009, p. 13) not necessarily for the commune overall, but for a particular population within the commune, like Daniel, and for those, often outsiders and not Aubervilliers residents, who seek out the Fort as a space of instagrammable trendiness divorced from the rest of the commune.
As we began our visit, Giles explained, not unlike maire Derkaoui, that after the military, and later police, moved out, the Fort became a junkyard (FORT D’AUBERVILLIERS, n.d.). The way he expressed the place’s junkyard phase emphasized emptiness; he described the place during that time as devoid of purpose, messy, unused. This period was framed in contrast with Fort Recup’s current project of reinvigorating the place and allowing new artists and individuals to make use of these military and junkyard remnants. With this description, spoken over the course of our visit, Giles revealed how Fort Recup engaged in placemaking, imagining the past of Fort d’Aubervilliers as unappealing and messy, thus positioning the present and future of Fort Recup’s work in the place as not simply custodial but meaningful and needed. Fort Recup interprets the past of the Fort to seemingly justify its right to place. As Keith Basso (1996) writes, “the character of the place...transfigured by thoughts of an earlier day, swiftly takes on a new and foreign look” (p. 4). Still, Fort Recup’s vision of placemaking does not account for the way in which “activity does not [necessarily] disappear from...localities after their supposed declines” (Jackson, 2012, p. 53) and works to affirm “underlying assumptions of what voices were deemed worthy to speak and be heard” (hooks, 2009, p. 104), in this case, Parisian people and organizations, like Fort Recup. Indeed, Fort Recup’s assumptions of activity and narrative about who participates and who is valued are inherently political, creating a selective “culture of belonging” (hooks, 2009, p. 13) that contrasts with the placemaking enacted by communist maire Derkaoui, whose vision positioned Fort d’Aubervilliers without reference to a lumpen past, focusing instead on its future as a place of communal skill learning and openness.
These visions of placemaking layer, overlap, and abut each other, adding to the **Fort d’Aubervilliers’** already complex palimpsest of histories, actors, and potentialities. And when Daniel mentioned the *maire’s* visit earlier in the day, Giles responded that Fort Recup was completely unaware that *maire* Derkaoui was hosting a visit that day. He went on to say something to the effect of “well they didn’t tell us.” This reaction articulates the dissonance that exists between Fort Recup and the municipality’s placemaking visions and thus the differing types of belonging they produce. While Fort Recup has crafted a trendy art place that attracts visitors from outside Aubervilliers and newer inhabitants of Aubervilliers, the organization has yet to fully embrace a placemaking vision inclusive of the diversity of inhabitants on the tour with the *maire* earlier in the day and inclusive therefore of the municipality’s desire to provide *une place pour toutes et tous* amidst the commune’s changing landscape.

To further demonstrate Fort Recup’s placemaking, as we passed large clearings, covered in light gravel and sand, Giles stressed multiple times over the course of our visit that Fort Recup spent hours cleaning up material from the Fort’s junkyard days, again emphasizing the Fort’s resemblance to a forgotten wasteland, physically and culturally, before the arrival of Fort Recup. This narrative fails to consider other scales of Fort activity and use that was not visible or readily apparent to the Fort Recup team due to the newness of the organization’s presence in the place. Specifically, Giles mentioned that the founder of Zingaro, the equestrian theater group founded in 1989 that neighbors the Fort to the north, informed Fort Recup, when the organization first arrived, that the Zingaro uses the Fort as rehearsal grounds for new performances, some of which involve fire displays (*Le Théâtre équestre Zingaro*, n.d.). The founder expressed a desire to
continue this practice and asked Fort Recup to allow it to go unreported to authorities. While Giles expressed that Fort Recup did not prohibit the practice or report it, shortly thereafter, authorities discovered Zingaro’s use of the Fort for practice and the group’s founder was banned from the Fort. Giles continued, saying that there is even a photo of the founder at the front gate so security can identify him and successfully bar his access. Still, this banishment reinforces how “The Parisian banlieue, like so many other places, is still governed through a focus on policing” (Angélil and Siress, 2012, p. 64). At Fort d’Aubervilliers, this policing is executed as the presence of Fort Recup coincided with heightened awareness of authorities whose actions effectively excluded members of the Aubervilliers’ community and their practices, stifling the potential for “nonviolent [or non-policied] conflict resolution” that would contribute to a more inclusive “culture of belonging” (hooks, 2009, p. 13) as a result.

While Fort Recup cannot be blamed for this banishment, this history nevertheless demonstrates how Fort Recup is shifting the “culture of belonging” (hooks, 2009, p. 13) and politics of control in the Fort towards individuals and groups who are outsiders, not from Aubervilliers. Whereas prior to Fort Recup’s arrival Zingaro was able to belong, to find a place in this place, and to use it as an artistic testing ground, the group is now excluded. Yet these practices are carefully elided in Giles’ placemaking narrative of Fort d’Aubervilliers’ barrenness pre-Fort Recup, which does not account for Zingaro’s use and its importance to part of the Aubervilliers’ community. Thus, this placemaking narrative denotes gentrification, whereby Fort Recup’s presence has changed “the social character of the neighbourhood” (Castree et al., 2013) by indirectly excluding Zingaro and creating a privileged place for predominantly white and recently-relocated Parisians. Fort Recup’s
contribution to the Fort’s changing social dynamics denies other groups, like Zingaro, and the broader diverse population of Aubervilliers, the claim to place within the Fort and to placemaking. Giles’ articulation of this history expressed an apathy towards Zingaro that reinforced his belief that pre-Fort Recup Fort d’Aubervilliers was a dump and stomping grounds for illicit activity. Framing history this way, Giles is placemaking in a way that also presented a politics of control that legitimized Fort Recup’s presence and control, admonishing Zingaro’s. Thus, Fort Recup exerts a politics of place that ranks the experiences and place of those from outside Aubervilliers and does not create a “culture of belonging…in which there is ‘affinity for alternative modes of knowing’” (hooks, 2009, p. 13), or in this case, alternative art (horse theater) practices and place use.

Approaching Fort Recup’s casemates that the organization transformed into their offices and spaces to rent for coworking and private parties (Figure 4), Giles explained that surrounding casemates were rented out and used by other artists, many of whom live outside of Aubervilliers or in Paris. The casemate that was available for party rentals was filled with eclectic furnishings and smelled like my favorite vintage store back home in Madison, Wisconsin. As I wandered around, Giles elaborated, telling us that the space has been used for parties, dance performances, and art shows. The individuals who used the space, I gathered from Giles’ remarks, were people who were not or did not live in and were not based in Aubervilliers. This again positions Fort Recup as a gentrifying actor whose reinvestment contributes to the creation of a locale for people coming to Aubervilliers to partake in the places Fort Recup has to offer, and not for residents of Aubervilliers. Indeed, the reality of whose arts (performances and parties) are included in Fort Recup’s place, as Ingrid Monson (1996) describes jazz improvisation, connotes a
political choice that is “‘saying something’” (p. 73). Whose art is presented articulates who and what are prioritized and “alter the geography” (Jackson, 2012, p. 68) of the place they exist within (Jackson, 2012, p. 24). With mostly people from outside of Aubervilliers, and also mostly people who are white-presenting or white-passing, processes of gentrification and selective belonging are exposed again. For example, Jean-Michel Pradel-Fraysse and Laurence Favory, two artists and teachers at the école des Beaux-Arts de Versailles [Versailles school of fine arts], work out of a casemate next to that of Fort Recup, and as Giles introduced their casemate to us and praised their work, this action demonstrated how elite Parisian identities are consistently privileged and legitimized in the Fort’s place (Revenu, 2017).

Moving into the Fort Recup coworking space next door, I was excited to see a handsome dog wander over to us, with a mouth seeming to smile through pants of hot breath. When I asked the dog’s name to no one in particular, Giles replied “Manouche,” and continued to explain that she belonged to an older man who has lived in the Fort since the 1970s. As I write this, I chuckle now that I know Manouche means gypsy, and so does Zingaro (Manouche, n.d.; Zingaro, n.d.). Even though Fort Recup’s placemaking did not prioritize or make room for certain elements and actors, like Zingaro, these histories are layered into places, popping up in unexpected ways, like, say, the name of a dog. Still, the interjection of Manouche demonstrates how things can “suddenly activate currents from the past that alter the present” (Lee Dawdy, 2016, p. 9). While Zingaro (gypsy) the historic theater company no longer belonged in the same place as Fort Recup, Manouche (gypsy) the dog was welcomed into the organization’s sleek coworking casemate with cooing and treats.
Sitting in the coworking casemate and sipping coffees, Claire asked Giles if Fort Recup has partnered with local organizations or events, pointing out that Fort Recup may be viewed as a source of gentrification and as an organization that caters to trendy, “bobos who appropriate working-class spaces and culture” (Gunther 2016, p. 114). Posed this question, Giles, standing at the front of the casemate, became slightly defensive, stating with a hint of frustration that while Fort Recup has attempted to be amicable to other local arts organizations, they do not seem interested or comfortable working with Fort Recup. This reveals, as Keith Basso (1996) writes, the way in which:

places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one is presently, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become. And that is not all. Place-based thoughts about the self lead commonly to thoughts of other things—other places, other people, other times, whole networks of associations that ramify unaccountably within the expanding spheres of awareness that they themselves engender. (p. 107)

Claire’s question sparked Giles’ self-reflection, pushing him to consider how Fort Recup’s actions and mission may not be accessible to or align with those of preexisting local organizations. Nevertheless, Giles’ frustration was increasingly contextualized for me over time. I maintained my closeness with Fort Recup via Instagram where I observed the organization’s collaboration with globally acclaimed musical groups like Major Lazer and Diplo, who filmed videos in Fort d’Aubervilliers around Fort Recup’s casemate (Fort Recup, 2019). Reflecting on this, I argue that the fact that this elite collaboration was more attainable and publicized than efforts and events between Fort Recup and local
organizations exemplifies Fort Recup’s promulgation of placemaking that imagines the Fort to belong to privileged individuals, like the Parisians and non-Aubervilliers dwelling individuals participating in the visit, Major Lazer, and Diplo. Therefore, this practice of placemaking reinforces a selective “culture of belonging” (hooks, 2009, p. 13) that is not available or accessible equality to Aubervilliers’ diverse inhabitants and organizations.

Perhaps Fort Recup is not ready to consider how its presence and placemaking in Fort d’Aubervilliers shape landscapes of belonging, gentrification. Nevertheless, if spaces are political, then places, wrapped up in meanings and memories, are doubly so (Fox & Riches, 2014, p. 227), and require attention and consideration because what—practices and people—these place include possess the power to “metaphorically open a space for seeing life differently” (Jackson, 2012, p. 212).

At the end of my Fort Recup visit, the four of us visitors lounged on the couches in the coworking casemate for a few hours. And, before leaving the Fort Recup casemate at the end of our visit, Giles kissed each of us on the cheeks and announced that we were all “friends of the Fort,” even extending invitations to an otherwise private dance performance the organization was hosting in one of the casemates the following weekend. This half-day experience provided me with the privilege of these connections, and I felt like I was an insider too quickly, possessing the right to a place I should not have. Walking past the same street art graffiti as I had on the visit with the maire, I began my own process of placemaking, attempting to imagine and reconcile layers of gentrification, control, and shifting belongings.

And yet, gentrification is not only attributable to outsiders. Listening to Giles speak about the artists in residence is the casemates surrounding Fort Recup’s, I
wondered how the project the maire discussed might also gentrify—reconstruct, affect, and change the “social character” (Castree et al., 2013) of public space—Fort d’Aubervilliers. Indeed, this vignette strives to underscore the messiness of placemaking and gentrification, and how these processes, driven by differing politics of place, demonstrate how Fort d’Aubervilliers, is “fluid, and alive; it pulses, palpitates, flows, and collides with other spaces” (Fox & Riches, 2014, p. 227). The Fort continues to be a place in which these layers coincide and conflict. In my time in Aubervilliers, the municipality worked with Grand Paris Aménagement, a government land developer, to finalize a plan for constructing new housing near the Fort starting in 2019 (Rampazzo, 2018; IDENTITÉ, n.d.). This project adds another filter of placemaking and politics to the Fort. Still, Fort Recup’s work to establish trendy coworking and other spaces continues, and in an interview with Aubervilliers’ local newspaper, a Fort Recup employee emphasized “C’est un bon moyen de roder la machine et j’espère que dans un an nous aurons encore plus d’espace, ici ou ailleurs, et que nous ferons des ateliers avec 300 personnes. Mais, pour le moment, nous démarrons à échelle humaine [It’s a good way of running it and I hope that in one year we will have even more space, here or elsewhere, and that we will create workshops for 300 people.]” (Rampazzo, 2018). Only time will tell how this palimpsest will continue to settle, who will belong in the place developed by Fort Recup, and who will be ordained new “friends of the Fort.”
Vignette II: *La Ferme Mazier*

In early July, as my research continued and the weather remained warm, dry, and sunny, “Auber’ Jazz Day” entered my frame of reference. While attending an outdoor film viewing in Aubervilliers’ Square Stalingrad, a man handed me a pamphlet detailing Jazz Day events, coordinated by the municipality in conjunction with local organizations. The name, I found, was deceiving; this “day” was actually a three-day, eleven-event affair. I took the pamphlet home with me, and I spent a portion of the next morning planning out which events I would attend. One event in particular seized my attention: *Jam et Jam* [Jam and Jam]. I received a separate handout promoting this event, and the title’s play on words, “*Jam comme confiture, / Jam comme session* [Jam like fruit preserves, / Jam like a session]” (Figure 5) combined with its overall simplistic and cute design, hooked me. Additionally, I noted that the location for the event was *la Ferme Mazier* [the Mazier Farm], a place I recalled the maire mentioning on our bus ride a few weeks earlier. I took a break from my planning to trot downstairs and ask Pauline if she knew of the upcoming events and if she would like to attend any of them with me.

Almost a month into my fieldwork, I was very friendly with Pauline and would often ask her about events or ask for her insight into local politics.

Pauline agreed to join me on my venture, especially since *la Ferme Mazier* was just a short walk from the house. The event was scheduled to run from early afternoon to evening, and as we walked over Pauline wondered aloud how the place would be set up for the event in between moments of hastily tousling her hair with her hands. Once we reached *La Ferme Mazier’s* street my attention gravitated to the sound of my blocky cork heels tapping on the cobbles of the sidewalk, echoing off of the buildings on either side.
of me. Our steps broke the tranquil silence resting over the street in the lazy warmth of the afternoon sun. The street seemed very still, the effect of the sleepy warmth of the languishing afternoon sun. Between heel clicks, the swing of music jingled ever louder as we drew near.

La Ferme Mazier was enclosed with two tall wooden doors, one of which was cracked open, and a man stood at the opening, wearing a band that marked him as security on his upper arm. He waived us in, and my eyes were pulled upwards. The place we entered was an atrium of sorts, open to the sky with alcoves sectioned off surrounding it (Figure 6). Low, backless wooden benches and pockets of tables with black plastic chairs sat before us, littered with a few people sitting, empty cups, and the toys and blankets of children who were busy wandering the alcoves. Under a tent to our left, a musical trio, enacted a jam session, playing jazz and reggae songs. To the right were two adjoining folding tables covered with pizza making supplies and ending with a wood fired stove. Also to our right was the other promised jam, the edible kind. On tables sat dozens of jars cooling, and near them were a woman and child attending vats of dark liquid, the beginnings of more cherry jam. Pauline walked near the music tent, announcing in an exhale as she walked away that she would get us both something to drink.

The whiteness in this place was noticeable as I glanced around and took a seat on an unoccupied bench. When Pauline returned and sat next to me, handing over a lukewarm beverage, she urged me to take note of the “prix libre [free price]” signs next to the makeshift bar and food making areas, citing that this philosophy as a product of the
The commune’s current communist reality and deeper *ceinture rouge,* or red belt, roots. With this commentary, Pauline rendered present the historical context of this lived practice, shirking the “‘pastness’ of the past” (Basso, 1996, p. 33), and bringing to light one way in which the coordinators of this event were actively placemaking, conceiving of “what happened here [in this case, in Aubervilliers]” (Basso, 1996, p. 5) and how these happenings bear on and are expressed within particular places, like *la Ferme Mazier.*

After a few moments of silence, Pauline continued, commenting that all those in attendance she either had never seen before or had only engaged with a few times as she knew they had recently settled or moved to Aubervilliers. When I followed up, asking what recently implied temporally, she clarified: within the last few years.

Pauline’s insight held a particular weight; I knew she often attended community meetings and participated in local events in Aubervilliers and thus better understood the diversity of the commune’s populace. Her work in cultural marketing, as she would later inform me in depth, “ça consiste de travailler autour des sociologies publiques de la culture de la fréquentation des spectacles....Élargir la fréquentation, avec des statisticiens, avec des anthropologues. Je travaille sur aubervilliers...projets de territoire, pour faire participer des habitants du territoire [this consists of working with public sociologists about event attendance….to expand attendance, with statisticians, anthropologists. I work in Aubervilliers...town projects, to make the town’s inhabitants participate]” (Pauline, personal communication, July 26, 2018). I knew that Pauline had the expertise to validate her perception of the place and the type of people it welcomed and included. Again, while we sat and observed, together absorbing the last set of the jam

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3 This term is used to describe the areas surrounding Paris (usually *banlieues*), in a belt shape, that historically supports the communist—red—party (Stovall, 1990).
session, Pauline commented that this event was very *bobo*—“cosmopolitan, upper-middle-class individual who espouses liberal politics” (Gunther, 2016, p. 105)—in line with the equally *bobo* identities of those in attendance, newer residents of Aubervilliers, and thus indicative of a larger trend in municipal event planning that appealed to white *bobos*. The attendees, therefore, represented the gentrification of this place; the newcomers that Pauline cited are transforming the social dynamics of the area (Castree et al., 2013). While Fort Recup created a force of gentrification from outside of Aubervilliers (Parisians, others who reside outside Aubervilliers), gentrification at *la Ferme Mazier*, as Pauline articulated, is the result of the preponderance of participation in this place by white, newer residents of Aubervilliers.

I layered this information upon what I had already observed: the majority of white bodies occupying this place, and now recognized this as another manifestation of gentrification. Indeed, other scholars, such as Demoulin et al. (2016), have also noted the homogenous nature of participants, in terms of race and class, in art places in Seine-Saint-Denis. Pondering this, I recalled that the municipality sponsored the event in conjunction with another organization. Looking back at the entrance, I noticed a schoolroom chalkboard with information about this organization. Called *la Pépinière* [plant nursery], the organization’s board read: “*Depuis 2016 nous organisons des événements ponctuels avec l’idée de partager une alimentation saine dans la Ferme Mazier...À terme, notre volonté est de pouvoir occuper ce lieu exceptionnel pour accompagner sa réhabilitation...de faire la Ferme Mazier un lieu vivant et ouvert à tous* [Since 2016 we have organized events with the idea of sharing wholesome food in *la Ferme Mazier*...Over time, our hope is to be able to occupy this exceptional place to
facilitate its rehabilitation...to make la Ferme Mazier a living place open to all)” (Figure 7). And yet, looking around me, while the place may be open to all, this event in particular was clearly attracting a select, privileged genre of individuals, as Pauline expressed.

Walking around in the different alcoves, I read posters that lined the walls, describing la Ferme Mazier’s connection to the agricultural past of Aubervilliers and other Parisian suburbs, where small farms like this one grew food for the city’s center throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Conversation between Marjetica Potrč, Séverine Roussel, Philippe Zourgane and Carlos Semedo*, 2011). These posters also presented photos of this agricultural past, and I reflected on the accessibility of these histories. These images and descriptions of la Ferme Mazier’s past were couched in histories of white labor that were potentially less relatable to the current diverse realities of the commune, and are therefore more accessible to the bobos in attendance than to others in the broader population. Indeed, this selective presentation of history contributes to a vision of placemaking that is not accessible to all. This inaccessibility is not unlike the way in which bell hooks (2009) articulates that the erasure of certain histories and the primacy of others predicates who can and cannot “find a place for myself [or, here, themselves] in this heritage” (p. 11). Thus, placemaking in la Ferme Mazier rests upon the explicit evocation of a heritage grounded in a monolithic background that does not necessarily allow for a diverse population to “find a place for” (hooks, 2009, p. 11) themselves. This elite belonging is evidenced in the predominantly bobo population in attendance at la Ferme Mazier’s event.
And while further research revealed that starting around 2011, and before 2016, another organization used la Ferme Mazier as a place of community gardening where “most of the people are foreigners from all kinds of countries who knew nothing of the history of Aubervilliers until they came to this garden” (Conversation between Marjetica Potrč, Séverine Roussel, Philippe Zourgane and Carlos Semedo*, 2011), the use of the place today by La Pépinière and the people the place attracts do not engender or represent multicultural inclusivity. Did the influx of white bobos make this type of inclusive gardening practice no longer workable? La Pépinière, while it was sharing the physical space of la Ferme Mazier, it was not espousing, or nursing, as its name might imply, a form of placemaking or belonging that was accessible to all. Thus, even as it seeks to create “un lieu vivant et ouvert à tous [a lively place open to all]” (Figure 7), la Pépinière, showcasing particular past stories, contributes to a politics of place in which experiences are made accessible and resonant to some and not to others. I puzzled as I read over the posters. If, as Carlos, Aubervilliers’ Directeur de la vie associative et des relations internationals, suggested, “on est connu pour la vitalité de nos structures associatives [we are known for the vitality of our organizations]” (C. Semedo, personal communication, July 16, 2018) in Aubervilliers, why not continue practices and initiatives that showcase how the farm could be used to celebrate or include other cultures and practices?

Thus, the municipality and la Pépinière were vying to maintain two visions of placemaking at la Ferme Mazier: one in which the commune’s communist present and past were expressed, and cost of entry and participation was free and couched in current communism and inclusivity, and one in which Aubervilliers’ bobo newcomers were
welcomed with a punny theme and quirky premise in the context of a deep agricultural past that la Pépinière sought to render present with jam and pizza making. These layered practices and politics of placemaking further illustrate how “any determinate and hence demarcated space necessarily embraces some things and excludes others” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 99). These intertwined acts of embrace and exclusion, here facilitated by the municipal government, are political, demonstrating who controls place of la Ferme Mazier.

Indeed, these acts of embrace and exclusion are not only political but also constitute a selective community of belonging for some, while other residents of Aubervilliers may not resonate with this place, and will be excluded, due to this presentation of an agricultural past, even if it is also draped in selective performances of the commune’s current communism. La Ferme Mazier’s emphasis on articulations of an agricultural past does not adequately contribute to processes of “building and sharing place-worlds” (Basso, 1996, p. 6) to allow attendees to imagine new forms of placemaking that might engender a new and broader “culture of belonging” (hooks, 2009, p. 13). The way in which these processes of placemaking contribute to certain belongings and not others may have broader consequences relating to who feels they are able to identify as a community member in Aubervilliers. As Keith Basso (1996) states, "relationships to places are lived most often in the company of other people, and it is on these communal occasions—when places are sensed together—that native views on the physical world become accessible to strangers" (p. 109). At Jam et Jam, I absorbed how the acts of a jam session and jam making, set within la Ferme Mazier, articulate through...
the arts, who is prioritized (Jackson, 2012, p. 24) in this place and the exclusivity of who, therefore, has a right to belong.

As the sun dipped lower in the sky, Pauline and I readied to leave la Ferme Mazier. Once again, with the tap of my heels against the cobbles measuring my distance from this place as we walked home, I remembered that Pauline’s house was also a small farm when it was first built at the turn of the twentieth century. She enjoyed telling the story of how the second family to own the place constructed an addition onto the farmhouse in the sixties to create more living room. I reflected on my own ability to further connect to the posters hanging at la Ferme Mazier now that I could connect that history to my own dwelling. But what about others who do not live in former farmhouses? Will la Ferme Mazier appeal to other heritages and histories in the future, and how will these layers exist in place?
Vignette III: *La Villa Mais D’Ici*

Founded in 2003, *La Villa Mais D’Ici*—in English, literally, “the villa but from here”—was the first place out of the three presented that I identified as a possible field site. I had researched the place in advance, and understood it to be, per the images on its website, a sort of Tim Burton-esque wonderland. Still, its slogan-like description “*friche culturelle de proximité* [neighborhood cultural wasteland]” (le projet, n.d.) jarred me. While I reasoned that the “*friche* [wasteland]” word choice may be a shortened reference to *friche industrielle* [abandoned industrial site], hinting at the fact that *La Villa Mais D’Ici*’s building was a former coal factory (le projet, n.d.), this phrasing still reinscribes the stereotypes of *banlieue* barrenness, lack of multifaceted culture, and singular identity as spaces of former industrial activity (Milne, 2010; Oscherwitz, 2004). This stereotype is reinscribed again in the website’s description of how “*compagnies et d’artistes en quête d’un lieu propice à l’épanouissement de leurs recherches* [groups and artists looking for a suitable place to help fulfill their projects]” (le projet, n.d.), founded *La Villa Mais D’Ici*, “*cette ancienne usine de charbon...aujourd’hui une friche culturelle de création en pleine ébullition* [this former coal factory...today a neighborhood cultural wasteland boiling with creation]” (le projet, n.d.). This contrast between past and present demonstrates the way in which *La Villa Mais D’Ici* is engaging in placemaking (Basso, 1996), framing and imagining their presence as transformative, injecting cultural, creative force into an empty *friche* [wasteland] of an Aubervilliers’ neighborhood.

This method of placemaking is not unlike Fort Recup’s; both hinge on colonial themes of reconstruction, “redevelopment...[and] *reconquest*” (Kipfer, 2015, p. 614). This placemaking language also serves to validate the political power that *La Villa Mais*
D’Ici is this place; it asserts that they have a right to “control resources” (Lewis, 1985, p. 282) of place—who occupies it—and also politically, and thus control the representation of that place. Indeed, image control is a political act. For instance, when asked what political strategy suburbs should adopt, Pauline immediately told me “Ben, changer l’image [Well, change their image]” (Pauline, personal communication, July 26, 2018). Nevertheless, I still questioned just how the specific on-site practices and perceptions of individuals at La Villa Mais D’Ici work to engage with and change the landscape of Aubervilliers.

It was lucky that when I arrived and Pauline supplied me with the map of Aubervilliers, she mentioned that Adam sometimes collaborated with Jean-Martin, an musician who, Pauline explained, has space at La Villa Mais D’Ici and with whom Adam was actually going to meet that morning. When Adam arrived back at the house in the evening, he presented me with a pamphlet directory from La Villa Mais D’Ici that listed all of the artists in residence. With this list as a guide, I reached out to many of the artists, and thankfully, some responded, informing me they would be willing to do interviews for this project.

I began with Jean-Martin. I agreed to meet him at La Villa Mais D’Ici on a weekday morning, and when I arrived before him, I fidgeted with the strap of my bag outside La Villa Mais D’Ici’s red door that was set into a larger red gate. I tried to open the door, but it was locked. I recalled that Jean-Martin said the door could be locked, in which case he told me he would meet me to let me in. Waiting, I felt awkward; as if I was soliciting a service to which I had no right. I heard the mumblings of conversations taking place over the red gate amidst a clamoring of the next door construction’s jackhammering
and rumblings. I checked the time on my phone. I wondered how such a large conglomeration of workshops and studios could appear so small from the outside. After a few minutes of waiting, and no sign of Jean-Martin, I gave him a call. He answered, surprisingly spritely for the early morning hour, and explained he was a block away, walking from the métro. With this explanation, I realized that this mention of a commute to Aubervilliers already marked Jean-Martin, while a member of La Villa Mais D’Ici’s community, as an outsider to the broader Aubervilliers-residing community. I spotted him, now half a block away, just beginning to pull his cell phone away from his ear as he sauntered towards me wearing a white seersucker suit and small, full moon sunglasses.

We greeted each other, and with the turn of his key, I was allowed to enter La Villa Mais D’Ici. Inside, he led me through the garden and the open main building, through a doorway, up a spindly wire spiral staircase that lasted a few steps too long for my taste, and into an expansive and well-lit attic office. Jean-Martin offered me a coffee, commentary on the loudness and seemingly unending presence of the construction next door, and once settled and caffeinated, the interview began.

When I started, I asked about how Jean-Martin thought people perceived Aubervilliers overall. He listened to my question, ran his fingers slowly through his mid-neck length gray-blonde hair, and responded:

_Aubervilliers, ça fait partie des villes de la Seine-Saint-Denis qui ont pas une très bonne réputation et en même temps bizarrement où il y a des collectives comme théâtre de la commune, les laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, Zingaro. Quand on travaille la culture on dit, ‘oui, à Aubervilliers il y a pleine de choses intéressantes.’ Si on ne travaille la culture peut être on dit, ‘oui c’est ou on faire_
brûler les voitures.’ Je pense que c’est un peu sale l’image de la ville, il n’y a pas encore assez [des choses culturelles à Aubervilliers] par rapport au besoin qui a [Aubervilliers, it’s part of the towns in the Seine-Saint-Denis that don’t have a great reputation and bizarrely at the same time, it’s a town that has collectives like the théâtre de la commune, the laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, Zingaro. When you do cultural work you say, ‘yes, in Aubervilliers there are a lot of interesting things.’ If you don’t do cultural work maybe you say, ‘yes, that’s where they burn cars.’ I think that the image of the town is a little grimy, there’s still not enough [cultural things in Aubervilliers] in relation to the need that exists]. (Jean-Martin, personal communication, July 12, 2018)

His narrative implied his understanding of the cultural and arts places that contribute to the landscape of Aubervilliers, simultaneously implying that there is still a need for more places like these. Still, over the course of our interview, Jean-Martin, when I asked about his political engagement, did not identify these cultural places as necessarily political, nor did he specify that he believed his activity and place at La Villa Mais D’Ici to be particularly political in nature. This narrative signals that Jean-Martin, while he recognized the intrusion of the construction upon his life in the neighborhood, did not engage directly in a consideration of how La Villa Mais D’Ici might also affect how people order their lives, and thus serve a political purpose. It seems, that to Jean-Martin, his own placemaking was apolitical and personal, and as he explained further, it became evident that his place within La Villa Mais D’Ici was much more about creating space for his work. When I asked him about coming to La Villa Mais D’Ici, he spoke generally about the process:
Il faut attendre qu’il y a de la place, et oui puis demander à être résident temporaire ou permanent. Avec [ma compagnie] on était dans le dix-huitième arrondissement pendant très longtemps, petit atelier de vingt mètre carré...on a cherché des années, des années, des années avec la ville de Paris et...jamais [trouvé un lieu]. Il y a des jeunes qui ont plus de temps à trouver des locaux squattées. Ici [à La Villa Mais D’Ici], c’est pas en bonne état, c’est fragile. [You have to wait and see if there are open spots and then yes, apply to be a temporary or permanent resident. With [my company] we were in the eighteenth arrondissement for a really long time, a little twenty square meter studio...we searched for years, years, years with the city of Paris and...never [found a place]. There were young people who had more time to find squats. Here [at La Villa Mais D’Ici], it’s not in a good state, it’s fragile].

(Jean-Martin, personal communication, July 12, 2018)

This response articulates—and is reiterated in different ways over the course of the interview—that Jean-Martin is Parisian, and thus is someone who sought this place in response to a lack of space in Paris. Explaining this process, Jean-Martin’s experience demonstrates how “any determinate and hence demarcated space [like Paris and its studio space market] necessarily embraces some things and excludes others” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 99). Excluded from obtaining access to an adequate studio in Paris, Jean-Martin’s place in Aubervilliers, at La Villa Mais D’Ici solved his dilemma. Even so, while scholars have studied how artist studios have contributed to processes of gentrification and landscape change in Paris’ arrondissements (Billier, 2011; Deutsche and Ryan, 1984), there is no parallel understanding of how artists, like Jean-Martin, in large artist studio collectives,
places like La Villa Mais D’Ici, also contribute to fraught processes of gentrification that have spiraled outwards, into banlieues and carrying Parisians with them.

But again, in Jean-Martin’s description of the application process, the exclusivity presented therein conflicts with La Villa Mais D’Ici’s “ouverts à tous [open to all]” (le projet, n.d.) proclamation. Indeed, through my research and by way of casual conversation, I knew that very, very few, only a couple, of the roughly forty artists placed in La Villa Mais D’Ici, lived in or relatively close to Aubervilliers. For instance, one woman, an artist and person of color and who has a long history of collaborating with local schools in Aubervilliers, applied to La Villa Mais D’Ici several times before she was finally accepted, while other artists, who are not from or previously involved in Aubervilliers’ community, attained places in the collective on their first try. With this context, the application process Jean-Martin explained, was another barrier to entry for members of the Aubervilliers community, while Parisians appeared to achieve easier access, marking their political power and control over the place and also their roles as gentrifiers who create a place of exclusivity with their presence that serves to change “the social character of the neighbourhood” (Castree et al, 2013), affecting who belongs in arts places and who does not.

To further examine the concept of belonging in La Villa Mais D’Ici, I turn to my second time at La Villa Mais D’Ici, when I interviewed Emma, a young musician who also has a place in the “friche [wasteland]” (le projet, n.d.). Emma, lived in a different commune in the Seine-Saint-Denis, and like Jean-Martin, met me outside of the red gate, where as we entered together, she also lugged her blue bike over the threshold by her
side. In her studio space, she made two coffees, and let me know that while she speaks both French and English, she preferred to do her interview in English.

After chatting for a while, I asked her what she thought of the fact that most of the artists in residence at La Villa Mais D’Ici were not from, and did not live in, Aubervilliers or the surrounding area. She answers, animated:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. This kind of group of people [at La Villa Mais D’Ici] get formed into will of doing something different which means you had the chance to have a certain level of education and that you saw a couple of different things and that you have a precise idea of what you want to do...yeah, you see what I mean? If you gave the possibility of people of Aubervilliers to have this place they would of course take it but it means you have to know the law and landlord shit so it’s a lot of organization and if you didn’t have the chance to study a bit of stuff it seems like unreachable because it’s a bit complicated. It’s how I would explain the situation. Also it’s of course sure that landlords would more trust white people from I don’t know where, and that’s really awful. (Emma, personal communication, July 25, 2018)

Here, Emma recognized the barriers to entry that people in Aubervilliers face at La Villa Mais D’Ici. Nevertheless, she paints these barriers as part and parcel of the creation and continuation of a place like La Villa Mais D’Ici. Indeed, if processes of urbanization and urban policy can be likened to neocolonialism (Kipfer, 2015), then Emma’s description works to subtly reinforce how “one of the great tools of colonization has been pushing the assumption that poor people (especially black people) [or, here, the general populace of Aubervilliers] have neither the inclination nor the time to be concerned about the
substantive quality of their lives [or the organization and leadership of arts places]” (hooks, 2009, p. 213). Still, Emma’s description of who controls the politics of place at *La Villa Mais D’Ici* also serves to demonstrate who can belong in that place. Because the landlords possess biases relating to race, socioeconomic status, and level of education, underscoring “Paris’ [and the broader Paris region, I argue] ethno-racial and spatial patterns of redevelopment, gentrification and displacement” (Newman, 2011, p. 204), Emma narrated how these structural barriers contribute to *La Villa Mais D’Ici*’s inability to create a “culture of belonging” (hooks, 2009, p. 13)—and therefore of “egalitarianism, mutuality” (hooks, 2009, p. 13)—in Aubervilliers. And, to couple her narrative with that of Jean-Martin, *La Villa Mais D’Ici*, while it has created belonging for Parisians and outsiders, has yet to provide a parallel or mutual experience for many diverse artists in Aubervilliers. Pauline, too, echoed this when I interviewed her, stating, “[*La Villa Mais D’Ici*]...c’est extrêmement fermé, extrêmement fermé pour avoir le droit d’entré [it’s extremely exclusive, extremely exclusive to have the right to enter]” (Pauline, personal communication, July 26, 2018). *La Villa Mais D’Ici*’s attentiveness to the belongings of outsiders, and their relative political power, again demonstrates how art, and art places, can reveal who is prioritized in communities (Jackson, 2012, p. 24).

When I asked about the engagement of the Aubervilliers’ community at *La Villa Mais D’Ici* and questioned what political policy Emma thought Aubervilliers should adopt, she replied:

It’s a really difficult situation because for example here [at *La Villa Mais D’Ici*] if we do an event with music, or cinema, or anything, it’s really—it’s sometimes it’s difficult to make people from Aubervilliers come to us. Like, now it has been 15
years and it works quite well, but it has been a lot of work. It has been going also from both sides, like people don’t trust themselves to go to a place which are a bit different and the place which are a bit different don’t make it open enough that people feel comfortable to come. So yeah, I don’t know. I think what would be the best is some social mix, but I think social mix is an utopia, even if I want to believe in it really. What I observe the last three years there is this gentrification process, so actually people like me, or like white people come to the suburb, they try to make something nice, but it develops another cultural life, then the price of houses increase, so the people cannot afford anymore to live there, they are pushed more and more out of the city, it’s like a...[Emily: mess] Yeah, a mess. Even if the intention were not to break all this balance. (Emma, personal communication, July 25, 2018)

With this answer, Emma identified one attribute of gentrifiers: whiteness. She is also illustrating how “places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become” (Basso, 1996, p. 107). Furthermore, in doing so, she also recognized whiteness as a factor that affected how the community perceived La Villa Mais D’Ici, and therefore affecting who could belong in the place. This act of prioritizing white belonging is similar to “liberal and progressive white folks who think it ‘cool’ to buy land next to neighbors who are openly racist [but] rarely understand that by doing so they are acting in collusion with the perpetuation of white supremacy” (hooks, 2009, p. 51). As Emma relates, unless “both sides” (Emma, personal communication, July 25, 2018) are incorporated into the landscape of art places in Aubervilliers, La Villa Mais
D’Ici’s creation of selective belonging will continue to reinforce “underlying assumptions of what voices are deemed worthy to speak and be heard” and who has to request a voice or access to the supposed friche [wasteland] that exists behind a red door. In this way, the creation of a culture of belonging hinges on the sharing and understanding of shared place (hooks, 2009, p. 85).

And yet, when I interviewed Calvin, a resident of La Villa Mais D’Ici who also said he lives in Aubervilliers and grew up nearby, his comments explode this conception of belonging even further. When I asked what political strategy he thought Aubervilliers should adopt, he said:

“Arrêter de cantonner les gens dans leur banlieue, quoi. Justement il y a des gens qui habitent à Aubervilliers qui met jamais un pieds à Paris, par exemple...parce qu’on est dans le quatre-vingt-treize [département]. Donc il faut rester dans le quatre-vingt-treize [département]. L’ouverture [c’est bon]. Paris c’est quelques kilomètres...découvrir d’autre chose qu’Aubervilliers! [Stop confining people to their suburb, what. There are people who live in Aubervilliers who have never set foot in Paris, for example...because they’re in the ninety-three [département]. So you have to stay in the ninety-three [département]. Openness [is good]. Paris is just a few kilometers away...discover something other than Aubervilliers!” (Calvin, personal communication, July 12, 2018).

Calvin suggests that a culture of belonging is not simply created when members of the broader Aubervilliers community feel they belong in La Villa Mais D’Ici but, rather, when people living in Aubervilliers feel they can belong elsewhere, Paris specifically.

While my conversations with Jean-Martin and Emma highlighted how art places, La Villa
*Mais D’Ici* specifically, can be sources of change and exclusivity, Calvin’s comment notes that places can also create cultures of belongings if they encourage not only the inclusion of diverse communities but also if they allow these communities to placemake, to imagine themselves beyond. Thus, Calvin notes the power of musicians to contribute to and create cultures of belonging within and among both the “local and translocal” (Jackson, 2012, p. 57).
Conclusion

Places, especially those wrapped up in the arts “‘say something’” (Monson, 1996, p. 73). Still, this work, while it acknowledges what is said, strives to take a step further, to demonstrate that “geographical landscapes are never culturally vacant. The ethnographic challenge is to fathom what it is that a particular landscape, filled to brimming with past and present significance, can be called upon to ‘say,’ and what, through the saying, it can be called upon to ‘do’” (Basso, 1996, p. 75). This work compels us all to consider our own places, artistic or not, a little more closely, to better understand how acts of placemaking, cultures of belonging, and processes of gentrification undergird them.

In Aubervilliers, recent art places are entangled in politics and actors who are actively influencing and changing the commune’s landscape in critical ways. Examining these places—their layers and messiness—and having conversations about them—render concrete placemaking, showing us who is vying for control and how privileged newcomers are increasingly included while the belonging of diverse inhabitants is not prioritized and thus is at stake. Paying attention to the expression of the arts—in place, in Aubervilliers— and how this art is performed and who engages with it is an important plane of knowledge, telling us how the politics of banlieues are changing form. Embracing a multidisciplinary approach, I sought to, as David Robinson (2013) notes, render processes tangible—even if inherently partial (Haraway, 1988)—and to heed “the value of spatial analyses...to develop an understanding of the place of art in the social world for both the makers of the art and the communities who encounter it” (Robinson, 2013, p. 121). However, I am not ignorant to the fact that my access to these places was
in part largely facilitated because I presented similarly to the *bobo* gentrifiers who also frequented them. This knowledge stuck in my mind, necessarily informing my process. This project, then, pushes for a consideration of how identities play into how we all belong and placemake in the places we encounter and exist within. I encourage us to ponder, in different places and even those very familiar, who surrounds us, who seemingly belongs, and who might, then, be absent.

Sensing three places together, “in the company of other people” (Basso, 1996, p. 109) in Aubervilliers I experienced how “places...are as much a part of us as we are part of them” (Basso, 1996, p. xiv). That is to say, they are not unchangeable. And, as Foucault (1978) reminds us, “where there is power [or, say, politics], there is resistance” (p. 95). Now that I have spent time conversing with, in many ways, the hegemons and organizers of the places presented in my three vignettes, my next task is to go back, wander again, and seek to better understand how Aubervillers’ diverse population may contribute a resistance, how this population placemakes and belongs in increasingly gentrified art places. Reflecting on the frequency of individuals mentioning Paris in contrast to Aubervilliers, I would also strive to place Aubervilliers within the context of its relationship with Paris upon my return to do additional fieldwork. Nevertheless, these new questions and inquiries of resistance and broader urban relationships would still center the foundational intention of this work: to parse out how art places intermingle with politics within the landscape of Aubervilliers and how they may, or may not, contribute to a *commune* in which there is *une place pour toutes et tous*. 
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Appendix

Figure 1. Photo of the flyer distributed to households to advertise the “À LA DÉCOUVERTE D’AUBERVILLIERS” event.
Figure 2. Photo of the flyer distributed in front of Aubervilliers’ Hôtel de Ville on the day of the “À LA DÉCOUVERTE D’AUBERVILLIERS” event.

Figure 3. Graffiti wall along the path that leads to Fort d’Aubervilliers, after the security checkpoint. Photo taken by the author.
Figure 4. Interior of one of Fort Recup’s rental *casemates*. Photo taken by the author.
Figure 5. Photo of the flyer for the Jam et Jam event at la Ferme Mazier.

Figure 6. La Ferme Mazier during “Jam et Jam.” Photo taken by the author.
Figure 7. La Pépinière’s chalkboard describing their organization’s work at the Jam et Jam event at la Ferme Mazier. Photo taken by the author.