Original English version of a text to appear in French in *Cahiers de recherché sociologique*, Fall, 2015.

Two kinds of scene

Will Straw

> Le terme de « scène » appartient à un registre lexical communément partagé[1].

A recent book on contemporary American literary culture offers us two images of what we might consider to be cultural scenes. Each of these is a cultural world available to aspiring young authors seeking to launch literary careers. **MFA vs NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction** compares the world of the college-based creative writing program (the "MFA", or Master of Fine Arts, of the title) to the more informal literary universe of a large city ("NYC", New York City.)[2] While Masters of Fine Arts programs for emerging writers have a long history in the Anglophone world , they are -- quite remarkably, given widespread claims about the decline of literary reading – continuing to flourish across the United States and Canada[3]. At the most famous of these, the Iowa Writer's Workshop (based at the University of Iowa in Iowa City), students selected in conditions of high competition come together to develop their writing under the close, formally-organized supervision of experienced authors.   MFA programs in creative writing are spatially circumscribed by the boundaries of the institutions which offer them, and often located in college towns far from the centres of literary publishing. The transmission of knowledge within these programs follows the conventional pattern of intergenerational apprenticeship, through which published, established writers pass on their skills to younger aspirants. At the same time, the developing of a writing practice is shaped by rituals of "horizontal" feedback and collective criticism within the peer group of those attending the workshop as students.

The New York City to which the book's title refers is obviously a very different kind of cultural space.   The institutional infrastructure of literary culture in New York is dispersed and informal, rooted in networks of publishers, agents, writer's groups meeting in cafés, and friendship circles. To become a writer within this world is to move between different points in this network, accumulating the capital of opportunity and connection which, in a complex labour of conversion, may structure the establishment of a literary career. If success in the "MFA" seems to follow the path of competition for recognition within a highly-structured process, in "NYC" it is about the gathering of resources across a scattered, disorganized constellation of points.

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[1] Marie-Thérèse Mathet, « Avant-Propos », in Marie-Thérèse Mathet (ed.) *La Scène : Littérature et Arts visuels,* Paris, L'Harmattan, 2001, 7.

[2] Chad Harback (ed.) *MFA vs NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*, New York, n + 1, 2014.

[3] See, for a critical discussion of this expansion and its effects on literary style, Anis Shivani, "Part II: The New Genre of Plastic Realism in American Fiction," *Huffington Post*, 16 juin, 2015 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anis-shivani/part-ii-the-new-genre-of-_b_7577230.html Accessed 5 July 2015.

I begin with this comparison in order to explore the variety of forms which cultural scenes may take. On the one hand, the question posed by the book *MFA vs NYC* is the practical one of the most effective path towards success as a literary author. Should one seek the formal training provided by the MFA program, in which access to successful models and useful resources is immediate, or move to a literary *metropole* and engage in the complex labour of moving towards its centre? For our purposes, though, the book's interest lies in way in which it sets, against each other, two modes of organization of literary culture. The immediate temptation on contemplating these two organizational forms is to set the institutionally framed terrain of the Masters of Fine Arts literary workshop against the fluid mobility of New York literary culture, and to view the latter as somehow more contemporary in its functioning and sensibility. Indeed, the distinction between them would seem to replicate that between the Academies of 19th century European painting and those looser, more modern cultural worlds produced in the interplay between an urban bohemia and a relatively unregulated commercial market for art.[4] The aspiring writer's passage through the world of the MFA seems to be punctuated by formal milestones in an institutional process which dispenses rewards and resources in a highly structured manner. That of the New York City writer's scene follows the more improvised pattern of uncoordinated and loosely interconnected gatherings – launches, readings, meetings, etc. – within which social capital and cultural capital are in a constant state of bidirectional conversion.

It is tempting to suggest that only the second of these worlds constitutes a scene, in the sense in which I have defined that term elsewhere, as that phenomenon formed by the supplement of sociability which attaches itself to any purposeful cultural activity[5]. On closer examination, however, the distinction between these two worlds begins to shrink. Reminiscences by former students about time spent at the Iowa Writers Workshop are full of references to the constant, even excessive sociability of the experience[6]. These references identify a supplement of social effervescence we might designate as "scénique," insofar as it breaks through the bounds of institutionally mandated behaviours and into the textures of collective life. Likewise, the movement of aspiring and established writers from one writer's workshop to another, along national and international circuits solidified through blogs, festivals and the work of agents and other mediators, produces the image of a dispersed, creative writing "scene"[7]. However formally organized this scene might be at the level of the individual institution, across broader geographies it assumes the overall form of those loosely interconnected, so-called "trans-local" scenes

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[4] See, for one extended account of the difference between these two worlds, Pierre Bourdieu, *Manet: une revolution symbolique*, Paris, Editions du seuil, 2013.

[5] Will Straw, "Above and below ground," in Paula Guerra et Tânia Moreira, (ed.) *Keep It Simple, Make It Fast: An Approach to Underground Music Scenes, vol. 1*, Porto, Portugal, Universidade do Porto – Faculdade de Letras, 2015, p. 408.

[6] See, for example, Alexander Chee, "My Parade," in Chad Harback (ed.) *MFA vs NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*, New York, n + 1, 2014, 82-102.

[7] Indeed, Fredric Jameson suggests that the various writer's workshops in the United States together make up the "contemporary scene of literary production." Fredric Jameson, "Dirty Little Secret," in Chad Harback (ed.) *MFA vs NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*, New York, n + 1, 2014, p. 277.

which are regularly written about in relation to particular styles or genres of music[8]. The replication of literary events in different places provides the occasions for an endlessly renewed sociability, and for the emergence of in-groups, obscure logics of advancement and other features typical of scenes.

Conversely, the apparently informal "horizontality" of literary scenes in New York City may obscure the pyramidal, tightly hierarchical structure of that world. It is possible that the aspirant's advancement within that world requires a labour which is all the more difficult because the criteria which would make it possible are obscure. The literary scene of New York City rests on a constellation of social occasions and places -- cafés, bars, private parties, launches – whose mastery requires an apprenticeship which is no less arduous, perhaps, than that which is institutionalized within the regional MFA workshop. However informally ordered the steps in a literary career in the New York City literary "scene" might be, these can be identified and listed as components of a formal sequence. The editor of *MFA vs NYC* describes the literary scenes of New York City as constituting "a social world defined by the selection (by agents), evaluation (by editors), purchase (by publishers), production, publication, publicization and second evaluation (by reviewers) and purchase (by readers) of NYC novels."[9] We have, in this description an infrastructure which, insofar as it consists of well-defined roles and positions, resembles Becker's art worlds, or the cultures of production theorized by such scholars as Paul Du Gay[10], as much as it suggests the loose informality and flux of scenes as commonly described.

 Two ways of conceiving scenes

Let us accept that both the literary culture of New York City and the Iowa Writer's Workshop are scenes, in a sense. The differences between them will allow me to contrast some of the different ways in which scenes may be understood. At present, models of cultural scene are divided between what I would call open and restricted models of *coherence scénique*. In the first, "open" model, scenes are the expression of a general urbanity. A scene is the spectacle of human social interaction transpiring in public places, of they sort we evoke when we refer to the "Condessa Scene" in Mexico City or the "Oberkampf Scene" in Paris. Neither of these terms identifies a specific category of cultural activity; each designates some combination of public sociability, entrepreneurial energy and creative sensibility. Scenes, in this sense, are a visible effervescence in which may be observed the flux and diversity deemed to be definitive of city life. The second, "restricted" sense of term is that which sees a scene as the people, practices and objects which surround a particular cultural object or domain (a style of music or genre of literature, for example.) This is the sort of entity more usually analyzed in the scholarly literature on scenes, such as Daniel Kane's study of the poetry scene in New York's Lower East Side

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[8] One of the musical genres most commonly written about in terms of an internationally dispersed set of global scenes is that surrounding Heavy Metal music. See, for example, Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, et Paul D. Greene (ed.) *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2011.

[9] Chad Harback, "MFA vs NYC" [introduction] in Chad Harback (ed.) *MFA vs NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*, New York, n + 1, 2014, 25-26.

[10] Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982; Paul du Gay, *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom, Open University Press, 1997

neighbourhood in the 1960s[11].   A scene, in this sense, need not partake of a broader urban effervescence, nor, indeed, be located within urban space. It may, like the visual arts "scene" in the Massachusetts town of North Adams, take shape amidst a tight circle of institutions in a small community. Conversely, it may take the form of a dispersed, global circuit of institutions and events, like the international tango scene described by Kathy Davis in a recent book.[12] What grounds the restricted scene is its consistent reference to a particular category of cultural expression.

This distinction is more heuristic than concrete however. Conceptualizations of scenes which see them as the expression of a broadly-dispersed urbanity may well acknowledge that this urbanity arises in the accumulation and convergence of innumerable small acts of purposeful cultural activity[13]. Likewise, studies of individual, focused scenes (like those which take shape around individual genres of music) often see the energies of such scenes as partaking of (and contributing to) a general collective ethos which transcends any one "scenic space".   Nevertheless, even if the distinction I have offered here cannot be absolute, it has produced key divergences between different academic treatments of the concept. Work which employs what I have called the "restricted" conception of scene is principally concerned with the forms of organization assumed by those people objects and institutions devoted to a particular kind of cultural object (an art form, a style, a particular kind of aesthetic product).   These organizational forms may be trans-local, even networked across space[14], but it is common to think of them as spatially-bound. This conceptualization of scene is the most common, particularly in the studies of popular music which have been the terrain of scene theory's most consistent applicability.   Studies of "restricted" music scenes, produced over the last twenty years or more, include studies of jazz in New York City, punk in the Czech Republic, electro in Germany, rap in Chicago, blues in Madrid, folk and metal in Toronto, and so on [15]. The concise definition of scene offered by Hamdaga et al, captures this

[11] Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, Berkeley and Londres: University of California Press, 2003.

[12] For a journalistic account of the North Adams visual arts scene, see Andrew L. Pincus, "When can the arts revive an economy" http://web.williams.edu/Economics/ArtsEcon/Documents/When%20can%20the%20arts%20revive%20an%20economy.htm accessed 5 juillet 2015; see also Kathy Davis, *Dancing Tango: Passionate Encounters in a Globalizing World*, New York, NYU Press, 2015.

[13] See, for example, the discussion of Montreal's Mile End district by Rantisi and Leslie, which sees its energies as produced in the coming together of the music, design and retail scenes. Norma M. Rantisi and Deborah Leslie, "Materiality and creative production: the case of the Mile End neighbourhood in Montreal," *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 42 (2010), pp. 2824-2841.

[14] See, for a discussion of the different "spatialities" of scenes, Christopher Driver and Andrew Bennett, "Music Scenes, Spaces and the Body," *Cultural Sociology*, 9 (2015) 99-115.

[15] See, among many other possible examples, Travis Jackson, *Blowin' The Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012; Ondřej Císař, Martin Koubek , "Culture, politics and a local hardcore/punk scene in the Czech Republic," *Poetics* 40: 1, février 2012, pp. 1-21; Bastian Lange et Hans-Joachim Bürkner, "Value Creation in Scene-based Music Production: The Case of Electronic Club Music in Germany," *Economic Geography*, 2013, 89: 149–169; Geoff Harkness, "Gangs and gangsta rap in Chicago: A microscenes perspective," *Poetics* 41: 2, April 2013, pp. 151–176; Josep Pedro, "Jam sessions in Madrid's blues scene: musical experience in hybrid performance models," *IASPM@journal*, 2014,

restricted sense of the term efficiently: "cultural scenes emerge whenever a critical mass of people interacts with some shared context (place and time) with overlapping interests on shared topics".[16] A scene, from this perspective, is a unity defined both by its purposefulness (its orientation towards the making and consuming of something) and its devotion (the attachment of all "parts" of the scene to the object which is its raison d'être.)

In contrast, those engaged in developing an "open" conception of scene are more likely, first of all, to situate their interest in scenes in relation to general, aestheticizing accounts of urban life and culture. A scene, from this perspective, is the public, visible form in which something called urbanity (or "city-ness") expresses itself. This version of scene is one from which any sense of a "referent", of an underlying set of cultural objects or activities, is absent. A scene is the spectacle of effervescence, which stands, not as a supplement of sociability laid atop the production and consumption of culture, but as a more general phenomena though which cities perform what Alan Blum has called their own specific "form of creativity": the public display of intimacy[17]. Rather than the makers of specific forms of culture generating scenic vitality as the social excess of their focused and purposeful labour, the city itself produces scenes as part of its ongoing urbanity.

We may further distinguish between restricted and open conceptions of scenes in terms of the ways in which each draws upon other fields and subfields within cultural analysis. The restricted vision of scenes, insofar as it is principally concerned with the organizational forms by which culture is produced and consumed, is linked to a series of concepts which have emerged over the last several decades in the analysis of creative labour: post-Fordism, networks, cultures of production, *travail flexible*, clusters, and so on[18]. In what is perhaps the most recent invocation of scene in relation to these issues, the concept has been deployed to name those contexts of contemporary cultural labour most marked by exploitation and precarity[19].

The second, open conceptualization of scene likewise mobilizes a variety of theoretical precedents, most notably those works of social and urban theory concerned with the city as a space of experiential flux and excess[20]. Often, in these accounts, the scenic dimensions of urban life are seen to

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http://iaspmjournal.net/index.php/IASPM_Journal/article/view/639; Diana L Miller, "Symbolic Capital and Gender: Evidence from Two Cultural Fields," *Cultural Sociology*, 8 (2014), pp. 462-482.

[16] Mohammad Hamdaqa, , Ladan Tahvildari, , Neil LaChapelle, Brian Campbell, *Cultural scene detection using reverse Louvain optimization. Science of Computer Programming, Volume 95, Part 1, 1 décembre 2014, p. 44.*

[17] Alan Blum, *The Imaginative Structure of the City*, Montreal, McGill Queens University Press, 2003, p. 179.

[18] See, for examples of this scholarship, Manuel Tironi. "Gelleable spaces, eventful geographies: The case of Santiago's experimental music scene" in Ignacio Farias and Thomas Bender (ed.) *Urban Assemblages: How Actor-Network Theory Changes Urban Studies,* Londres et New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 27-52; Mohammad Hamdaqa, , Ladan Tahvildari, , Neil LaChapelle, Brian Campbell, *Cultural scene detection using reverse Louvain optimization. Science of Computer Programming, Volume 95, Part 1, 1 décembre 2014, p. 44–72.*

[19] See et Pascal Gielen, "The Art Scene. A Clever Working Model for Economic Exploitation?", Open *17,* 2011, http://kruzok.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/citanje_021.pdf Accessed 5 Juillet 2015.

[20] The key works here are familiar and canonical, and range from Charles Baudelaire, *Le peintre de la vie modern* [1863] to Jonathan Raban, *Soft City*, Londres, The Harvill Press, 1974.

be engaged in a form of pedagogy, producing within their participants the ethical and affective constituents of urban citizenship. In Allan Blum's compelling account, the scene is one way in which a city resolves the status of intimacy within itself. It does so, in large part, by offering public demonstrations of that intimacy in spectacles of sociability.[21] Scenes, we might say, are engaged in the ongoing provision of lessons about the appropriate ways in which the intimate may assume public form. Véronique Willemen's recent historical overview of night-life in Paris, for example, is principally concerned with the development of those scenes (of cabaret life, partner-swapping clubs, and the sex industry more generally) wherein the boundaries between private intimacy and public, commercial spectacle have been challenged[22].

For Silver, Clark and their collaborators, a scene serves, in a similarly pedagogical fashion, to educate a city's residents in the common features of urban life. In particular, for them, a scene is that collection of amenities through which a city best fulfills its possible destinies: those of serving as "a theatrical place to see and be seen (glamorously, transgressively or in other ways), an authentic place to explore and affirm local, ethnic or national identities (among others), an ethical place to share and debate common values and ideals (such as tradition or self- expression)."[23] In a sense that borrows more directly from the theatrical uses of the term, a scene is that public stage upon which urbanity is learned and enacted. More broadly, in the work of these collaborators, scenes are the means by which cities endow urban life with a semantic and experiential depth, "by making available an array of meaningful experiences to residents and visitors." Scenes, they argue, "give a sense of drama, authenticity and ethical significance to a city's streets and strips".[24]

We may point to another set of analyses of cultural life in which both the restricted and open conceptualizations of scene have been taken up, albeit in observably distinct ways. This is the field of cultural policy discourse, and, in particular, that expansive body of work which analyzes (or seeks to intervene within) processes of cultural regeneration or gentrification within cities. Much of that discourse employs a restricted sense of scene, in the sense described above. Cities are seen to contain many scenes, each focused on a particular cultural object or terrain of activity; each scene serves as an amenity within a broader tapestry of cultural richness. A scene, here, is a unit of cultural activity which exists alongside other such units, some of which (like arts centres or museums) are institutions, while others (like dance troupes or choirs) are formally organized cultural collectives. Each of these amenities is the site of its own, focused labour; any broader effervescence is the excess which accumulates

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[21] Alan Blum, *The Imaginative Structure of the City*, Montreal, McGill Queens University Press, 2003, p. 179.

[22] Véronique Willimen, *Les secrets de la Nuit : Enquêtes sur 50 ans de liaisons dangereuses : argent, sexe, police, politique, réseaux*, Paris, Flammarion, 2014.

[23] Daniel Silver, Terry Nichols Clark et Christopher Graziul, "Scenes, innovation, and urban development," in David David Emmuel Andersson, Ake E. Andersson, Charlotta Mellander (ed.) *Handbook of Creative Cities*, Glos, UK, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011, 229.

[24] Daniel Silver, Terry Nichols Clark et Christopher Graziul, "Scenes, innovation, and urban development," in David Emmuel Andersson, Ake E. Andersson, Charlotta Mellander (ed.) *Handbook of Creative Cities*, Glos, UK, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011, 229.

through the agglomeration and proximity of these scenes[25]. Thus, in a plan for the development of the arts in the Canadian city of Edmonton, the overall cultural excitement of the city is broken down into the various cultural amenities from which that excitement is generated. Edmonton, a policy report claims, "has one of North America's finest theatre scenes, many award-winning choirs, an exciting and quickly expanding music scene, one of Canada's best concert halls, a thriving ethnic-based dance community, an exhilarating new art gallery set to open in 2009 and a planned major expansion to the Royal Alberta Museum.[26]" Scenes are one category within a list of amenities.

A more open conceptualization of scene is lodged within the perspective of Richard Florida, whose doctrine of "creative cities" has proved highly influential, particularly in North America. Within the discourse on creative cities, I would argue, a scene is most often imagined as the expression of a generalized urbanity. The key components of a city's bohemian sensibility, in Florida's model, are tolerance and the offering of variety, evidence of a broadly communal sensibility which need not rest on any focused cultural labour (or which, in any case, is not simply the expression of this labour.) Cultural labour enters into Florida's model principally through the ways in which a general scenic ambience, the index of openness, permits a city to attract the educated information-sector professionals who will render a city prosperous. For example, a city's night-time scene, for Florida, is that generalized effervescence which the creative class of mostly day-time workers will consume. The scene is not itself, in any important way, the accumulation of the specific cultural labours transpiring in the city.[27] Rather, it is a general condition which contributes to the broader inculcation, within its residents, of an openness of spirit and acceptance of diversity.

The sense that cities instill affective states within those who live within them, and that scenes are central to this instilling, is eloquently expressed in the study by Serrudo and Marin of salsa music culture in Bogota, Colombia. In its focus on a musical genre, *Salsa y cultura popular en Bogota* offers itself on first glance as another study of a circumscribed, restricted musical scene. However, the authors move quickly to situate salsa dancing within the city's broader pedagogical enterprise. As the networks of salsa clubs and events in Bogota produce their own cartography of the city, generating circuits along which its residents travel, these networks are engaged in what the authors call a "éducation sentimentale", the training of citizens in forms of feeling and festiveness.[28] These feelings, bound as they are to ways of being together and occupying space, participate in a general urbanity. They are not simply the affective bonds of those joined by a specific set of musical tastes.

Scenes and the night

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[25] For some of the earliest manifestations of this position, see Andrew Lovatt, Justin O'Connor, John Montgomery, et Paul Owens (ed.) *The 24-Hour City: Selected Papers from the First National Conference on the Night-time Economy,* Manchester, U.K., Manchester Metropolitan University, 1994,

[26] Edmonton Arts Council, *The Art of Living 2008-2018: A Plan for Securing the Future of Arts and Heritage in the City of Edmonton*, Edmonton, p. 7.

[27] See, among many other sources, Richard Florida, 'The Economic Geography of Talent', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 92 (2002), p. 743 — 755

[28] Nelson Antonio Gomez Serrudo, Jefferson Jaramillo Marin, *Salsa y cultura popular en Bogota*, Bogota, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana et Universidad Autonoma de Colombia, 2013, p. 59, 87.

The claim underlying what I have called the open conceptualization of scene -- that a generalized urbanity acts upon the city to render it "scénique" -- is most pronounced in recent writing on the urban night. As I have suggested elsewhere, the urban night has emerged over the last decade as the focus of an expanding body of sociological, historiographical, aesthetic and policy-oriented discourse[29]. Arguably, this discourse has had two effects on the ways in which cultural scenes are discussed, in both academic and non-academic treatments. The first of these is that the character of those discrete scenes which are focused on particular cultural interests – on individual styles of music, for example, or literary creation – is being subsumed within a general account of the nocturnal life of cities. While not all cultural activity in cities is nocturnal in character, of course, those who imagine scenes as spectacles of urban sociability will, most of the time, find their examples in the culture of the night. In the rise of "night studies," I suggest, we see what I have called the open conceptualization of scene edging out the restricted understanding of the term. The historian Craig Kowlovsky has spoken of a "nocturnalization" of cultural life in Western societies over the last two or three centuries, as social and cultural activities have moved later and later into the night[30]. Similarly, we might speak of a "nocturnalization" of the scholarship on scenes, which is ever more exclusive in its concentration on the sociability of the night. Within this "nocturnalization," a number of the pedagogical processes ascribed by Blum and others to urbanity in a general sense are seen, rather, as generated by an experience of the urban night. The night is imagined as a time/space (both a period of time and an experiential "territory") in which urban dwellers are trained in the ethical and experiential dimensions of city life. This is one of the claims of Marc Armengaud and his collaborators, for whom night becomes "an ethic and an identitarian landscape"[31] Elsewhere, Armengaud writes, « [n]ous proposons cette hypothèse : la nuit n'est pas un état diminué de la ville, c'est un temps essentiel de la fabrique de sa valeur, de son organisation et sa capacité de variation[32].

The second way in which an ascendant concern with night has shaped the treatment of scenes lies in the ways in which the political status of scenes is considered. Many of the classic treatments of cultural scenes (in particular, those dealing with popular music) framed the political struggles in which scenes were embedded in terms of an expressive relationship between the creators of culture and the communities out of which they emerged[33]. The central issue within these treatments was the capacity

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[29] See, for an overview of the recent wave of night studies, Will Straw, "The Urban Night," in Michael Darroch et Janine Marchessault (ed.) *Cartographies of Place : Navigating the Urban,* Montreal, McGill-Queens University Press, 2014, pp. 185-200.

[30] Craig Koslovsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 1. For another account of this nocturnalization, in relation to theatre-going in 19th century France, see Jean-Claude Yon, « Des théâtres dans la nuit, » *Le magasin du xixe siècle*, no. 3, 2013, pp. 43-48.

[31] Marc Armengaud, Matthias Armengaud, Alessandra Cianchetta, *Nightscapes/Paisajes nocturnos/Nocturnal Landscapes*, Barcelona, Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2009, p. 147.

[32] See also AWP/Marc Armengaud, *Paris la nuit: Chroniques Nocturnes*, Paris, Pavillon de l'Arsenal/ Picard, 2013, p. 9.

[33] See, among the most influential of these studies, Holly Kruse, *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes*, New York et Frankfurt, Peter Lang Publishers, 2003.

of cultural expression to retain authenticity in relation to a variety of forces, such as commercialization, which threatened to render it inauthentic. Increasingly, however, as recent scholarship suggests, the political status of distinct cultural styles and their associated scenes is more and more shaped by conflicts about noise, gentrification and the policing of public sociability.[34] In this shift, the specific aesthetic or expressive qualities of different styles and genres, so central to the analysis of restricted scenes, are becoming marginal. Just as we may speak of a *nocturnalization* of scene studies, so we may identify an *urbanization* of this work, which is more and more compelled to confront the place of cultural expression within political struggles over gentrification, noise and other phenomena associated more broadly with the transformations occurring in cities.

One symptom of this reframing of scene analysis may be found in the recent study, by Anne Clerval, of gentrification in Paris around the rue Oberkampf. Clerval comments briefly on the transformation of café life in neighbourhoods which were occupied for many generations by the descendants of immigrants from North Africa but are now undergoing a gentrification from which these populations have been excluded.   In the neighbourhoods she studies, Clerval still finds cafés frequented, in the morning and mid-day, by longstanding residents of the neighbourhood, whose social interaction is accompanied by the drinking of non-alcoholic beverages, like coffee or tea. As night approaches, however, the same cafés are taken over by "the gentrifiers and their friends," who come to drink alcohol, while the earlier clientele is pressured into leaving.   This process condenses the broader dynamic of this neighbourhood in transition : « The temporal succession of different populations in the frequenting of public space operates at the level of the whole street on rue Oberkampf between day and night. It expresses a transitory state in the coexistence of diverse, even antagonistic populations competing in their appropriation of the neighbourhood[35] » Earlier forms of cultural analysis might have concentrated on each of these two social groups – day-time coffee drinkers and the festive night-time crowd – as distinct scenes, cataloguing their expressive forms and rituals of interaction. In the present moment, Clerval suggests, scenes cannot escape their status as what Boulin and Mückenberge have called "temporal communities" groups for whom the thickness of collective identity recedes behind their status as combatants in the struggle over social transformation[36].

 The visibility of scenes

One key difference between the "open" and "restricted" models of scenes I discuss above has to do with their relationship to visibility. In the open model I have described, scenes are the visible manifestation of a city's social and cultural energies. They are produced through the transformation of such energies into the "theatricality" of public sociability[37]. This conceptualization of scene most

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[34] See, for example, Ocejo, Richard E. Ocejo, *Upscaling Downtown: From Bowery Saloons to Cocktail Bars in New York City*, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 2014; David Rowe et Nathaniel Bavinton, "Tender for the night: After-dark cultural complexities in the night-time economy," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, vol. 25, 2011, 811-825.

[35] Anne Clerval, *Paris sans peuple: La gentrification de la capital,* Paris, La découverte, 2014, p. 220.

[36] Boulin, Jean-Yves et Ulrich Mückenberge, *Temps de la ville et qualité de vie*, Best 1 : Etudes européennes sur le temps, 1999, p. 52.

[37] Alan Blum, *The Imaginative Structure of the City*, Montreal, McGill Queens University Press, 2003, p. 179.

obviously mobilizes the visuality inherent in the etymology of the word. As the public expression of urbanity, an open scene by its very nature requires visibility as one of its defining features, though we must be attentive to the ways in which the visible is inescapably intertwined with the tactile and aural[38]. In the restricted model of scene, which has as its centre a particular category of cultural expression, it is often the invisibility of scenes (the ways in which they seem hidden behind the routines and formal structures of collective life) which is taken to define them. This invisibility may be an effect of their marginal, "underground" status within particular locales, or of a geographically dispersion which cannot be easily observed from any single vantage point. Even when these restricted scenes assume visibility – in the public gatherings, like music concerts, which are part of their event-structure, or through a mediatization brings renders them subject to a journalistic or touristic gaze – that visibility is not normally the main criteria by which they assume the character of scene. If the open definition of scene presumes the passage of urban intimacy into the realm of public visibility, the restricted definition identifies forms of interconnection which need not assume public visibility.
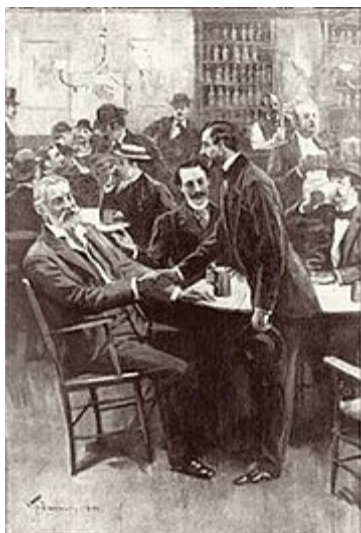

Figure One.

Figure 1 is an image of the New York City bar Pfaff's, in an artist's rendering from 1895 of a scene from the late 1850s[39]. Pfaff's was the bar in which the poet Walt Whitman spent his nights after having lost his position as a journalist. Those assembled at Pfaff's were, for the most part, writers whose careers had been marked by failure. We may see this space and the people gathered here as a scene in the restricted sense of the term: as a professional group engaged in the circulation of information about their profession. However, as Christine Stansell has suggested, Pfaff's came to stand,

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[38] On the tactile and corporeal dimensions of scenes, see Christopher Driver and Andrew Bennett, "Music Scenes, Spaces and the Body," *Cultural Sociology*, 9 (2015) 99-115; for a discussion of "aural pubiic spheres" with high relevance to the study of scenes, see Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier, "Sonic Transculturation, Epistemologies of Purification and the Aural Public Sphere in Latin America," *Social Identities*, 12, 2006, 803-825.

[39] Image of Walt Whitman at Pfaff's first published in *Harper's Magazine*, 1857. See the discussion of this image and its context in Justin Martin, *Rebel Souls: Walt Whitman and America's First Bohemians*, Boston, Da Capo Press, 2014, pp. 1-4.

in the eyes of the circulating urban tourist, for a general urban condition, that of a sociability nourished by the energies of an urban creative class:

> Pfaff's was, then, a kind of showcase for bohemians-perhaps in actuality, as urban tourists like Howells peered into its gloomy interior to take in the "sight," or perhaps only in the minds of its habitués. As strollers and urban tourists came to expect the streets themselves to provide a visual spectacle of urban diversities, so the bohemians provided for each other a theater of democratic, esthetic camaraderie. Pfaff's made this self-conscious spectacle available to a respectable audience these writers both courted and spurned. It offered a condensation of the bohemian life, providing a setting for elaborating an identity which went beyond the threadbare and seedy persona which was the mundane lot of the working writer[40].

Here we have a scene in both the restricted and open senses of the term. The group assembled at Pfaff's was, in one sense, a professional sub-group engaged in the traffic of influences and opportunities. It was thus part of a dispersed literary and journalistic scene whose contours were often invisible to those excluded from it. At the same time, Praff's was a scene in the ways in which it provided a platform for the performance, by literary bohemians, of what Stansell calls their "democratic, esthetic camaraderie." Through this performance, the crowd at Pfaff's became one of New York's spectacles of urbanity, in which the city could be lived as a sequence of visible pleasures in which were displayed the ethos of urban living.   Insofar as the gatherings at Pfaff's took part, for the most part, at night, they played upon the ambiguous relationship of the night to visibility. On the one hand, Pfaff's offered, to the urban tourist, a gaze upon the obscurity of hidden cultural logics, whereby writers engaged in the collective elaboration of new styles and themes as they sought to energize their careers. On the other hand, the tavern's windows and lighting transformed its interior space into a theatrical spectacle, such that it participated in that tendency, which Alain Mons has described, whereby the multiple practices of modern life are offered up for display[41].

We may further explore the question of a scene's visibility by a detour through literary accounts of "scène". In the collective volume *La Scène : Littérature et Arts visuels*, Renée de Smirnoff treats the novelistic scene as an interruption of narrative in which elaborate descriptions, typically of social situations (like the parties described by Balzac), escape narrative logic. These descriptions, in Smirnoff's account, function as a dispositif for the generation of spectacle. A "scène", in this sense, is that portion of the literary text which most obviously seeks to approach the condition of visual display: "The 'surface-making' of the scene designates and brings together two things : the passage from a logic of narrative to a logic of the *dispositif*   on the one hand oipens and delimits a space of representation . . ; on the other hand, it transforms language into a sensible surface, into that 'something' which, in the scene, becomes surface, is given to be seen and experienced[42]. »

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[40] Christine Stansell, "Whitman at Pfaff's: Commercial Culture, Literary Life and New York Bohemia at Mid-Century," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review,* vol. 10, no. 3 (1993), p. 115-116.

[41] Alain Mons, *La traversée du visible: Images et lieux du contemporain,* Paris, Editions de la Passion, 2002, p. 11.

[42] Renée de Smirnoff, « Jeux de regards dans la scène balzacienne, » in Marie Thérèse Mathet (ed.) *La Scène : Littérature et Arts visuels*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2001, 232.

Let us imagine, for a moment, an analogy between the goal-directed activity of those scenes we have described as restricted and the « logic of narrative » of which Smirnoff is speaking. In both cases, what we might call a *dispositif scénique* works to break free of the productive logics which underly it, to generate a space of representation which offers itself up as sensory experience.

Conclusion

If I have insisted, perhaps too persistently, on the distinction between open and restricted versions of scenes, this is not because I am able to construct a difference between the two which is epistemologically pure. Rather, I would argue, the distinction between open and restricted concepts of scene provides us with one way of understanding a key divergence in scene studies at the present time. As suggested, one line of research situates scene within a vocabulary which names the forms of organization of cultural life; "scene" sits within this vocabulary alongside "champ", "monde" "réseau", "cluster" and a long list of other terms. Within this research, an emerging question, it seems to me, is whether the notion of scene is of continued usefulness in the face of work which offers further development of such concepts as "musical world" or network[43]. The other line of research uses the concept of scene to name and capture the experiential excess and dynamism of urban life. The take-up of this version of scene is most common in research concerned with urbanity and the constituent features of urban citizenship. Scenes, from this perspective, are among the forms of heterogeneity characteristic of what Doevendans and Schram have called the "accumulation" city, whose disorder and complexity are in excess of any organizational form[44].

Both of these conceptions of scene may work in parallel to each other, underpinning research with different foci and points of departure. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest, ongoing transformation of the cultural sectors within cities is forcing a convergence of these two ways of thinking about scenes. As works of contemporary art are conceived more and more in terms of the sociability which they construct, the constituent features of a scene are now lodged within the aesthetic principles which shape such works, rather than forming around them as an excess. Likewise, as cinemas, bookstores, libraries, museums and other cultural institutions acquire, as appendages, spaces for

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[43] Nick Crossley's development of the concept of "music worlds" encompasses virtually all the dimensions of cultural life elsewhere discussed in terms of "scenes". See Nick Crossley, "Totally wired: The network of structure of the post-punk worlds of Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield 1976-1980," in Nick Crossley, Siobhan McAndrew et Paul Widdop, (ed.) *Social Networks and Music Worlds*, Londres et New York, Routledge, 2015, pp. 40-60. The work of Troni on experimental music in Santiago offers, in my view, an account of networks which is able to incorporate most of the phenomenon hitherto subsumed under the concept of scene. Manuel Tironi. "Gelleable spaces, eventful geographies: The case of Santiago's experimental music scene," in Ignacio Farias and Thomas Bender (ed.) *Urban Assemblages: How Actor-Network Theory Changes Urban Studies,* Londres et New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 27-52

[44] Kees Doevendans et Anne Schram. « Creation/Accumulation City", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 22: 2 (2005), p. 30.

eating, drinking and public sociability, the focused activity which surrounds individual cultural forms is being absorbed more and more within the theatre of visible public intimacy [45].

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[45] See, for a longer, preliminary treatment of this phenomenon, Will Straw, "Above and below ground," in Paula Guerra et Tânia Moreira (ed.) *Keep It Simple, Make It Fast: An Approach to Underground Music Scenes, vol. 1,* Porto, Portugal, Universidade do Porto – Faculdade de Letras, 2015, pp. 403-410.

Resumé

This article suggests that the scholarly writing on scenes is marked by a divergence between two ways of conceiving a scene. "Open" conceptualizations of a scene treat them as broader manifestations of urbanity, as part of the theatricality of city life. A "scene", in this sense, is engaged in the instilling, within city-dwellers, of the values and ethical protocols of urbanity. "Restricted" conceptions of a scene regard them as the forms of organization which surround particular cultural forms, like genres of music. However much one might imagine a reconciliation of these ways of conceiving scene, each has generated its own traditions of research and each mobilizes distinct domains of cultural analysis. Each, as well, presumes different ways of thinking about the visibility of scenes.

Mots clefs: culture, ville, scène, nuit, urbanité