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STREETNOTES 31

Spring 2026



Flying Kites, Downtown Manhattan Skyline in the background. Brooklyn, New York, USA, 2025. Photo: Nikola Bradonjic.

An Anthology of URBAN HABITS

Editors: **Jorge de La Barre**
Blagovesta Momchedjikova
Jo Novelli-Blasko

AN ANTHOLOGY OF URBAN HABITS

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Streetnotes **31**

AN ANTHOLOGY OF URBAN HABITS

Edited by Jorge de La Barre, Blagovesta Momchedjikova, and Jo Novelli-Blasko

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FOREWORD

Welcome to An Anthology of Urban Habits! What began as a modest effort to publish a journal of a few submissions (see our original Call for Papers in Appendix A), transformed into an epic collection of 133 Urban Habits, organized alphabetically, from 91 contributors! The Survey of Urban Habits (see Appendix B), which was developed with The Habitorium, gave momentum to the volume and resulted in the Report on the Survey of Urban Habits (see Appendix C). Learn more about The Habitorium's practice in the essay "Surveying." All in all, this was a monumental undertaking!

Our understanding of habits as repeated activities and behaviors informs this collection. How do bodies shape the city through habit? Whose body can express a habit, where, when, and how? How does the body habitually sense a city? How does the body incorporate the city through habit? When and where does the body habituate to the infrastructure of a city? We hope this group of writings will inspire readers to imagine their own bodies and the privilege of paying attention to habitual behavior.

In keeping with the mission of *Streetnotes*, this special issue brings together ethnographic studies of habits, documentarian practices of habits across time and place, poetry, and photography. Some habits are documentation of art in progress, as our contributors' habits have continued. Others theorize habits or simply describe routine activities. We selected academic articles, short impressions, photo essays, poems, original artwork, and even one art proposal.

In the mix are habits occurring in cities around the world including: Antofagasta, Chile; Athens, Greece; Lisbon, Portugal; London, UK; Phoenix, Arizona, USA; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Sofia, Bulgaria; Tbilisi, Georgia; and Tokyo, Japan. There is a disproportionate number of contributions on New York City urban habits but then again, New York is a city like no other… This may be due also to the fact that we editors have lived and met each other in the Big Apple. One of us still lives and teaches in New York; her students' writings on everyday urban performances–habitual in their nature–appear throughout the volume. The specific writing assignment is briefly described in "Writing the Urban."

Several of our contributors are, or have been, professors, mentors, and leaders at the Expository Writing Program (EWP) at New York University. Many of the contributors (42, almost half!) are former and current students of EWP, who developed their contributions for a writing class. The collegiality, excellent pedagogical mission, and enduring legacy of writing inspired by the program is evident in the rich diversity of our Anthology. We editors have a deep gratitude to the former director of EWP, Prof. Pat C. Hoy II, and the former director of faculty, Prof. Darlene Forrest, as well as Prof. Denice Martone, director of international writing, and our current director, Prof. Jenni Quilter, and director of faculty, Prof. Nate Mickelson. Thanks also to our incredible contributors who patiently waited, dare we say, two years, for our project to manifest. It was a delight and we hope you enjoy drifting through our wonderful collection!

The Editors

A

Air-Drying the Laundry

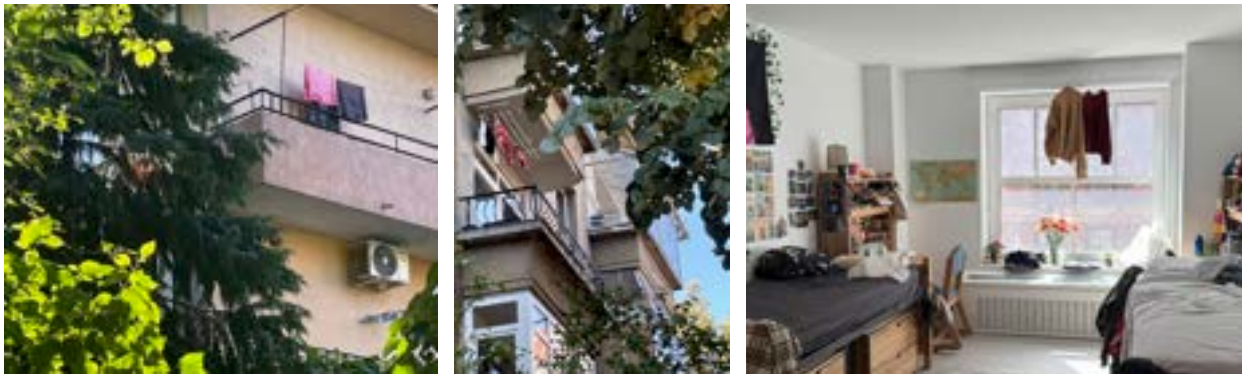
Teodora Miteva

Flowing in the Breeze…

For as long as I can remember, my grandma has air-dried our clothing on the balcony. My cousins and I would play in the towering white sheets, colorful socks, and bright shirts flowing in the breeze. Air dryers were (and still are) rare in Bulgaria, thus clothes are often dried outside, especially in the summer. This habit, which originated from village life, continued even after many Bulgarians moved from rural regions to cities during the Soviet period.

In my own family, despite having a dryer, we still prefer the balcony. Not only is it more economically and ecologically friendly, but when clothing is properly hung, the fabric effortlessly straightens, removing the need for ironing it after (which is also saving us time) (Figs. 1-2).

When I first moved to New York City, I was shocked at how few balconies there were. The windows didn't fully open, and I couldn't dry my clothing as I used to at home. Even when going around neighborhoods in Queens and Brooklyn, I noticed that the few balconies I saw were hardly used, even on sunny days. That's when I chose to adapt, integrating a piece of my culture into my new home. I started hanging my clothing near the window to capture the sun (Fig. 3). It may take longer, but it feels comfortable. And it saves me money on dryers in the basement laundry room.



Figs. 1-2. *Air-drying the laundry*. Sofia, Bulgaria, Summer 2025. Photos: Blagovesta Momchedjikova; Fig. 3. *Adopting air-drying the laundry in a college dorm*. New York City, USA, Spring 2025. Photo: Teodora Miteva.

Applying Makeup on the Train

Faye Edens

Lipstick on the Subway: Which Direction Will it Take You?

It is early in the morning as I step onto a New York City subway. I grab one of the hard plastic seats and settle in. The crazy beginning of my day fades away as I get further and further from the original subway station. My body bounces along with the tracks as I rummage through my bag for a small tube of makeup: lipstick. One hand on the circular tube of lipstick while the other holds a phone, set to the camera facing me in order to see what I am doing. My lips are still blank except for one tiny spot where the lipstick meets the lips. Right hand crossing to the bottom left lip. My face seems to be neutral but deep down I'm concentrating hoping the rocking of the subway doesn't mess me up. Unsteadiness seeping into my body as the tracks jostle me. Leaning forward ever so slightly to press into the lipstick and get closer to the mirror adjacent object as the color glides over my lips. Then I click the lipstick closed and put it back in my bag.

Sitting on the subway can sometimes feel like a waste of time. With never enough hours in the day to do all that needs to be accomplished in the city, everything always moves fast: the city propels life forward. But while above ground one can choose to jaywalk, ignoring the red no walk signal, in order to save time, the people on the subway do not get the luxury of choice in their continual motion: they are trapped. If the subway stops, there's no way to force it to keep moving, or to preserve the momentum created like jaywalking does for walking. There is already so little time in the day and the subway takes away even more of it. Doing nothing during long train rides can feel as though you are losing time that is already slipping through your fingers. Many women have found a way to fix this by making their subway rides productive. They put lipstick on while on the subway.

Putting on lipstick on the subway is a simple act harming absolutely nobody meant to save time yet it is filled with contradictions. The fact I even dared put lipstick on, on a subway, already sparks controversy. BBC ran an article, "Make-up on the Train: What's the Problem?" by Jennifer Meierhans, about if it was socially acceptable to apply makeup on the train, examining this habit in an urban setting. Meierhans conveys how many people find the application of makeup on the train to be unpleasant. Yet the only people who express dismay in the activity to the point where they believe it to be culturally unacceptable are men. One particular man, Gerard, a 60-year old interviewee, even declares, "There seems to be something so totally 'in your face' about females who insist on their dubious 'rights' in this matter" (Meierhans). Gerard discusses how this habit makes him uncomfortable; it throws feminism into the faces of men, but not once does he consider why the ladies perform the task during transportation. He only focuses on himself and how he thinks women should behave when it comes to getting ready in the morning.

Putting on lipstick isn't like some other activities that could occur on the subway. A person could easily be cutting their toenails–which is beyond gross–having removed their shoes that protect their feet from the germ-infested floor. While both are methods of beautification, toenail clipping is far messier, with pieces of toenails flying around as each is trimmed. Putting on lipstick is contained, affecting only the person doing the activity. If you do not want to see it, look away because the young lady, which these men ridicule, is not meaning to be impolite or vulgar.

The *Stylist,* a women's empowerment website, responds to the BBC article, with its own, authored by Moya Crockett and titled, "I Really Don't Care if People Think Applying Make-up in Public is Rude." She writes: "Gerard might sound like the absolute last person you'd want to get stuck talking to at a party, but I'm grateful to him. Thanks to his insight, I now know that the act of covering up my dark circles on the bus to work isn't something totally mundane and unremarkable; it

is actually A Feminist Act" (Crockett). Her words become a call to action: continue putting on makeup as it is no longer just an action but a symbol of feminism.

Yet some women admit to applying lipstick to make themselves look pretty and more desirable for men, in order to be treated better. Maria, who wears lipstick every day, can attest to that. When asked if people treat her differently she responded immediately with a simple, "yes, of course" (Maria). As an avid lipstick wearer, she can notice the stark contrast between how people treat her with versus without lipstick. Do women wear lipstick because they want to or because they believe that those around them will treat them just a little bit better when they have it on?

The world we live in isn't black and white; we exist in shades of gray. Lipstick is no exception. Is wearing it an act of feminism or internalized misogyny? To be honest, I do not know. I personally use lipstick and makeup like armor similar to how many use their phones on the elevator–scrolling endlessly to avoid eye contact, interactions, and awkwardness while among strangers, or putting them away while with friends. With lipstick, I use it to shield myself in situations I might feel inferior or less than: at a party or job interview. I even wore it during welcome week at my college, stopping once I had made solid friends and felt like I actually belonged, lowering the barricade.

This switching between meanings for lipstick is nothing new, and started when lipstick was first discovered around 3500 BC (though face paint was already known), as a powder made up of crushed up rocks. Its popularity spread like wildfire: in Egypt the dead would be buried with pots of it. Then, things changed: for some time in Greece, lipstick was only used by prostitutes and sex workers; during the Roman Empire, it rose to a symbol of wealth; later in England–a sign of witchcraft; and during the US women's rights movement–a token of women's empowerment (Jackson). This flip-flopping between meanings creates a tug of war in the mind: wear lipstick to combat everything women are told or to submit to misogyny?

Of course makeup could be used for something silly and childish: a face painting booth at the fair, where no one is thinking about feminist movements or offending someone with one's actions. Everyone wants something joyous instead: a cool superhero or a spooky skeleton to run around and pretend to become. Face painting tends to be far less subtle and worn more often by children. Lipstick, by contrast, is mostly worn by adults; somehow it has lost the joy of childhood spark that face painting brings. Yet makeup is meant to bring the same feeling face paint gives to a child: joy, so the wearer can feel a little bit better about themselves and going about their day.

So, wear lipstick! It will bring love, hate, joy, and sadness to you no matter what, so wear the brightest shade or the most neutral shade you can find. Wear what makes you happy and wear it with pride. Because in a world that judges women for everything, you do not need to add onto it by judging yourselves.

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Archiving

Victoria Reshetnikov

Queens: Your Time is Infinite

The project "Queens: Your Time is Infinite" consists of a set of four sculptures, or "books," that reference the borough of Queens and its history, particularly the 1964 New York World's Fair (Fig. 1). With its troubled and complex history, ties to Robert Moses, and the architectural relics it left behind, the 1964 World's Fair elicits ideas of architecture, memory, and time. In the context of Queens, a suburban and often overlooked borough, the world's fair helps me further consider the capacity the borough has for legacy. The project takes its shape because of the melding of this present with this history, joining personal and generational memory together.

The project centers the process of archiving, collecting, and sifting through urban space. I am picking up detritus, taking photos, collecting artifacts to combine it and elicit new juxtapositions. The sculptures are the result of this process of recombination, remnants of an art practice that centers collecting. The facades of the sculptures are produced out of photography taken around the borough today, using the present to give shape to its history.

The project also recognizes the way world's fairs infamously miniaturize space, clipping and editing participating nations to create traversable, and often utopic, "villages." The project samples architecture from the fair, including the New York State Pavilion (Fig. 2), an ice-cream truck (Fig. 3), the New York City Pavilion/Queens Museum (Fig. 4), and the Russian Orthodox Pavilion (Fig. 5). Through their miniaturization, the sculptures give people the opportunity to handle architecture, and its history, more personally.

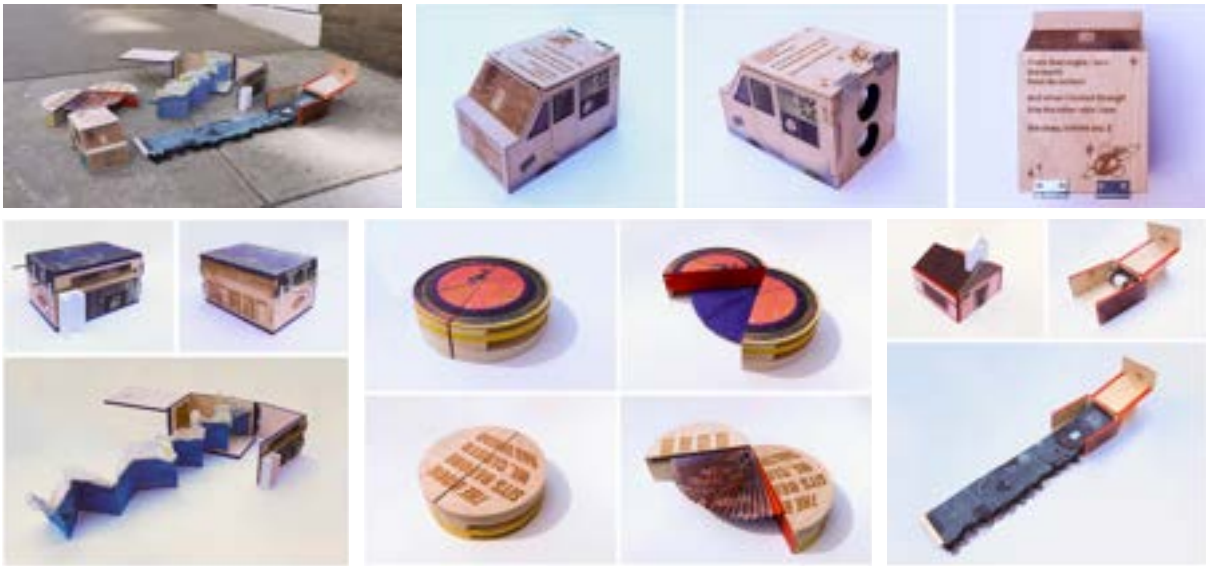


Fig. 1. Top (left to right): *A selection of Queens sculptures/books;* Fig. 2. *Unisphere-Adjacent Ice Cream Truck*. Screenprint and laser cut on wood with inset speaker diaphragms 8 x 5 x 6". Bottom: (left to right): Fig. 3. *New York City Pavilion/Queens Museum: think of yourself as a relic sleeping*. Screenprint, dye sublimation, and laser etch on wood (Exterior), Screenprint, graphite, colored pencil, acrylic, gold leaf, secondhand lace trim (Interior), 12 x 10 x 7" (Closed), 12 x 30 x 7" (Open); Fig. 4. *New York State Pavilion: The Book Sits Before Me*. Screenprint and lasercut on wood, hardware (Exterior), Dye sublimation and screen print on Canton (Interior), 10 x 10" (Closed), 20 x 10" (Open); Fig. 5. *Russian Orthodox Pavilion: зубы щелкают*. Screenprint, lasercut, and dye sublimation on wood (Exterior), Screenprint, embroidery, acrylic, and secondhand lace trim on canvas (Interior), 5 x 8 x 7" (Closed), 5 x 25 x 7" (Open). Queens, New York City, USA, 2024. Artworks: Victoria Reshetnikov.

Avoiding Eye Contact

Enhe Cui

If You Don't Look at This Title, This Title Won't Look at You

Close your eyes and imagine yourself on the streets of New York City–crowds akin to the results of pressing "randomize" when creating a video game character one too many times all rush past each other on the sidewalks, disorganized as ever. Yet, they flow like some sort of a syncopated symphony to the ever-so-present sounds of sirens. Now turn your head to the right: heaps of people have formed lines in front of storefronts with big, bold lettered signs describing their newest, hottest event. Turn your head to the left: cars, lots of them, driving at surprisingly moderate paces because at any given opportunity, they would have to slow down to honk at a jaywalking opportunist. Everywhere you look, you are bound to find someone doing something.

As a newly minted and slightly under-qualified New York "local," I used to look everywhere I could to fully bask in the glorious chaos that is this city. However, I soon learned that I was making the mistake of looking too much. Nobody "sensible" in New York seemed to dare to look at each other, eyes desperately dodging the gaze of another like the king piece of a losing chess game. Whenever someone walks towards another, they must look elsewhere–if they don't, their eyes would drift towards the others' by instinct, and they would be hit with an inexplicable, uncomfortable feeling. And so, eyes dash from one object to another before settling somewhere unsuspicious such as the window of a shop or the screen of a phone. In just another second, they will forget about each other and become the backgrounds of insignificant memories–but for that moment, the stranger walking towards them is the most important person in their life, and eye contact must be avoided at all costs.

So why, exactly, is such a simple and seemingly insignificant task treated like a life or death situation in New York City? While it might not be easy to answer this question with utmost certainty, "Eye Contact Perception in the West and East: A Cross-Cultural Study" by Shota Uono and Jari K. Hietanen may provide some insight into this situation. The study, like its title suggests, delves into how different cultures (Finnish and Japanese) interpret eye contact (or the lack thereof). Ultimately, Uono and Hietanen concluded that western participants were more likely to assume that slightly averted eye contact was directed at them due to eye contact being more common in western cultures, and the difference in facial expression interpretation in a cultural aspect (Uono & Hietanen). Perhaps the reason why New Yorkers go to further measures to ensure that eyes do not meet is because we are likely to assume that every pair of eyes that are subtly avoiding ours are looking straight at us, and in turn think that falling victim to eye contact is way more common than it actually is.

While the aforementioned assumption could explain a few things about our behavior, this still doesn't explain why New Yorkers tend to see eye contact, a seemingly harmless act of silent communication in many communities, as something so negative, and create the purposeful habit to avoid it. What exactly makes New York so different? Kessiah Gordon, who investigated the phenomenon that is jaywalking in New York in her essay "Jaywalking: Cannon Fodder for the Urban Lifestyle," believes that one of the many "unique and detailed intricacies that define [New York]" comes from its "[fast] pace of life" (Gordon par. 2). As a city that "never sleeps nor ceases to slow down," nobody seems to want to spare their precious time waiting for things, or on people whom they don't know, and will likely never know (Gordon par. 3).

But of course, eye contact isn't exactly a time-consuming task in itself. During my investigation into avoiding eye contact on the streets, I had a conversation with my friend Hannah

Le about her opinion of and relationship with avoiding eye contact. She explained that she "never [makes] eye contact when [she] walk[s] around," as she fears that eye contact would become a signal which "[makes others] think they should start talking to [her]" (Le). To be viewed as a target for time consuming and pointless small talk, which follows eye contact, would be unideal in such a quick-paced environment, and become an incentive to eye-contact avoidance.

That being said, I do sometimes find myself making so-called "dreaded" small talk with people on the streets. Granted, they have all been with friends whom I am more than familiar with. In the middle of a busy street, friends would find themselves meeting eyes, then proceed to gravitate towards the other like two different magnet poles, greeting each other and talking about anything and everything. At that moment, it would almost feel like their pace of life has slowed down compared to the double speed of the people around them, and they no longer have to worry about avoiding gazes while they comfortably exist within each others' eyes. In fact, they may even feel an obligation to make eye contact, just as they feel obligated to avoid it with strangers– the two performances contrast each other like two halves of one whole. It seems like familiarity, more specifically the lack thereof, also plays a role in the intrinsic "wrong" feeling that we may experience when meeting eyes with others on the streets.

This instinctive correlation between eye contact and relationships has always been present throughout history. The blogpost "The Power of the Gaze: How Artists Evoke Emotion Through the Eyes" by Portraits Inc., which delves into the different portrayals of eyes and their gazes in art, speaks of the usage of eye contact, something "innately human and relatable" in portraits to create a feeling of "[intimacy] between the subject and the artist or [...] recipient of the painting" (Portraits Inc. Par. 8, 12). When viewers view a piece of artwork which they don't have a personal connection to, they may feel as if they've "intruded" on the aforementioned intimacy–one that they feel like they should have no part in (Portraits Inc. Par. 12). This silent yet uncomfortable conversation that the audience has with those portraits is not much different from ones that passersby have with each other when they meet eyes–there is an inherent feeling as if we've intruded into someone's lives and are crossing the unspoken line into an intimate connection, however short it is, that we may not feel the right to have with a stranger.

And so, we tend to seek out and prefer options that minimize the chances of meeting eyes and having that moment of uncomfortable intimacy with another person. In his essay "The People on the Bus," which talks about the ever-evolving New York transportation system and his relationship with New York buses, Adam Gopnik exemplifies this conscious choice by taking the bus instead of other modes of public transportation. He finds the "non-confrontational and yet collaborative nature of the seating" in buses much more preferable than alternatives such as having to "[look] directly at [people][...] as he must on the subway" (Gopnik Par. 8). It seems like being in a bus creates an almost perfect environment for eye contact avoidance, and we can see people mimicking similar formations, though less stagnant, on sidewalks. By being in a collective whole which moves as one form, we are able to avoid having to directly look at others walking towards our direction, while drawing as little attention as possible to ourselves, meaning that less people would look back at us. After all, eye contact requires two participants, and this method seems to lessen the chance of both parties to be afflicted with the others' gaze.

When moving with the flow of pedestrian traffic on the streets, the people of New York walk quickly and silently, avoiding drawing too much attention through not only visual, but also auditory means. However, walking in complete silence is often considered as, if I may, an incredibly dull and monotonous activity. People on the streets often listen to music through headphones to make this task less tedious, which introduces a new and perhaps irrational fear into our current bluetooth-filled generation–accidentally playing music out loud due to disconnected headphones. To make sure that we're not sending out a musical signal which draws others' gazes towards us (or even

worse–having our music become an excuse for another to begin conversing with us), I've noticed that people on the streets would, in variable intervals, take out one of their earbuds and confirm that our music can now only be heard through the remaining ear before putting it back. Though this action and avoiding eye contact are both attempts to avoid drawing attention to oneself, the latter is much more subtle and instinctual as compared to the former. Avoiding eye contact is something which blends into the day to day life of another, and something that we wouldn't usually notice.

This paradoxical subtlety of obviously averted gazes is an artform in itself–a performance that New Yorkers have mastered. Eye contact is a constant presence in the performing arts, as actors use them to convey emotions and stories left unsaid that the audience (spectators, if you will) then pick up. However, that is not the only role that the eyes play in these productions. What's less noticed, yet equally as important in terms of eye contact in theater is the deliberate choices to not make them with the crowd, letting them remain as "spectators" of the story. Locking eyes–an action that's inexplicably personal between two people–with someone in the crowd creates a connection, however small, between the actor and the spectator. This isolates them out to each other, breaking their immersion into the collective that is the production. Though we are not as lucky to receive instructions from a director or instructor and have to develop this skill by ourselves over time (often subconsciously), this is not so different from what we do on sidewalks. We play our role as the "collective" that is the backdrop of New York City, avoiding eyes with people who are both our co-stars and audience–the people around us.

According to Hannah, making eye contact with someone and thus being perceived and isolated from a crowd by them (and vice versa) makes her "[feel like her and the other individual] are suddenly real [to each other]" (Le). Indeed, sharing an act so emotionally intimate with a complete stranger is almost intimidating just to think about, and something that most New Yorkers certainly don't have time to experience and explore. Thus, we avoid eye contact by habitually glancing away in a quick and subtle manner to avoid any confrontations that looking at someone may bring. And so, as I, an inexperienced inhabitant of New York, complete this essay and prepare to stroll on the streets of New York to scour for dinner, I'll be sure to pick up my pace, blend in, and look away.

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B

Babysitting

Sandra Roberts

I have been babysitting kids in Manhattan and Brooklyn for over 20 years. Before taking on babysitting, I belonged to a homeschooling program, for about 2 years, where we went to different kids' homes, to teach them. I am happy that I transitioned to babysitting: I make the same amount of money caring for one child, not 12. I also get to form a special bond with that child.

You are needed as a babysitter when kids are anywhere between 6 weeks and 3 years old, until the child is old enough to start school. Sometimes, you are needed until the child is 11 years old. That depends on the needs of the family: sometimes parents work late hours, sometimes parents like to go out on a regular basis, sometimes the child has activities that are far away and you need to drop them off and pick them up. If the parents like you, they can keep you working for them much longer, even full time though the child might be older and more independent. All in all, I have taken care of 12 kids, each for several years. The longest I have taken care of a kid is 11 years! Some of the kids I took care of in the past are now adults: they call me, come to see me, update me on their lives. I feel very connected to all the kids that I have taken care of over the years.

Babysitting is all about creating habits with the baby that you are taking care of, and sticking to these habits. Routine is something babies look forward to: it gives them safety. There are many habits I follow as a babysitter: the time when I arrive and leave (and the rituals associated with these) as well as the progression of events in between: breakfast, going outside, coming back, lunch (the baby has her lunch and then she eats up mine (hahaha!)), then a nap, snacks when she wakes up, more play, and time for me to go. Habits are very useful to me as a babysitter: if the baby does not want to go outside, for example, all I need to do is remind her of the friends she is going to see in the playground, calling them by name, and she is suddenly ready to go!

New York City is great for babysitting: there are so many places to go, so many activities to take the baby to: there are paid activities such as music and movement classes but also totally free activities such as events in the city parks and playgrounds all summer long. We go to both.

When I meet other babysitters and we talk, I learn that not all parent-employers are nice. That makes me appreciate all the parents that I have worked for even more: I always find nice people, nice families, who want to keep me working for them. I feel so lucky! Not all babysitters are that lucky.

The majority of babysitters that I run into are women of color and the majority of babies that are being taken care of by babysitters are white. There are exceptions, of course. But it really makes you wonder, do white families have better jobs and earn more money, so they are more likely to hire the help of a babysitter?

Being at a Train Station

Beth Kurkjian

"My Station"



Fig. 1. *Subway Sight*, New York City, USA, 2024. Drawing courtesy of the author's eleven-year-old son, Harry.

There are actually two of them,
I often forget

I take my line

though another station (also another color)
bears the same name,
it's like it's in a foreign language.
it's even the same street, just deeper;
but not the one I use, near home

subways lift our feet and set us down.
when we know one, or a few, really well,
we tinker with a time, space, energy equation
consciously, and not

frequent retracing affords adjustments
and observations

at my station
I mostly enter the side heading to the city
beside a corner deli that keeps changing
owners and façades
(frequent transformations project
untrustworthiness)
unlike my bodega, the storefront is like a blank space
as I descend

if I'm off to teach
I stand
where the second car from the front of the train will
arrive
because it's closest to the stairs (I need)
when I step out

but if heading to the office,
I'll stroll to the platform's other end;
it sets me up for a better staircase on the other side

if the train rolls in
just as I push through the turnstiles

none

of
this
matters

but I almost never wait in the platform's middle:
wasted space, wasted time

I do like waiting near columns on the platform–
it feels like protection from an unlikely
push

I gravitate towards them,
without worry really surfacing

returning home
I mostly exit my side (not the other, a block away)
leaving through the turnstiles to the left
I make a u-turn at the top of the stairs, ignore the doughnuts
and begin walking
uphill

but I consider which exit is closer
to the store that sells cat food
versus Italian bread
and so on,
pivoting as need be

mix-n-match:
purpose and pleasure
a balancing
of inner and outer scales

I know which side of which streets
has better shade, fewer people
an additional crosswalk, a dangerous intersection

I know where the air smells like everything bagels

I know which sidewalks are dotted with dog poop,
which have colorful doors, flower boxes
at twilight, I glance at chandeliers glowing within

come fall, I slow down,
admiring brownstones with outlandish Halloween decorations:
massive spiders and climbing skeletons, bats dangling

come winter, I accelerate home,
and so on

I am my own car

Biking

Kilian Scott

Citi Biking: An Individual or Communal Act?

Everybody seems to hate Citi Bikers. Dashing in front of startled pedestrians, interweaving between unobservant taxi-drivers, pedaling down the wrong way in bike lanes–there seems to be little method to their madness. From suited businessmen to gaggles of teenagers getting off from school, you'll catch a wide range of characters Citi Biking about New York. The one thing they all have in common: a dash of fearlessness.

I remember when Citi Bikes first appeared on the city's streets. Inquisitive citizens investigated the docks, unlocking bikes from the fleet, and speeding across the avenues. Paired with the recently paved bike lanes, it seemed like a recipe for disaster; people were blindly stepping into the streets, forgetting that there was the possibility of incoming traffic so close to the curbside. *Not another big city change. It's like they're upping the MTA prices again.* Now, New Yorkers have accepted Citi Biking. An integral part of the city? Just another unnecessary addition to New York City traffic? I asked NYU student Diana Ortez about this. "I do think [Citi Biking] is really important for people to get around," she says, "but… it's just so dangerous. Drivers, walkers get annoyed with them… I'd say I do, too. But I do think it's important–[it's] easy, fast, and accessible transportation" (Ortez). When time is a form of currency, speed and efficiency often override the element of danger.

Although many New Yorkers won't like to admit it, Citi Biking exemplifies the spirit of New York: there's a "hurry up" attitude that resonates from the act. While walking has always been my preferred method of transportation, it's not always feasible. Walking affords you more time–time to peer into every nook and cranny, to catch a glimpse of every bodega window reflection, to let yourself fall in love with every snippet of overheard small talk. You get to see the city as it should be seen: on your own two feet. The repeated motion of heel-toe, heel-toe creates a steady rhythm that's unique to the curve of your sole and the weight of your step. Walking is a contemplative act; it grants a time and space to refocus and gather your thoughts before turning back into the bustling world around you. It's one of the few activities where I can make myself enter a mode of concentration.

Yet, somehow, Citi Biking manages to speed up this process. Grasping the handlebars and pedaling for speed, I'm alert. I'm confident. The rush of wind against my face bestows on me a sense of invincibility. While walking provokes thought, Citi Biking eliminates *over*thinking. Fingers always placed against the breaks, I anticipate any reason to halt, searching for any bump, car, or pedestrian that might set me off path. But it's not a conscious or deliberate thinking, it's a reflex. An instinct. A habit. Citi Biking is not just a form of transportation–it's a mode of focus. Thrust into the community and your surroundings, it enables you to take in the city at maximum speed.

In her essay "Rollerblading," Blagovesta Momchedjikova describes a similar focus that rollerblading both provides and demands. Despite the city's seemingly disjointed elements, we all move in tandem with each other like parts of a piece of complex machinery. Momchedjikova argues that the city "resists [her] but also assists [her]" (Momchedjikova par. 2). She works in opposition to many elements of the city, but they also help her navigate her surroundings. Much like Citi Biking, rollerblading requires a sense of urgency and alertness. You have to be quick on your feet–or in this case, wheels–ready to interpret and digest any variations in terrain. A grid system of beautiful chaos, its fast-walkers and taxi drivers are constantly in opposition to your speed, a constant scrimmage over space and time. But perhaps we're all working together. Each individual's hurried nature adds to an overall faster pace of the city, achieving the maximum efficiency. Everyone has places to be, and we're all forging the fastest way to get there.

For this reason, Citi Biking is a wildly convenient form of transportation (Fig. 1). Smaller than a car and faster than a pedestrian, your wheels take you in and out of traffic as you please. Unlike *owning* a bike, you don't have to plan ahead or worry about the hassle of locking up your bike; you can even opt to take a one-way ride. Just scan a QR code or insert a key, and the bike is yours for as long as you wish (of course, after the initial fee and 30 minutes pass, you are charged by the minute). You can easily grab a bike from one docking station and let it off at another. Unlike buses and subways, you can ride almost directly to your destination. Once you're undocked, you're off onto the streets of New York, where the hustle and bustle dances up each avenue and awaits you.



Fig. 1. In the past year or so, I've found that Citi Biking has not only been an integral part to my transportation, but also an integral part to my mental health. When I've felt restless or anxious, Citi Biking has given me a quick solution to letting off some steam. It often feels like a personal act. But the more I bike, the more I feel connected to the city. The ins and outs of New York, the ability to dock or undock a bike as I please–Citi Bike meshes the community with the individual; we all work together to make the system work. New York City, USA, December 2022. Drawing: Kilian Scott; Fig. 2. *Witte Fietsen, White Bikes*, by Provos, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, January 1, 1965. Image Source: *Actipedia.*

Although now an integral part of our cityscape, Citi Biking didn't take to New York City streets until 2013, trailing behind massive bike-sharing initiatives in Paris, Seoul, and Suzhou (Meyer par. 5). Proposed by the New York City Department of Transportation, Citi Bike surprisingly does not receive public funding from the State–it was started with Citigroup's $41 million sponsorship and a small fleet of 6,000 bikes. Currently with 25,000 bikes and 15,000 stations, (Citi Bike), Citi Bike has surpassed the numbers of Paris' *Velib* as the "biggest bike-sharing service outside of China and Taiwan" (Meyer par. 1). It is only expected to increase in popularity and usage in the coming years.

The concept of bike-sharing is not a new one: dating back to Amsterdam in 1965, it began as an initiative by Dutch anarchist Luud Schimmelpennink, from the larger Provo movement (Chandler par. 4). The goal of *Witte Fietsen*–or *White Bikes*–was to reduce the environmental impact of transportation as well as provide an accessible free form of public transportation (Fig 2). The proponents saw the white bike as a symbol of "simplicity and hygiene, as opposed to the gaudiness and filth of the authoritarian car" (Chandler par. 6). Although *Witte Fietsen* only lasted a year, its impact was significant. As pollution has become a more imminent problem, bike-share systems seem to offer a solution. Collective efforts start with individual endeavors; Citi Biking can prove to be not just an act of self, but a step toward minimizing our impact on the environment.

Is Citi Biking fulfilling these goals? David Meehan attempts to answer, in his thesis "Participatory Planning in Urban Transit: An Ethnographic Case Study of Citi Bike." Environmentally, it seems to be hitting the mark–docking stations are solar powered and almost entirely free of carbon emissions. But its opening was not as equitable as initially thought. While it is

sustainably driven–a "product of ethical consumerism" (Meehan 18)–and Citigroup itself donates a portion of its proceeds to organizations that engineer more environmentally friendly materials and energy, Citi Biking is not accessible for all. With docks scattered throughout Lower Manhattan and select neighborhoods in Brooklyn, it failed to reach many lower income neighborhoods. Johnathan Westin, the executive director of New York Communities for Change argues that "There's reason to believe that if Citi Bike is in your neighborhood, it's gentrifying and turning over," its goal being not to serve New Yorkers but "to make money" (Westin qtd. in Guse). As Citi Bike expands, Citi Biking will reach into the Bronx, as well as further into Brooklyn and Queens. Is that a sign of gentrification or a step towards making Citi Biking more accessible?

Taking the bus is much more accessible both cost- and location-wise. The MTA operates 44 local and 46 express routes connecting Queens, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan (MTA). But aside from the functional and equitable aspects of the bus system, there's the communal one: it is both public and intimate. Confined in a space with strangers, you keep to yourself, avoid disruption, and give up your seat when someone needs it. Shared space warrants a set of unspoken rules one must follow. This balance of privacy and community that the bus achieves is why Adam Gopnik calls it "humane," in his essay "The People on the Bus." The "non-confrontational and yet collaborative nature of the seating" makes it personal, but not *too* personal: "You look over people's shoulders, closely, and yet only rarely look directly at them, face to face" (Gopnik). There's space for silence and sifting through your own thoughts, but there's also room for observation, taking in the stuff around you. The bus is a place of silent reverie.

It's interesting to take the same element of community that the bus so earnestly upholds and apply it to the act of Citi Biking. A seemingly individual act, it is often used just for the sake of transportation. Bike racing, in comparison to Citi Biking, appears to be more communal. It is planned, an event in which people gather together. Lining up at the starting line, dressed in slim billing-wear, and feet strapped to the pedals, all cyclists shoot off down the path at the "flying of the flag." It's go-time. They set off along with hundreds or thousands of people to achieve what they came there for. While cycling is an individual sport and can serve a very personal and often psychological purpose, it is also a communal experience. Everyone comes to a race with a different goal in mind; and although competing, they simultaneously work together, weaving in and out of each other's paths to help each other achieve their individual goals.

Citi Biking is not so different from cycling in a bike race. While an individual and independent act, is not a solitary one. Just like cycling in a race, Citi Biking requires coordinated work to reach a final destination, usually at the fastest speed. When Citi Biking, you're part of a collective–part of the city, and part of the fleet. You can't be selfish on the road; it'll only slow the pace of the city down. And although heavily reliant on your own actions, you also rely on the biker before you, and thus, on the biker before them. Citi Biking is an act in constant circulation; like currency, bikes from one dock pause only to be passed onto another. When one bike sails in, another leaves–and another person grabs the one after that. A network of bikes being exchanged, Citi Biking weaves elements of both freedom and responsibility into New York City transportation. Somehow, we owe our independence to each other.

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Busking

Sophia Rike

Busking in the City: The Roots of Public Music

New York City is full of life and sound. It is always moving to the rhythm of the street, the chatter of the subway, and that distinct howl of the wind scraping past the buildings. There is a flow to these sounds, creating the music of the city. This music moves the collective mind of New York. It can be influenced by the everyday activities and performances that happen within it, they all affect the rhythm. You can choose which ones you tune into. One of these prominent activities is busking. Musicians can be seen performing in any public park, subway station, or street. Oftentimes these performers will have an open instrument case, hat, or bucket for passersby to drop a couple of dollars into. Any kind of instrument can be used, from guitars to drums, even pianos. The performer often has a small setup in an open space to allow the flow of traffic and any crowd they attract. It is a very variable art form, with no hard and fast rules to its mechanics. These musicians present their music for free but rely on donations from the public to keep up their art form. The presence of buskers is often a welcome one in the community, their music being a pleasant addition to the city's environment. Many native New Yorkers share this sentiment. In my conversation with Tangie Gaillard, she talked about how busking is an integral part of life in the city. "They bring a unique element to walking around the city. The atmosphere of New York would be very different without them" (Gaillard). It's exciting to hear music being played in the park or subway station, the heavy load of the day is lifted slightly by this free musical display. It would be a very dreary walk to work without the music buskers share. Busking is central to the atmosphere of the city; public music performance gives life to cities.

Not only is busking central to city life, it is a key part of New York City's history and our collective human history. Street performance has been around since medieval times and is rooted in city living. In his article, "The History of NYC Busking," Joel Feinberg details the origins of busking and how it made its way to New York. "Busking can be traced back to the Middle Ages as jongleurs, troubadours, and minstrels would sing, juggle, dance, and perform other acts in the streets and at fair," writes Feinberg. In the early 1900s, German and Italian immigrants brought the activity to the United States, where it grew in popularity, especially in poor neighborhoods. Though busking was aimed at entertainment and making some money, it was often seen as an elevated form of begging. It became more and more popular, especially in New York, and especially with young people. They would play in public parks until the NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation decided Washington Square Park "should be a quiet and peaceful place" (Feinberg). This shutdown would cause the Beatnik Riot of 1961, where street performers gathered in the park to protest. The riot started the long legal struggle between city regulations and eager buskers. Busking was a central part of the social revolution in New York during the 60s, becoming linked with teenage rebellion. Its history is deeply intertwined with the evolution of New York City, making it a central part of the city's atmosphere.

New York doesn't only rely on busking for its unique atmosphere. Many kinds of performances add to its unique charm, including street preaching. Though quite different from busking on the surface, they have quite a few features in common. Both activities involve performing openly in a public space, expecting people to watch and listen in. They present something to the public, hoping that someone will be drawn in and interested in what they are saying or playing. However, buskers often rely on donations while street preachers have no need for them. There is almost always money involved with busking; the musician often has a tip bucket urging people to donate. Street preachers do not need to ask for donations, their only goal is to share their

message, and don't need to make money from it. This brings up the central trait of busking: playing for monetary gain. There is a strange intersection between the performers' joy and passion for playing, and the need to make money from their craft. Though they present their music for free, they urge the public to donate. Money is the barrier between public and private performance. There is always the choice to donate to public performers, but private performance requires a monetary fee from the attendees.

This divide is more evident when busking is observed in contrast with music concerts. Music concerts are the scheduled, private equivalent of busking. Busking occurs in public spaces like parks, while concerts are held in private venues. Purchasing tickets is a required step in attending a concert while giving money to a busker is completely optional. This is the direct monetary divide, but this divide leads to further divisions. There are a limited number of tickets available for concerts, but busking could potentially reach an unlimited number of people. The monetary fee leads to scarcity and select audiences. Often there is a process to get admitted into a concert: you must go through security, get your bag checked, get your ticket scanned, and be escorted to your seat. With money also comes more safety and security for all those involved in the performance. However, busking doesn't require all of these steps because of its public and free nature. There is no security guarding the performer from the audience, no need for tickets, and no seats. People must stand to watch a busker perform, coming and going as they please. In concerts, it is frowned upon to leave during a performance or enter late. Money is the key trait that divides public from private music performance. It is what characterizes them, and sets their most basic mechanics apart.

Though music concerts are private events, sitting is a free activity that is seen everywhere throughout New York City. The public nature of sitting is its connecting factor to busking. Often the two are seen in tandem with one another: park goers sit on nearby benches listening to the performer. Yet, sitting is usually a quiet and personal activity. In contrast, busking is naturally a loud and outward-facing activity: it is meant to engage other people and produce sound. Sitting is a very static activity, the body is at rest, motionless while busking is quite active: the performer is usually standing up and exerting energy to play their instrument. Though these two activities are very different from each other, they both tend to happen in public spaces. Even when sitting alone, you can still be seen and perceived by others, despite the singularity and secluded nature of the act. Busking happens in the same public places and invites this perception from passersby. There is an intent to be seen, to be heard, and experienced with busking that is not there with sitting. The cities' liveliness relies upon busking, on active performances that intend to be perceived.

This liveliness that comes from performances meant to be perceived is alluded to in Melanie Sovern's essay, "Street Preachers: Solicitors of Free Thought in New York City." She speaks to the nature of street preaching, and how the messages they share help to break the individualistic atmosphere of the city. Street preachers "fight that blind speed with which people rush to gratify their immediate urges, and reach out to strangers so as to tear down the wall of alienation that exists between pedestrians" (Sovern). There is a constant bustle in the city that tends to isolate city-goers from each other. But, as she states, this can be interrupted by the lively and public presentations of street preachers. This type of performance is "inherently thoughtful, defiant, and selfless" (Sovern). It provokes thought in anyone who may hear the message and acts against the rushing pace of the city. Street preaching provides a bit of respite for passersby, hoping for them to get a break from alienation within the crowd.

While street preaching functions in this way, busking often appeals to our interests in culture and music. We may not stop for a preacher sharing an idea we have no connection to, but we are more inclined to listen to a musician performing one of our favorite pieces, or a recognizable tune. We are drawn to the familiar, especially in a city that for some of us can seem so alien and polarizing.

The music of buskers can bring us joy, comfort, and a sense that we aren't so alone. Busking adds a needed element of connection and comfort to the city.

There is still the question of how busking mechanically operates in such a busy city, especially with so many performers competing for space and the public's attention. Daniel Ryan, in his article, "Street Character," outlines the two basic rules of busking: "Stay out of another performer's line of sight" and "Stay out of earshot of another performer" (Ryan). These two rules ensure that performers don't disrupt each other, which also ensures that each performance is unique: in terms of space, moment, and impact on passersby and the city. Ryan notes how little is needed to stage busking, concluding that "it is all about the creation of a place for encounter" (Ryan). Yet these spaces for busking have always been challenged: buskers are often barred from performing in certain locations. This sentiment of exclusivity is discussed in Stephanie Farqhuar's essay "Memoirs of the City's Unfamous," in which she speaks about the private Gramercy Park in Manhattan. She describes its beauty, the "blossoming trees, sculpted walks, peaceful reading, and a kept garden," which can be enjoyed by a small number of people: those who live immediately surrounding the park and own a key to its gate. As a private park, it embodies the idea that "Space becomes power through exclusion" (Farqhuar). The power of space is present within busking, especially as the city prevents performers from using certain areas to present their music. Busking has been prohibited from private property as well as many streets. The spaces available to them have been shrunk to public parks and subway stations, in addition to a few other select areas. This exclusion shrinks the number of unique performances that can happen. Therefore the ones that do exist are a precious rarity, increasing their possible impact on the public. Scarcity of space increases cultural impact. This is the power that lies within busking, its ability to influence culture and city atmosphere.

There is a struggle to keep public music alive, and busking is key among these public music performances. Ever since the Beatnik riot in the 60s, busking has struggled to keep its place in our vast city. It is a dandelion growing on the street; what some see as a beautiful flower, others see as a weed crowding the sidewalk. Public authorities have tried to curb the infestation of weeds, yet despite their best efforts, they can never destroy the root. It is too deeply ingrained in the rebellious soul of our society to be thwarted. Its rarity in the garden of the city is what makes it beautiful and impactful. I choose to see the flower. I choose to pick the dandelions on the street instead of buying a thirty-dollar bouquet. I choose to enjoy the diverse melodies busking brings, the feeling that I'm not quite as alone as I think. I want to watch it blossom against the grey-blue background of the city, its petals dancing in the rhythmic music of the wind. I choose to listen.

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Buying from Coin-Operated Vending Machines

Jorge de La Barre

Eating Instant Ramen from Vending Machines in Tokyo

Due to the decline of traditional items like newspapers, health concerns regarding selling sweets and candies in public space, high rates of vandalism and theft, and the rise of cashless payment systems and modern vending alternatives, coin-operated vending machines are slowly disappearing from the streets. There is an exception, Japan, where, in stark contrast to many Western countries, vending machines remain ubiquitous.

Japan operates over 2.6 million vending machines for its 125 million residents, which breaks down to roughly one machine for every 30-40 people (Japan Dev Team). Another source states that Japan has 4 million vending machines, equating to about one machine per 32 people (Zen Gaijin). In any case, the highest ratio worldwide, by far. This is largely attributed to public safety (low crime rates and little vandalism, meaning machines can be left unattended without high risk), cultural factors (high level of trust and a cultural emphasis on convenience and automation), and a cash-based society (while cashless payments are growing, a significant portion of the Japanese population still uses cash and coins frequently).

Coin-operated vending machines are surprisingly diverse, offering everything from hot and cold drinks, snacks, frozen crêpes (Noble), meals like burgers, pizza or instant ramen (Fig. 1), to gmore unique, unexpected items like wedding rings or insect snacks (IHCSA Café). At the cutting edge, Japan even has coin-operated cosmetic vending machines that use AI for personalized recommendations. Kanebo's Kate iCon Box analyzes your face to suggest eyeshadows from thousands of combinations, offering a high-tech, convenient beauty experience with touchscreens, cashless payments, and integration for unique, customized purchasing (for a tentatively exhaustive list of what's for sale in Japan's vending machines, see Zen Gaijin).



Fig. 1. This instant ramen vending-machine has 20 varieties available, Tokyo, Japan, 2023. Image source: *Web Japan.*

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C

Carrying a Purse

Neven Armanios

I always carry a purse. In it are some essentials that I need when not home: my wallet with ID, some cash, glasses, a pen and some paper, keys, napkins, lipstick, moisturizer, phone, and headphones. Depending on the season, I may also have gloves or a hat. This habit of transporting belongings with me has been with me since forever. Even as a little girl, I remember carrying a small handbag. In addition to choosing the right purse to carry, and what to carry in it, I never put my bag on the floor to avoid misfortune. I am not so sure where I picked that superstition from–Sydney, where I grew up, or New York City, where I have lived for over three decades. Recently, I came across a habit that I had forgotten I had: drawing my purses: I have several drawings from 1998; some of these purses are still with me, perhaps worn out or used more as storage now (Figs. 1-3).



Figs. 1-3. Purses I owned and drew back in 1998. Crayon, oil pastel, pencil, 11 x 8.5 inches. Photos: Neven Armanios.

Catching Wafts of Beauty

Traci Molloy



Fig. 1. *Linden tree blossoms.* Parkside Ave., Brooklyn, New York City, USA, June 21, 2025. Photo: Traci Molloy.

The
linden
trees
are
in
bloom
now.
I
am
walking
down
the
street
and
catching
wafts
of
beauty
from
their
blossoms!

Cleaning Leaves before the Rain

Neven Armanios

Rain is a natural needed element, in every country, city, community and habitat. We need it to replenish us, cleanse us and wash away our days. With every rainfall, the sun eventually shines. However, before every projected rainfall in my neighborhood–my habitat here in Brooklyn–I experience intense sadness, filled with worry and concern. Will I flood again? Every new season of spring or summer fills me with joy and trauma. And every other day during these seasons, I habitually prepare the yard by cleaning leaves, ensuring no obstruction of the drains is present and my floodgate is up (Fig. 1). And with every flood, the sun always shines again.



Fig. 1. *"Flood" Slope*. Digital Collage. Mix-media (Google Map Photo of building, own photo of drainage, and digitally rendered leaves). Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2025. Artwork: Neven Armanios.

Collaborating on a Jazz Album

Albert Marquès



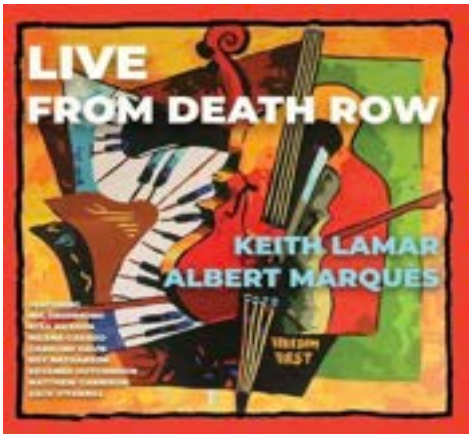


Fig. 1. *Freedom First* (2022) is the first album in history created in collaboration with an artist on death-row, Keith LaMar; the second album is *Live from Death Row* (2025). Source: Albert Marquès website.

For the past six years, I have been collaborating with Keith LaMar on the recording of two jazz albums, *Freedom First* (2022) and *Live from Death Row* (2025), which we have performed all over the world in order to raise awareness of Keith's predicament, the role of jazz in sending a universal message, and the power of community (Fig. 1). I am a composer, jazz pianist, and music educator in New York City; Keith is a wrongfully accused human being and poet, living in solitary confinement in the Ohio State Penitentiary for 33 years. He is scheduled to be executed for a crime that he did not commit on January 13, 2027. I believe that he is innocent and I believe in the power of jazz music to help free him. That is why I participate in the campaign "Justice for Keith LaMar."

How have we been able to collaborate despite the prison bars that Keith lives behind? We communicate almost daily via the electronic messaging system of the prison app. We talk by phone as well but Keith cannot call whenever he wants, just between 3-5 p.m. I have also visited him in-person several times and we have done video chat (during the pandemic). We have done pre-recordings of his spoken word, which we have played during a recording session at the studio. Our basic collaborative habit is deciding on a theme for each song and the whole album. Two more habits follow when we create together: either Keith writes the lyrics and I compose the music, to empower emotionally the lyrics; or I compose the music and Keith writes the lyrics to explain his situation. For example, in January of 2026, we recorded two new songs, which we will perform at the IFC Center concert in New York in April: one of them is based on K. Jarrett's song "Endless": there are many things about the experience of endlessness while in solitary confinement: time is infinite, it has no cycles, no weekends, no Mondays, no seasons. Keith brought the song to me and I made an arrangement for a string quartet and piano jazz trio, with places where he incorporates his poetry.

The albums that we have recorded and given concerts of around the world translate what it means to live on death row for someone who does not know about the experience: listening to the album, you learn more about it. One of the first songs that we recorded together, "Tell 'Em the Truth," tells of Keith's childhood and some basic lessons he wishes he had learned, like: "Life is not meant to be fair, it is meant to be lived." During the concerts, Keith calls from prison, and is able to deliver some of his spoken word over the phone, to a live audience; sometimes, he can answer questions. When we play in Europe, we have to schedule the concerts around the prison schedule because we want to make sure that Keith can call. If his call gets interrupted and he cannot call back,

we use recordings. The concerts have evolved over time. In addition to Keith's call and the projected song lyrics (in translation, whenever necessary), the concerts include an animated short film about Keith's life and explanation of how he was wrongfully implicated in the 1993 Lucasville Prison Uprising; a curated set list depending on the audience, venue, and musicians available to play with us; guest artists; and a merchandise table with copies of Keith's book *Condemned*, our jazz albums, T-shirts, and information about the various ways to get involved in the fight to liberate Keith.

How did the album collaboration begin? In August of 2020, I was out in the streets protesting. The *Freedom First* project was born in the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement. It started as a grassroots movement, with people protesting and attending the street music performances–we played at Grand Army Plaza with no permit but no one stopped us–and then it moved indoors (Figs. 2-4). The first indoor concert was at Northwestern University, Chicago. We did one more outdoor concert after that, but the Black Lives Matter movement had dissipated and there were no more people protesting outside and performing. We have been playing indoors since. But no matter where we give concerts–in Santiago de Chile, Seattle, or Paris–the message about Keith's life and philosophy resonates the same: human beings are asked to confront their own mortality, to ask themselves if they are doing the right things in life–it is truly a universal message.







Fig. 2. *Freedom First* concert, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn, New York City, USA, August 2020; Fig. 3. Keith LaMar's phone availability, to coordinate calls from prison during concerts, 2026. Sources: Albert Marquès Archives; Fig. 4. *Freedom First* concert, Joe's Pub, New York City, USA, May 2025. Photo: Blagovesta Momchedjikova.

I was always an activist and a musician, but I had not put the two together until *Freedom First*. Once I did, I felt personally liberated, truly like myself. Keith says that the project has empowered him to share his story, as he says in one of the songs::

> "After I was sentenced to death, I was placed in solitary confinement. It felt like I was thrown into the middle of the ocean. Try to imagine it: water as far as the eye can see and it's just you by yourself, floating. That's what solitary confinement is like." (LaMar)

Having hundreds of thousands of people hear your story when you are wrongfully convicted brings huge psychological benefits: you are being heard, you are being seen! The goal of *Freedom First* is not only to stop Keith's execution: our goal is to liberate him and we will continue playing music around the world until he is free.

Collecting Cans

Aleksandr Kobrynich

How *Can* They Do It? A Cultural and Performative Analysis of Canning

From deep within earth, passing through the factories of the world, plastic is made and bent into the shapes of bottles. Filled and sold, used and discarded; that is the end of the journey for the common consumer, but that is not where the river runs dry. In the dark valleys between the mountainous buildings of New York City, amongst the passing crowd of nameless faces, there are an invisible few who work through the trash of their fellow man to make a "living" wage. They pick around the rot and waste, the food and mush, to find the diamonds in the rough: plastic bottles. Canners, if you will, are the rough survivors who found their economical niche amongst the Wall-Street Bankers and celebrity stars. It's not pretty, but it's worked for years.

The history of collecting cans and bottles for cash, what we will from here on call "canning," is a long and windy path through the past. Its origins can be traced to 1803 where "UK soft drink producers were offering money back on returned beverage containers" (TOMRA par. 7). This was before the time of plastic and aluminum bottles, but it made economic sense. Still, there was a mutual understanding from both the producer and consumer in regards to the use and recollection of glass and stone bottles: the risk of damages or non-returns was too great. When the age of consumerism and single use plastics dawned in the 1970's, these same producers jumped on the idea of cutting such liabilities and increasing profit. It was then solved! No more worry about the reuse of product containers… right? Well, as Wolfgang Ringel, Senior Vice-President Group Public Affairs at the Norwegian based bottle recollection company TOMRA, explains, "It was all going swimmingly until it became apparent that these throwaway items created a waste stream that would put a burden on municipalities," (TOMRA par. 13). That's when the government stepped in.

Soon, as an act of protection for the people and the environment, policies emerged in countries all over the world in an attempt to find a solution. "Cash for Cans" became a popular idea, stemming from earlier attempts to reclaim glass bottles by incentivizing the actual return, people who brought in their plastic bottles or aluminum cans could redeem them for cash at a Deposit Return System (DRS). Currently in the United States there are 10 'Bottle Bill' States, which have codified into law such reclamation practices (this includes New York). Because of such opportunity in a strongly capitalistic society, Interstate Bottle Bill Redemption Fraud has become an issue in these states. According to Legislative Analyst II, Kristen L. Miller, in New York, the law "prohibits knowingly redeeming an empty beverage container that was not sold in the state," and further that, "Dealers (retailers) must post a sign at the point of sale to inform customers that, among other things, it is illegal to return beverage containers for a refund if the containers were not purchased in New York," (Miller). The fine for such infractions? $500, As it is in relation to the money from a sales tax fulfilled by taxpayers. This is their money that is being toyed with in the fraud after all.

The relative history of habitual canning at this level is so new, however, that it tends not to hold much of a presence photographically. All of the photos documenting canning are more recent; in most, the can collectors hold the presence of "vultures of the city," feeding not on carcasses but on garbage bins. Here is an image of an elderly Chinese woman, walking through New York City's Chinatown with two bags as large as her, packed full of cans (Fig. 1). To carry them, she has tied them, one to each end, to a large stick which she has balanced across her bent left shoulder. Soon enough she will have traded these in for the cash she deserves. This may have been enough before, but to make a real profit she will need to make many trips like this, or acquire a cart which she can load fully, like in this image of a mother and her children prowling the streets as the sun sets in

search of just a few more cents they can acquire (Fig. 2). It all makes a difference in this desolate urban scape, where the backdrop is the Empire State's most prolific city. Where everyone fights for themselves… even if that means fighting each other.





Fig. 1. *A Resourceful Way to Carry Cans*. Photo: Henry Garciga, in K. Marks' "Trash Money," 2022; Fig. 2. *Negotiating the streets with a fully-loaded trolley.* Source: J. Alpert and M. O'Neill's 2013 documentary *Redemption.*

There is a frantic air that sometimes surrounds these droning worker bees as they collect. A day's work can be inconsistent if one is freelancing around the city, so (as if it were something in the Animal Kingdom) canners establish territories. Territories then, of course, lead to tensions between trespassers, oftentimes resulting in fights between different canners. Yet, can anyone blame them? The ambiance of New York City is not some jolly, goody-two-shoes, place where "dreams are made of." Adam Gopnik, writer for *The New Yorker*, in his piece titled "The People on the Bus," reminds the readers that, "anxiety is the ordinary New York emotion. It is a form of energy, and clings, like ivy to a garden wall, to whatever is around to cling to [...] the anxiety of keeping up, of not falling behind, of holding one's place," (Gopnik par. 16). How could this not infect even these people? They, of all the people, know the pressures of survival. Pressure from the weather, from hunger, sleep, responsibility; so much so that an explosion is bound to occur. Such fights may not literally be life or death, but they illustrate an important fact–there is an assumed hierarchy, laws, and customs–a culture to canning, which has never been acknowledged. It sprouted from New York society like the evolution of a new species. And it has found its empty niche, embodying and accepting its role.

This niche, however, is not such a great position for most people to live in as a grueling and unique job comes with grueling and unique hours. It is no nine-to-five, but can happen at any time of day, anywhere there are those who drink and discard such bottles… but, of course, there are certain advantages to collecting at different times. Due to the nature of human consumption and waste collection, more cans and bottles would be available to the canner later in the day, as more and more trash accumulates in trash bins around the city. Because of competition, the canner might miss out on opportunities for collection if another is already scouting the territory. Alternatively, in areas where recycling is big, canners can set out early on trash day mornings to pocket the sorted bottles of others who don't have the worry or care to cash their goods in, a jackpot. This still is no cheap way out, they still have to beat out the garbage collectors and their competition in their area.

When viewed this way, it is easy to see all of the quiet back runnings of the city. The action blends with the scurrying of rats at night and the changing of street lights. Nothing out of the ordinary. It is invisible, under-the-nose, and averted; a habit we all *choose* not to see. This is so unlike the street-preachers of Midtown, who blast, night and day, their messages of repentance and sin.

"They solicit beliefs–nonmaterial ideas–while the rest of New York City solicits concrete items or services" (Sovern par. 5), claims Melanie Sovern in her article "Street Preachers: Solicitors of Free Thought in New York City." And she's not wrong. Most of New York City, including canners, are materialistic. Dead set and lasered in on what can be done with the physical things in front of you and how they can play a role in the capitalist super-giant city. Street-preachers *want* to deliver a different message, forming "a counterculture with its own values and customs that contributes to the city's diversity; they also contribute thought to New York City" (Sovern par. 14). You see, although it is the antithesis of canning in some ways–giving instead of taking, being present instead of invisible, volunteering instead of working–it is in essence all the same to the godly eyes of the city. Canning, just like street preaching, creates its *own* subculture that works within urban society, but, unlike the dogmatists of the street, it can accept everyone into its world.

Still, even though anyone *can* collect and refund bottles and cans, normally, when one thinks of canners, they correctly assign the act to the lower class. These *are* the main embodiments of this urban habit, and for a very particular reason. Canners are often depicted as "an extremely hard-working subsection (there are an estimated 5,000 canners working today) of New York City's population," per Nicola Twilley's article "Five-Cent Redemption." Although the metric was taken in 2013, and the number of canners has since doubled, the required hustle and bustle of this work is still too much for the common man. But when you have no other option, turning one man's trash into your treasure is your best bet. Many canners have other jobs, many others will rely on the cans to live, but all in all these people will eventually, after working like a dog, engage in one of the most unknown transactions in America: exchanging used bottles and cans for money. The common man throws the bottle away because it is only worth 5¢, but for a collector it all piles up. A large bag could be worth hundreds of dollars. A day's work could mean the difference for a mother and child. The people who have the money to purchase one of these beverages have no worries about reclaiming the 5-10¢, which they literally throw in the trash. Those who know of, and actively seek the value in the discarded vessels, hence, are those who worry about the money and *need* it. They *need* the 5¢. And this has turned into a large enough "industry," with its own territories, infighting, and alliances.

It is hence surprising that *no one* has examined exactly what I am examining here; specifically the canner and their culture through the lens of habitual urbanism, although several people have explored the idea of Deposit-Refund Systems. Most try to explain the logical path of efficacy for reclamation and reimbursement, such as Margaret Walls, in her 2011 discussion paper on these systems both in theory and practice. Here, she explains from an ecological standpoint that "taxing litter directly is ineffective given the difficulty monitoring it so a deposit-refund applied to bottles, packaging, plastic bags, and other products that often end up as litter may be appropriate" (Walls 1). Of course, these are the 'theory' of the action. As previously mentioned, most consumers do not even attempt to participate in the system. Canning, however, makes up for some of the inaction of these people. As driven by capitalism as it might be, canning has connections that branch far away from and profit. Walls also touches on this briefly, explaining how the ten bottle-bill states are employing the laws to make the environment a cleaner, less polluted space. Such a far reaching effect then begs the question of what sets this activity apart from other common to urban spaces.

On the way back from this most recent break for Thanksgiving, after trudging through the heavy rain uptown without an umbrella, hopping the turnstiles with a bag of clothes, a bag of books, and a bag of leftovers, I got on the local 6 to head home. I heard, then, what many New Yorkers hear around the holidays, "Good evening ladies and gentlemen, my name is Ray and unfortunately I am a New York City homeless man. If you are able to spare any food, a dollar, a nickel or a dime, anything would be greatly appreciated." Three people helped that man: two gave him money and I gave him some cake and a turkey leg. This is panhandling: technically illegal, it pervades the streets

and subways of New York. Like canners, panhandlers are in it for the money, asking for "generous donations" that are fulfilled by the whims of the people who pass by. Most of the time, however, they are worse off than canners socio-economically–often entirely homeless. What separates these actions furthest, however, is the view that canning can be done for a living, to make a profit.

It is obvious that here, in this capital driven megapolis, there are many ways to make a profit–to save a buck in the city. While the canners collect and turn in bottles and cans, or the panhandlers ask for money outright, those who jump turnstiles have adjusted their budgets by taking the fare in their own hands. Three days a week–at least–I ride the subway to Brooklyn and back, and the journey is, without a doubt, filled with people "jumping" the turnstiles. Many people actually jump, others (smaller in stature, maybe) duck under them, and many–including myself–pull the bars backwards halfway to slip through the gap. This habit is, without a doubt, widely practiced in the city. Thousands do it, and only a few get fined for it. Complete payout if you're careful. One who jumps may not interact with the belongings of others, or the people themselves, nor will the participant receive money for it, however they are doing this for the same reason as canners. Money. The jumpers are spared the $2.90 entrance charge and ride the subway as a free service. Anyone can and has done it. This is possibly the easiest habitual performance one can form in the city, because once one does it, they find that there is a split second of relief in the fact that they can get around for free by doing something that took less than a second.

While jumpers rely on being invisible, street performers look for visibility: they want to be seen. Take Kanami Kusajima, one of these street dancers, though she is now quite famous for her many partnerships with the city in an ad campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic. She sets herself apart from other dancers by dancing on white paper after pouring ink over her hands and feet. As much as possible she gets out to the park and dances like this, weather permitting, to share her art with passersby. She dances for money, but also for a rare fulfillment she says she cannot find anywhere else. She loves to perform, especially in a place that is shared. Similar in passion and fire to her is dancer/choreographer Babacar Top, who visited our NYU class Nov. 29th, 2023 and discussed everyday urban dance in public. He explained how the love of his work stems from the fact that, "there's a performance all around us everyday": "when you're late, when you walk, when you're hungry" (Top). It is an expression, a performance that can afford failure and flop. Canners simply cannot: to fail is to fall and never get back up. It could be to miss a meal, or to fail your child. There is no flippancy in this performance. It is bred out of the pains and sufferings of real life and real responsibilities.

This habit is really an action for self-preservation. To live, a canner cans. It is simply done out of necessity. Still, born out of this necessity, one is able to see quite clearly the special nature of canning and the canners' role in the overall society. Selfishly done as it is (in the eyes of the holistic body of the city), they help keep the streets clean, keep the trash from overflowing, and all while keeping food in their bellies or their kids in school. It may well be one of the only symbiotic relationships with this grand organism that survives at such a low level of the socio-economic system, no matter how taboo or grimy it may seem. These are, afterall, real people who face some of the same struggles as you and me; reduced to invisibility by the way they stay afloat.

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Composting

Carolyn Lavender

Tiny Push

For nearly 36 years I have owned dirt. With this dirt came a house, trees, bushes, and grass on an urban lot that my husband and I live on. It is easy to see that there is an abundance of natural materials here. For instance, all the parts of a mature pine tree that died and eventually fell in the yard are still here. The trunk sections remain large shapes, branches became part of a wood wall, and the branch tips were made into a hanging sculpture. Some people comment on the stacked firewood, but I always correct them. It is art and composting (Figs. 1-2). Grass, leaves, pods, seeds, and wood stay here. It is wasteful to send these materials to the landfill. Nothing produced by nature is trash. It is earth food. Most of the plant materials created by my yard are allowed to compost.

People come to my house and see a maximalist number of plants, objects, art, and landscaping. But a large part of who I am and what I am doing in my yard is invisible. I have been breaking down natural materials and returning them to the earth for three decades. It is a story, not of what you see, but of what you do not see. My certified National Wildlife Habitat Central Phoenix yard is not far from two freeways but is also close to the Grand Canal. The clay soil has no rocks and was used for farming in past centuries. Flood irrigation assists with the mix of microbial life, fungi, plants, insects, birds, reptiles, and small mammals that interact here. Over time many Phoenix homeowners have opted for landscaping with gravel and Astroturf. These heat absorbing materials have consequences over time. One of my neighbors recently hired a pest control company to routinely spray his entire lot with pesticide. Against those things, it feels very small to break a branch and toss it back to the yard. A tiny push against a plastic and toxic world.

Some composting happens without any effort. Leaves fall into the yard and stay in place until they break down over time. Branches are cut smaller. Even whole palm tree skirts have been broken down and composted. Cutting smaller and smaller. Over and over. Being active outdoors, standing on soft ground, with constant bird noise.

The synthetic world finds its way into the yard. Cellophane wrappers, Styrofoam peanuts and other trash. But I also find fake plant leaves regularly. I don't know which one of the neighbors has fake plants, but I have been finding leaves for years. Recently, I started keeping them. An unsustainable tribute to standard societal practices.





Fig. 1. Compost samples showing different stages of decomposition; Fig. 2. Site of Compost Samples, Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2022. Photos: Carolyn Lavender.

Crocheting

Cameron Kersting

Keeping Out the Cold: Art and Leisure



Fig. 1. *Crocheted Afghan, 2020*, by Esther Mae Ellis (1931-2025). Dyed cotton yarn. Featuring approximately 6,000 stitches, this afghan is the second in a series of five, one made for each of the artist's great-grandsons. Ellis began this series during the COVID-19 pandemic, when she was isolating herself in her home. A skilled knitter and quilter, she was taught to crochet by her aunt at a young age. While crocheting had been a hobby of hers for a while, the pandemic allowed her to spend more time crafting. What handmade gifts do you possess? What gifts have you given? How did you spend your time during the pandemic? What was meaningful, what was memorable? Perhaps a new skill was picked up, or a chance to relax granted. How did the time without duty change your perception of leisure and "hobbying?" Photo: C. Kersting.

I often find myself overwhelmed by the sheer amount of *stuff* going on around me. Very rarely am I allowed a moment to breathe, to clear my mind, not worrying about homework or housework or work-work. It is something I wish I could have more often, a break. I hear many people mutter about how they yearn for some time to *sleep* or to *eat*. Our work has gotten in the way of these very human functions, and our denial allows us simply to laugh off this obviously illogical state of being. But this raises an interesting question: What happens when we are faced with an excess of time? When we are left with no school and no jobs, without worry of needing to get them back right away, what are we supposed to do for weeks and months on end? This interesting thought experiment became reality through the COVID-19 pandemic. And we tried to enjoy ourselves. People were suddenly free to work on things they wanted, freed (however partially) from the societal obligations of daily life. In a way, the pandemic surrendered creativity back to the human mind and reinstated each person's connection with themself.

My great-grandmother, Esther Mae Ellis, endured the pandemic alone in her home. While I busied myself with gardening and playing outside, she got to crocheting. One of her projects became making afghans for her great-grandchildren. She asked us which colors we would like incorporated into it, and "took great care in making sure it was just the right soft yarn" (Kersting). Shortly after, a box arrived with a beautiful blanket (Fig. 1)–a gift from a person I looked up to, created just for me. I saw its delicate stitching and vibrant colors and kept it safe on a shelf, unused, for nearly five years.

I could never quite put my finger on why it was important, but in his text "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," German philosopher Walter Benjamin speculates that the value of something like my blanket is tied to its aura via authority and uniqueness–that is, its ability to impact an audience and to find "a place of its own among the artistic processes" (Benjamin 3).

My object's aura comes from its history, and the fact that it is an original. It is not a direct reproduction of any previous object, but it shares similarities with items from the past, the way a 21st century statue does with those from Ancient Greece. In her essay "From Comfort to Contempt," Katelyn Herron explains that afghans are often given as gifts from elders, like mine was, and "symbolizes how their choices have impacted my life" (Herron 27). However, this tradition was not the reason I was gifted my object. The familial aspect is what makes it so special to me. In fact, Benjamin notes that the aura of any object is so specific that it is "imbedded in the fabric of tradition… thoroughly alive and extremely changeable" (6). Even though my afghan was not gifted in the same ritualistic context as its predecessors, the aura is so ingrained in the very nature of the object that, assuming it is not mechanically reproduced, they are inseparable. It was handmade and thus, one of a kind! My great-grandmother *created* something–many things–during her time alone.

I point this out because crochet originated as a hybrid between embroidery, which was viewed as an artsy and aesthetic craft, and knitting–a practical skill. As Hailey Sowden explains, crochet is a unique art, designed to be useful while keeping the beauty of "other more complicated forms of lace-making" (20). The desire to spend our time practically is not a recent development, and people found innovative ways to keep both fun and functionality in their projects. This is art peeking its way through the necessary rigidity of everyday life. At the heart of creating anything is creativity, but we feel we must justify our desire to make art with a utilitarian product.

But what if artists did not need to concern themselves with this industrial ideology? Any art should guide the artist to "understand something about the world, and what their connection to the world is" (Schmidt Campbell 0:11-17). In her interview with *The History Makers Digital Archive*, Mary Schmidt Campbell argues, among other things, that art is intended to satisfy the artist, and its impact on anyone else who receives the art is irrelevant. In other words, Ellis should not give her art away, even as a gift–the joy and meaning should come purely from crafting it. Making art creates "a whole system of knowing and understanding… a way of connecting to things, a deep inner life that may not be evident" (Schmidt Campbell 0:34-48). It is our prerogative to spend time doing things that we enjoy doing, simply because we enjoy them. But we veer away from this because we think leisurely activities are inherently lazy, and thus negatively impact our lives.

And why should we bother making art? John Berger, an artist and art critic, discusses the connections between art, nature, and beauty in his work "The White Bird," and suggests that a person's mind must be driven with both "a mysterious skill and a kind of love" (51) to create anything of note. A skill, however mysterious, can be learned, but the love to create can only be reinforced. As we age, we stop playing, drawing, singing in the shower. We begin to lose our creativity, and our humanity, in a sense. We cease to find things to keep us entertained, we cease making art. We become tired from work. If we cannot reach back into the imagination from childhood, we won't be able to find the creative spark. Why did Ellis make this afghan? Perhaps it was an attempt "to transform the instantaneous into the permanent" (Berger 52), outliving the creator as tangible proof of their existence; not all people are gifted with such an opportunity. Perhaps it was, to her, just a way to pass the time. It offered her a chance to distract herself amidst the chaos, controlling what was in her control. This leisure allowed Ellis to breathe.

The work we do depends on our ability to refuel; we cannot function, at least not to any state of efficiency, without these human functions. And yet, we continue working ourselves to the core because we have been taught that hard work is the only way to succeed. American society has so forcefully imposed itself upon us, and as our global connection only speeds up, our need to feel productive does not counterbalance by slowing down. No, we are in a constant state of production, needing to be busy, to feel successful and avoid boredom. We have associated leisure with sloth; anything that does not immediately support our work should be avoided at all costs.

Two things need to be addressed. One: The view persists that allegedly useful crafts, such as crochet, are not worth the effort because they have become "a luxurious hobby filling a need for personal fulfillment" (Sowden 25), contradicting the work-driven nature of American culture. Crafts and hobby arts like crochet have become discounted, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when baking, scrapbooking, and gardening became ways to *pass* time–or even *waste* time–rather than *spend* time. Often, without a person realizing it, hobbies become ways to cope with the dramatic changes in everyday life. The word "craft" has shifted from artisanal in meaning to cheap–think "arts and crafts"–and since we'd rather not spend all our time working on these hobbies, we are unwilling to invest in them financially.

And two: Why do I keep such an attachment to my blanket? Can it be quantified? Nostalgia is an inherent part of the human experience, and as such, we intentionally seek it out, often finding it in objects that become what Susan Stewart calls "souvenirs." In her book *On Longing*, Stewart argues that a souvenir is incomplete on its own. It becomes a source of specific, personal nostalgia for the possessor, "authenticat[ing] a past or otherwise remote experience" (Stewart 139), who completes it with his stories; in my case, the memories of my great-grandmother. We find safety in our sentiment, as it reminds us of simpler times. My blanket, as a souvenir, serves as a representation of my family and, in a way, my childhood. Its value comes from how it was made, and by whom.

I know it was made with love. It reminds me of my great-grandmother, and by extension, my family as a whole. My blanket has become "emblematic of the worth of [my] life and of the self's capacity to generate worthiness" (Stewart 139), reminding me to slow down and breathe, even presently in the 21st century, when it seems the world moves faster all the time. And how to slow down? Like Ellis, make art. The more time we spend allowing ourselves to imagine and to create, the more we will ultimately be guided away from the limitations and repetitions set for us by society and reconnect with our humanness. The *humanness* is why I value my blanket so much. It isn't perfect. It isn't expensive. Sure, it is useful; it keeps out the cold just fine. But above all, a human hand made it with care and love. In an excess of time, she chose to create.

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Dancing Outdoors

Khalifa Babacar Top

Dancing in the City Streets: Making Connections

I dance outside in order to connect with the environment. I observe people's gestures and feelings. I like to reflect people's energy; see what it can give me, what I can give back. Dancing outside is my urban habit. I like to sense the energy of an area like Washington Square Park, where people are drawing, writing, performing: I get inspired by those. What matters is the energy that I feel around me. The energy of Ashland Place, where I am right now, used to be different: more color, more trees, more of a neighborhood feeling. Now, it has become too gentrified and fancy. The energy has changed. I like areas with more color, more nature. I have danced in cities all over the world. I explore a city by taking the time to walk outside and dance. Sometimes I dance alone but sometimes I teach those who watch me to dance too (Figs. 1-2). Often, in big cities, people don't pay attention. So when they stop and watch, it means that they want to be involved. When they dance, they get a release and they become more confident. Sometimes they think that they don't have a voice but when they dance outside they are surprised to find out that they do! Every spot can be my dance stage because I can express myself anywhere. Dancing outside helps me explore people, their energy, the built environment, nature. Sometimes I make friends with strangers that I dance with in the streets. I just spoke with someone who remembers me dancing here during Dance Africa half a year ago! I am the same person everywhere I dance but the connections I make in every city are different because every city is different. My favorite city to dance outside is my hometown Dakar, in my neighborhood Sikab Mbao: I can feel my roots when I dance there. In New York, there's more stress and people don't pay attention. Dancing outside can help people make better connections.



Figs. 1-2. Khalifa Babacar Top (Senegal and USA), dancer and choreographer, dancing around the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2023. Photo: Khalifa Babacar Top Archives.

Data Tracking Walks

Jo Novelli-Blasko

Making Magic with SIRI

I gather the tracking data with my watch which records my movement and all sorts of statistics about my pace, heart rate, and elevation. It's entertaining and informative to review my data track. What really captures my attention are the maps generated by my walks. I have a thing for maps, especially ones of foot pathways through urban spaces. Data tracking my walks expands my digital footprint. Do we still have footprints in these days of clouds? Footprint or cloud, mine has been developing for more than 25 years, so it's already pretty deep. What's another TeraByte of information? Among the walks I data track are my daily outings with the dogs and irregular strolls through a local labyrinth.

The maps generated by data tracking my dog walks reveal a lot of variation in routine. Sometimes I forget to turn on my watch before I leave the house. Other times, I forget to SIRI–STOP WORKOUT when I return. Rarely, I forget my watch all together. Slower walks are captured by an orange to yellow line on the map. When I rush, a strong green line. Red spots capture where I pause for my dogs to poop. Another regular feature of my data track is the poop dump in an alley. It appears as a knuckle on the line, a virtual arrow pointing at the dumpster location. There are non-poop stops, too, when I pause to Zero In on Nature, or to chat with neighbors. Our conversations are recorded as a cluster of red squiggles, holding hands and jumbling up the otherwise straightish line of my progress (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. *Daily Dog Walk detail of neighbor conversation*; Fig. 2. *Daily Dog Walk Data Track, detail of infinity;* Fig. 3. *New Moon Labyrinth Walk Data Track*. Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2025. Images: Jo Novelli-Blasko.

My favorite data track is one which invokes infinity. When I want to boost the magic of my day, I walk the figure 8 between trees along my way. It elevates my mood and the vibration (Fig. 2)!

I track the data of my labyrinth walks which happen according to moon phases and seasonal shifts. Labyrinth walks are also useful for processing grief, welcoming in transition, and feeling the depth of a blessing (Fig. 3). There's a part of me that wants to run through the labyrinth to light up my data track a bright green from start to finish. I also dream of walking so slowly as to hack the track into red orange shuffles. Mindfulness always prevails on the labyrinth, though, leaving little room for hacking the data track. I stop thinking about my watch as soon as I enter, always with my left foot first.

Delivering Food

Aaron Benedict

Digitization or Derealization: New York through the Eyes of Delivering Food

I step off the curb just as the white walk signal lights up, but pause as a frantic bell chime draws my attention to the bike careening down the street toward me; I take a step forward, then back, as we play a high-speed version of the sidewalk shuffle, praying I don't become a substitute for his bike brake. Impatiently, he swerves around me one last time, and I just barely get a glimpse–black motorcycle helmet, heavy work boots, old winter coat, thick handlebar mittens, and, most eye-catching, the bright red cooler strapped to the back of his bike with the characteristic angular swoop next to the words DOORDASH in thick white lettering on the back. Despite our incidental run-in, he pedals on without pause, and as he weaves through the onslaught of passing cars, he slowly rejoins the indistinguishable blur of the city on his way, delivering the next meal.

New York is the city that never sleeps: the ever shifting, constantly rushing presence that alludes to more than solid space, but a sort of mirage, an idea that you cannot pin down to its full extent because it is too overarching and multifaceted to encapsulate. This illusory effect has only strengthened in the digital era, as reality becomes less and less trustworthy and the online world more and more intrinsic to our daily lives. The complex balancing act between one's presence in reality and one's reliance on technology is perfectly encapsulated within the world of the food delivery couriers who work for apps like GrubHub, UberEats, and DoorDash…

The city, to someone delivering food, is less a collection of neighborhoods and more a living map of opportunity and challenge, its streets redrawn every hour by algorithms, couriers "ping"-ing from place to place, always seeing the city through the map on their screens, marking their next destination. This reminds me of the activity present in Blagovesta Momchedjikova's essay "Rollerblading." While on her rollerblades, Momchedijikova observes how "the geography of the city is never fixed, it is always in motion" (Momchedijikova). Although the work put into delivering food seems menial on the surface, it is anything but mindless. In 2019, New York Times writer Andy Newman chose to work as a delivery worker for a week in preparation for his article about the subject. He describes it as "a game of real-life speed chess played across the treacherous grid of the city, as riders juggle orders from competing apps and scramble for elusive bonuses" (Newman). This constant calculation, quick decision making, and evasion of hazardous obstacles comes from the collision between the physical and the digital worlds. The reliance on these third-party delivery service's apps becomes a clear distraction from the physical hazards of the roads, as speeding cars, negligent pedestrians, and other unpredictable road incidents occur that threaten the physical safety of couriers.

However, it can also be said that these dangers are what distract from what is often regarded as the much more pressing matter for these workers: fulfilling a delivery before the fickle GrubHub gods or DoorDash deities decide an order has taken too long to be completed. On delivery apps, the "'map is always changing, always changing, always changing, it never stops changing,'" (Newman). This ever shifting map is both liberating and exhausting. Unlike Momchedijikova, who finds freedom and individuality in her ability to "constantly pass from somewhere to somewhere else, connecting the city" on her rollerblades (Momchedijikova), the world of online food delivery appears to do the exact opposite, giving its workers only the illusion of flexibility while they are truly at the whims of the tiny black box in their hands, attention bobbing back and forth between the digital world and the frantic streets of midtown Manhattan during lunch rush.

Delivering food in New York has evolved considerably in the last couple years. While its prevalence has been extremely noticeable since its rise during 2020, "even before the pandemic, food delivery nationally was already growing at 7% to 8% a year–double the growth rate of the restaurant business as a whole" (Committee on New York City Affairs 4). Delivery was simply seen as an extra table at a restaurant, and delivery couriers like waiters; they were paid the same minimum wage plus tips from customers (Committee on NYC Affairs 6). These delivery workers were seen as "fixtures of almost any residential neighborhood in New York City" (Asimov). What started out solely with Chinese food in the 1960s and 70s was viewed as a pillar of New York by the late 90s and early 2000s. Much of this had to do with the pizza craze of the 1990s, as different pizza companies vied for the fastest pie, guaranteeing it at your door in 20 minutes or less (History Guild).

The first website for food delivery was PizzaNet, a site where customers could order from the PizzaHut chain. As the first apps came on the scene, restaurants continued to supply their own delivery workers; it wasn't until the mid-2010s that the apps started to supply their own third party couriers (Committee on NYC Affairs 6). The apps allowed users to explore businesses outside of just their neighbourhood, bringing in more orders for restaurants and introducing consumers to a more diversified selection of food.

Compared to getting food delivered to your door, going out to eat is seen as a much more social activity. It's usually a group outing, and even when it isn't, the act of going out is inherently more social than staying in: you talk to a hostess to be seated, order your food from a waiter, and eat your meal in a restaurant usually full of other people. Even grab-and-go food stands have one-on-one conversations with the vendor. On the flip side, going out to eat is much more time consuming, and requires significantly more energy than hitting a few buttons on an app, and may be more expensive because you need to tip the waiter. Getting food delivered is easier and cheaper; it leads to significantly less face-to-face interaction with other human beings, a fact which can have detrimental effects on a person's perception of their own reality.

When compared to waiting tables, delivering food is much less customer based, as the majority of your interaction is channeled though an online platform instead of in-person. You are also paid only for your time spent on orders, not your time waiting for orders to come in. In this way, waiters have much more stability and also team effort. When you work for a restaurant you learn to work as a team to put on a meal, whereas delivering food is a fairly solo invention.

"COVID-19 put the trend on steroids," The New York City Bar concludes (Committee on NYC Affairs 4). The pandemic required us all to adapt to social distancing. Confined to our homes, many of us relied on food delivery as the main source for our meals; "in the first month of the pandemic alone, the major meal delivery app companies grew a stunning 162% over the previous year" (Committee on NYC Affairs 5). This boom sped up the growth already being seen in the food delivery industry and it remained constant even after people started going out into the world again. In New York City alone, there were "17% more deliveries in the first six months of 2022 than the same period in 2021" (Committee on NYC Affairs 6-7). This growth led to the plethora of food couriers that we see riding on the streets of Manhattan today. Food couriers became essential workers almost overnight. Yet, their importance was not met with stability or security. Instead, many found themselves working longer hours for less pay, exposed to greater risks and new pressures from both the apps and customers.

Nowadays, going out to eat feels more and more reserved for special occasions. Part of this is the higher cost of eating out in recent years, but I also think that quarantine, combined with our already pervasive but growing reliance on digital platforms, fundamentally shifted the way we interact with the outside world. The combined effort of the consumers' desires for convenience and the appetitive monetary needs inherent to American corporations led to an increased pressure on

food couriers, who were at the whims of both, and until more recently, they were without proper representation as a united workforce.

In addition to the amount of workers on bikes delivering food, the amount of New Yorkers relying on pedal power has skyrocketed in recent years due to the growing prevalence of Citi Bikes. Citi Bike is a privately owned bicycle sharing system deployed in New York City in 2013. It allows for everyday pedestrians to get around the city much faster, cheaper, and easier than previously through an app on their phone, while also supporting the growing reliance on non-carbon emitting vehicles, rather than buses, taxis, and Ubers. Unlike the customized bikes of food delivery workers, citi bikes are uniform, a sleek blue or steel grey and a Citi Bike logo on the side, found in rows on sidewalks, attached to charging ports. However, the users are often much more individualized than workers; while workers often have an unspoken uniform–cheap black shoes, work pants, scarfs, buffs, heavy coats and helmets–city bike users are much more varied in appearance and purpose. They are also more likely to obey traffic laws. Food delivery workers are often seen speeding through red lights, riding down the sidewalk, or pedaling down the middle of the street–anything to get to their next destination faster. Delivering food, which is reliant on a ticking clock, is observably a very dangerous activity because of the very fact that those who do it have to work fast and rely on instincts instead of actually thought out approaches.

This pressure being put on workers in order to make ends meet was brought to attention in late 2023, when a bill was passed in New York requiring that workers delivering food for third-party apps must receive minimum wage (which they were not previously). In early 2024, Josh Wood, a member of the Worker's Justice project delivering with Uber at the time, told Streetsblog NYC in an interview that the new policies made it so "you don't have to risk your life to try to save two minutes anymore. You can take your time and ride safely and have a better chance of making it home at the end of the shift" (Wood qtd. in Cuba). However, even with this huge step in governing policy, Gustavo Ajche, the founder of Los Deliveristas Unidos, cautioned that "apps are still looking for ways to pressure workers to make deliveries as quickly as possible," explaining how "if the worker doesn't complete a delivery within a predetermined time, which varies based on the order itself, he or she can get kicked off the app" without warning (Ajche qtd. in Cuba).

A news article released by The City this past September saw Ajche's warning realized, as it chronicled delivery app workers' experiences with being locked out of their accounts without prior notice for things as simple as one missed delivery or a single bad review over a carton of melted ice cream (Aponte). When consumers and corporations alike hold so much power over a person's livelihood, it's worth stopping and asking, why?

In her essay "Jaywalking: Cannon Fodder for the Urban Lifestyle," Kessiah Gordon observes how New Yorkers refute "anything that could impede momentum, such as a red light" (Gordon) valuing speed over their own safety. In this way, Gordon reveals the importance of jaywalking as a part of the culture of New York, comparing it to her much sleepier city of Seattle, she concludes asking, "what is New York City truly without a frenetic pace and pedestrians simply trying to keep up with it?" (Gordon). Just as Jaywalking represents the intrinsic "velocity" of this city that you "cannot help but get swept up by" (Gordon), so are the hurried masses of delivery couriers a representation of the same grind and hustle of a digital-aged New York. Both jaywalkers and delivery couriers are shaped by the same relentless energy, moving to keep up with a city that never slows down. Despite being a staple of New York in a digital age, they not only fight to keep up with the frantic pace of the city streets, but do so while bogged down by the political policy of the city, their perception split between the hazards of outside life and the distractions of the digital world. New York's endless energy and constant motion is mirrored in those who keep it fed, each worker delivering food–a moving part in the sleepless engine of urban life.

The evolution of delivering food in New York City serves as a window into the broader transformations wrought by digitization on city existence. The people delivering food, caught between the relentless demands of algorithms and the hazards of city streets, embody the tension between technological convenience and lived reality. As the city continues to race forward, shaped by both human ambition and digital imperatives, the experiences of those delivering food remind us of the ongoing need to balance progress with the well-being and dignity of those who keep the city moving. The story of food delivery is ultimately the story of New York itself: fast-paced, ever-changing, and defined by the people who navigate its challenges every day.

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Dining Alone

Tatum Perry

Table For One

It's a common phenomenon, enjoying a meal alone in a restaurant, but a fleeting one in terms of captivating our attention. As onlookers, we watch as the stranger enters from the chaos of New York City streets; we see them find comfort and concealment within a table and chair, hidden in plain sight. For a moment they are an anomaly, a character we desperately want to probe and interrogate to figure out what exactly led them to being here. New York City can be a dizzying place; it's a fantastical overwhelm of faces and personalities and sometimes faces that seem to contradict personalities. You are never alone even if you want to be, so there's mystery in wondering what it was–what ticking emotion or burning sensation–that forced that stranger to carve out some alone time in the city that promises none. But then the mystery fades. It fades when we become distracted by our own meals, by our own company, by our quest to satiate anticipating hunger. We become lost again in our own lives and thus, we lose our momentary main characters; their mystery succeeds.

From the perspective of the solo diner, there's a different approach. We stroll in, activated by a goal and a space to accommodate. In eating alone, the restaurant itself is just as important as the reason for doing so; sometimes we seek privacy and comfort, other times we want the chaos and excitement. Solo diners are just as diverse as the restaurants themselves, so each character performing the event is an entirely new figure. They could be bobbing their heads to the music of the restaurant. Or their eyes and fingers may never once leave their phones, or laptop, or whatever gadget they have except for a swipe and swig of whatever it is they're consuming. Maybe they're passionately reading, or undeniably pretending. Maybe they're slightly peeking over at each table to see if anyone's looking at them, hoping or fearing they're being observed. They could be hungrily eating or eagerly waiting for the check, repeatedly checking the time as they try to flag down the waiter. Sometimes they're waiting to smile at every person who looks at them, they prolong each interaction with the waiter into a conversation, and wave at every kid, spreading smiles.

Whatever the context or appearance of solo diners, in order to better understand the performance, its emergence must first be established. The Bowery Boys' podcast episode "Counter Culture: A History of Automats, Luncheonettes and Diners in New York City," details the formation of the city's eateries: the early 19th century luncheonettes and diners accommodated an influx of women consumers recently entering the workforce. During this time, Jan Whitaker explains in the blog post "Restaurant-ing Through History: Dining Alone," how the style of seating was communal, and so there wasn't an option but to be in the company of strangers; eating alone in an empty space was considered a luxury, granted to only those who could afford it. It wasn't until after the Civil War, when more restaurants emerged around the United States and portion sizes increased, that dining for two or more became the standard; inadvertently, the act of eating alone became strange.

Here, dining alone has been a growing phenomenon. According to Roberto A. Ferdman's article "The Most American Thing There Is: Eating Alone," between the 1960s and the 1990s, the number of solo diners in the United States tripled, and by 2006 almost 60% of all Americans ate alone (Ferdman). These numbers continue to be on the rise due to the shifts in the nuclear household, fast-paced work schedules, and technology, which is often the companion to solo diners. With the increase of the habit, regardless of whatever motivates it, the perception of it may also turn positive. But the stigmas surrounding eating alone have deep roots in American society.

Indeed the relation of dining alone to loneliness and gender has taken many forms. For men, it didn't evolve too far from a general appearance of being lonely, and possibly incompetent, both

socially and romantically. In regards to women, the stereotype is similar, however gender-based discrimination has added a deeper severity to some of the conclusions drawn about solo female diners. Whitaker notes that "the idea that a lone woman entering a restaurant might be in the sex trade was the reason given for barring her from first-class restaurants in the evening," though in the early 20th century the policy was reversed and when a "lone woman" was judged to be a "lady," she could get service. Ann Landers, an American advice columnist, describes lone diners as some sort of "social reject": the men having "character flaws," and the women suggesting "a failed rendezvous" and "an empty heart" (qtd. in Whitaker). There is something inherent within the act of eating alone in a restaurant that heightens these stigmas, and gives them a vigor that transcends just baseline generalizations and elevates them into the realm of reality. The stereotype of loneliness becomes real when diners witness themselves being perceived as lonely, and are then isolated by this truth. Essentially, the stigma perpetuates itself, but how culpable are we in its endurance?

Compared to dining alone, making a reservation in a restaurant is a much more regulated event; the time, location, and reason for dining are all established well before that actual dining takes place, and while they can exist in dining alone, there is still a much higher level of certainty in having a reservation. What makes eating in a restaurant under a reservation distinct is that it is almost always created for the sake of company. The instances in most people's lives where they feel compelled to make a reservation is when they and their party need absolute assurance that the restaurant of their choosing will be able to accommodate all of them comfortably at a time that is convenient for everyone. A solo diner wouldn't particularly face this challenge as most restaurants can very easily accommodate a party of one. Further, the restaurants where diners need to make reservations are highly popular, with more stimulating or specialized cuisines, and often, more pricey. It's rare that we see solo diners in expensive, fancy restaurants just like it's rare to see them make a reservation.

As previously noted, the stigma of eating alone is extremely pervasive in inhibiting solo diners, but when it comes to fancy restaurants, the thought seems almost ludicrous. There's something about a restaurant, one that suggests status, wealth, style, and most significantly social aptitude that appeals to large crowds but scares individuals, out of fear that somehow the suggestion of all these attributes will become implausible on a single person. If the act of having a reservation is linked with these types of restaurants, then the act of eating at a restaurant under a reservation suggests a much more privileged position. It inadvertently suggests that those who eat alone must be aware of the limitations of their performance, of all the contexts where it is deemed and feels acceptable and all the ones where it is an abnormality; thus, the stigma of eating alone isn't bolstered by the existence of solo diners themselves, but by their absence from specific restaurants. The societal norms have marked very clearly the limitations of the performance and whether or not we are cognizant of them, we casually abide. However, we must also consider that there are some of us who are aware of the stigma, and rather than just acknowledge it, fear its consequences and the questioning of our characters as solo diners.

The fear the stigma of solo dining generates is also incredibly powerful in stunting the performance, but also in its maintenance. In his article titled "The People on the Bus," Adam Gopnik considers something crucial, something that every everyday urban performer must know before making an appearance: the unsolicited companionship of anxiety, or fear, or both. Regarding fear, he suggests that it is in large part reliant on an expectation of "certainty," provokes the natural response of "stillness" rather than buzz (as elicited by anxiety), and is a product of a sense of "delusional domesticity"–a false sense of safety and home–that we naturally create to cope in unfamiliar settings, especially urban ones. If this be the case, then consider this: if you go to a restaurant with the intention of it feeling comforting and safe, much like a home, you're more than likely going to be disappointed. Humans naturally judge, in both sly, ugly ways but also in silent,

unconscious ways; more importantly however, universally humans become defensive when feeling alone. Even if there's nothing to be defensive of, there's always something to *find* to be defensive of. I spoke to a friend regarding the matter, and he took a position of opposition to the performance. He argued that eating with others in restaurants is "one of the best opportunities to socialize," noting how these moments can often be sparse throughout the day (Sarquis). If eating alone in restaurants is then uncomfortable, or possibly even unrewarding, then it becomes clear why it's difficult for some to enjoy a meal alone.

A natural solution then would be to avoid dining alone. Eating with people at a restaurant is comparatively a much easier task. It still follows some of the same inherent implications of dining alone: a needing to maintain some level of decorum while in public, a fear of being perceived and judged by those around you, and a diner in this situation can even contend with that same conundrum of "delusional domesticity," although all issues that are more likely assuaged by company and collective confidence. If in good company, it feels freeing, easy, oftentimes we become uninhibited and relaxed. In dining alone we automatically feel we must take ourselves seriously, risking that no one else will if we don't. And even in poor company while dining alone, there still is a subconscious comfort in being among others, despite how much we ignore and suppress it. It may be true that it's better to be alone than to wish you were, but this phrase can be countered by another: bad company may be better than none. Then, if eating provides both felt and hidden comfort, why would anyone choose to eat alone? The answers unfortunately vary from circumstance to circumstance–if it's for a quiet place to study, that could reveal silence or solitude as lacking factors of one's home, or the opposite in searching for a restaurant that is nosy and crowded. However, everyone who chooses to eat in a restaurant makes an active decision to be in public, to subject themselves to the promise of being perceived, to the possibility of the fear it might elicit. What is it of these characters that demands a need to be alone among others and does that reveal something inherent about humanity?

Humans inherently need company, it's a truth that even the biggest introverts cannot deny. However, we also need privacy. And not just privacy, but solitude, time to reflect on the day, on our interactions with others, on our feelings, and on our perceptions and realities of ourselves–and we can only do this with space and time. It would be false to assume that everyone is comfortable being alone with themselves, but more importantly, there is no greater comfort, not even among family members, than the comfort felt indulging in one's own self. This is a phenomenon Roland Barthes touches upon in his essay "Leaving the Movie Theater." He writes that he feels the movie theater grants him a special kind of "darkness," where he can feel buried "in a dim, anonymous, indifferent cube"; a private kind of comfort, but he also notes the "hypnotic" sensation he endures among this "darkness," allowing him to absorb the film in much greater depth and focus (Barthes 419).

Focus is something crucial for many solo diners; of course there are the occasional drifters who split their time between eating and wasting the rest. But primarily solo diners go to restaurants with a task, the aforementioned goal, and like Barthes, they enter a similar state in honing into that goal, even if it be just eating. It may be due to a lack of others to converse with, but regardless, it illuminates a motto Barthes includes: "*Inclusum labor illustrat,*" meaning "it is because I am enclosed that I work and glow with all my desire" (Barthes 419). There's this comfort in being isolated–even if it isn't true, and doesn't extend past a theater seat or a table and chair–that grants us partial solitude, and allows us to feel and see clearer.

This partial solitude can exist among other performances native to the city, such is getting food or coffee from a street vendor. Firstly, the performance itself is undeniably a contradiction. You walk among the busy streets of New York City, overrun by people and traffic and blurring sounds, towards a cart parked against the curb. It's public, open, vulnerable. But once you make it to the cart, and you're face to face with that solo vendor, insulated by their organized mess of equipment, you

can't help but join in their illusion of isolation. Even the surmounting noise of the city seems to quiet down for the sake of this one exchange. You create your own bubble and within it there is solitude. The act is essentially another iteration of Barthes' assertion; it's a continual attempt to consolidate one's own singularity despite the roaring evidence of plurality. Perhaps this is why solo diners choose to eat alone in restaurants–they seek an isolation that's borne from a contrast of being among others, which is more potent because it must be earned, and allows for a greater sense of independence.

I've been interested in art for as long as I can remember and nothing else has ever made me feel more independent than painting. It's a deeply personal performance, and sometimes, maybe at the best of times, it's especially lonely; you become a secluded victim to a specific vision, forged from the whims of your own imagination and experiences in life. It's a daunting task, being the sole individual capable of bringing it to fruition, because only you understand the consequence of missing your mark. Conversely, there is triumph in fulfilling that vision, yet growth in relinquishing control of it. It's a moment where when you're lost in trying to foment an agreement between your mind and your hands, your heart and physical being, you forget whoever it is you're trying to be, because there's simply no time, no mental space and physical strain to waste while painting. Losing yourself in a canvas and losing yourself in a crowd of strangers, isolated by the width of a chair are two of those moments, and interestingly enough they yield the same result: just being. Or at least, that is what eating alone should be. Eating (or whatever sublet activity you may choose) is the vision, so find yourself victim to its fulfillment. Or it's subversion: strike up conversation, sit at the bar, order dessert first, whatever you do just lose yourself in the state of being.

The performance of eating alone in a restaurant is highly symbolic and yet painfully literal. It can mean everything and nothing depending on who is performing. We ourselves are walking contradictions, figures full of, if not mystery, then definitely history. There is no scene, no daily performance more cinematic than finding oneself alone. At a restaurant. In New York City. It is a deeply romantic, mysterious, and agonized performance, and yet, it is also none of these things at all. Sometimes, we're just hungry. It all depends on perspective.

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Disposing of Trash

Leonidas Koutsoumpos

Urban Habits of Waste: Trash Bins of an Athenian Street



Fig. 1. Trash Bin #78 with an anarchist poster. Athens, Greece, 2023. Photos: Leonidas Koutsoumpos.

"For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation." (Benjamin 233)

"It is hoped that from this different inhabitation of the everyday (which is always a social inhabitation) that perhaps possibilities for disrupting everyday, habits, norms, and conventions through various modes of social (inter-)action will emerge, (inter-)actions that may make the world–or aspects of it, at least for a time–strange, unfamiliar, and uncanny. It is also hoped that such disruptions and unfamiliarity might enable the releasing of new attunements to the world and the emergence of new possibilities for (communal) life." (Smith 101)

Introduction

The trash bins! Again and again, every day, in the streets of our cities, we habitually dispose of our waste, the leftovers of our life, the unwanted parts, or our civilization in them. Sometimes, it is the first thing we do in the morning when we leave our private space and interact with the city. Sometimes it is the last thing we do before we call it a day.

This is an experimental photo-essay accompanied by theoretical texts that reflect on the nature of this habit–how it is formed and how it affects our ethics in relation to urban space and architecture. The text is not exhaustive in its theoretical argument, but with its extensive quotes, it creates a background against which images are contrasted, like a tune and a rhythm (Fig. 1). The photos here are a part of a wider project that documents all the trash bins on a 1300 meter long street in Athens, Greece (Fig. 2). I take this route everyday: from my home to the office and back. The project documents this neglected city apparatus–the trash bin–together with the people who habitually use it and the everyday life that happens around it. People's activities become apparent not only through their visual presence in the images, but also by their absence and the traces left behind to be witnessed by the photographic lens.



Fig. 2. Map of Exarcheia and the street of Charilaou Trikoupi, with pointers of the places where the images were taken, Athens, Greece, 2023. Photos: Leonidas Koutsoumpos.

The street is named "Charilaou Trikoupi," after the prime minister who used to live on it and dominated Greek politics in the end of the 19th century. On December 10th, 1893, he infamously said: "Unfortunately, we are bankrupt," thus trashing the country's creditworthiness. The street is located in Athens' city center, in the neighborhood of Exarcheia, which is notorious for political activism and urban social violence. Elsewhere (Koutsoumpos, "Morality Versus Ethics in the Urban Development of Exarcheia"), I have extensively written about the urban development of the area and its relation to the political activity in this part of the city. Exarcheia has always been a politically active neighborhood, well-known for its collective action and solidarity (Vaiou and Kalandides) as well as a center of political riots, drug activities, and social misbehavior. Common knowledge of the area stands on two major pillars of 'immoral' behavior: one has a political dimension (anarchism) and the other–a social one (gangs, drugs, debauchery, etc.). Although different, these two pillars coincide in the imaginative topological space known as the *verge* or the *marginal* (Ιωάννου 1).

Even though nowadays Exarcheia is in the heart of the city center, since its very birth, it has been on the verge of the city–the city beyond the city. Nevertheless, its marginal character never ceased to exist. This neighborhood is part of the "immoral" geography of the city: it has always been a "dirty" place. It is no chance that an extended police operation in the area that took place in 1984 was given the code name "*Virtue,"* suggesting that a "cleaning" process was underway. Today Exarcheia is going through a new *clearing* process–gentrification–with the new metro station in the central square as an epicenter. In this case, fear has been used as an urban planning tool or vehicle to create new housing and entertainment spaces that are free from any form of criminality (Μίχα 17).

The trash bins of Charilaou Trikoupi here symbolize the dirty character of this part of the city (Fig. 1). They are not just an instrument of public infrastructure. When moving in the city, one tends to erase them from the visual field, despite the fact that we all feel their smell and face them as obstructions. They form an unnoticed apparatus, often neglected, often in bad shape, often with lids wide open. Cars bump them while parking. People approach them with disgust. But with posters and graffiti on them, they tell a story. This photo-essay is an interpretation of this story.

Forming Habits

Of course, the everyday disposing of our trash is a conscious decision, based on planning and a strategy of housekeeping. Nevertheless, it is also a habit that is formed by the repetitive nature of the task (Fig. 3). It forms a tactic so essential to our existence that we either forget we do it or think of it as a burden or punishment. And according to esteemed sociologists "[t]he routine (whatever is done habitually) is a basic element of day-to-day social activity" (Giddens).

We often think of habits as something that we choose to do. We think that it is our choice to stick to a habit. We throw our garbage every morning in the trash bin outside our houses, and we think that we are in control of this habitual recurrence. But, actually, habit does not *stick to* an individual, in the sense that a self pre-exists and then a habit comes to join it. Habit *happens to* one, in the sense that is beyond one's free will and at the same time is constitutional of the self; the self is a collection of habits. Gilles Deleuze describes the constitution of the self like this: "[w]e are habits, nothing but habits: the habit of saying 'I'" (Deleuze x; in: Nicotra 1). Habit destabilizes the self by gaining control over it, and for this, it is essential for the way we understand ourselves and the way others perceive us (Fig. 4). Andrew Ballantyne argues that "my *ethos*–my habits, from which my system of values can be inferred–is what I am," (Ballantyne, "Heart and Horizon" 116) and he goes on to suggest that ethics are related to the 'architecture' of our patterns of behavior. "Our habits of mind, and our habits in deed, generate our world" (Ballantyne, "Heart and Horizon" 122).

The custom of familiarizing ourselves with space by creating habits is necessary in order to do all the other things that are necessary for accomplishing the activities of everyday life, since "[s]o much of what we learn consists of learning *not* to think about what we are doing, so that we can concentrate on other things" (Ingold 95). Walter Benjamin too has emphasized the role that habit plays in the tactile appropriation of the built environment (Fig. 5) as opposed to the touristic perception of buildings through sight, which is associated with contemplation (Benjamin 233).



Fig. 3. Trash Bin #15; Fig. 4. Trash Bin #72; Fig. 5. Trash Bin #94-96. The street of Charilaou Trikoupi, Athens, Greece, 2023. Photos: Leonidas Koutsoumpos.

Furthermore, Jodie Nicotra describes the animal base of habituation in space:

> "…like the way dogs trot around a new place, accustoming themselves through repetition (literally running in circles) to unfamiliar smells and new configurations of space. We learn, through repeated experience, how to interpret the creaking sound in the hall and the way the light tends to slant through the windows in late afternoon. Through repeated encounters with a new place (and one could extend this idea of the 'dwelling' to any new experience or set of actions as well), one learns its contours, how it works, the sticking points and the

> places that attract one, thereby creating a sense of familiarity that eventually doesn't just 'free up' one's attention for other things, as James described it, but actually creates a deeper level of attention, one that resonates in the body as well as in the consciousness." (Nicotra 15)

Habit also has a direct relation to ethics (Fig. 6). A big part of the discussion about waste habits brings our attention exactly to this moral discourse of treating our waste ethically (Hawkins). Nevertheless, the most interesting part of this ethical aspect of habit relates *not* to the moral rational property of deliberating and distinguishing between notions of good and bad, but rather to the preconscious and almost animal nature of man, which takes some of these notions for granted, due to its embedded habits, tradition, and a tacit understanding of things (Koutsoumpos, *Inhabiting Ethics*). It is no coincidence that the original Ancient Greek word *"ēthos"* means custom, manners, disposition, character, and especially moral character as the result of habit. According to Plato in the *Laws*: "For because of the force of habit, it is in infancy that the whole character is most effectually determined" (Plato book 7, 792e), which is a line of thought followed also by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle ~1103 a17).



Fig. 6. Trash Bin #100, Charilaou Trikoupi. The poster depicts an immigrant and says: "I am human not trash" (An augmented reality artwork on the occasion of the 100 years of the humanitarian crisis). Athens, Greece, 2023. Photo: Leonidas Koutsoumpos.

The word "*ēthos"* (*ἦθος*), derives from the word "ethos" (*ἔθος*), which clearly means custom or habit (Boisacq and Rix). It is exactly in the repetitive nature of the everyday that the fundamental mechanism of acquaintance takes place, through the creation of habits and dispositions (Butler). Habit is fundamentally related to place and architecture through *in*habitation since most often "what we need from a building is for it to give an appropriate frame and support for our everyday habits. These habits make the structure of our lives and our identities… " (Ballantyne, *Architecture Theory, a Reader in Philosophy and Culture* 33). Habitat then becomes the dwelling place characterized by a certain locality in which animals or plants live and grow. Humans inhabit places through the repetitive, mundane activities that constitute everyday life. According to Heidegger: "building as dwelling, that is, as being on the earth, however, remains for man's everyday experience that which is from the outset "habitual"–we inhabit it," (Heidegger 349). In this sense, our animal nature inhabits an open area of ethics. "We have a habit of forming habits. At a personal level we would describe habitual behavior as routine–and we need to have some elements of our lives as routine, so that we are not

exhausted and disorientated by ever-shifting circumstances in which we would never be able to act with confidence" (Ballantyne, "The Nest and the Pillar of Fire" 27–28).

The way we treat our waste is very much influenced by the way that we have been accustomed to treat the excess, the things that we believe are not useful, not needed, or unwanted. A poster from the street of Charilaou Trikoupi (Fig. 6) creates a metaphor of the illegal immigrants who are treated as waste in the western "civilized" modern metropolis of Athens. When we feel at 'home' within our habitual understanding of the world, we tend to forget the Others that are not part of it. But the trash bins are here to remind us of the limits of our civilization (Figs. 7-8).



Fig. 7. Trash Bin #117, Charilaou Trikoupi. Graffiti on the bin saying: "Please Leave Your Dream After the Tone."; Fig 8. Trash Bin #100. Charilaou Trikoupi, Athens, Greece, 2023. Photo: Leonidas Koutsoumpos.

> "These unconsidered, more or less automatic responses, play a very significant role in our lives. If we live entirely within the repertoire of our accustomed ways of behaving, our familiar spatial practices, then we will feel securely at 'home'–we will not be faced with puzzles which we have to figure our before we can get on with our lives; we will not feel challenged, and we will not really have to 'think' at all, but will be able to deal with each situation as it arises on the basis of the ingrained and unconscious memory of other similar experiences. This is the basis of 'common sense,' which feels perfectly normal and everyday. The everyday environment in which we live is constituted through repetition and recognition. We know how to behave because we have successfully behaved in that way before; our habits can become entrenched, and when they do so then they shape our behavior as firmly as solid walls. Our habitat is habit-generated: there are things we do, and things we don't–barriers we respect and other which some people seem to respect but we don't. Indeed not only our surroundings but also our identities are constituted by habit [...]. At a personal level we would describe habitual behavior as routine–and we need to have some elements of our lives as routine, so that we are not exhausted and disorientated by ever-shifting circumstances in which we would never be able to act with confidence." (Ballantyne, "The Nest and the Pillar of Fire" 27–28)

In 2008, the global economic crisis hit Greece very hard and the country flirted with bankruptcy again, one century after Charilaos Trikoupis' famous quote. At that point, the trash bins of our case study street, became objects of obstruction of the city's everyday life in order to form

barricades during violent protest (Fig. 9). Trash became the raw material that fed the flames, and the bins became vehicles of resistance. And there, when the breaking of everyday life happens, it opens the field for seeing our habits, the city and the entire world with new eyes.

This breaking of the routine exploits what Gabriel Marcel finds to be as something "out of the way," arresting our attention and opening up new possibilities (Marcel 45). Such extreme tactics appear to look for, what Butler also means, that: "reason points remorselessly to an awakening, but faith and hope still beckon to the dream" (Butler 307). This could be read in a poster that shows a map with fires on the streets of Exarcheia stating that (Fig. 9), "in the flaming barricades, is burned the state's history of cannibalism, and our own is being born." In the smoldering remains of routine, the trash bin ceases to be a receptacle–it becomes a medium through which the city reclaims, resists, and reinvents itself. Yet can the burning of waste truly illuminate a path forward, or does it risk consuming the very grounds on which resistance hopes to stand? Can the incendiary transformation of domestic waste truly advance the goals of resistance, or does it risk eclipsing political discourse in the flicker of flame?



Fig. 9. Trash bin on fire forming a barricade during the night, Exarcheia, Athens, Greece, 2025. Photo: Leonidas Koutsoumpos. Based on an image by Kostas Tzoumas, Athens, Greece, 2024, in *iefimerida*.

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Dog Walking

Karen L. Dean

The City That Never Sleeps Dances to the Rhythm of Our Paws or Dogs Taking Human for Walks

/Tough life/Good life!/ People who don't know any better think it's tough being a dog in Manhattan. Not so! I say dogs have a pretty good life in this city. I'm a dog and I've lived more than half my 14 years in Manhattan, so my opinion should count for something, right? Fun fact: there are more dogs living in New York City than there are humans in Cleveland. And I'm here to tell you that the city that never sleeps dances to the beat of our feet! **/Schedule/** Peeps say it's really important to hold their dogs to a regular schedule. This isn't some absolute law of nature, but we encourage the peeps to believe this one. Remember, our humans go to work every day and do peep things away from home. We stay indoors all day and all night. Meal times, play times, walk times–whether for potty breaks or party breaks in the park–feel more important to dogs than to humans. **/Rewards/** Smart city dogs reward our humans for giving us our best lives, and we make them feel really guilty when they drop the ball instead of tossing it in the park. F'rinstance: I live with my peeps, Bill and Penny, in a tall apartment building in Manhattan. Most weekday mornings, Bill and I go to the coffee shop to get a puppuccino for me, a cappuccino for him, and a piece of coffee cake to share. (What, you're surprised I know weekdays from weekends? ANY city dog can tell you the difference between weekdays and weekends! I'm always on best behavior at the coffee shop. I sit quietly and wait for my treats. I wag my tail at the baristas and customers. I like it when friends there scritch my ears and share their treats. The coffee shop is one of my favorite happy places! On days when Bill doesn't take me to the coffee shop, I wait for him by the front door. As soon as he comes in, I look up at him with the saddest, most disappointed, big old spaniel eyes you've ever seen, and he does the right thing–he opens his bag and hands over my coffee cake. **/James/** After Penny and Bill leave for work, I listen for my two dog friend neighbors, Sally and Toby, who take their peeps for morning walks, but don't get to go to the coffee shop. We trade quiet woofs as they pass my door, and then I snooze until James comes. Sally and Toby and I are lucky enough to get a visit from James every afternoon while our humans are at work. James has the best job, cuz he spends the whole day visiting stay-at-home dogs and takes us on adventures. The peeps call James a "dog walker," but us dogs suspect that James is actually a dog disguised as a human. He really gets us, and we get him. James brings good treats and he takes us by stores and buildings where shopkeepers and doormen give us more treats and scritches. We have lots of yummy fun with James! We see other dogs walking their peeps in the afternoon, and sometimes a bunch of dogs get together and hang out in the dog park. We're all tired out and ready for naps when we get home. The peeps say that James is doing a great job if I'm chilled-out at the end of the day, so I make sure to look really mellow when they come home. Yay James! **/Clancy/** My friend Clancy the corgi who lives a few floors away hasn't been so lucky with his dog walker, and all us dogs feel really sorry for him. Clancy's human is dating a rich guy who has more money than heart. He calls Clancy "that chubby corgi" and has arranged for a Dog Taxi to fetch Clancy every afternoon and take him to a dog gym where a "personal trainer" makes him run on a treadmill and swim in a dog pool. Everyone in the building can hear how poor Clancy howls so miserably when the taxi guy comes to get him, and we all hope that Clancy's peep goes back to dating the chef who used to bring gourmet leftovers for Clancy and all his friends. Clancy and his human and Penny and I often take a walk late in the evening, and that's when I hear about Clancy's bad fortune. I sure hope Clancy's human trades in her boyfriend and Clancy can join us in James's afternoon posse!

Doing Laundry

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

Loads of Laundry



Fig. 1. *Dirty laundry.* Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2025. Photo: Blagovesta Momchedjikova.

In the city
that never sleeps
loads of laundry pile
up in every home
and fast

Once a month,
on a Sunday morning,
I push a shopping cart
with laundry bags
stuffed with dirty clothes
to the laundromat on Nostrand

There, I drop them off,
pay, and pray to
Yusuf, the Moroccan
or Vlad, the Ukrainian,
to get them done
by day's end.

Smelly socks, underwear,
pants, sheets, T-shirts, and towels
but also bills, coins,
ATM cards, keys, and
napkins with notes,
forgotten inside a pocket,
make their way
to the washers, then dryers,
and finally to the hands of the
Chinese ladies–the undisputed
architects of clean laundry–
who fold each item
impeccably and expertly
stack them all up,
as if building a tower inside
each cleaned laundry bag.

At night, I slowly push these monoliths
of crispy wearables
back home,
get some help unloading
but no help undoing them–
for I strive to preserve each perfect fold,
fiercely protecting it from
filthy or impatient fingers
as I gently transfer
each sacred beauty
from the warmth
of the laundry tower
to the cold closet.



Fig. 1. *Washed and folded laundry.* Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2023. Photo: Blagovesta Momchedjikova.

Drawing Panoramas

Chiara Masiero Sgrinzatto

State of Grace

Sketching 360-degree drawings is the essence of what I am and what I do.

It was a cold February day in New York City, in 2022. I was debating with VR photographer and location scout Sam Rohn about the disneyfication of places, the impact of branding, merchandising and advertising on the urban environment and on people that are experiencing that space. How can screens or lights shape a square? How do people perceive this chaotic environment as a place rather than an information flow? How can I represent my thoughts about that space? Is that place keeping its own identity or is an example of Deleuze's (1986) any-space-whatevers?

These questions are important to my investigation of places through immersive drawing. I decided to go to Times Square, to look for an answer through observation by panoramic sketching. I started drawing just after choosing the point of view–close to the street but still in the pedestrian zone, the iconic red steps on one side, the One Times Square Building and the Paramount Building on the other. The latter is the only building that remains "naked," it has not been covered by billboards yet (and hopefully it will stay that way) (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. *NYC, Times Square at Dusk, 2022*. A 360-degree spherical illustration, hand-drawn from observation in equirectangular projection. Pencil on Borden & Riley #840 Kraft Paper, 12 x 18", inked with white acrylic marker and black ink. The white out of all billboards draws attention to the architecture of the buildings. Artwork: Chiara Masiero Sgrinzatto. (Interactive version and *WorldWidePanorama* links in Works Cited.)

At the time, Sam and I were testing the brand new 360 camera Ricoh Theta X, providing nice sample pictures to the public and reporting glitch and issues to the manufacturer. Sam brought me a red foldable chair and table found just right at the corner, on Broadway, to make the sketching process more comfortable. He placed the camera in the centre of the table, just in front of me and started filming. Despite the rigid temperature of that afternoon I was not feeling cold. I sketched for over an hour, experiencing the kind of feeling of inner peace and a deep connection with some

elements of the environment I was focusing on, but at the same time the total disconnection from what was happening around me. I barely noticed there was a camera just in front of me, able to capture the whole space instantly.

Looking at the footage in a second moment, I perceived this extreme tranquillity inside of myself, a kind of trance when I was drawing. While the world around me was chaotic, loud, flashing, fast. The feeling is that my body belongs to a reality but is not fully connected to it, I am immersed and detached at the same time. This friction makes me capture the essence of the space on paper (Fig. 2). Even though this video is part of a series to test the image quality in changing low light conditions and evaluate the in-camera stitching performance, I found that it best describes my "state of grace"–my very essence, doing the thing I like to do.



Fig. 2. *NYC, Times Square at Dusk, 2022*. The 360-degree drawing is reprojected digitally in stereographic projection, also called "little planet" or "tiny planet" projection. Artwork: Chiara Masiero Sgrinzatto.

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Drinking Espresso

Teresa Mendes Flores

Lisbon Mornings Are Never Truly Mornings without an Espresso…or Two

A *bica* in Lisbon,
a *cimbalino* up in Porto,
short, long, or just right–
in a cup cold as stone or scalding hot,
a *carioca* or a *duplo*,
a *pingado*, a *garoto*, or *cortado*, as they call it in Spain–
a *carioca sem princípio*,
weak or strong,
in a small cup or a generous one,
an *americano*,
or better yet, an *abatanado*,
with every shade and twist already mentioned.
And let's not forget the *meia de leite* or the classic *galão*.

Portugal, without a doubt,
is the land with the most ways
to ask for a simple cup of coffee.

In the sunny café terraces or the neighborhood joint,
no *lisboeta* goes a day without it,
in one form or another.
It's the fuel for work,
the cheapest ticket to linger and chat
through long, lazy hours in the sunny terraces.

Without coffee, the day won't start,
the body feels dull,
the mind blurs without its caffeine–
our sacred heroine.

Colonial brew,
you traveled from the depths of Portugal's history,
how many enslaved hands on distant plantations
to feed this Lisboan habit
across the sea?

Driving an Ambulance

Jibriel Ahmad



Fig. 1. NYU Langone ambulance returns from a night of nonstop 911 calls during a relentless NYC snowstorm. New York City, USA, January 2025. Photo: Jibriel Ahmad.

Since I started working 911 EMS at 18, being an EMT in Manhattan and Brooklyn has shaped the way I move through the city (Fig. 1). I work on a basic life support unit, and over time, certain things have become second nature, like writing vitals on my hand. I do it so often on calls that I catch myself doing it during regular days too, even when I'm not in uniform. It's a small habit, but it shows how much the job has become a part of me.

One moment I'll never forget was during a snowstorm in January. My partner and I were crawling through thick snow and barely visible roads to reach an older woman who had fallen and split her head open; she was on blood thinners and the bleeding wouldn't stop. I remember holding pressure and talking to her the whole ride, trying to keep her awake while feeling the weight of how badly she needed us to get her to that ER in time.

What I love most about EMS is the feeling of being the hand someone might need when they have no one else. That quiet presence, showing up for people in their worst moments, is something I carry with me every day.

E

Entering the New Year

Jorge de La Barre

Diving into the New Year with the Coney Island Polar Bear Plunge

Founded in 1903, the Coney Island Polar Bear Club is the oldest Winter bathing club in the United States. Members take weekly plunges together on Sundays from November through April. The annual Coney Island Polar Bear New Year's Day Plunge is open to the public; for over a century, it has been one of the most exciting ways to start the new year, for New Yorkers and general visitors of all ages. To be sure, a great *real* escape game, into the ice-cold Atlantic Ocean waters, like a polar bear! (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. *Coney Island Polar Bear Club Big Splash.* Coney Island, New York City, USA, 2023. Photo: Jim McDonnell.

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Estate Sale Shopping

Jo Novelli-Blasko

What to Do About Those Slides?

Estate Sale Shopping is a great way to get to know a new urban environment or explore different parts of a familiar city. It's a habit I've fostered in two cities where I've lived and a few cities I've visited. (Tourist Estate Sale Shopping is a travel habit, which deserves consideration.) Today, my urban habit of Estate Sale Shopping is enjoying a resurgence. Instead of going to the sales in person, I participate in online auctions and pick up the goods if I win. Like many habits, this one is a lot like riding a bike, the habit can go dormant for years and then spring to life with keen familiarity. To be honest, my Estate Sale Shopping habit can get a little out of hand. This week, I will drive from one end of the valley to the other, to collect loot from downsizing homes. Do I need a 3' tall reproduction of Michelangelo's Moses? No, and I didn't need a 16" plaster bust of Socrates either. But I have the perfect spot for him and, as an Art History teacher, I might just write Moses off on my taxes!

In February 2024, I bid on and won an auction item of two slide projectors, several slide carousels, many boxes of slides, and a great little single-slide viewer. The lot cost me $16 and a trip across town. While I remain curious about what was on the slides, it was the projector and the orange plastic viewer that made me do it. I've been trying to find a functioning machine, or cobble one together. It would be a birthday present to myself, to look at all the slides in my collection.

Unfortunately, neither the viewer nor the projectors were in functioning order. I fiddled with the metal bits, the fan worked, the light did not. I pulled out my stash of projector light bulbs (also acquired at estate sales) and paced through a few… no luck. Slides would not drop into the machine. I tried different carousels. The viewer didn't light up either. I considered purchasing cute little light bulbs that might fix it. Did I want to nearly double my investment and then be left with a scad of cute, little bulbs as well as two more bulky machines, and another hoard of unseen slides? No, not really.

I meditated on the problem of the hundreds of slides, taken in by The Habitorium over the years. Originally slides were part of the equation because a small number came with a donation to The Habitorium of photographs. It was an archive left behind by an Army Dentist. The cache held images from Guam, Thailand, Indonesia, lots of other places. The snap shots are terrific, full of those pictures of soldiers snapped by other soldiers during WWII. Men are monumental in these images, often standing on top of a rock or hill, looking down at the cameraman, holding each other around the shoulders, laughing sometimes. My mind drifted back to the problem at hand: what to do about those slides? I took a deep breath, gathered guidance and drew a line: no little bulbs. In that moment, I also freed myself of the wish to see the slides, all the hundreds of slides including the dentist's slides. I was happily resolved. Maybe the decision was the real birthday gift of the auction lot.

In early March, I donated the projectors and decided to keep the slides until another time. As I prepared them for storage, I had a string of thoughts: it's likely these slides will outlive me. If they do, they're destined for the landfill. Should I just send them to the landfill now? Will anyone want the outdated media?

Flash forward some months when I saw Lorie Novak's Facebook post, inviting donations for her *Slide Mound*. On August 5, 2025, she wrote: "Thinking about loss as my slide mound grows. A memorial to past lives, photography and what we leave behind. *DM me if you have slides to donate. Will pay shipping." She had my attention. What is this *Slide Mound*? Where is this *Slide*

Mound? WHY is this *Slide Mound*? I wrote to Lorie and she responded beautifully to my offer of slides. They were in the mail by the end of the week.

While I haven't seen her work in person, nor ever met Lorie, I love her work for many reasons and taught several pieces in my seminar classes. Her sensitivity to obsolescence and deep interest in the archive are humbling. Lorie's work is couched in performance, too, in ways familiar to my training and mind's eye. Her *Migraine Register* project captures the alienating experience of pain, particularly the trauma unique to suffering recurrent pain over a long time. While many artists may take pain saturation as a starting point, it's rare they hit the mark as squarely as Lorie.

The *Slide Mound* makes so much sense to me, as an artist and a human. I wanted to know more and asked Lorie if she would give me an interview on the subject. To my delight, she said yes. The following conversation unfolded through email and during an online video meeting late in September, 2025.

Jo Novelli-Blasko: Lorie, thank you for talking with me about the *Slide Mound*! I love so much of and about your work. *Above the Fold* is insanely important, thank you for creating this intense archive! Your *Collected Visions* project is super close to my heart, it treads in the same waters as The Habitorium–other people's photographs. When you posted your call for contributions to the *Slide Mound*, I was excited to meet you through the work. How did the *Slide Mound* happen?

Lorie Novak: It started as an idea that popped into my head. It was an image that came to me, of the slides in a mound in the woods. It's weird that I didn't really think it through, I just did it. Usually, my long term works are thought through before I begin. I don't know how many slides I used to begin the mound, there were three garbage bags full. The pile is located about 5 minutes walk from my house in Upstate New York. I like that I cannot see it from my window. I have a little red wagon that I used to transport the slides from the house to the mound.

JNB: When did you start the *Slide Mound*?

LN: I started it in Fall 2021.

JNB: Where have you found slides for the mound?

LN: A few friends gave me some, but a lot of people said they got rid of slides a few years ago. So if I'd started sooner, it would be huge. I got slides from a curator who bought a family's collection for me to use in my art. I didn't do anything with them until the mound. Another friend gave me her parents' travel slides (lots of landscapes), my cousin's mother-in-law sent me her family slides that were digitized. But, I'd say about ⅔ of the slides in the mound are from artist friends or teaching slides.

JNB: So, it's mostly artists contributing. I had that so mixed up in my imagination.

LN: Yes, artists have many multiples of images. Back in the day when you submitted for publication or to a show, you sent slides. I would have 15 slides of one image. It was a lot. I have a shipment of about 5,000 slides coming this week. They are from a friend of a friend who used to work in multimedia. I plan to get more formal pictures of the mound, when they arrive, using a tripod and pulling the camera back, before and after adding her slides.

JNB: How was the response to your call for slides on Social Media?

LN: I posted to insta with very little response. Facebook was super fruitful, probably because of the demographics–people old enough to have slides.

JNB: I once installed bridesmaid dresses in an aspen forest of Colorado. It's a long and beautiful story for another day. I mention it because one of the loudest critiques of the project was about the environmental impact of letting dresses deteriorate in the landscape. What are the impacts of letting

slides decay? How did you address this concern in your work? For me, it's sort of moot. The slides will be discarded and are bound for landfill or incineration–all equally impactful. But as an artist, I'm curious about how you handle this sort of critique?

LN: Good question about decomposition. Eventually I will pick up every one and throw them out. Parts of the *Slide Mound* have been out in the forest for years and the cardboard is mushy but still there. I like that idea of bridesmaids dresses in the forest. My latest idea is to find a place that will take it. It may not be feasible. It's going to fall apart. We'll sell the house eventually, I can't just leave it there, even though it's part of the property but will be a deterrent to selling because it looks like a pile of trash.

JNB: What do you do with the little cardboard or plastic boxes that house the slides? I was totally tempted to keep the vintage boxes that held my offering to the mound.

LN: Yes, when I unpacked your shipment, I saw the cool, vintage boxes you included and realized they were a gift. Thank you. I recycle some of the boxes when I add the slides onto the mound. And I keep some.

JNB: Are there any of your family slides in the mound?

LN: Only duplicates I'd made for installation purposes. I don't trust the digitization process for slides and am preserving my father's slides.

JNB: You mentioned loss in your Facebook post. Can you say more about loss as it relates to the slides?

LN: I think about loss with photographs all the time. I am also thinking about huge losses of lives in this time in our history. Slides are a dead technology, we used to have tangible, material things and students all worked with tangible photographs. I feel a really big loss of the objects. Slides are discarded by people. The Slide Mound is a memorial to photography and to the past in general there are a lot of personal photos in it, it is the past, the way we used to live (before digital photography). Also, film loses its image pretty quickly, the film material seems intact, but without the image.

JNB: And please tell me everything about the architecture, which you also mention in your post.

LN: The armature was designed to make it more stable, to make it look a little bigger. Two sculpture friends helped me figure out a solution using chicken wire and a tomato cage. It was tricky and my brother-in-law who is an architect stepped in to help finish it. I draped the armature with a drop cloth to prevent the slides from falling through the cracks.

JNB: It's not everyday that I get to enjoy a conversation with someone who also collects other people's photographs. As I mentioned, my inclination started in the late 1990s, after a particularly deep dive into Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, I found myself sorting through the leavings of my great aunt's estate. I came upon her collection of snap shots and they became the topic for a seminar paper. Since then, I've been given small collections of photographs by people who 'rescued them' from the trash, but didn't know what to do with them. They felt obligated to care for the photos - even though they documented the life of someone unknown. It was a perceptible relief, and unburdening. I felt the same thing when I released my collections to your Slide Mound. Thank you. Can you say something about the feeling this experience gives you as an agent of unburdening?

LN: In the 1990s, I created *Collected Visions*, an interactive website and projected installation exploring how family photographs shape our memories. I collected family photographs from hundreds of people but never kept the originals. I would photograph or scan them and return their photographs. People were willing to let me use them, but not give them away. The slides people have

given me are not ones they have an emotional attachment to so there is often relief in being able to give them to me.

JNB: Thank you, again for your time and talking with me. Also, I thank you for documenting the addition of my contribution to the *Slide Mound* (Figs. 1-2). I'm sitting here in Arizona, imagining the beautiful, natural decay of them: both the images and objects. It's been wonderful talking to you about the project.





Fig. 1. *Slide Mound*, 2022 - ongoing. A mound of discarded slides/A mound of past lives/The remains of an obsolete technology/A memorial to photography. Upstate New York, USA, October 12, 2025. Artist: Lorie Novak; Fig. 2. Detail of one slide from the *Slide Mound* demonstrating the material and photographic deterioration. Upstate New York, USA, September 2025. Photo: Lorie Novak.

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Evading the Subway Fare

Zahara Slovenski

Kindness in Illegality: The Communal Nature of Fare Evasion

Millions of people use the New York City subway every single day, constantly moving and shoving to get to their destinations amongst the flurry of crowds. If the people of New York are the lifeblood of the city, the subway is the heart: a hub of movement and haste, integral to keeping the city alive. Just weeks after moving to New York, I experienced a cultural phenomenon for the first time. As a friend and I rushed through the crowd of a subway station, we watched a group of people slip through the emergency exit to enter the subway: in a rushed but practiced manner, they went through, like water flowing through a dam, always pushing the door open for the next person. Though I had seen people hopping turnstiles before, never had I seen such a large group of people, from all walks of life, rushing in at once without paying the fare. Before I knew it, I was also slipping through the door, making sure to push it open for the person behind me, and rushing to my train, with an extra $2.90 in my pocket, and adrenaline pumping through my veins. To this day, though I can pay the fare, I refuse to pass up the opportunity if someone presents it–and will always hold the door open for the next person. This urban habit is reflective of the city itself–New Yorkers' need to constantly be on the move but also the city's silent but unwavering sense of community.

Rushing through the emergency exit door, I had unknowingly participated in a dance, where the performers move to the heartbeat of the city, as familiar with its workings and rhythms as they are with themselves. The participants in this everyday performance are the commuters–students, tourists, families–however the performance generally consists of people who live in the city: New Yorkers. They are often on their daily commute, having seen this activity done many times before participating in it themselves, and truly feeling the pressure of the expensive subway fare. Even innocent bystanders, who go about their business, are performers, their silence an act of respect or indifference. Though fare evasion has existed throughout the history of public transport ("as long as there have been fares, there have been riders who have opted to not pay it" (Surico and Byington)), the emergency exits installed in 2005 for mass evacuations (Schuerman), presented a new portal for fare evasion: by 2018, its use for that purpose had "quadrupled" (Fitzsimmons and Sandoval).

For some people, entering through the emergency gate is a necessity: they truly cannot afford to pay the constantly rising fare, but need to use the subway to get to work or medical appointments, or to provide care for others. Sometimes those who do it are not bold enough or physically fit to jump the turnstile. The accessibility of this performance is strikingly similar to the reason the gates exist in the first place. However the increasing conflict between citizens of the city and the MTA has brought to light just how warped that purpose has become. In her article entitled "In Praise of the Subway Exit Gate," Adriane Quinlan discusses the merits of the exit gate: as a parent, the gates allow her to travel amongst a "hellscape of broken elevators and late trains," with a stroller or larger bags. It is a light of accessibility in a system where many people are made to feel "unwelcome" (Quinlan). The MTA has responded to the increased fare evasion by locking these exits, or replacing them altogether. The cracking down of fare evaders has actually made the subway more inaccessible for *everyone*. The system, made for people, no longer reflects the needs of the people; a system that is built for making transportation accessible to New Yorkers is instead a roadblock for that exact thing.

As someone who grew up in a city, public transportation systems like the subway are not unfamiliar to me. I felt a sense of pride when I realized I had more experience with the subway than many of my American peers simply due to my familiarity with the train system back home. However,

one aspect of the subway system here that was completely new to me was the evasion of the fare. Why is fare evasion so prevalent in New York and not in Singapore? Singaporeans are paying less for their subway system and they are paying for a system that serves its citizens well. The stations are clean, the security is kind and helpful, and there are regular upgrades being done. Singaporean culture is also very heavy on rule-following–if anyone jumped the turnstile or held open an emergency exit, they would be reported to the nearest security station. This idea of fare evasion, amplified by the idea of holding the emergency gate open, is one that is inherently reflective of the rebellious, even ungovernable nature of New York City.

The less accessible the subway becomes, the more going through the emergency door becomes a form of protest. It depicts the culture of New Yorkers: take what you need and oppose what doesn't serve you. If the city does not want to make room for you, you make room for yourself! Hopping the turnstile is another act where one asserts the self but what makes rushing through the emergency exit unique is the communal nature of it. Both are forms of evading the fare, however, they incite very different experiences: hopping the turnstile is about the individual whereas holding the door open is about others too. When I spoke to the friend I had first done it with, she talked about her fear of hopping the turnstile after hearing of the fines; the "mass herd of people" provided her, ironically, a sense of safety (Korb). This idea of community amongst strangers reminds me of going to the cinema. It is an urban performance in which a diverse group of people come together, amongst the rush of their busy lives and separate worlds, to have a shared experience. Though they do not talk to each other, for a brief period of time, they are a part of a community.

There is an element of selflessness in holding open the emergency exit that is not present in a cinema–one must do something kind for another in an environment where the stakes are *real*. These people choose to hold the door open even if doing so increases their chances of getting caught. A performance like rushing through the emergency exit door can serve as an example of how it is human nature to want to help one another, especially in the face of a common enemy–like the MTA. The understanding and empathy toward fellow citizens' struggles has evolved into a social script where people hold the door open. Even if not well intentioned and simply following the cultural practice, it is cemented in society and that, in itself, shows kindness.

The act of holding the door open for others transforms from social script to occupation in the context of a doorman. For a doorman at a hotel, their entire job is to perform this simple action. It completely lacks the transgression that holding the emergency door open does. However it has a different tension, where a person may lose their job if they fail to complete the action. Whilst holding the emergency door open is an act of risky selflessness, even if for the simple fulfillment of social script, for the doorman, it is obligatory. They could risk losing their job if *not* done, whereas the subway user risks more by choosing to do the act of kindness.

The doorman also gives an insight into further class tensions in New York City; the doorman, kind and inviting, is only present in the upper echelons of society. You will likely see them standing dutifully in the crime-free, Upper West or East Side neighborhoods of the city, in which people have enough money that a job can be allocated toward something as simple as opening a door. The doorman exemplifies the concept of authenticity in social interaction through the context of labor. This act, often a charade of authentic kindness, is an example of just how quickly kindness can be monetised and constructed, especially in a low pressure environment that does not often breed genuine acts of fleeting kindness–it becomes a true, premeditated performance.

Thus, there is a clear tension between the ways I refer to this act of holding the emergency door as both a performance and something unequivocally nonfictional–how can something so *real* be considered a performance? In calling this urban act a performance, I extract from Babacar Top, a dancer whose public performance I witnessed. In a blank, clinical classroom, a class of intrigued students watched him derive energy and movement from something internal, something "beyond

technique" (Top). His dance fused the internal and external to create something entirely new, and something inherently human that is unique to art as a medium. *This* is why I view holding the emergency exit as a performance: it was derived from the energy of the city and in turn the energy of the city can derive from it; the interplay between people and place elevates this act into a work of art.

Even when it might not benefit us, even when the stakes are high and our blood is pumping through our veins at immense speed, human beings want to help one another. The act of holding the subway gate open for the next person to slip through is one that is not only a reflection of identity and assertion of the self, but more importantly a reflection of community. It highlights an unspoken bond between strangers in a very tangible way. A horde of people rushing through an emergency exit represents how an illegal activity can illustrate the best of New York. There is beauty in what we choose to do with our free will and how we support our fellow people. Kindness should not be a crime, and it is acts of defiance towards this that show us most about humanity.

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F

Fixing Things

Alberto A. Rubini

"Fix It Yourself!": A True Story About Freedom



Fig. 1. The Leatherman Multitool–Leatherman Charge + TTI Model (2023). Through its compound stainless steel and titanium construction, the Leatherman multitool is the workhorse of many tradespeople and enthusiasts alike. This tool is not just a gizmo in a big arsenal, it's the symbol of the right to repair movement. Through its wide offering of tools in a small pack, the Leatherman enables ordinary people to perform little repairs on their own, democratizing repair culture and emancipating people to be more knowledgeable about their belongings. The Leatherman multitool inspires new generations to overcome gender stereotypes, open sourcing information, and creating a sharing economy where giving back creates value, instead of privatizing it. Image Source: *Grainger*.

As ubiquitous and widespread as it is, the Leatherman multitool is a must have for those who love to take care of their things (Fig. 1). To the untrained eye, this little companion might seem like a banal tool in a big arsenal, but its power lies in the idea of its founder, Mr. Tim Leatherman, a visionaire who wanted everybody to be more capable of solving problems with their own hands. Ever since the time of the Romans, tools were in demand. Soldiers created portable toolchains to bring their utensils around while going from *castrum* to *castrum*, since single tools were very hard to carry around and made the troops tired fast due to all the excess weight. Two thousand years later, the Swiss engineers Karl Eisner and Theodore Wenger fought fiercely to win the contract to produce Swiss Army knives for the Swiss Army, which needed a compact tool that revolved around a knife, while also having a cork puller, a saw blade, and a bottle opener. Fast forward to the 1970s, mechanical engineer Tim Leatherman decided to develop a multi-utensil that would revolve around pliers instead of a knife, due to his inability to fix broken hotel rooms during a trip to Europe with his wife Chou, creating a tool that everybody can use to fix ordinary problems in the household (CBS News Video).

It is evident then that people needed to fix things since the dawn of time, and they had the means to do so in every historical period. But advancing technology has made fixing things challenging; in response, the Right to Repair movement was born!

Typically, all things modern technology are seen as soul-less: tools that make tools, machines that make machines, computers that code computers–this dystopian way of thinking appears in modern literature, as many writers fear the new, the cold, the machine–and for good reason! Historically, we have never built systems so small, so capable and so intricate, so it is natural for one that isn't specialized in the field of study to see such technologies hard to understand, and, as a consequence, to repair. In the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin believes that what "withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art" (Benjamin 4), stating that art loses its value the more it's reproduced. But we don't have to see it this way: tools, especially mass produced ones, are the exact opposite: through the usage of machines, more tools can get around, more people can use them to fix their things, and the stronger their aura grows, thus democratizing repair culture, instead of restricting it. The deviation between technological progress and democratization of information poses the real challenge for today's right to repair movement: if technology will always progress further, tools must follow accordingly.

Picture this: you are a farmer who spent many of his hard earned savings on the latest tractor from John Deere. You can use it to collect valuable data on your fields; autonomous guidance systems make working easier and more efficient, and state-of-the art technology enables you to spend less on fertilizers, fuel, and other consumables. The technology you have at your fingertips seems to be almost miraculous, but, suddenly, a gauge on your console starts beeping and the tractor breaks down. You try to take it apart, only to realize that there is so much complexity and proprietary technology that you can't get a hold of your personal machine. You are fed up, and confronted with a massive invoice from the authorized service center.

This is what John Deere was in 2021: due to their proprietary technology policies that restricted machine's serviceability only to authorized centers and original parts, Deere faced a massive lawsuit from US farmers who wanted to be able to repair their own equipment. Balance struck when "The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) and Deere & Co. signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU)" (Miller 1), where Deere & Co. took action to make repairs from independent service centers accessible, along with sharing critical information about some of the software architecture contained in new tractors, to enable debugging from independent centers. This is a novel concept: many companies decide to protect their intellectual property by enacting protectionist control measures, exactly like small medieval feuds. Companies like Leatherman, on the contrary, make the design visible to everyone and guarantee that the customer comes first. As a matter of fact, my multitool has a 25 year full warranty: if it breaks, I'll be covered. A bold move, considering these tools are under wear and tear every single day.

Analogously, in 2024, a new Act passed in the European Union where all phones sold after 2024 had to have the USB-C charging port supplied as standard–a curious step from a political institution that threatened to take Apple products out of market if they didn't switch from Lightning connector to USB-C: "New EU rules require all phones sold after autumn 2024 to use the USB-C connector for their charging ports" (Hern 1). The EU's decision proves that objects have social lives. Arjun Appadurai, in his introduction to the collection *The Social Life of Things*, believes that "Focusing on the things that are exchanges, rather than simply on the form or functions of exchange, makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is *politics*" (Appadurai 3), then saying that the argument justifies that commodities have social lives. Hence, if politics drive exchange and values of objects, objects can also represent political ideas and movements. During my residency here at NYU, the AC unit kept rattling. Strange, I thought, considering that the building was recently renovated. I could have called the repairmen but instead I busted out my multitool and

fixed it myself. Just like a more accessible iPhone or a widely available multitool, I think the impact of more serviceable technology could be great. In this case, I just saved a repairman some time, but if we add it all up, the financial and environmental impact of Right to Repair can be massive.

The turning point is substantial: while in the past, commodities intrinsically contained all the necessary information to be repaired, it is now the company's responsibility to provide hi-end tools, both physical and intellectual, that can make products serviceable. And this is why tools like the Leatherman are more necessary than ever: they enable people to fix things they simply wouldn't without proper hardware. Right to Repair is not a physical movement, it's an intellectual one.

Dr. Thiago Leitão de Souza from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro would understand that, as he has been on a mission to repair and restore in digital form the lost painted panorama of Rio de Janeiro. Through the use of open source information, Prof. Leitão was able to find studies of the lost panorama, digitizing them, doing additional measurements, cross-referencing the original data, thus reconstructing what was once lost. Prof. Leitão had no experience in 3D modeling and game design, essentially having to "go back to school" to learn what was necessary to technically pull the feat off. He reported that "YouTube videos and online forums were my best resource for learning game design" (Leitão), proving that he was able to repair something because information and tools were readily available to him. Had he not had access to these resources, the project that he had been supervising for six years would have not seen the dawn of day. Prof. Leitão's case is one of virtuous right-to-repair implementations, as all resources were accessible. It would have been easier to contact a game design studio for the job, but the fact that he was able to do it by himself proves how much humanity can accomplish if it's provided the correct information and tools to do so.

Call it right-to-repair, call it open source code distribution–these practices have surged in the past few years because free circulation of intellectual property is the only way towards a future when people can be free from ties to corporations, vendor lock-ins, and subscription models, making way for a next generation of products that truly serve the end customer. For now, though, I'll be happy to help you with my trusty Leatherman.

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Flirting

Michelle Dent

Fireflies and the Elusiveness of Sleep

Waking in the middle of the night, girlish anxiety, a busy mind. The mystery and heat of flirtation and connection. Trying to stay in the moment – this sleepless moment – while musing on the incandescence of fireflies… blink, blink, blink… blink… we are here only now. To be stirred up, infatuated, agitated, doubting, insecure, bold. I scroll through our messages, all those lovely flickerings. They create a hunger, to see and hear and feel that electricity with you over the wires and in real time.

Flushing the Shower Drain

Jo Novelli-Blasko

For Every One You See, There's a Dozen You Don't

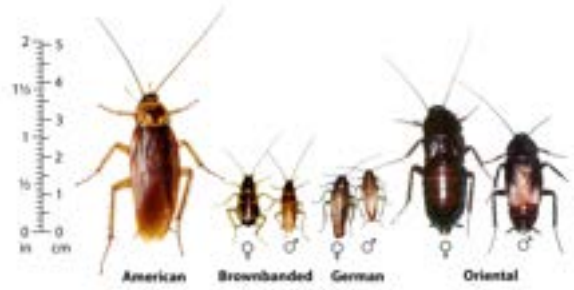


Fig. 1. Source: University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

Living with American Cockroaches is a reality in Phoenix (Fig 1). Commonly called *Sewer* Roaches, they reside in the urban infrastructure, coming out during rains, and monsoon. The enormous bugs are slow and clumsy on foot above ground. They buzz when flying, seemingly blindly, through the night, thudding into walls, and people. In Phoenix, the American cockroach comes to visit then goes back underground. They don't thrive outside the infrastructure. The enormous bugs come from flood irrigation too, a municipal service offered during the hottest months.

To my mind and in my experience, American Cockroaches are distinctly wild in comparison to German Cockroaches which thrive in squalor, or squalor proximate places. Silvery and fast-moving, they are revolting because they set up house inside your home. An infestation is a curse of epic proportion and can derive from relocating neighbors or a visitor's overnight bag. I loathe them in part because I know I cannot kill them all: for every one you see, there's a dozen more that you don't.

My first encounters with sewer roaches happened in August 1982 when they flung themselves at me from the oleander bushes at the entrance of my apartment complex. Dodging them! Failing! Arms swinging! Shrieking! It was hysterics every time I came home after dark.

Every time I see a sewer roach I shriek. I shriek repeatedly and without fail. In 2004, my habit inadvertently trained my dog Desdemona to alert when she saw a sewer roach. She would issue a low growl. I'd follow her eye, scanning the floor as I grabbed a sandal for a weapon. *Good girl Dezzie.* I loathe sewer roaches in part because I know I have to kill them.

Flash forward 20 years, I moved to a place smack dab in the middle of an irrigation zone. The inevitable happened. I found a sewer roach in my shower–but not until I'd already lathered my shampoo! Woman against nature, with bubbles! This experience added a new wrinkle to my murderous, shrieking habit: flushing the drain with a chankla in my hand, *before* I get in the shower!

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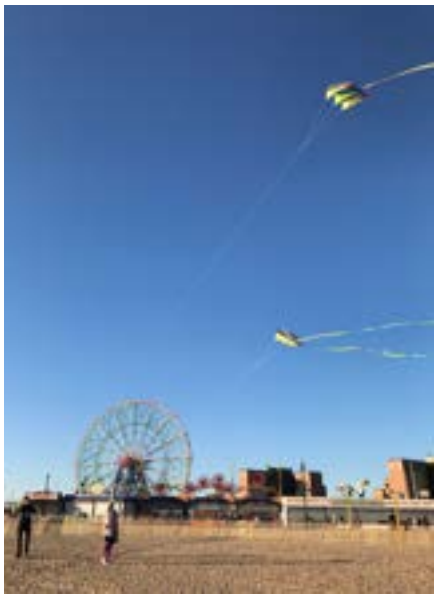
Flying Kites in New York City

Nikola Bradonjic





Fig. 1. *Flying kites with Moussa and Malick*. Industry City, December 2016; Fig. 2. *Mila trying to catch some wind for her kite.* Prospect Park, April 2025. Brooklyn, New York City, USA. Photos: Nikola Bradonjic.





Figs. 3-4. *Danijela and Nikola flying kites at Coney Island*, December 2016. Brooklyn, New York City, USA, Photos: Nikola Bradonjic.

Flying Kites in Rio de Janeiro

Jorge de La Barre

"Flying kites gives a feeling of freedom; for a moment we forget about life's problems and have fun, free like children," says *Instagrammer* rbpipas011 in a recent post. One of the oldest and most beloved pastimes, popular among children and adults alike, kite flying has proven to be a great *real* escape game, especially from Rio de Janeiro's numerous *favelas* located on hilly tops. It is a common sight in the sky above Rio: kites of various colors blending with the blue sky and white clouds (Regina). There are also many kite festivals in Rio's *favelas*, for example in Rocinha, the largest *favela* in Latin America, or Complexo do Alemão (Figs. 1-2).



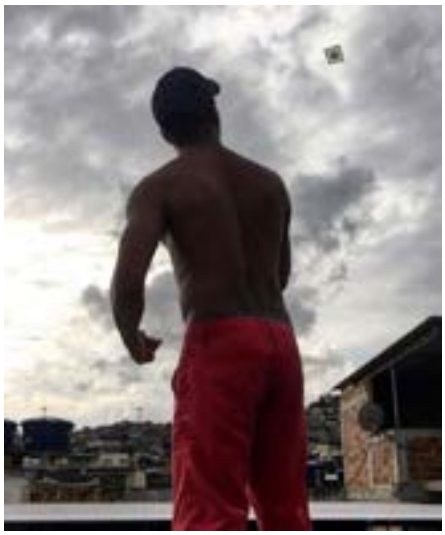


Fig. 1. *Kites Festival in Complexo do Alemão, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2012*. Photo: Bruno Itan; Fig. 2. *Wellington, from Complexo do Alemão, says that flying kites is therapy.* Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2020. Photo: Pipasgrafias (photos from C. Garcia's article).

In 2018, kite flying was declared a Cultural, Historical and Intangible Heritage through Law 7.810/18 (ALERJ), by then-Rio State Governor Luiz Fernando Pezão (Sodré). This resulted in the creation of Kite Day (Leis Estaduais), celebrated on June 29, and established in Rio de Janeiro's Official Calendar (Regina). There is also an International Kite Day, celebrated on January 14 in various Brazilian cities since at least 2006 (Correio Braziliense). During the 2020-2022 pandemic, greater interest in kite flying was also registered (Fox).

> Even if people comply with social isolation, houses in the outskirts are often small, with many people occupying few rooms. When flying kites on their rooftops, the kite flyer is an artist, finding their individuality and the power of play. To think about this everyday way of playing is to think about the celebration of life, even in the necropolitics of Rio de Janeiro. (…) It is common to see adult kite flyers on their rooftops, flying and retrieving kites for hours on end. This pastime extends from childhood into adulthood. It seems that the kite becomes an extension of the person, and playing, joking around, and engaging in healthy competitions among kite flyers becomes a kind of therapy. (Garcia)

> Kites encourage movement, generate positivity, and bring a sense of achievement to children and adults alike. Adults end up reliving their childhood days, keeping their inner child alive as they fly a kite and watch it drift with the wind. The freedom brought by this sensation means

the hardships of daily life in the favela are forgotten for a few hours; all focus is on the line, the kite tail, and of course, the kite itself. (Regina)

Kite flying has also involved increasingly ferocious and competitive practices: cutting the strings of other kites in the air using Cerol, also known as "Chilean string": a mixture of shoe glue with ground glass (or iron filings or quartz powder) that is applied to kite strings (Cerol). Such practices are now considered a crime by law in various states including Rio (Jusbrasil) and São Paulo (ALESP). There is currently a hotline aimed at receiving reports with information about the offense (Disque Denúncia). Campaigns such as "No Cerol!" (Cerol Não!) and "Cerol Kills" (Cerol Mata) were created to raise awareness about the dangers of flying kites in public roads, and above all the dangers associated with abrasive cutting lines (Regina). And so it goes: more than the virtual ones, "real" escape games can be fierce and cruel!

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Folk Dancing

Neli Sandeva

Practicing Bulgarian Folk Dancing





Fig. 1. *Female folk dancing* and Fig. 2. *Male folk dancing.* Sofia, Bulgaria, 2025. Drawings: Dimitra Nacheva.

I have been practicing in a Bulgarian folk-dance club in Sofia for the last three years. I go twice a week, after work. It is one of the most inspirational activities in my life. I await the days when the group gathers with extreme excitement. If I have a tough day at work or some other problem, folk dancing helps me overcome the stress. It stimulates my physical well-being, good mood, and positive thinking (Figs. 1-2). The vibes coming from the Bulgarian rhythms are so diverse, mystical, inundating, and unique that they make me think of the people who have created and preserved them over time with great respect. Bulgarian folk music and dancing makes me proud and willing to dive deeper in this invaluable heritage.

Following the Full Moon

Lavina Singh

Moonlit Odyssey–A Monthly Sanctuary Nurturing My Soul and Spirit

I moved to the city of Phoenix to help take care of my father at home. He had been diagnosed with dementia. My mother and I didn't know what we were in for as we committed to a journey we had no idea how to navigate. It lasted 5 grueling years.

Additional significant life changes emerged, including a divorce.

I was completely overwhelmed.

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In previous years, I had the privilege of dwelling in stunning and remote natural settings. I had never lived in a city before but through time *I adapted like a bird who's made its nest among the electrical wires creating a refuge in the midst of the urban sprawl.*

~~~

It took awhile
to get used to living in the city
after a life of beaches, mountains, and trees.
How could I live without the beauty of nature?

Through time I've learned that everything is nature!
I am a part of this creation,
beneath me around me within me
at all times!

I've adapted like a bird whose made its nest among the electrical wires
creating my refuge in the midst of the urban sprawl
under the blue sky.

~~~

I found myself seeking and finding ways to stay afloat through this arduous voyage. In addition to the support of a couple of close friends, mindfulness meditation, spontaneous writing, connecting with nature through hikes, and full moon drives in and around the city of Phoenix, became my life rafts. I collected an arsenal of tools to nurture my weary heart.

The moon excursions in particular developed into a monthly event that kept me going and sustained me in multiple ways:

– Despite the hardships I was facing, the drives along busy streets offered me a poignant glimpse of humanity carrying on with life undeterred.
– The moon's transits served as a constant reminder that there was something greater than myself unfolding at all times, encouraging me to embrace the transformations occurring in my own life.
– It helped to remember that "this too shall pass."
– The moon's sheer beauty took my breath away and distracted me from my misery.
– It brought up a remembrance of belonging to something eternal.
– It eased my anguish by tracing time through the cosmos.
– The moon became my friend, confidant, and guide.

How can I get through all this change?
~~~

The full moon rose and illuminated its light
Shine on dear one
Look within for all the answers
Let love guide you

Inhale
Let all thoughts be
Allow your feelings
Acknowledge the hard
Feel the calm energy increasing

Exhale
Release the questions
Come back to yourself
Align with the light of Love

Peace
~~~

To this day, every month I jump in my car and go chase la luna! I never know the direction of my sojourn or where I will end up. My mindfulness practice keeps me in the present moment which helps me let go of control and relax into the chosen route for the night.

The key for me is to watch the orb come up on the horizon when it appears larger and displays orangey red colors that are most magnificent. After it's up in the sky it's still amazing to see, but for me, the excitement, wonder, and awe lies in the epic moments when it first reveals itself.

The flat terrain at 1100 feet elevation here in the valley of the sun creates a perfect canvas to witness nature's artistic play, the moon's monthly ascension.

Once, there was a breathtaking moment when the lunar eclipse rose on the horizon between the downtown city skyscrapers and the Estrella mountains in the west valley. The unobstructed far reaching view made it an exhilarating experience to behold nature's spectacular show.

Recently, at my monthly meeting with the celestial body, I found myself in an open field, which is rare to find in the Phoenix metropolitan area. As I got out of my car and looked to the sky, I realized behind me was the mortuary where my father's funeral and cremation had taken place. Again, I hadn't planned to go to this spot. I didn't even know it existed, but there I was with the grandeur of the rising moon before me and the place where I said my final earthly goodbyes to my father.

It was a full circle moment as I greeted my friend once again. I experienced tendrils of deep grief and ecstatic joy in the same moment as I understood the beauty of existence through remembering being by my father's side when he took his last breath. I was filled with gratitude for my life and the opportunity to stand on the earth, recalling all the moons I had seen through the past 9 years and watching this full moon rise in front of me.
~~~

Undeniably, the moon and Earth engage in a mutual gravitational attraction. The most tangible manifestation of this connection between our planet and the moon is observed through its daily influence on the ocean. Considering that our human bodies consist of 55-60% water, it is plausible to speculate that there might be an effect on us as well.

As I progress in life, this gravitational pull continues to beckon me to jump in my car, venture out in the twilight and connect with this celestial body, making me somehow feel less alone even amidst the 5th largest city in the United States.

Food Craving

Kathryn Hummel

Monsoon Cravings

rainy days bracketed
by *bonda*

AM to PM
capricious appetite stoked
by boiling street-side oil
& old news printed
with a script
familiarly indecipherable

grand words i use as appetizers—
as provocations

sometimes want goes beyond
fried dough
macerated with chutney

rounding out cravings
seeped in ambiguity

to the hands of
the *bonda wallah* himself
resembling the *bonda* itself

warm, firm, deft
involved in
sating emptiness

my aching wants
laying out
rapid packaging

cheap & quick
secured
by a tooth-cut thread

Mumbai Highway Ghosting

There is twilight, unfixable at the edge
as a slip of flaking celluloid. Steel-buffed blur of vinegar and *gris*.

Funny how you crave the sky when shut away
but misremember your longing in proximity. Ether is nothing, really,
but unstrung love gathering cloud like spindles of dust.

Familiar neglect evades comment. You know the scene too well.
Padlocks buckling the chai stalls, coarse boards as last rites,
swags of unstirred air between trees. None of it is shocking.

Transition is a rapid binding of stone, a scale that scorns no surface.
Once you grew sentimental over eucalyptus leaves, their flutter your
own private semaphore.

It goes this way: surveying things abandoned, distantly broken, instantly
gone. Not just objects but also memory. A young night from which
no freshness can be drawn.

Compact patterns of shadow replace compact patterns of life.
The cars passing low, aspiring to middle heights, confine separate
lives. You think they do.

Refractions obey a perpetual course of rebound.
Old trucks carry cargo that's never loosed.

Your skin has been smeared with inexplicable muck. Your key
grinds out the same lock's song; the door hesitates in its
habitual place. You return as if you've never been away.

Vinegar Syndrome

Roiling, internal, woke me
and in a sense I'm glad it did.
There was acid in the smoky light
as I pulled on outside clothes
I'd only mended yesterday;
descended to stalk the streets
that, unusually subdued, turned
the hope of a new day melancholy.
I wrapped my *chador*, waved
good morning to the man setting up
his small shop near the temple.
Walked down patched-up streets,
noticed the char of last night's fire,
the blanketed bodies of those
who'd sought the warmth
slumbering under gauze tents:
a bigger version of the kind my
mother once used to guard
fruit from flies. At the shop
on the next corner I patted
a black dog dozing on the step:
the woman at the counter
looked me over warmly,
an attest to my humanity.
I'm not unlike you, I later
thought of saying but not
until I was taking turns
around an unlocked park;
its ring of frangipani trees
gnarled and sculptural.
I missed no-one but wanted
to be seen—I thought
of my child self who wasn't
often happy but perhaps
happier than I am now
because she hadn't yet
been obliged to navigate life.
Maybe more than healing her
I need her to heal me—
to feel the press of a freckled
paw in my idle hand, the
fascination with the dress-up
box or caring for dolls rather
than human beings (who are
too apt to run). I walked home,
chilled. The air was warm

in the hall, the light still blue.
I made a saturated decision
to use my words for peace,
convinced it was good and just
to anoint the wounds before
distance scarred them, these
configurations of betrayal
that have never been answered
and likely, never will. I wrote,
then wrapped my *chador* again,
brewed a strong small pot of coffee
which I drank from the cup I'd
fastened back together yesterday.
I rescued my passport from the spot
on the floor where it had ended up
after restless room swapping and
sleep, with the book I'm fitfully
reading. I put it with the fruit
ripening on a plate on top of my
refrigerator, on the paper coaster
souvenired from a friendly pub,
the one that declares: *drinks on me*.

Foodstagramming

Vidhi Chellani

Beyond the Plate: The Performative Feast of Foodstagramming in New York

I love living in New York. Every time I leave my room, I come across a new place and a new adventure. Every new block I explore has new restaurants and diverse aromas. It didn't take long for me to realize that a significant aspect of living in New York is the unparalleled access to an extensive array of food and a thriving restaurant culture. While I've always appreciated food, the distinctive manner in which New Yorkers engage with culinary experiences has been an eye-opener for me. From visiting iconic bakeries to the anticipation of winding lines that stretch around blocks, I've immersed myself in the diverse and dynamic culinary landscape that defines New York. The restaurant culture, particularly in a city like New York, has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade, propelled by the pervasive influence of social media in our society. This digital age has not only heightened our awareness of culinary treats but has also ignited a collective need to explore the gastronomic wonders this city has to offer.

The first iPhone was released when I was just two years old, and thus, my understanding of life is defined by an era where everything is at our fingertips. However, what I do know is that in 2010, Instagram was released–a highly successful app that, with the combination of a compact handheld device for effortless photography and a platform for widespread sharing–which brought about a revolutionary shift in societal functioning. This transformation is especially evident in our daily lives, where the notion of becoming an influencer has evolved into a viable career. In this digital age, individuals have grown remarkably comfortable sharing every aspect of their lives on social media, a simple yet prevalent example being their meals.

This phenomenon of capturing meals, coined as "Foodstagramming" gained immense popularity on social media in 2010 and has become almost instinctive over the decade. I must admit that I, too, have engaged in this practice, influenced by the environment I grew up in. However, in New York City, this experience takes on a unique significance: the city offers countless Instagram-worthy moments at every corner, coupled with one of the finest gastronomic scenes begging to be captured. The ritual of foodstagramming manifests effortlessly and is universally recognizable. The phone poised just inches from the face, the back slightly hunched over a dish that's gradually losing its warmth. The final touches come in the form of subtle edits and creative flourishes, culminating in a picture-perfect post that intricately weaves the tale of a culinary adventure, pixel by pixel.

Foodstagramming has become an integral part of our daily lives, and capturing these images almost compulsively serves as a validation of the experience. Aleksandra Atanasova explores the psychological dimension of this phenomenon in her article "The Psychology of Foodstagramming." She highlights the dual nature of the practice, stating: "It quickly rounds into a vicious circle, though. Devoted foodstagrammers may get so accustomed to photographing their supper that abstaining from the ritual can make them feel like an important ingredient is missing" (Atanasova). This sentiment echoes the colloquial saying, "Pics, or it didn't happen." In this digital age, the act of documenting our meals has become so deeply ingrained that it often feels as important as the actual consumption. We seek external approval, a digital pat on the head, for our culinary adventures.

The need for validation is so instinctual that it blends seamlessly into our lives. No one thinks about pulling out their phone to take a picture: it just happens. I find that to be very interesting because the performative nature of taking the picture has become so blended with life that it is unrecognizable. I think of how reality and performance have blended together while

witnessing the succinct yet powerful performance by dancer and choreographer Babacar Top. His short expressive dance, initially perplexing, provided me with a fresh perspective on the idea that our everyday actions are performances and art. In this captivating display, Top chose to convey the dynamic positions observed when people walk through the city. Using his breath as the rhythm of life, he skillfully broke the barrier between performer and audience, blurring the lines between the performance and life itself. This newfound awareness of the performative nature of our lives extended my understanding of the motivations behind why we photograph our food, revealing a deeper layer of the desire for social approval intricately woven into the fabric of our daily actions.

Just as Top blurred the lines between performance and life, foodstagramming blurs the lines between reality and the curated digital image. We don't just eat; we stage culinary experiences, transforming meals into props for our online personas, feeding into the city's insatiable hunger for validation. This need for validation is further encouraged by the inherent materialism laced in "New York's stimulating and bold persona," epitomized by iconic locations like Times Square (Sovern), suggests Melanie Sovern in her essay "Street-preachers: Solicitors of Free Thought in the City." Thus we discover that a symbiosis exists between urban materialism and the seemingly innocuous act of photographing food. Much like Times Square's transformation from a hub of adult entertainment to a haven for retail and restaurants, the act of capturing one's culinary experiences through the lens of a camera has become emblematic of a city defined by material indulgence. Photographing food transcends the mere documentation of a meal; it evolves into a visual narrative, a curated story of one's consumption choices and lifestyle. This practice seamlessly translates into cybermaterialism within New York and emphasizes the significance placed on expensive and diverse gastronomic experiences. Each snapshot of a meticulously arranged dish or a fleeting moment in a bustling eatery serves as a testament to the individual's active participation in the consumerist culture, where the portrayal of one's culinary adventures becomes a form of self-expression intricately woven into the fabric of urban life. In this city that thrives on visual spectacle and constant validation, the act of photographing food emerges as a personal choice and as a nuanced performance reflecting the city's overarching ethos of materialistic expression.

Materialistic expression in the form of restaurant culture in New York acts as a powerful catalyst for the widespread phenomenon of foodstagramming. As one of the world's most renowned cities, New York's allure extends beyond its materialistic facets to embrace a lavish lifestyle inherently tied to affluence. City residents, motivated by a desire to experience the city in all its glory, actively engage in a lifestyle centered around indulgence. Since relocating to New York, I've noticed that the everyday performance of dining out isn't merely a means to satiate hunger; it has evolved into a deliberate and social activity. Even when not driven by hunger, individuals choose to embark on culinary adventures, undoubtedly capturing and sharing their experiences on various platforms. This prevalent behavior underscores the profound connection between the act of dining out and the culture of foodstagramming. In the dynamic landscape of the metropolis, the ritual of enjoying meals in restaurants serves as a compelling catalyst, fueling the pervasive trend of documenting and sharing culinary moments on social media.

This phenomenon of documentation aligns with the prevailing trend of cybermaterialism in contemporary cultural theory. In her essay "'Cybermaterialism' and the Invention of the Cybercultural Everyday," Amrohini Sahay highlights a transformative shift that embraces the digital realm's influence on everyday life. Rooted in the celebration of cyberspace, cybermaterialism signifies a departure from traditional materialist frameworks, emphasizing a cultural understanding of "material" grounded in the symbolic dynamics of the "everyday." The act of foodstagramming becomes a manifestation of this broader cultural shift, emphasizing the indeterminate nature of culture within the digital sphere; a way for individuals to curate and present themselves in the digital space, competing for attention in the online world.

While cybermaterialism may initially seem like a downside of foodstagramming culture, there exists a substantial community that, when formed, actively engages in this collective performance. In her article "First Camera, Then Fork," Kate Murphy quotes Nora Sherman, deputy director of the CUNY Building Performance Lab, who emphasizes the positive aspects of foodstagramming, "'People I have never met follow my blog and know me through the food I eat'"; she even met her boyfriend through her blog (Murphy). This aspect of documenting and sharing one's life through food can be a positive and enriching experience if approached with moderation and mindfulness.

Spotlighting food and spotlighting ourselves are not that different though: while some channel their expression through food, others engage in street performances captured by their cellphone cameras, scripting the narrative of their lives via Instagram posts. Take, for instance, the basic rooftop bar selfie: seemingly spontaneous yet encapsulating the performative essence of self-expression in New York. The chosen pose, the carefully curated designer outfit, and the breathtaking backdrop all contribute to projecting an image of success and urban sophistication, satiating the city's voracious appetite for visual spectacle and material validation.

In the heart of New York City's dynamic culinary landscape, foodstagramming reflects a profound shift in cultural expression, marked by the fusion of cybermaterialism and the performative nature of our daily lives. Foodstagramming, as a digital extension of our gastronomic experiences, seamlessly integrates into the fabric of urban life, blurring the lines between reality and the curated image. Amidst the pursuit of validation, a community emerges, transforming foodstagramming into a collective performance that fosters connections in the bustling city. In this dance between the tangible and the digital, our culinary narratives become both individual expressions and a response to the city's insatiable appetite for material acknowledgment. Foodstagramming is not merely a documentation of meals but a testament to our shared desire for affirmation in a city defined by constant movement and the perpetual pursuit of the extraordinary.

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Foraging

Ann-Marie Everitt

Da Bronx, Spring, 2024

Foraging is the gathering of wild food like herbs and plants for free. It is an ancient practice that is part of a modern movement to decolonize or rewild our relationships to the earth and to each other, to develop a mindset of reciprocity or stewardship rather than domination over the land. There are many benefits to foraging: it creates a greater awareness of one's surroundings, the seasons, individual and community health.

Yellow Dock Root, Foraging Field Trip with "The Alchemist's Kitchen"*

The process of rewilding and decolonizing ourselves continues.
An Ex-Con is that you or I can be fined for picking chickweed, or
purple dead nettle or cleavers or any other plant that is
medicinal, nutritional, or just plain beautiful straight from
mamma earth;
Unless, I paid the man for the seed, the packaging, the
pharmaceuticals, I could not eat or heal myself and my family;
I'll let you walk in the Park that I made the man said, but
that's it.
But city folks here and there, said "waydaminute,"
This is what we want and this is what we are gonna do;
We free ourselves from the tyranny of your labels,
We are not invasive species, that's not cool to say man,
My cousin is a dandelion and neither is she.
If you ask nicely she will let you season her and pan fry her
petals,
Dig her bitter roots to make tea that cleans your liver,
Make a salad with her leaves
An Ex-ConCrete Plant has become an Edible Food Forest,
The tide has turned, the water will become clean
For swimming, fishing, drinking as more people remember what
their great, great, great grandparents knew.
Did you know wild violets are cool to touch and can cool your
fever?
Stinging Nettle will soothe your arthritic knee.
For Free.
We forage because we love the land,
Our great, great, great grandparents are smiling.
This is what is happening in cities today.

***Thanks to The Alchemist's Kitchen and Journei Bimwala.** Journei Bimwala is a Bronx native who has dedicated her life to educating the Bronx communities on the importance of using native & bioregional plants. Since 2017, she has been an active leader at the Foodway at Concrete Plant Park, NYC's sustainable food landscape. She is a Clinical Herbalist, Forager, Health Coach, and Educator. She teaches children and families about wild plants and their healing/nutritional benefits (Figs. 1-6).













Top: Fig. 1. *Journei Bimwala, Clinical Herbalist, Forager, Health Coach, and Educator*; Fig. 2. *Purple Dead Nettle;* Middle: Fig. 3. *Edible Food Forest, Bronx River Foodway*; Fig. 4. *Concrete Plant Park,* Bottom: Fig. 5. *Entrance to Concrete Plant Park;* Fig. 6. *Yellow Dock Root.* The Bronx, Spring 2024. Photos: Ann-Marie Everitt.

Forgetting One's Umbrella

Cameron Kersting

Caught in the Rain

As I walked to the store last week, I was suddenly caught in the middle of a downpour with no protection from the rain. Nearly everyone around me was prepared for this–they had all checked the weather forecast for the day, and the umbrellas gleefully popped open as the first drops landed. I was not as lucky. I could picture where my umbrella sat, useless and alone, next to my desk. No help was to be found today. I pulled my jacket on tighter and kept going.

Not often is rain more than an inconvenience. Things caused by rain, like flash floods, or connected with rain, like hurricanes, can be. But rain itself does little harm except to perturb those who become caught in it. A tool was created to combat the problem whose ingeniously simple design has been used for thousands of years in many varying purposes. The ancient umbrella was "a flabellum, a fan of palm-leaves or coloured feathers fixed on a long handle" (Sangster 6); it was used by the upper classes as shade from the sun–servants or slaves would carry it for royalty, and thus it became associated with a higher social status in the Ancient East and the Ancient Mediterranean. Both names describing the portable protective device–umbrella and parasol–originate from Latin ("umbra" means "shade," "parare" means "shield" and "sol" means "sun") and are linked to the sun. The shift to umbrellas being used for rain is a relatively recent one.

Perhaps the umbrella is a symbol of our human desire to control nature. We do everything in our power to understand nature, because we know we cannot change it. We use this knowledge to guide our decisions, dressing for the weather because it is so often a disturbance to our daily routine, and we do not–cannot–allow ourselves to yield to the randomness of existence; there is simply no time. Preparation is especially necessary in large, walkable areas, like New York City, where much of our time traveling is spent subject to the weather. Everyone is always hurrying, pushing past everyone else, seemingly unaware of each other, trying to get to the subway or to the store before a forecast downpour, thinking of themselves, but not in a selfish way; they do it to survive.

On a rainy day, every person who has not made the same forgetful mistake I did, comes with their own personal canopy. Attempting to remain as dry as possible, people move through the city, as they normally would (that is, trying to reach a destination in a finite amount of time), but with added obstacles. Now, they must dodge other beings with their anti-rain appendages, posing a unique challenge because of their significant additional width within any given walkway. Successfully navigating this aspect requires a deep knowledge by both parties of the unspoken conventions by which we interact with the countless others around us every day. It is one of those social norms and courtesies that one is simply expected to know. In more crowded areas, umbrella-folk weave in and out of each other slowing down foot traffic; so they are relieved when they finally reach their destination, gracefully close the umbrella, and step inside where the rain cannot harm them.

Their umbrellas say much about them. Is it a compact umbrella or a full-sized one? Is it plain black (formal or dreary, you decide) or does it have a fun pattern? Is it a transparent near-hemisphere that implies inspiration from the jellyfish? How is it held? Over a shoulder? Protecting a bag? Facing into the wind? Can they handle it with Mary Poppins-esque grace or not? Trudging through the weather, many cling to the umbrella for any form of protection. But how effective is it? Samuel Yang, a travelled umbrella user, notes that instead of using umbrellas, New Yorkers "wear hooded jackets" (Yang) because the high winds render umbrellas useless against rain. In fact, when people know that their whole body is at risk of getting wet (at a waterfall or an attraction), they will use the ubiquitous, single-use plastic rain poncho, designed to protect an entire

ensemble from water, as it can counteract water from all angles. There is more forethought that goes into wearing the poncho, suggestive or organized travel, i.e., tourism.

Though I am not a tourist, I am not from here. I feel more familiar with NYC than when I first arrived, I still find the weather in Manhattan completely unpredictable, which explains my habit of forgetting to carry an umbrella. A plastic poncho could have saved me on that fateful rainy day. I arrived at the store completely soaked. My legs were freezing. My jacket needed a wringing. And then came all the dry and happy shoppers. They masterfully closed their umbrellas while weaving through others, fitting through the crowded doorway in a feat of precision accomplished without hesitation. And before two drops hit the floor, the employee by the door handed them a bag for their umbrella, precisely to counteract those drops, leaving the store cleaner and less of a slip hazard. In no less than ten seconds had I witnessed a human solution to a problem caused by a human solution. In our desperate attempts to minimize our inconveniences and be in command of our surroundings, we can unknowingly impact other aspects of the world; in this case–the environment.

The new problem? Waste. At the store, every person (except me) had an umbrella in an umbrella bag. A 2009 study found that "[a]pproximately 50 percent of plastics are used for single-use disposable applications, such as packaging, agricultural films and disposable consumer items" (Hopewell at al) just like these umbrella bags. How many umbrella bags does *one* store go through on *one* rainy day? Thin, single-use plastic shopping bags were banned in New York in 2020 (all plastic bags were banned in California starting 2026). But what about plastic umbrella bags and their environmental impact? Or does that fly under the radar because it does not immediately endanger us? Umbrellas themselves have become so cheaply manufactured that they break with the slightest gust of wind. Nearly one billion umbrellas are discarded every year, globally. They are disposable, temporary, with no stakes attached to them; they are simply an expendable means of protection.

When walking around the city, umbrella in hand, it is common to cross paths with those who also hold umbrellas. You must become hyperaware of the other, so as not to run into them or otherwise cause them a disturbance. What I have realized through umbrellas is that this city does not ignore people as much as you may think at first glance. The tunnel vision is only simulated; rarely is it genuinely executed. This is the culture of New York: always *acting* as though everything is going well, intentionally living as the main character of one's own world. Originally, I thought it was because each person believed they were truly better than everyone else. But really, more than anything, it is a survival skill. When we use umbrellas, it becomes just slightly more difficult to ignore the countless faces we walk past. Still, we hold them tightly as we cling to the little control we have, navigating through the chaos, trying not to get wet.

Since that first stormy day, I have still left behind my umbrella when it would have come in handy. This is not my desire, but my forgetfulness has become an annoying, inconvenient habit; I have the ability to defend myself against nature, yet I endure the slightly inconvenient alternative, looking around at the sea of horizontal shields, thinking, "Next time, next time."

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G

Gentrifying East Flatbush

Moussa Toni Cisse

The Gentrifying Buildings

I chose to show how gentrification could be accomplished by change in urban architecture! This project represents my artistic preoccupations in photography: I like to photograph what surrounds me but I look for things that don't add up very easily, things that create more questions than give answers. Photographing in color matters for this particular project because it makes it possible to see how the new buildings that come to the area are painted mostly in light or dark grey, and they stick out due to the color as well as their shape and size; many of the older buildings are reddish, or have some other signature colors that makes them special and warmer. Urban landscapes all over the world change all the time; old residents end up being displaced by newcomers, who are usually richer and also, unfortunately, less concerned about preserving communities and memories. I try to capture the old voices and memories of communities and individuals, even if sometimes I have to show the lifeless built environment in order to comment on the living people. This project shows where I grew up and how the newly sprung architecture steals from the sky, the sidewalk, and nature, as well as pushes those who made the neighborhood what it is further and further away…

Architecture shows how neighborhoods change: new residents coming in, new money being poured into them, care, preservation, amenities. One need only observe the size, the position, the style, the color, the shape of a new building to understand if the new building is trying to fit into the landscape or totally take it over. If buildings clash with their styles, how about those who occupy them? Architecture can exist peacefully with the trees and the sky and with previously built structures, but the new buildings we see here think that they are more important than the sky and the trees, towering over the trees and stealing the sky. Gentrification and architecture can go hand in hand, and gentrification comes in different sizes: the size of a building, the number of floors, the amount of sidewalk it takes over, the gates that it surrounds itself with–Architecture is a powerful tool for those who build and occupy the structures to assert their power over the surroundings.

I enjoyed doing this project though it also made me sad to see my neighborhood being taken over by expensive new buildings and their amenities. For all new buildings that come in, who are the new people who come in? But even more importantly, who are the old residents who need to leave, in order to make room for the new? (Figs. 1-5).





Fig. 1. This row of houses on Martense Street in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, is flanked on both sides by new construction. In the case on the left, a new building popped up where the old building stood, now demolished. The style was changed, the new building being twice as tall as the ones on the right, with two balconies, and painted in beige. The building on the right is a phenomenon all its own: built literally on top of the old buildings, it transforms their look as well. The new architecture style is taking over the old, imposing itself on the whole street, destroying the relationship between sky and buildings, eating up the sky. No trees are seen around either. The new-looking buildings invite new kinds of inhabitants, richer perhaps.; Fig. 2. Another new building has jutted out onto Linden Boulevard, taking over more and more sidewalk space for itself and its dark grey being. The gates for the building are also much higher than the old gates, for the old building on the right. In fact, the new gates of the new building are twice the size of the old ones. What are they keeping inside? Who do they want to keep outside? I wonder how the people in the old building, whose windows touch on the new might feel, it looks like their vision to the right is completely blocked by the new building; it must be so dark in their apartments now. East Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2024. Photos: Moussa Toni Cisse.





Fig. 3. This image shows a lot of crashing architectural styles and old/new, on Linden Boulevard in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. The shortest building is the one family house, painted in white, in itself not small but in comparison to the tall buildings around it, tiny. It is next to a building on the left, which is old. But notice the buildings on the right and behind: the black behind it, and two white ones on its right, all of them taller than it, also white, but jutting onto the sidewalk significantly. Less and less sky is visible here, because the new architecture has cut into it significantly. The family house looks like a toy, compared to taller houses around it.; Fig. 4. The Monster Building, on the right side of Linden Boulevard, here, a little off the center of the photograph. It stands way taller than the brown buildings on its right and the ones across from it. It is taller than all existing trees. It punctures the sky with its grey monstrous structure. I took that picture walking down the center of Linden Boulevard because I wanted an opportunity to show how the tallest building looks from afar. I wanted to see that it is not just an eyesore for us, living in the brown buildings near it, but for anyone who looks down the boulevard. It makes a statement. But what statement is that? I am here to stay? My richness is more than you can ever afford? I like that cut-off streetlight hanging as if from the top of the image, in yellow, partially offsetting the imposition. East Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2024. Photos: Moussa Toni Cisse.



Fig. 5. Here we have another tall building, which appeared on Nostrand Avenue a while ago. Those who came to live here after it was built do not understand how it disturbs the view of this street. If you look carefully, you will see the steeple of a church, a white pointy thing in front of the building, on its right. This white steeple was a significant landmark: seeing it, one could tell if they should walk north, towards it, or south, away from it. In addition to being so much taller than everything around it, the new building eliminated the church steeple as a landmark. Just like that. It is gray, wide, and it takes way more sky than was previously above Nostrand and above the church. This church is a voting site during election times. Now, instead of being able to point to it, one has to point to the huge grey building near it. What is new makes the old unseen: it erases old structures from the visual landscape. Nostrand Avenue, East Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2024. Photo: Moussa Toni Cisse.

Getting a Haircut

Perry "PJ" Jones

Complimentary Cuts: The Importance of the Barbershop Experience

Getting a haircut is the equivalent of watching your favorite movie in the comfort of your home with your favorite meal. You enter a flow state with mind, body, and spirit, feeling comfortable and at ease during the process, and brand new and rejuvenated–afterwards. The barbershop is a sanctuary for men, African American men in particular. For decades within the African American community, the barbershop has been proven to be a place where men can go to ease their minds, take a load off, and relax. It's a place of friendly debate, comedy, and brotherhood. It takes a very special and sacred kind of energy to turn what seems to be an ordinary and dull location into someplace so meaningful and poignant. The barbershop and barbers are much more than what meets the eye: they bring joy and stillness to those who you might not even think they need them!

Where should you get a haircut? There are plenty of barbershops to choose from in New York City as a whole. Some look like run-down holes in the wall while others are high tech and souped-up for appeal. I usually go to the 4Kingz Barbershop on Schenectady Ave in Brooklyn, NY. The awning outside of the barbershop as well as the decals and designs in the windows all have designs and elements that make one think of getting a haircut: scissors, razors, etc. The vibe and look of my barbershop is very casual and modern, having TVs and speakers on top of your average barbershop necessities: mirrors, chairs, equipment, and a restroom. I have been going here for the past 6 years because of its great service, atmosphere, and how well my barber cuts my hair (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. *The Barbershop: The Most Unexpected Sanctuary.* Brooklyn, New York City, USA, January 2025. Digital and mixed media art. Original artwork by Perry "PJ" Jones.

My barber usually starts our monthly visits by sitting me down and putting a covering over me to protect my clothes from falling hair. Then, for the next 40 min. to an hour, he cuts, starting by just taking off some hair off my entire head, to fading out my sides and neck, to lining my hairline up and sending me on my way. The relationship between barber and customer is one of the strongest aspects of the barbershop experience in the Afro-American community. Even if a customer isn't close with who cuts their hair, they usually have strong respect for the barber, greeting them, and engaging with them in some sort of way. My relationship with my barber, Jermaine, has always been strong, but has grown over the years. I know him through my father, being a good friend of his for years, and we have our own connection today because of my frequent barbershop visits.

Barbershops have a flow and structure, fitting into the already syncopated beat and rhythm of New York City. Sometimes barbers are needed in moments of desperation in one's life, be it a last minute haircut or a piece of advice while in a rush. The practice of getting a haircut brings unity to city life, as people of all walks of life can come together to talk out their problems and enjoy company. When talking to my barber Jermaine about unruly people within the shop over the phone, he simply said "If you bring problems, you get no business, simple as that. Respect goes both ways" (Jones). So, while at the barbershop, treat others with respect and be yourself–that's the only rule.

Barbershops are second nature in communities and the everyday lives of people. They were built on the foundation of good vibrations being spread and shared. Barbering started in ancient times when barbers were looked upon highly by other men since they believed that good and bad spirits entered the body through the head; bad spirits could only be driven out by the cutting of hair. In Egypt and Greece, barbers became prosperous and highly. Alexander the Great, Ticinius Mena, and William, archbishop of Rouen, played an important role in the development of the trade, popularizing beard shaving, introducing shaving to Rome, and prohibiting beards in 1096, all in that order. Most notable was William Francis Truefitt, who founded Truefitt and Hill in London back in 1805, regarded as the first official barbershop ("A History of Barbering").

Going to the barbershop feels familiar. The experience and process is something that happens frequently in one's life and creates comfort through common visitation, just like going to the doctor's office. On the one hand, going to the barbershop and going to the doctor's office are very similar. Both require prior appointments being made in order to happen, take place in areas where multiple people sit and wait for the same service, and usually receive it in the end: a haircut or diagnosis. On the other hand, they are completely different. The barbershop is a very lively and colorful environment, with everyone commenting and conversing. The doctor's office's waiting room is very cold, white, and eerie, where conversation doesn't take place unless to confirm one's appointment with a receptionist. In the barbershop, appointments overlap so you are able to see those who are getting haircuts before you while going to the doctor's office doesn't make you privy to other people's ailments. You are unaware of the interactions between doctor and patient while those between the barber and their customers are out in the open for everyone to see. Getting a haircut is marked by visibility.

This visibility is amplified at hair competitions, such as the day-long "Battle of the Boroughs" 2, most recently held on July 13, 2025 in a new, state of the art, air-conditioned event space in Downtown Brooklyn. Barbers and stylists from each of the five boroughs competed for a title in the following six categories: student, fastest fade, free style, fastest tape-up, fade and beard, and the braid (doNYC). The event was complete with corporate sponsors, vendors, education, and entertainment (including a live DJ), spanning two indoor levels and an outdoor space. One could purchase general admission tickets, competitor slots, all-day education passes, and vendor spots, ranging from $31.05-$263.42 (doNYC). Unlike getting a haircut in the local barbershop, the Battle of the Boroughs Hair Competition is a high stakes event, with a prize attached to it. The goal is recognition and prestige–to win a title by cutting hair under certain requirements and within certain

time limits, which is then evaluated by judges. Getting a haircut from your barber at your local barbershop, in comparison, seems routine, regular, and small-scale.

Yet the barbershop has been so influential in the African American community that it inspired a very successful and impactful franchise developed by one of the most prolific Black entrepreneurs and artists. In 2002, rapper-turned-actor Ice Cube in collaboration with MGM Studios released a film entitled *Barbershop*, encapsulating the heart, comedy, and even hardship present in this type of community. It focuses on a barbershop on the south side of Chicago, but also touches on how inclusive this community can be regardless of location. One of the most notable moments from the film is when veteran barber, Eddie, brought to life by Cedric "the Entertainer," comedically argues that all Rosa Parks did was "sit her ass down on the bus!" This scene left an impression on audiences because of how funny and real it was in the context of the barbershop. Everyone knows an "Eddie," that one person who speaks his mind and lets his opinion be known regardless.

But certain audiences took what was supposed to be a funny moment in the wrong context, creating controversy and confusion surrounding the first film, so when Ice Cube was interviewed about this as *Barbershop 2: Back in Business* came out, he refused to discuss that matter saying instead that his focus lied in making a truthful movie: "we just chose to continue what we did the first time [and] just try to make a good movie about a barbershop, and everything else should just take care of itself" (IGN/Jackson 9). Ice Cube wanting to remain authentic and raw within his portrayal of the barbershop regardless of what people say is why this series is still fondly remembered, and encapsulates the essence of the barbershop itself.

These films had the ability to touch on one of the most important aspects of the barbershop within the African American community–its strong sense of comradery. Barbers have a great understanding of the customers and whatever problems or struggles they might be bringing into the shop that day. They both cut hair while also being outlets to vent to, or even serving the role of consciousness, with good advice to share. I think of the type of conversation that happens in the barbershop and the power (both positive and negative) that African American men hold in different environments while reading Brent Staples' essay "Just Walk On By: A Black Man Ponders His Power To Alter Public Space." In it, Staples discusses his experience with racism, being profiled as someone dangerous multiple times just because of his outward appearance. He describes his feelings when a white woman runs away from him when she sees him in the distance, on a dark city street: "I was surprised, embarrassed, and dismayed all at once. Her flight made me feel like an accomplice in tyranny. It also made it clear that I was indistinguishable from the muggers who occasionally seeped into the area from the surrounding ghetto" (Staples 261). Yet at a barbershop, Staples would most definitely feel welcome. Us Afro-American men have the power to positively impact whatever space we inhabit. The barbershop is more than just a place to get a haircut for a Black man; it is a place to talk about and express things that the general world just doesn't understand or fully grasp.

I always commute to the 4Kingz Barbershop. I live in New Jersey but still come out to Brooklyn with my father to get haircuts regularly because nobody cuts like a Brooklyn barber. There is something special that they have that just isn't present in Jersey, and that was something that I became even more aware of after visiting the Queens Museum only a weekend back. A large Panoramic diorama of New York City had expanded both my eyes and mind to just how large its community and life really is. When talking about this exhibit in the piece "My Heart's In the Small Lands: Touring the Miniature City In the Museum," author Blagovesta Momchedjikova states "one can 'stride like a giant' above the miniature city, and thus experience one's own body differently in regards to city architecture: dominating it, rather than being dominated by it" (Momchedjikova 269). Looking at the small model of Brooklyn in particular made me think about how there are other barbershops just in that borough alone that mean the world to a plethora of others just as mine does

to me. New York itself has a large number of barbershops that all serve the same purpose, albeit in their own ways, and they are all very important to each community that they serve.

The world that we live in today is ever-changing, whether we like it or not. Certain aspects drastically alter and even become outdated, but the barbershop, which is built on authenticity, familiarity, and vitality continues to stand the test of time. The look and feeling of the barbershop will always evolve as time changes, but the essence of the experience of getting a haircut will remain intact–strong in its foundation, sense of community, and purpose.

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Getting Coffee

Alexandra Stancheva

Sanity in a Cup

Have you ever wondered why New York is the city that never sleeps? The answer is sweet and simple: coffee. Yep, coffee. New Yorkers are not superhumans with the ability to live the fast paced life that they do because they just happen to be born that way, no: they become superhumans because of coffee. It is the glue that holds this city together, the oil that keeps it running.

I came to understand this very shortly after moving to New York for college. No matter how well prepared I believed I was prior to my arrival, experiencing the madness of living in the city for the first time was overwhelming. I realized I had to do two things to survive here: I needed to get into a New York state of mind but I also needed to find a refuge from the chaos. I discovered the solution to both of these problems at my local coffee shop.

Whereas before I would have deemed my consumption of the beverage recreational, coffee has become a necessity in my life. But the drink itself solves only half of the solution that maintains my sanity. My local coffee shop, what has become my home-away-from-home, is what gives me the chance to slow down and take a breath in the midst of the hustling and bustling of this crazy city.

When I wake up in the morning, sleep crusted in my eyes, my first thought is usually "I need coffee." The hubbub of the city greets me and pulls me into the mayhem as I orient myself towards my local shop. Pedestrians take reign of the sidewalk, some bumping into each other, some kicking trash out of the way, others jaywalking across busy streets while narrowly avoiding oncoming traffic. Unbothered by the honking cars and drills of the nearest construction sites, New Yorkers talk on the phone contributing to the noise of the streets. I assimilate to the crowd as I walk under scaffolding past little shops and towering buildings, losing myself in thought. I reach the coffee shop quickly and open the door to its warm interior.

Getting coffee at a coffee shop is a unique experience to the nature of New York. It is one of the only places where New Yorkers can be observed not rushing off to some unknown destination. It is where, in a city full of strangers, the veil of anonymity is lifted as I am greeted by the familiar faces of my favorite baristas. I take my position in line as the sounds of espresso machines buzzing and faded music playfully tickle my ears. Mornings are usually the least social hour in the coffee shop as people are still waking up and adjusting to the start of a new day. Some people stare ahead absentmindedly while others look down hypnotized by their phones, looking up only briefly to order their drink. As the line moves forward, I am enticed by the pastries in the vitrine next to the register and I contemplate maybe adding a toasted butter croissant to my order. Caught off guard, I reach the register and it is my time to order. A smiling barista greets me, sometimes by name, and asks me what I'll be having.

Despite having had a couple of minutes to decide my order, I question my decision at the last moment. I begin to hold up the line with my deliberations and have to stop myself from further delaying the process by striking up a conversation with the barista at the register. I eventually end up ordering my usual (a latte with oat-milk) and manage to sneak in a few words before swiping my card. I walk to the end of the bar where my coffee is to be called out and once again start observing my surroundings.

Depending on what time of day I am at the coffee shop, I am able to observe different behaviors from different kinds of people. As I wait in the morning, the only potential conversations I engage in are with the baristas. People are too tired to interact with strangers and are content to just be in the cozy environment of the shop. Morning customers are also typically on their way to

work and do not linger in the shop after receiving their drinks. There is a certain kind of peace and comfort found in the rare silence of the morning where most of the noise comes from espresso machines and coffee grinders whirring. My final interaction is usually with a barista when I thank them for my drink before exiting the store and once again being swallowed by the bustling streets of the city.

My first cup of coffee is usually not my last. I find almost any excuse to visit my local coffee shop, whether it be to finish homework, to meet a friend, or really anything else. Coming from a small town and where I could recognize most people on the street, the coffee shop is the closest thing I have to a second home. Afternoons are when I am really able to get that small town feel from the shop. The atmosphere of the store transforms as regulars begin to show up. When in line, I consciously put away my phone and try to strike up conversation with customers around me. Sometimes people are reserved and conversation is surface level, while other times conversations last beyond the line and into a table. The shop becomes separate from the city outside, yet the diversity in thought and experience from the melting pot of New York is reflected in the people at the shop.

Sometimes when I sit alone at a table with only my journal as a companion, I stop to look at the people around me and am able to see the extraordinary power contained in the space that allows people to just be. Coffee shops are safe spaces and this is no coincidence. In her article "Environmental Psychology and the Coffee Shop," Lindsay McCunn defines the establishment of the coffee shop as a "'third place' setting," a place away from home and the traditional work environment that gives people a novel sense of comfort. "Indeed," she says, "the interpersonal opportunities afforded by coffee shops is part of what makes the business model so popular and successful. Physically, they serve as hubs for communication and congregation–in both verbal and nonverbal terms. They are places to 'see and be seen'–an important facet of human nature" (McCunn par. 3).

One of my favorite scenes at the coffee shop is when I see a group of people huddled around a large table engaged in a passionate discussion. As I look at them I imagine myself in a different time period and recontextualize the group to be a distinguished society from the past that held meetings at New York's first coffee houses.

The Merchant's Coffee House, located on the northwest corner of present day Wall Street and Water Street, opened in 1737 and is considered one of the most historic in America. Many notable events took place there as it became a meeting ground for societies and important figures alike. Among the societies that congregated at the site were the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, Whig Society, Society of the New York Hospital, and more. On April 23, 1789, George Washington, the recently elected first president of the United States, was officially greeted at the coffee house by the governor of the State and the mayor of the city. In 1790, the first public exchange of stocks was held at the Coffee House. In 1804, the Merchant's coffee house was burned to the ground and other coffee shops took its place (Ukers Ch. 13).

Again, today I see that a similar spirit is held in coffee shops as they remain meeting grounds for friends and business partners alike. Unlike before, however, the coffee shop has somewhat opened its doors to more people than just those of the elitist class. Yet still, even with all of the wonderful aspects coffee shops have to offer, I am met with the reality that coffee shops are not welcoming to all. To some even, coffee shops are a marker of exclusion as they are some of the first signs of gentrification in neighborhoods where residents cannot afford to buy their goods. Coffee shops often signify the impending rise of housing prices and therefore the inevitable displacement of people living in the neighborhood that cannot pay such prices. Katie Kilkenny agrees. In her piece "A Brief History of the Coffee Shop as a Symbol for Gentrification," she writes: "There's a long history of coffee shops accompanying an influx of middle-class people and tastes into poorer neighborhoods" (Kilkenny par. 1). She makes a distinction between the drink itself and the place

where you consume it: "Though coffee's long been an affordable drink for the masses, coffee shops have–for just as long–appealed primarily to the leisure class," (Kilkenny par. 1). Thus, coffee shops have been linked, from their inception, to those who have the means and the time to frequent them.

Prior to moving to New York for college from California, I worked at a coffee shop for two years. While the natures of New York and California are very different, my experience as a barista is something I keep in mind as a point of reference when in New York. My first day of real work at Philz gave me a completely new perspective on an activity I felt that I knew so well. I was no longer the one waiting on my phone or having conversations with other customers in line–I was now faced with a bar with four filter baskets and what seemed like an explosion of people at the door. I tried to move as quickly as possible while making sure not to rip any coffee filters, mess up orders, or spill scalding hot water. Unfortunately, I ended up doing all of the above and I would continue to do so from time to time even as brewing coffee became as familiar as the back of my hand. That first day at work, however, was what emphasized the difference between ordering and waiting for coffee as opposed to being the one making it. The main relation between the two acts of ordering coffee and making coffee is that they are two sides of the same performance–otherwise, they mostly differ. As a customer your main goal is getting your coffee so you can run errands and fulfill your commitments of the day, while as a barista your main goal is to get the coffee to the customer as quickly as possible. Having been in both positions, I have become more conscious of myself as a customer. I am now much more patient and aware of the fact that the baristas have orders ahead of mine to tend to, which has changed the way I approach the performance of ordering coffee.

Ordering coffee is an intermediate activity before moving on to other errands of the day. Similarly, taking the subway is an intermediate activity between your errands of the day and where you are prior to getting there. The physical structures of both spaces, however, differ greatly. On average, coffee shops are much smaller than subway stations. The subway stations are usually underground and lack personality, their grey or white walls housing only subway maps and advertisements. Coffee shops, conversely, are decorated keeping in mind the fact that pleasant ambiance is important to customers. There is a coffee shop at the corner of every street in New York City so people can afford to be picky when it comes to where they choose to order their coffee. This choice is not one people have when using the subway. People have to use very specific stations in order to reach their desired destination. Even when in a position equidistant from two stations that can take you to the same location, neither station will necessarily be nicer. The very nature of the two performances is different in the fact that one is a commodity and the other is, in some ways, a necessity.

As the cheapest form of fast transportation in New York, the subway does not compete with other businesses in transportation because it will always have a large customer base. Therefore, MTA workers really do not have to concern themselves with the way they treat travelers in the subway. Coffee shops, on the other hand, need to make sure their employees have the utmost respect towards their customers in order to make sure they return. The very business models differ. When I really think about it, it is true that I would not be going to my local coffee shop if the employees were disagreeable because they are part of the whole experience.

As I have previously mentioned, people drink coffee at all times of the day. No matter if the sun is no longer shining, you will always find people stopping for a cup of coffee at their local coffee shop. While the activity is more synonymous with the morning than any other time of the day, coffee shops in New York City are never empty. For many, ordering coffee is not a scheduled activity. This is very much unlike, say, sitting down at a restaurant for a meal. Meals in general are much more scheduled than drinking coffee. Breakfast is usually eaten between the hours of seven and eleven, lunch is eaten at noon, and dinner is eaten after six. When going out to eat, the meal is labeled as being part of the above meal times. Coffee on the other hand is always, well, just coffee.

When at a restaurant, the customer is seated at a table and catered to. It is the job of the waiter to make sure your every need is met–refilling water, bringing food, asking follow up questions, bringing the check, etc. At coffee shops, food and drinks are received at the bar, with the barista staying behind the counter at all times. The interaction between customer and employee is different in both performances, making coffee something more personal only if there is more effort put in by the customer.

Drinking coffee is to me one of the most enjoyable activities I participate in. I do not have to act in any way that is unnatural to me when ordering or drinking coffee at a coffee shop. I am never conscious of my actions in this way. When I walk to my local coffee shop for my daily latte, for my "sanity in a cup," I have gotten to a point of such comfort in the routine that I have begun to take it for granted. I must never forget the power and importance of this act, however, as it is what has been my rock for my whole time living in New York.

> I have been coming to this coffee shop for 11 years now, and when I started coming it was not even the same store. But the people here, who I look to for comfort just in their presence, are what make me feel like I am not so lost in the insanity of the city. Yeah, the warm cup of coffee and the warmth of people in this place is what keeps me going. (Anonymous)

This is what a woman I saw smiling at me sitting by the window told me when I approached her. I have a strong sense that in many years, I will be that woman telling a young, wide-eyed girl who loves coffee that everything will be ok as long as finds the place that keeps her grounded. I now sit at a table alone, finishing this essay as the shop around me gives me a warm embrace and the coffee on my tongue dances its way down my throat and into my satisfied belly.

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Getting Your Caricature Drawn

Joe Parrino

Fabricating Power Through Caricature

Getting your caricature drawn by an artist on the numerous bustling streets of New York City is a relatively modern trend that began sometime within the mid-twentieth century. It is a staple of tourist memorabilia but it is not relegated only to the globetrotting visitor. Many native New Yorkers get their caricature drawn, perhaps to frame on their wall or rather simply for the experience. With the rapid expansion of AI technology, caricatures are becoming a digitalized interactive experience that anyone could participate in around the world. Lin Liang, a Microsoft affiliate and creator of "a system that automatically generates caricatures from input face images," programmed their AI to copy the styles of other traditional caricature artists (Liang 1). But in this new process, what does society lose in their reception of their caricature? What makes caricatures an influential art form? Ultimately, what makes a caricature a caricature?

To figure out what a caricature is, it is necessary to first understand portraiture. Until 1816, having an artist draw one's portrait was one of the only ways to document the physical appearance of anything at its most accurate portrayal. Portraiture was used to exult power, influence, and wealth. Which explains why only the rich and powerful would have their portrait drawn, but also why almost all portraits would be inauthentic and more likely inaccurate: "Portraits have almost always been flattering, and painters who refused to flatter, such as William Hogarth, tended to find their work rejected," read a statement written in an article entitled "Portrait" from the Art Museum formerly known as the National Gallery of British Art (Tate). It can be noted that from the inception of artwork which depicts others, there is a tendency–by human nature–to desire a portrayal of oneself in a flattering but fabricated manner. Whereas fabrication has the ability to convey power, one can only fabricate if they possess power. Flash forward to the mid-eighteenth century and the first books containing caricatures are being published in Britain and North America. These caricatures were depictions of men in power or military officers, and were never commissioned by the people they were depicting (Ames). And, they were the opposite of flattering. With the new accessibility of the printing press, the threshold for how wealthy one had to be to share their art decreased, allowing artists to use that same vulnerability people of power had for unflattering portraiture to their advantage. The fabricators now possess the power.

The performance of caricature drawing itself relies solely on the artist's ability to push the boundaries of their subject's vulnerability. Nowadays, any pedestrian can solicit a caricature artist off the street to draw them in the form of a caricature. These street artists have set up shop on a city sidewalk almost always near a popular tourist attraction or in a lovely setting such as a park or near a river. The set up includes two stools and a canvas. Street caricature art is always initiated by choice. This means that the customer who is commissioning the piece has some understanding that the caricature may be mocking or insulting, and yet they choose to take the risk of being distortedly drawn. The customer pays the artist to begin, not knowing whether they will end unimpressed or pleasantly surprised. This concept of risk, the fact that the canvas is hidden from the subject to the very end is not a gimmick, it is a necessity for the experience. The artist possesses the power, redefining the once inverse power dynamic of portraiture. For ten minutes the subject remains under the periodical gaze of the artist, unsure of what the artist has focused on, unsure of whether the artist will have any mercy. When finished the subject is abruptly shown their caricature with their reaction being only one of two: delight or horror. Everyone has heard the age old proverb, "Curiosity killed the cat," but that is, in fact, only half of the popular adage. The second, but lesser

known half reads, "but satisfaction brought it back." People seek to have an artist draw their caricature out of curiosity, knowing both that they could be displeased or satisfied. Once the canvas is turned towards the subject and the drawing is revealed, the anticipation is over. The risk taken. The payout was either a worthy experience or an experience to forget.

But getting one's caricature drawn on the streets of New York is not the only risky activity that can occur in the city, ice skating is also risky while at the same time uniquely dangerous. There are many professional ice skaters, however, the majority of recreational skaters are made up of people who possess subpar skating abilities. Similarly, most commissioners seeking to have their caricature drawn from New York street vendors are not art connoisseurs, far from it. Furthermore, when ice skating everyone, no matter their skill level, are perilously close to one another, while on the other hand, it is only the caricature artist that moves in the performance of drawing the caricature. This helps distinguish the dangerous parts of ice skating, while contrasting with the safety of simply sitting on a stool as a subject. Danger, though, is something that getting your caricature drawn lacks. "There were dozens of epidemiological studies tallying the injuries associated with ice skating, ranging from broken wrists to fractured skulls to infectious warts of the feet," wrote Emily Underwood in her essay entitled "Ice-Skating: An Overanalysis" (Underwood). As Underwood experienced ice skating, she began to build her confidence and her agency. She conquered her fear through exposure. With caricature art, one is equally taking a risk that could be softened with the help of a heightened self esteem. With self confidence, the fear of your own insecurities would not be exposed through the uncomfortable exaggeration of caricature. But what would prevent one from getting their caricature drawn is unique, in this sense, is that one is insecure about their physical appearance rather than uncertain about a skill that can be practiced. One does not have agency over their physical attributes.

Deborah Lupton, sociologist at the UNSW Sydney Centre of Social Research in Health, in her article, "'Life Would be Pretty Dull Without Risk: Voluntary Risk-taking and its Pleasures," develops major discourses that describe the benefits of voluntary risk taking. One most notable discourse that Lupton discusses is self-improvement, or the "importance placed on knowing and monitoring the state of one's self, on movement and progression of this self, on flexibility and adaptability" (Lupton 119). Working with this concept, getting one's caricature drawn has the possibility to improve one's self esteem. It is no secret that being the subject of a caricature is risky as a caricature is known to cause people to feel uncomfortable and uncertain. An anonymous spectator of a New York City caricature artist explained that they felt uncertain about taking part in the experience, saying that "I don't know. I don't know if I would like what [the caricature artist] draws" (Anonymous). These feelings, which support results from Lupton's article, are a reaction from a person who has not tried getting their caricature drawn. Getting more exposed to seeing oneself, drawn or digitalized in a photograph, would allow the subject of caricature artwork to become more flexible to their identity and the idea of themselves, building up their confidence. This greater exposure would transform their self-concept as well as the perception others have of them.

A popular spot for people who are interested in how they are perceived is none other than public transportation. Adam Gopnik, a staff writer at the *New Yorker*, writes about his evolving feelings towards riding New York City buses in his article, "The People on the Bus." Through multiple experiences riding the bus and observing interactions between people, Gopnik comes to learn that riding the bus is an extremely reflective and humanizing experience where he is better able to understand the inner workings of the subconscious. He recalls a moment on the bus when he discovers that "while anxiety seeks out the company of excitement, fear seeks out the illusion of certainty" (Gopnik). Sitting in the subject's chair while getting your caricature drawn cultivates fear. The subject wants the finished product, a certainty that they have been depicted truthfully. The

caricaturist is a fear monger. This anxiety is formed when the individual fears there is a disconnect between what they see in themselves and what others see in them.

This situation is subverted in the cinema, where one can indulge in self-exploration. Roland Barthes in his essay "Leaving the Movie Theater" explores the unique feelings that one experiences while in and leaving the theater. He believes there is a hypnosis that is created by cinematography captured in the movie theater. It functions through a special fascination for film, "I must be in the story (there must be verisimilitude), but I must also be elsewhere" (Barthes 420). These are the same feelings that can explain the desires of people who sit down with a caricaturist. Getting your caricature drawn is an astounding combination of this unique fascination. Whether one adores or is ashamed of what makes them who they are, the person is exaggerated through caricature and in return what is left is an illustration of one that is beyond reality. This is being "in the story," the exaggeration of self and therefore the showcase of truth through uniqueness. Caricatures are not accurate to the person's "in real life" appearance, the real person is elsewhere while what is left is the person drawn from the artist's imagination. The subject is actively searching for themselves within the caricature, that is the reason the person initiates the interaction in the first place. They are not just interested in how they are perceived, but also whether the other person's perception of them matches who they truly believe they are.

A way to make others perceive you how you want to be perceived, is by giving yourself more agency over showcasing your physical appearance. To do this, one may schedule an appointment with a headshot photographer. Of course, headshot photography involves a camera while caricature artistry involves the usage of a myriad of sketching and painting equipment. But what is important to note is the power balance that occurs in the photography studio. Here, the subject of the headshot is purchasing a service from the photographer whose main goal is to make the subject appear as attractive as possible to the best of the photographer's ability. While a caricature artist's goal is not to depict you at your finest, but rather to exaggerate your uniqueness. Thus, this puts the customer in a position of power. Like the kings and queens of medieval times, the purchaser has the ability to choose the most flattering photograph leading to the photographer having the duty to please. The photographer is employed to lessen the customer's insecurities by softening or eliminating the features that make them unique. Insecure about the size of your ears? They have the ability to make them appear smaller. Insecure about your freckles? Lighting or makeup can rid them from the final product. These corrections cause the subject to be disillusioned into believing that they will appear more attractive, but at the expense of any attention to uniqueness. Coincidentally, the purpose of professional headshots are to make one stand out, but in reality they lack the raw individuality that getting your caricature drawn can provide. You learn nothing about yourself through a catered image.

Sometimes, in the city or at a tourist attraction, one has to ask a stranger to take their picture. Once again, photography eliminates the creativity that the photographer has with the final product. Since this stranger has no monetary reason to please you and no canvas to hide behind, you put yourself into the position to be subconsciously judged. When a stranger takes your photograph, they usually take multiples. Unlike getting your caricature drawn, this allows for the subject to choose which depiction of them is most attractive to them. The stranger does not take time to evaluate how you look, this decision is placed upon the subject and the photos taken. In either performance, one is asking to be gazed upon. But because the stranger has no way to alter the photography besides perhaps angle, perspective, and brightness, getting your caricature drawn uniquely creates a memento of the physical product of an artist's subconscious judgments of you. It is all a gamble. Will the judgment be to your satisfaction or displeasure?

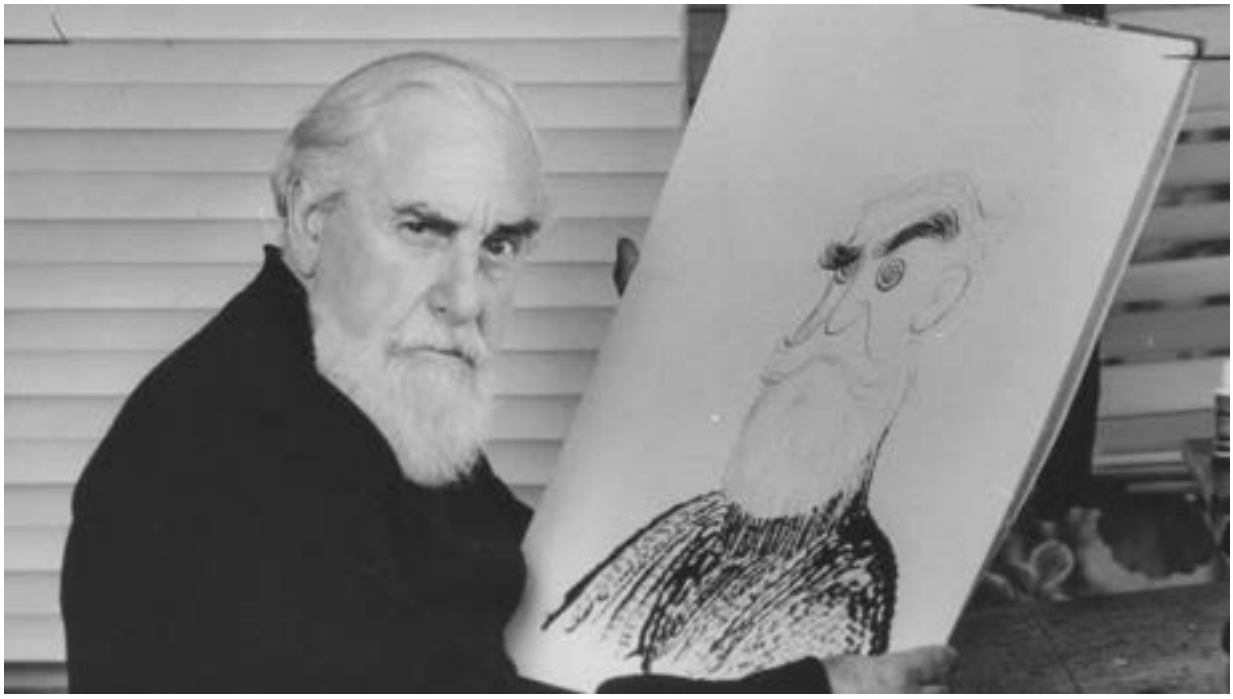


Fig. 1. Al Hirschfeld presenting a caricature of himself. Pitilli's *An Accidental Career: The Life and Art of Al Hirschfeld*, 2021.

Al Hirschfeld was the pioneer of caricature art in New York. Hirshfeld's claim to fame was his caricature art being featured on a myriad of Broadway Playbills that were later reproduced in *The New York Herald Tribune* (Britannica). Here we see a photo of Hirshfeld posing with a caricature that he drew of himself (Fig. 1). In an intriguing turn of events, the artist is given the opportunity to caricaturize himself. Hirshfeld tastefully chooses to emphasize his eyebrows, mustache, and turns his eyes into spirals. Whereas the eyebrows and mustache make sense, the eyes as spirals seems to be a personal choice that any other caricaturist would not have chosen. When the artist is given the opportunity to draw themselves, there is no fear of being misinterpreted. More importantly, does this affect the classification of the piece as a caricature? The artist knows themselves and therefore learns nothing about themselves from the experience.

The Big Apple is the city of opportunity and New York City is one of the world's greatest tourist attractions. People come from all over the world to bathe in its wonder. It feeds the caricature market with highly congested areas filled with stunning towers, parks, statues, and fountains for great backdrops. Coming and living in New York, for many people, is entirely a gamble. They are taking a risk by becoming a businessman and creating a company, or following their dreams of acting, to find a livelihood and be on Broadway–the very place that elevated caricatures to New York fame. Analogous to the New York experience is getting your caricature drawn, the experience of learning a little something about yourself, in a slightly unusual and perhaps unexpected manner. In New York City, your ability to be unique is what makes you stand out in the crowd of hot shots and wannabes. Getting your caricature drawn displays a desire to explore who you are, to discover you. While you are in New York City, not everything is going to work out. You may be intimidated by the noise, and drown into the grey landscape. But getting your caricature drawn, risky as it may be, is a reminder that there are unique things about you that make you exceptional. To remind yourself that you are still there when the mundane city life attempts to consume you.

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Giving Panorama Tours

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

The Panorama Tour Guide

When I became the official public tour guide of *The Panorama of the City of New York*–the glorious scale model of the metropolis legacy of the 1964-65 New York World's Fair (where it was first exhibited) and the infamous Robert Moses (who commissioned it for the fair)–little did I know that taking people to the gigantic scale model of the city in the Queens Museum would become more than a weekend gig for me; it would become a habit–one that I have had for over two decades. That habit expanded from the weekend job of taking strangers around the *Panorama* for an hour and a half to the self-imposed task of taking everyone I know–family, friends, colleagues, students–to the miniature. Virtually, everyone I know has been to the *Panorama*, in some cases, more than once. And for good reason. The model is a wonderful way of visualizing urban space and orienting oneself in the city's geography: whether you grew up here or you are visiting as a tourist. If you know me but have not toured the *Panorama* with me yet, what are you waiting for?



Fig. 1. *Unbuilt New York* (special temporary exhibit on view in 2017), installed on *The Panorama of the City of New York* (1964). Queens Museum, Queens, New York City, USA, 2017. Photo: Nikola Bradonjic.

Going Shirtless

Rodrigo Arenas

How to Become a Man: An Autoethnography about Male Shirtlessness as an Urban Habit in Antofagasta, Chile

Shirtlessness is the visual exposure of the human torso. In certain environments, this practice is considered an urban habit, while in others it is a taboo. In contemporary settings, its permissibility and effects seems to mainly depend on the gender identity of the body involved. Consequently, the term "barechestedness" has been coined to talk about the exposure of the male torso while "toplessness" is for female, non-male, trans and non-binary bodies. In Latin-America, the latter has been studied in relation to (de)colonialism, performativity, aesthetics, and gender studies, resulting in copious research. For instance, Gómez-Montes discusses the evolution of bare torso practices among the Mixteca women in Mexico in both "La historia en nuestros cuerpos," and "Sus cuerpos, nuestras vidas: torso desnudo y mandil en la historia mixteca de la costa." Yet the cultural and performative implications of the former–barechestedness–have not been examined. An initial approach could explain this practice as linked to particular weather conditions (heat). But the practice is more complex because it is a (regulated) patriarchal privilege, judicially distinct from that of non-male corporealities (Marron 842). It can also help construct masculinity or show dominance, as in the image of a bare chested Putin riding his horse in the mountains (Taub and Harris), which is a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity (Vélez Fernández 57-61).

Further, we have to recognize that barechestedness in the urban space has been an extended habit in Latin America. Nowadays, you can easily see it in cities such as Puerto Escondido, Cali, and Rio de Janeiro. Also, you can find it in movies and especially in social media videos, including children and teenagers. This speaks to my personal experience with shirtlessness, as I spent most of my childhood and adolescence barechested among the urban spaces of my hometown, Antofagasta, a city in the north of Chile. Going to stores and riding buses bare chested was a daily routine for me and for males of all ages, particularly during the summer. And no one really seemed to care about it. I was not aware that this could be seen as an exotic, annoying, or even disruptive performance. Of course, the warm climate of the area is deeply related to this, but despite the fact that temperatures are rising everywhere, nowadays partial nudity of male bodies outside the beach or pools has gradually become a strange practice to see, and this became notorious for me. The fact that I no longer live there, going back every 4 or 5 years to visit my parents, has allowed me to collect images in my memories and consciousness that inform my understanding of the evolution of this practice in Antofagasta. Each time it gets more unusual to see a shirtless guy or to be bare chested in the streets of Antofagasta, even during really hot days, so it could no longer be considered as a habit. Then I wonder, how did this change occur? Beyond patriarchy, what are the other implications of barechestedness? Is it related to class aesthetics? How much can it tell us about ourselves and our context? These questions reveal that the subject is more complex than it seems. In addition, the relationship of this practice to the current social architecture motivates me to explore and expand the idea of barechestedness as performance, a "vital act[s] of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called, 'twice-behaved behavior'" (Taylor 2).

Methodologically, and considering the lack of research and embodied nature of the topic, I will refer to my own corporeal and performative memory as a toll, allowing me to explore several different perspectives simultaneously: a subject, scholar, witness, and creator. My exploration will be

supported by a review of the available and relevant research. I should also mention that studies on non-male partial nakedness in urban and contemporary spaces have motivated this text.

The Politics of the Shirtless Male Body in Latin America, Chile, and Antofagasta

In the 1980s, Antofagasta was a place where going bare chested, especially during summer, was an urban habit. If you went for a walk on any day during February, you could watch lots of shirtless males of all ages occupying public spaces throughout the city. Some of them left their houses shirtless, while others took their t-shirts off later (*the security t-shirt*). Additionally, you could see shirtless workers–car mechanics, construction journeymen, gardeners, delivery men, and even soldiers–everywhere. Furthermore, I remember being shirtless in school on several occasions. This sight could have been noteworthy for tourists, but for locals it was just part of the city landscape. There were exceptions, of course, because for some members of the middle and high classes going shirtless in public, even if you were a teen or a child, was seen as an essential element of the culture of *flaites*, thereby deserving social and even ethical condemnation. *Flaite* is a Chilean social class slur, a stereotyping term that refers negatively to, and at the same time rejects, the lowest segment of society. It is a dynamic term, so if nowadays it is more associated with political anarchy, working class jobs, and a specific kind of jewelry, during the 1980s it was related to bad taste, delinquency, cheap clothing, and a lack of formal and social education. This word could be linked to the concepts of *nacos* (Mexico), *chorros* (Argentina), *chavs* (UK) and *racaille (*France) (Jordana 203, 204, 210). Then, social condemnation of male shirtlessness, manifested in the use of *flaite* as a written and spoken insult, was more usual in the southern part of the city, which is where the most affluent Antofagastinos have always lived. But in the downtown and the northern areas, there was almost no disapproval at all, and if we felt overheated or uncomfortable, we went shirtless.

In fact, the 1980s was a decade when the exposure of the male body in the public space in Chile was an extensive habit (La Historia del Zunga), and even the exposure of female bodies in newspapers and posters was socially accepted, and easy to access even for a 9-year old boy like me. But, at the same time, Chilean society was under the politics of disappearance, a tool the dictatorship used to erase thousands of political opponents and undesirables from the nation's memory. For Pinochet and his allies, it was not enough to torture and murder people. It was essential to make them disappear because in this way the probability of legal action was eliminated: no body, no crime. Under those circumstances, partial nudity in public could be seen as a manifestation of resistance against those practices of extermination. Bodies wearing only a swimsuit or a light dress and often shoeless was a display of vitality and survival that, sometimes, could take on carnival-like implications. I remember big and noisy groups strolling the avenues while carrying food, toys, boomboxes, etc., wearing only the essentials so as not to appear completely naked. We can relate this idea to other nudist practices as resistance. From naked protests to the powerful image of a brave and topless Tuira Kayapó facing the Eletronorte's executive (Arini), and including barefoot farmers visiting Ciudad de Guatemala to sell their products, the exposure of the body could be read as a manifesto against colonialism in Latin America. In fact, the American social norm of *no shoes, no shirt, no service* has no effect in Latin America. During my trips, I have eaten shirtless in different places–from *cantinas* to restaurants–between Mexico and Santiago de Chile.

Yet barechestedness compared to the more covered female body in Latin America is a sign of patriarchy (Martínez Barreiro 133), especially when we consider that Marron suggests that there is enough scientific evidence to conclude that both heterosexual women and men eroticize the other's chest (848). As a consequence, the dressing rules that affect female and non-binary bodies are stricter and more movable (Duran in Martínez Barreiro 134). Just consider how common it is to see workers at their jobs in briefs in some Mexican territories. In addition, this is related to the Catholic and syncretic morale, where female bodies are associated with the iconic figure of Virgin Mary and

with sex-for-reproduction. Therefore, its nakedness has more value and is under more regulations. For instance, I remember my cousin and I changing our swimsuits on the beach without any hesitation or condemnation, meanwhile my parents paid for a locker to allow my younger sister to do the same. In addition, skinny-dipping male children were everywhere, while the female children were forced to wear a swimsuit from an early age. This difference could also be related to the fact that female children bodies were subject to sexual abuse more frequently than male ones, but that does not mean that there were not assaults against boys. The discussion gets more evident if we reflect on the dressing policies in light of European colonization: female bodies were forced to be more covered than male ones. Meanwhile, and in a global perspective, there is a current discussion in U.S. legislation about toplessness in the city, as commented by Marron, which includes breastfeeding in public spaces and the judicial ban on public nudity in San Francisco in 2012.

Meanwhile, Martínez Barreiro adds that "women used to identify themselves more with the body than men. This can produce differential corporeal experiences. We can state that women tend to develop a deeper consciousness of their bodies than men, whose identity is not so body-situated" (136). At first sight, we can accept that proposal, and I remember being a shirtless teenager not fully aware of the complexities of exposing my body in public, but Martinez Barreiro's idea can be problematic as it could help justify the association of female bodies with occupations that have been stigmatized as physical, such as housekeeping, a connection that can be extended to the feminized areas of professional work as dance.

The social condemnation of shirtlessness was exercised by the privileged inhabitants of Antofagasta. Perhaps working classes question this practice less, and in fact urban barechestedness is more commonly found in (or associated with) the impoverished and unprivileged areas of Chile (Navarro; Salas and Ianiszewski; La Historia del Zunga) and Latin America. According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *Descamisados* (*the shirtless ones*) has been used as a synonym for the working class in Latin American since the 20th century, and there are several movies and short videos on social media that illustrate the association among urban partial nudity, marginalization and, consequently, vulnerability. Reviewing pictures from the 1920s illustrates the dissimilarity between the covered bodies of Chilean aristocrats at the beach and shirtless miners at work. In fact, it could be argued that popular shirtlessness at the beaches in Chile started when a law on required paid vacations was passed in 1931, allowing low income people to vacation on the coast (La Historia del Zunga).

If we try to go deeper into this connection and from an economic perspective, we could distinguish two aspects. First, less-privileged bodies are less-worthy of the architecture of capitalism, and consequently themselves and their exposure are less valued. Conversely, shirtless celebrities in the public space are news ("Chayanne 'enciende' Twitter con foto"), and then profitable. Second, a marginalized male loses less (in economic, social prestige, and aesthetic terms) if he is caught shirtless in an urban context. If an employer encounters one of his construction workers bare chested in a supermarket, his reaction could be different if his bank executive was the shirtless one. As a consequence, in Latin America, barechestedness in the city has been aesthetically and performatively associated with social exclusion (Florit 81).

But also, and especially for the working class, shirtlessness belongs to the construction of hegemonic masculinity (Vélez Fernández 11, 57-61, 130, and 146), including the performance of physical strength, in a context where toughness is an asset. My memories take me back to the girls in my neighborhood, motivating me with screams to take my t-shirt off because I had to show that I was a work-in-progress of a man, or street fights where an unwritten rule was to be bare chested as a strategy to dissuade the opponent. Also, when we were walking around shirtless and encountered teens our age wearing a t-shirt, we interpreted their style as any of the following categories: *cuico* (disrespective term to refer to an affluent person), shy/coward/nerdy, or homosexual.

From another point of view, barechestedness in Latin America has also been related to punishment, in particular when lynching criminals. This practice can be explained by the imbalance between the increase of crime versus the lack of access to an effective justice system (Castillo Claudett 218-219). Usually, lynching is a ritual involving partial or total nudity–the result of a forced barechestedness. Furthermore, and particularly in Central America and Mexico, policemen usually exhibit to the press bare chested suspects, and it is not rare to see pictures of those shirtless individuals in the morning news. We can speculate that this functions as humiliation and shaming but also, as a way of exposing the gang affiliation of a suspect through their tattoos.

I remember going shirtless in Antofagasta during most of the 1990s. As a teenager, I went shirtless while volunteering at the most impoverished zones of the city, and in some way I felt that this allowed me to crack the class barrier between the kids growing up in misery and myself. But I went back home with the t-shirt in my hand, and for my neighbourhood that was an unimportant fact. In addition, I can see myself being shirtless during the soccer matches in high school, or going to the corner of the block to smoke with my equally shirtless teenage gang. But, at some point, I left the city, and even when I would come back for the whole summer, I would notice that this habit was less common. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, fewer boys and men were shirtless in public spaces, even during the hottest days, and every time I went back to the city, it became more embarrassing for me to take my shirt off in places where I used to. The last time I did it in Antofagasta was in 2016 (Fig. 1). It was a sunny Sunday, so a friend and I went walking to the beach bare chested, and came back by bus, not experiencing rejection or criticism during the whole trip. But I do not think that I will dare do this again. Next, I will examine three interwoven factors that could help explain this shift: economic development, hygienization, and health issues.



Fig. 1: (From left to right) The author in Antofagasta, Chile (2016), Riverside, California, USA (2024), and San Francisco, California, USA, (2024). Photo: Rodrigo Arenas.

Economic Growth

The Chilean economy experienced a sustained development during the 1990s. "Between 1990 and 1998 output growth averaged over 7 percent per year. This was more than double the

average increase observed in Chile in the previous three decades" (Jadresic and Zahler). In addition, the GDP per capita went from US $2,276 (1989) to US $5,091 (2000) (The World Bank). This translated into households with resources to spend on more and better clothes. Additionally, the country started to open its economy, benefiting from cheaper imports of clothes. The impact of free trade was so wide that the internal fabric industry entered into a profound and definitive crisis (Calvo 3). Thus, less bare chested male bodies were seen in the public space, especially at the civic center, and we can examine this fact in five aspects.

First, during the 1990s, I went from having three t-shirts per year to more than ten. And I was not the only one. During the 1980s, the situation of my friends and schoolmates was similar, and taking into account the urban culture of the city, removing non-essential clothing from the family budget by going shirtless was a logical decision. Also, having a washing machine was a luxury, and not everyone could afford a fan to face the heat of summer.

Second, in a richer society, the cost of being caught shirtless in public gets higher. With more Antofagastinos getting access to better opportunities, you can expect that fewer men were willing to risk their social prestige or to show an unworthy *taste* (Bourdieu 1-2) to follow the habit they had during their childhood or teenage years. Dressing codes started to change, relegating urban barechestedness to marginalized areas or to very specific situations. In connection with this, the blog *Yo Uso Zunga* highlights that capitalism is expansive, demanding a rise in the sale of clothes. In this way, male shirtlessness in Antofagasta, especially downtown, became a more penalized habit. During my visit in 2020, I witnessed how security guards of a downtown supermarket denied entrance to a young guy because he was only wearing a swimsuit. However, just two weeks prior, I had seen another bare chested man shopping in a supermarket in Santiago de Chile with no problem at all. This difference could be explained by the high diversity of inhabitants–including immigrants who came with the shirtless habit from their places of origin–of Santiago's downtown area

Third, it seems that the exhibition of the male torso has been moved from the non-digital to the digital public space. Networks such as Instagram and OnlyFans contain a lot of partial or total nudity visual materials, profiting from urban shirtlessness; simultaneously, for the users, this habit has become a tool for increasing their social or sexual capital. Another strong feature is the choice of partial or total anonymity in social media via the development of an avatar (Radrigan 292), and as a consequence there are users that recur to platforms such as Twitter/X in order to exhibit their bodies. This is a case of consumer culture, where "the body is transformed into merchandise and becomes the main means of production and distribution of consumer society" (Baudrillard and Featherston in Martínez Barreiro 131), and prosumerism (producer and consumer of content at the same time in the Web 2.0 era).

Fourth, we need to take into account that the Chilean economy maintains high indexes of inequality. The Gini Coefficient in 1982 was 56.2, while in 2000 it was 52.8, showing almost no evolution despite the spectacular GDP growth (The World Bank). The combination of those factors could explain what I detected after reviewing my memories: the ease of getting together with people from different social backgrounds in public spaces was higher when I was younger. During the 1980s, the beaches I visited were attended by people coming from downtown and the entire north part of the city, even if they had to walk long distances. I shared summer afternoons with boys and teens from different backgrounds. Nowadays, only the people who live near those places are their main visitors, and therefore, share similar customs and *tastes*.

Fifth, and linked to the last aspect that we reviewed, the economic growth in Antofagasta resulted in an expansion of the city. Poorest neighborhoods were displaced and relocated from the downtown and coast areas. Gentrification expanded and so did the creation of recreational space–beaches, parks, and soccer fields. Strip malls, stores, health services, and supermarkets, which were concentrated downtown during the 1980s, appeared throughout the city. In this way, less

people had to move out of their neighborhoods, and the middle class started to cohabit less and less with the impoverished in public spaces, reinforcing the desire to separate from the Other. In addition, immigrants settled in the periphery, which contributed to deepening both cultural differences and social distances during the pandemic. This process is strongly linked to hygienization.

The Hygienization of Public Space

In terms of urban development, hygienization has been used "as a tool to impose the potentially more profitable uses of the space in Latin America" (Díaz-Parra and Cuberos-Gallardo 289). This strategy is evident in Antofagasta. Not only has the quality of sidewalks and parks improved, but also significant amounts of public and private resources were invested in search of a globalizing and colonial *beauty* of the city. We have to consider the concept of *beautiness* developed by Byung-Chul Han (2017): the smooth, the harmless, the positive. An aesthetic that transmits some sense of order and cleanliness, but at the same time devoid of the *sublime*. Instagrammable and forgettable. So, architectural standardization, the increase of green areas, the systematization of street vendors, and the disappearance of huts from non-peripheral areas, were all measures that made non-peripheral Antofagasta comply with the global aesthetic trends, losing its abject and chaotic places. For instance, near my parent's house and between two ugly apartment buildings, *the hut of the last flaite* of Antofagasta's downtown survives. I saw him, shirtless, opening the wooden gate that gives him some kind of privacy. Seeing his place between those buildings makes me think about the great effort at making Latin-America completely consumed by globalization under the pretext of modernization. González states that modernity as a social, economic, and aesthetic project conceived by the elites in Latin-America has failed (385-386, 394), but the image of *the hut of the last flaite* points to how desperately modernity persists as an end-goal.

Those reflections involve a recognition of a certain disruptive power in the urban habit of male barechestedness. In fact, I remember that most of the shirtless bodies were dark skinned, thin, and having kinetics and oral language associated with *flaites' culture*. Consequently, the hygienization of the public space in Antofagasta demanded dressing the non-white bodies, including mine. Instead of making them disappear, as the dictatorship did, the procedure was to erase the disruptiveness by making clothing more accessible, raising the social cost of being shirtless, and also transforming t-shirts in enunciative spaces where you can find personalized phrases and motifs in a desperate attempt to personalize your clothes while globalization aspires to uniformatize everything. In 2023, I saw teenagers from less privileged neighborhoods wearing socks and t-shirts near the sea, while I was the barefoot one. Back in 1987, however, it was hard to find a fully dressed male teenager. This could be read as part of the constant bio-power strategies of Eurocentrism to cover the bodies from *Abya Yala*, a process that started with the 1492 European invasion. And I use Abya Yala, which is the Kuna people term for Latin-America from a decolonial perspective, because I read urban shirtlessness as a performance that contains ancestral embodied knowledge.

Hygienization also impacted barechestedness at work. Nowadays, Chile has very effective policies to protect workers in activities such as construction, cleaning, car repair, etc. Evidently, those regulations are justified in terms of safety, including protection against UV rays, but the uniformization of those workers can be seen also as a hygienic procedure (La Historia del Zunga). Construction workers wearing different clothes or working shirtless, as evidenced by images on the website *La Historia del Zunga*, is a sight that can no longer be seen in the city. Shirtless male clerks at small grocery stores were easy to find, but not now, except in some areas of downtown Santiago. One of the last and remarkable examples of a shirtless laborer in the public spaces in Antofagasta was *El Rambo*, a downtown street car cleaner for 43 years (who died after being stabbed in the center of Antofagasta). He was very popular and cherished by the community, and this helped him avoid

any criticism due to his habit. *El Rambo*, whose name unequivocally derives from the shirtless, muscular, sweaty, and bronzed Sylvester Stallone's movie character, was considered by the community as a human heritage of the city. Another figure that emerged during the 1980s was a seller of a natural fertilizer, *El Cacha la Burra* (translates into *To f– the donkey*, because of an urban myth that he was a zoophile). Thanks to his cart, he was able to offer his product across the city, sometimes in the company of his teenage son, also shirtless (@Antofagasta1900). Those characters don't have a place in the current urban space, representing an era of resistance and freedom from contemporary capitalism, and reminding us about the partial nudity of Chango people, Antofagasta's First Nation. Nowadays, the only spaces where maybe you will find shirtless sellers are at the beach or in neighborhoods on the periphery, and these sellers are probably immigrants.

Lastly, the process of hygienization has resulted also in efforts to produce the *spectacle* of a city with no commercial sexual exploitation of children, or their sexualization. I mean *spectacle* exactly in terms of a social relationship mediated by images (Debord 2). In the 1980s, some of my childhood friends used to go to the public bathrooms at the city's main square to perform sexual acts to older men for money while teenage prostitutes used to spend their time at the arcades waiting for more clients. When I was 11, while walking barefoot and shirtless near my neighborhood, a man offered me money if I went to his house. In addition, used book markets provided children temporary access to pornography and high schools had communal showers (a practice I grew up with but that is declining today) (Chua 2017). With the political shift to liberal democracy came the desire of state authorities to exhibit *modernity*, and that required the covering of children's bodies. Yet these child protection measures were effective only on the surface. Today, you will not see preteen shirtless boys in the street yet recent reports show that the city still suffers from child sexual exploitation as well as a pedophile sex tourism market (AntofagastaTV). The *spectacle* is strong but the need to effectively protect children, especially the most vulnerable ones, has not been met at all.

Health Issues

Antofagasta and its surroundings present one of the highest indexes of skin cancer in the world, 37% of all cases. Antofagastinos have 240% more chances to get this disease than the rest of Chileans; the area presents worldwide record rates of UV radiation (Vallejo Delgado 20, 54). Almost all city residents know or have a relative or friend who has suffered from this illness. This alarming situation led authorities to develop campaigns to educate citizens about skin cancer prevention. Several factors, especially the diminishing ozone layer (Vallejo Delgado 17) and the increase of pollution due to extractive activities since the late 1990's (Tapia et al.) can explain those figures.

This situation made citizens avoid nakedness in public spaces, even at the beach. Nowadays it is very common to see bodies using t-shirts even while swimming. Another relevant fact is that sunscreens and umbrellas are much more affordable than during the 1980s, and there are pictures in social media that illustrate the absence of umbrellas at the coast during those years (Morales 2020), while today they can be found even during winter. Pollution and climate change have also affected the bare chested practices in other regions of Latin America, as in the case of some indigenous communities in Bolivia (Del Carpio Carreño, Castro Mojica, and Zeballos Puccherelli 25).

Conclusions and Extensions

Despite the fact that the local and regional complexities of male shirtlessness as an urban habit deserve their own analysis (I am inviting other scholars to explore those particularities in specific regions), it could be said that in Latin America this practice is linked to hegemonic masculinity, social and racial discrimination, and ethics, particularly as a punishment for a criminal act. The expansion of this habit via its digital documentation helps us configure the continental scope, particularly when we review the content of marginalized creators in Facebook shorts. Again,

the particularity of those creators takes us back to this urban habit as an act of resistance in the face of globalization and as an affirmation of working-class pride, as well as evidence of the stubbornness of the Latin-American economic structure. If social mobility were easier to achieve, probably males that follow this urban habit will feel less tempted to practice it as a way to climb into that structure.

In my attempt to explain the evolution of this habit in my hometown, three interconnected aspects emerged. First, the hygienization of urban space as a colonial biopower manifestation. Second, the role of economic growth, reminding us about how the long-awaited increase in material resources also affects bodies and how they relate to their environment, including the standardization of habits, a manifestation that can also be seen in other spheres, as in the global movement from cinemas to home streaming. Third, and somehow unexpectedly for me, the role of climate change in the decrease of public space shirtlessness, is evidence of how that ecological crisis can have consequences in the most overlooked or apparently insignificant cultural aspects. That crisis is totalizing and could be read as an emerging form of globalization.

But I also referred to this urban habit as a performance, and this relies on its relationship with hegemonic masculinity, ancestry, and class consciousness. Regarding the first aspect, as cismales we learn from older men that we not only can be shirtless in the urban space without the damaging consequences that female or non-binary bodies experience, but also that exposing our torso is part of the construction and learning of hegemonic masculinity. For instance, I remember when my younger cousin from the south visited us and he acquired the habit of public shirtlessness after I taught him it as a local code of masculinity. In this way, privilege is inherited, and then this practice transfers social knowledge and a sense of identity. Consequently the emergence of *new masculinities* cold also play a role in the evolution of this urban habit, which could lead to a reconfiguration of how we relate with public female or non-binary toplessness, which is linked to the eradication of sexual violence, the ending of the whore-saint binary, and other aspects encompassed in patriarchy and machism. It is my aspiration to develop a culture where gender or any other variable are not relevant regarding the effects that a person can be exposed to if he, she, or they decide to take off their t-shirt in public spaces. Concerning ancestry and class conscience, shirtlessness can be read as a habit that transfers knowledge at both levels. There are First Nations in Abya Yala that practice this habit, and then our connection with this carries an embodied knowledge. But also as a working class kid, I learned that shirtlessness was one of our habits and then it is connected with *taste*, and despite the fact that I can no longer be considered as unprivileged, my easiness with my own public shirtlessness speaks about that connection with my past and a sense of pride in working-class origins. In this way, this reflection connected me with other situations of discrimination based on my appearance in my early years, and how much of that trauma is still running under my skin.

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Going through the Farmers Market

Kalinka Vassileva

Summer at the Farmers Market





Figs. 1-3. *"Krasno Selo" outdoor farmers market.* Sofia, Bulgaria. June 3rd, 2025. Image source: *Skandal.*

Every day, on my way to work, I pass through a large outdoor farmers market, "Krasno Selo." I get in the car by my place at 9:15 a.m. and reach the market at 9:30 a.m., which is when I look for parking, leave the car, and catch the metro to my workplace. Sometimes it is very hard to find parking but my car is small, so it can fit in tight spaces. Once I have parked, I have to quickly go through the entire "Krasno Selo" market in order to reach the metro station, which is on the other side of the market. There is no parking at the metro station.

Going through the farmers market early in the morning allows me to check out the prices of different produce and plan what to get when I walk through the market again at the end of the day, at 5:30 p.m., on my way back from work. Some vendors put the prices down closer to the end of the day as well. Vendors in the center of the market always sell their produce for higher prices; vendors on the edges have lower prices, like the Roma vendors, with 7-8 stalls: their produce is cheap and fresh; there is always a line there. I buy what I need, load the car, and drive home.

The market changes along with the seasons. In the winter, there's only spices, bananas, apples, oranges. But in the summer, there is an abundance of produce everywhere (Fig. 1)! In great varieties! Going through the market twice a day, once in the morning, once in the evening, allows me to track the prices of produce over time, and ultimately score a deal. For example, strawberries were first going for 12 leva/kg, then, they got down to 8 leva/bg (Fig. 2), and eventually, to 4 leva/kg, which is when I bought several kg, for strawberry jam. I am now tracking the prices of cherries: they started at 18 leva/kg (Fig. 3), and are now down to 9 leva/kg. You can even find them for 8 leva/kg, for jam or syrup… I love the farmers market in the summertime! I love to cross it twice, daily!

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H

Hailing a Cab

Anna Griffin

It's About the Journey, Not the Destination

New York, New York. A city so great they say it twice. New York City is undoubtedly the most fabulous place on earth. This bustling city has become the cosmopolitan capital of art, culture, and innovation for the world over the course of its existence. Famous film director Milos Forman once exclaimed, "I get out of the taxi and it's probably the only city which in reality looks better than on the postcards, New York" (qtd. in Sasson). Times Square, the Empire State Building, and Central Park are all iconic symbols of the city that never sleeps, but nothing encapsulates the grit and charm of New York better than the yellow taxi cab. While eight million people call New York home, 13,000 cabs also reside in the city. The symbiotic relationship between those who drive and ride in taxi cabs are the backbone of this beautiful city, and truly are what make the world continue to spin round.

The iconic act, and habit, of hailing a cab is a quintessential part of every New Yorker's lifestyle in some way, shape, or form. New Yorkers, more than just about anyone else on the planet, have places to go and people to see. Transportation is a necessary ingredient to keep the city that never sleeps awake. But what does hailing a cab represent? A tourist afraid to take a subway? An affluent family afraid to brave the bitter cold on a January morning Zabar's run? A tried and true New Yorker who thinks taking an Uber, under any circumstances, is sacrilegious? While those who have only experienced New York through films and literature think it's an everyday occurrence, true New Yorkers know cabs are a luxury. At its essence, hailing a cab is not just a sign of status, but also of being street savvy and able to initiate primal human connection.

Successfully hailing a cab is like a lion stalking its prey. It's an elegant dance of two people in the most dangerous of arenas: the streets of New York. First, you must get on a busy street. While a lion might look for an antelope or a deer, you should have your eyes on one prize, a bright yellow vehicle. Before attacking, make sure their light is on. This is how a cab indicates that they are available. Once you have scoped out your target, it's time to strike! Quickly raise your hand to signal to the driver that you would like a ride. Technique is important, as Eugene Salomon explains: "Technique is simply the ability to communicate to the driver that his service is desired… Style is the flair with which that communication is accomplished" (Salomon 1). Making eye contact with the driver is another surefire move to guarantee success. Before diving into the car and successfully capturing your prey, make sure your surroundings are safe: watch out for bikers, pedestrians, and other predators hunting for cabs: New York is full of them. They will steal your capture if they get the chance. If you are so lucky to hail a cab successfully, then congratulations, you are on your way!

While the 1800's saw the rise of the automobile, the early 1900's saw the rise of the cab, with 1907 as the year when the first metered taxis appeared on the streets of New York (Hodges 1). Cabs were necessary to get around the newly forming cities due to the rise in industrialization in the United States. As cities grew, people needed ways to get into cities in order to work factory jobs. The

name "taxicab" comes from the "taximeter"–"the instrument that measures the distance or time a vehicle travels and allows an accurate fare to be determined"–itself created by German inventor Wilhelm Bruhn and in operation since 1891 (Bellis 1). Taxi cabs helped boost the economy through the sale of cars to be used as cabs. "Today, more than 12,000 licensed yellow cabs operate in Manhattan alone, but the fleet has been wracked by labor unrest, racial strife, ruthless competition and political maneuvering since it overtook horse-drawn hansom cabs in the early 20th century" (NPR). The cab has stayed strong through years of trials and turmoil in an environment such as New York, but in recent years a challenger has started to roam and dominate the streets.

The greatest threat to cabs in the modern day is the rise of ride share apps such as Uber. There are perks of taking an Uber: one is that all of the payment is online, another is that you know how much the ride will cost you when you book the car, and yet another is that your credit card information is already in the app so you don't have to scramble to pay once you get to your location. There are also the increased safety features: Uber lets you track your ride while you are in the car and share your location with someone else; and at the end of your ride, you rate the driver and the driver rates you, which means that you establish a history of your rides in the app. While all of these features are great, there is no feeling like hailing a cab in New York. There is something about raising your hand in the streets filled with hundreds of people, and hustling in a car that evokes a sense of belonging and pride. In a city like New York, you just raise your hand, and you are on your way.

One magical thing about New York is that you can get almost anything at any point during the day, at any location in the city. Cabs are no different. Those yellow automobiles are constantly driving around picking up New Yorkers and tourists alike. Taking a taxi can be a sign of status: you have the means to afford a cab even for a small distance. Or it can make you look like a total tourist who would rather die than step foot on the treacherous subway system. Taxis are available all over the world, but only in New York are they as useful as iconic. But they are expensive, which is why most people cannot take them regularly. In fact, most New Yorkers only take cabs in emergency situations: when it is raining or super cold. The yellow cab is indeed a luxury experience. But not even a lack of cabs will keep a New Yorker from getting where they need to be.

Of all the modes of transportation in New York, none is more popular or used than walking. Whether people walk to school, work, or the local coffee shop, almost every New Yorker walks at some point in the day. With rising costs of transportation, walking is becoming the preferred form of transportation for many. Of course, walking hours from Central Park to Wall Street is not efficient though it is the cheapest. What makes walking different from all other modes of transportation is the loneliness: one is simply passing through places and passing by people. There is no interpersonal moment of this everyday activity that can rival that which takes place in a taxi cab. Rebecca Solnit disagrees. In her essay, "The Shape of a Walk," she insists that "urban" walking does create a sense of connection since it "elicits unpredictable social encounters" as "one person's act can be an invitation to another's imagination" (Solnit 276). But walking doesn't create the same peaceful environment in a big city that a cab does.

The form of transportation that rivals riding the iconic yellow cab is riding the subway. The subway is infamous for rats, bugs, and otherwise creepy things and people. Tales of the subway have scared tourists away from the convenience of the train system. Yet while the subway isn't glamorous, it's an efficient and cheap way to get around the city. You have to simply find the right train, hop on, and pray for no delays. While catching a train does not have the same personal experience one will have in a cab, it offers a different form of human connection. You are shoved into the belly of the beast with tens of thousands of other strangers. Oh, the possibilities of magic! In contrast, taking a yellow cab is a private and personal exchange.

Taking a private car in New York City has always been a privilege. Just being above ground provides one with an increased level of security. Adam Gopnik alludes to that, while writing about another form of above-ground public transportation in the city–the bus: "The bus feels safe," he writes, quickly adding, "Of course, there is no reason for the bus to feel safe," (Gopnik 1). In his essay, "The People on the Bus: The Way We Ride Now," Gopnik discusses how the bus is affordable and successful in creating connections among people, for example, due to its seating arrangement passengers are more likely to give up their seat to someone with accessibility needs or pitch in if someone is short a couple of cents for the ride. But even that does not defeat anxiety, which Gopnik calls "the ordinary New York emotion," which is "a form of energy, and clings, like ivy to a garden wall, to whatever is around to cling to," (Gopnik 1). Taxis create a calm from the storm that is New York that no other type of transportation, not even the bus, can create.

To further research the effects and motivations of taxis, I decided to go to the source in town, the cabbies. I leaned forward towards the plastic shield that blocks the passengers from the Cabbies during my most recent cab ride. I timidly asked the cab driver how long he had been doing the gig. He appeared gleeful in the rear view mirror, and proudly told me he had been a cabbie for 20 years. Delighted by his response I asked him why he kept doing this grueling job for such a long time. After admitting he makes good money from it, he sighed and said, "I believe I have learned more about the world by driving around this car than any class could ever teach me" (Anonymous). While cabs are becoming less and less affordable to the everyday person, their importance persists.

As Frank Sintra sings in his most famous song, "New York, New York," "If I can make it there, I can make it anywhere." What keeps modern day cabs alive is not their dependability, pricing, or convenience, but the feeling that hailing and riding in a taxi inspires. New York is a dream for most people. A fated reality of success and love. With the yellow cab being so synonymous with New York, riding in one through the likes of the greatest city on earth evokes the feeling of "I've made it." A taxicab reminds those who inhabit it that in a city like New York anything is possible. And for the days when your entire life feels wrong, you can still raise your hand, yell "taxi," and be on your way home.

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Holding a Baby

Mariana Oliveira Gandin

Cradled in Connection



Fig. 1. *A mother holding a baby.* November 2024. Sketch: Mariana Oliveira Gandin.

When thinking about New York City, most people's minds go directly to the grand tourist attractions like the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, or the busy mash of lights that is Times Square and Broadway, or Wall Street–people hustling from 9-5, making the most of the city with the most opportunities. However, deep in the city, perhaps in Central Park or Gramercy, one may find a wonder that stands out against the individualistic nature of the city–a baby. Sitting on a bench in the park, a mother holds her young child tight, protecting it and introducing it to the beautiful mess of the city it has been brought into. This seemingly simple yet profoundly significant habit plays a crucial role in childhood development and, consequently, the future of New York City.

Holding a baby can be broken down into simple steps: it begins with a caregiver–a parent, a nanny, a relative, or a loved one–picking up the child and cradling it in their arms, adjusting their posture to accommodate the child's delicate weight. The caregiver shifts their grip and hold as the baby may squirm and stretch. Perhaps the baby will cry, urging to be comforted or held tighter–receiving more love. The activity ends when the baby is either put down somewhere or passed on to someone else–a transfer of this bundle of love and joy. How is the baby cradled in their loved one's arms–where are their hands on the child? Perhaps holding up its delicate head and back, leaving one hand free to comfort and entertain the baby, or carry on with other daily activities. The act of holding a child is giving love without expecting it to be given back. Protecting someone without them having to ask for it. However, in pure human instinct–the baby may find its way to give love back. It may wrap its tiny hands around its parent's finger, match its breath to its mother's heartbeat, or simply stare back with its childlike look of love–love in its purest form, unaffected by the world the child is about to be introduced to. The caregiver's eyes are gentle at this silent moment, showing quiet, profound care and attention. The essence of the close relationship between a caregiver and a baby is captured in this moment, a brief exchange of protection and comfort frequently repeated throughout the day, but never quite the same (Fig. 1).

Since the beginning of time, a baby has needed to be carried. It's an essential human need–one a child cannot survive without. However, nature and the need to physically carry them have evolved. Initially, babies needed to be held in arms at all times, having no other means of transport, but over time, inventions and technology have changed the nature of baby carrying. Around 50,000 years ago, baby-carrying devices were first invented; now they have changed the nature of carrying infants; swaddling and baby-wearing are common forms of still carrying around a child, but in a way that makes it easier for mothers and caregivers to go about their day (Rose). Other forms of baby-carrying actually don't involve carrying at all. Although convenient, they defeat the purpose of one of the major reasons behind holding children. According to the journal of Infant Behavior and Development, "Physical contact with others is vital to infant development" (Bigelow and Williams). Some technologies developed for improving mothers' lives and facilitating everyday activities deprive babies of this necessary physical touch, isolating them from their caregivers.

This aspect of need fascinates me most about the habit of holding a baby. Through this lens, a seemingly simple and convenient act becomes an act of service, care, and love. By holding a baby as it grows, the parent is telling their child that they care not just about their basic needs like food, water, shelter, and mental and emotional well-being, but also their need for physical touch. In their article "To Have and to Hold: Effects of Physical Contact on Infants and their Caregivers," authors Ann E. Bigelow and Lela Rankin Williams delve into this need for touch. They describe a 1958 psychological study done by Harlow: infant monkeys were placed in environments with a fake monkey mother made either out of wire or cloth, and food and water was provided to them. The results showed that the infants with the cloth mother were happier and more well-developed, demonstrating the need for real physical contact in young years (Bigelow and Williams). These early stages are crucial to attachment later in life and can determine how infants view relationships and healthy attachment. The authors go on to explain this through baby-holding, noting that skin-to-skin contact that babies get while being held has mutual benefits, allowing them to get to know their caregivers more and also heightening the caregiver's responsiveness to the baby's cues, tactile interactions, and their "belief in the importance of listening to infant's cues" (Bigelow and Williams).

Indeed, Gary Finckle, in his 2010 article in the *North American Review,* writes about the science and habits of holding a baby, noting that caregivers have somehow formed a habit of holding babies on their left side, freeing up the right arm for other activities. He notes this is true even for left-handed people and children playing with dolls. Finckle mentions that the heart is on the left side of the body, suggesting that a baby's connection to their caregiver would be stronger as they rest on their chest above their heart and listen or feel their heartbeat (Finckle).

I was lucky enough to speak with someone who has this activity as a part of their daily life–my teacher, who recently had a niece born into her family. When asked about holding a baby, she immediately went to physical touch and human needs, emphasizing that babies must be held. "It isn't a want but a pure human need–just as we need food and water, they need human touch" (Cavett). Her insight broadened my perspective, helping me realize that the need for physical closeness and human contact extends beyond infancy and into all stages of life. Why do children stop being held when they begin to walk? At one point in childhood development, it becomes shameful to request to be held, even if it may not be for transportation but rather for the desire to be touched and comforted. Why is it that touch is only socially acceptable as a human need when you are an infant? Although more crucial in early childhood, that need doesn't ever go away. Just as adults need food and water, they need physical touch.

In this interview, Cavett also mentioned that anyone can volunteer to go to a hospital and hold newborn babies. Like nurses, whose job is to hold and comfort these children, people may take time out of their day to do the same. This is a perfect example of how humans instinctively understand this need for touch. These volunteers and nurses know that babies need them, and it is

human nature to help the helpless. The connection between humans is built through touch and physicality, and in one way or another, just as babies need this connection to caregivers, the caregivers need it too, hence their disposition to do so, even with children who are not theirs. This scheduled act of holding a baby adds even more depth to the habit as it is less derived from responsibility and more from choice. Instead of knowing that, as a mother, one of your duties as a caregiver is to hold your own child, these volunteers and nurses do it by choice–taking time out of their day to give these babies a form of human connection and love.

The disconnect begins as holding your child turns into carrying them in a stroller. Although the aspect of physical touch is completely eradicated, the sense of need is still there as the parent or caregiver physically pushes the baby around. Although criticized, this activity embodies the effects of technology and the ever-changing world on how babies need to develop and mature. Is it possible that soon babies will lose their need for touch? Perhaps evolution will get in the way and adapt to new parent's attitudes toward carrying their kids.

As children grow and are taught to walk independently, they begin to walk through life holding someone's hand–an activity with many more similarities to baby-carrying than one may think. This act still involves some support to the baby and may happen if the child is not fully ready to walk by themselves yet. In her essay "The Shape of a Walk," on walking as an artistic practice, author Rebecca Solnit writes that, "A walk expresses space and freedom and the knowledge of it can live in the imagination of anyone" (Solnit). And so it goes for walking while holding a child's hand. There are slight changes in the sense that both baby and the caregiver are freer to move independently and have autonomy. However, one is still somewhat dependent on the other. The baby depends on the caregiver to lead them, and the caregiver takes on that responsibility willingly, agreeing to be in charge of the baby as they walk. There's a sense of letting go and allowing the child to move on from its young childhood, literally taking steps to be independent of the caregiver. The relationship between the baby and the caregiver naturally becomes less dependent as the child grows, a perspective that only emphasizes babies' pure dependency on those around them. This dependency never goes away–it only changes through time.

Holding a baby is like binding a book with blank pages, protecting something unwritten. There is beauty in the fragility of a child and their innocent and unaffected view of the world around them. Babies are born as the purest form of human beings, following only their instincts and senses to guide them through life. The most beautiful aspect of humanity is their need for each other. It keeps us all moving forward with love for one another and a sense of mutual collaboration for the betterment of the world. This starts the first time a mother holds her newborn baby.

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Hooping

Moussa Toni Cisse

To be successful at any sport, or at anything, requires practice. In that sense, habit is an internal part of basketball: to be good at basketball, you need to get in the habit of practicing regularly (Fig. 1).

For something to become habitual, like basketball practice, your "wants" must supersede your "don't-wants." Your "wants," in this case, is success at basketball. Your "don't-wants" is being tired, lazy, busy with other things, bored.

Habit is repetition. And repetition can get boring. So, is habit an extension of boredom? Boredom, when we specifically talk about repetition, which we can define as habituation, is a precondition to success. Habits in anything is the means to achieve any goal. Therefore, habits are not a separate entity; they are directly connected to the end-goal.

If you start playing basketball in middle or high school, you are already too late to become a great player, so you are always playing catchup. You can be the best player in your neighborhood park yet at the same time, the worst player on the travel team. My habits helped to try and close that gap.

People in our basketball conference would work out after school. 2 hours in the evening, 5 days a week. I did what they did plus woke up in the morning and did an extra 2 hours every day. Effectively, I was putting in twice the time than the others. This mathematically must lead to success. Yet habit doesn't always guarantee the attainment of your ultimate goal. Habits teach you to get better. I still developed and I got better at basketball, and this helps me for the future. Habits confirm that you can get better.



Fig. 1. *Playing basketball with the high school team*. New York City, USA, 2024. Photo: NYICE Archives.

Hosing the Sidewalk

Anna Barrett

Thoughts on Sidewalk Hosing

The sound of flowing water in Manhattan can only be attributed to a few things: someone or something relieving themselves, rain, a burst pipe, or a garden hose that will never see a garden. Most often the latter is the culprit if one happens to be in the more pristine neighborhoods of New York, for example, the avenues of Greenwich Village that serve as a backdrop to my morning walks. Many times I have paused to watch as these garden hoses flush the filth into the street. It's a new marvel of urban life to me, a suburbanite since birth. I can only compare it to the synchronized sprinkler system my family installed in our yard back in Cleveland. A few hours of work where we all pitched in and then flipping a switch for ourselves whenever the grass turned tan. Here in the Big Apple, it's a daily effort, a habit, not made by the people who benefit, but by hired hands. Only in Manhattan is sidewalk hosing a status symbol for the fortunate and a burden for everyone else. Unlike other universal urban performances like hailing a cab or jaywalking that could happen anywhere, sidewalk flag washing is confined within the boundaries of upper-class neighborhoods. Only territorial to places like Lennox Hill, the Upper East Side, SoHo, Tribeca. Only underneath emerald green awnings decorated with golden script announcing fancy names like "The Alabama" or "Devonshire House." Only where there stands a doorman in a black uniform, flower pots, and tucked neatly behind the entrance, the hose.

The hose–this simple tool is wielded by the building lackey to extinguish odors no one wants to smell and dirt no one wants to trod into their carpeted apartments above. Each morning and night, he methodically rinses every square inch of the concrete from left to right, letting the water run to the curb, stopping only for pedestrians like myself to hurry by before he can continue his work. Once the ground is free of waste and the atmosphere in front of the building loses its scent of garbage, the handyman coils the garden hose back into its concentric circles and stashes it away for his next shift. Like the Earth rotating around the Sun, it's a never ending cycle: inhabitants take their dogs to do their business outside, spill their coffees, squish gum beneath their feet, and track the city grime through the front door, prompting another person to clean up the mess, only to leave them a fresh canvas to soil the next day. Sunrise, sunset, every 24 hours. Though in the midst of this passing sequence there is a lasting image–a worker donned in grey coveralls with the hose masterfully looped around his back arm and the stream deftly led by his dominant hand. He moves with unappreciated precision and grace while completing an otherwise unsophisticated task. Truly one of the artisans that the world depends upon without even knowing it.

Another of these unsung masters are doormen standing guard in the elements in order to usher in tenants further demonstrating the amenities available to the rich that must be fulfilled by the poor. A pristine, gloved hand guides the privileged into their homes–as if opening their own door is unnatural, or too taxing for the elite–the action is purposefully unmissable as a way of flashing wealth. Their specific gesture of extending one's arm to push the door inward spreads from left to right just as the washing does as if all service employees are welcoming their employers to reap the rewards of their trouble. These performances are done by the "little people" in our lives that we hurry past so that they may continue in their work. Even within the same few square feet of the crowded city do these two scenes unfold. But, where one could argue that washing the sidewalk benefits us all because it rids areas of stenches and sullage, the opening of the door is reserved for the residents of the swanky Central Park split levels and gutted Greenwich pre-wars.

Meanwhile, an unpretentious habit is occurring only a few uptown blocks away from this elitist society. On the steps of apartment buildings in Harlem and Washington Heights, locals hangout for hours. Some would label this as loitering, a banned performance. But really it means chatting, laughing, and lingering on well-worn stoops until the sun goes down. Whereas the people in clean, beautiful homes avoid touching and interacting with their surroundings, those in less than pristine accommodations represent themselves to the world as proud dwellers, despite "No Loitering" signs. These make loitering extra visible while sidewalk hosing remains inconspicuous. Consequently, arrests have been made by overzealous policemen when loitering takes place whereas unlawful washing only results in fines. So, sidewalk hosing in rich areas may result in a fine while loitering in poor areas may result in a night in prison? You would think that splashing water might disrupt the hustle and bustle of the metropolis, but people rush past unphased. The opposite of what one would expect, but exactly what one grows accustomed to while in New York City.

I have found that the unexpected applies directly to this urban performance. Sidewalk hosing is riddled with acts, laws, and legislature beyond presumption. According to the city's Environmental Control Board, the washing can only take place before 11 a.m. and after 7 p.m. at the threat of being fined. Liquids cannot remain within 18 inches of residential or commercial structures, and during the months of November through March hosing cannot be used in freezing conditions. It is no wonder that those who can afford an employee to manage this undertaking do so. That's the American Dream–working hard enough so you don't have to work. Because who really wants to toil and labor anyways? Our human instinct is to seek ease and comfort.

This belief shines through the essay "The Chinese Food Delivery Man in Manhattan," where author Sam Kressner examines how these chauffeurs of dumplings and lo mein interact with the city they serve. He speculates that transportation by proxy represents the efficiency and order (the same sense of concord residents feel when walking on spotless concrete into their homes) we cannot live without. "The Manhattan psyche has moved beyond punctuality; so much so, that our most basic needs must be delivered instead of sought out [...] an accord between customer and restaurant" (Kressner par. 2). A few more dollars in tips in exchange for not needing to leave the house are worth it for the majority. Blue collar positions like that of the delivery man or the sidewalk hoser have endured because people crave leisure and are willing to pay for it. But at what point does this financial advantage become an unfair leg up? Stephanie Farqhuar argues that access to simple pleasures should not be granted due to wealth, in her piece "Memoirs of the City's Unfamous." As she examines the exclusive Gramercy Park, a place only for the rich and famous, she thinks, "It's not fair!! [...] I would love this park! I would be faithful! I would protect it from every gum wrapper, Coke can, pretzel carcass! Why does money buy you happiness?" (Farqhuar par. 7) Quite frankly, it is naive to think that people who have money would ever stop using it to make their lives easier and share their happiness with the rest of us. That they might grab the hose with both hands and give us a day off. Our own history proves otherwise.

The Department of Street Cleaning was established in 1881 but regular sweeping and garbage collection didn't start until 1895. Poor, filthy neighborhoods were ignored by the department because the friends and families of those in the political machine Tammany Hall resided in the affluent areas of New York. After years of inequality, civic reformer George Waring became head of Sanitation and initiated the systematic cleansing of Manhattan. "Waring proved them wrong. Rates of preventable disease went down. Mortality rates went down. It also had a ripple effect across all different areas of the city" (Oatman-Stanford). Suddenly more expensive streets lost their cherished privileges and had to adhere to the same treatment as their tenement counterparts. The well-to-do argued that if a building could afford to wash flags themselves, then the most efficient way to keep the borough clean would be to make sidewalks the responsibilities of occupants. NYC law sided with the wealthy. Still to this day, segments of Manhattan reveal their opulence not only

through luxury cars and expensive storefronts, but through sanitation as well. Asepsis means prosperity. In our city, not everyone deserves a clean front stoop. The gap between classes grows with each performance of sidewalk washing, reinforcing a broken system of the past.

It's fitting that this urban performance's controversial history has led to an equally disruptive present. Onlookers from other cities are starting to criticize the ecological ramifications of using water so flippantly, perhaps even worse than its socio-economic conflict. Primarily, they question the sustainability of using a precious resource for outdoor cleaning purposes. Garden hoses use 20 gallons of water per minute when connected to the city lines, costing 33 cents each minute of operation with the Manhattan price of $12.61 per 100 cubic feet of water for tap and sewage (NYC Environmental Protection). Every aspect of the events, from the hiring of additional employees just to clean the sidewalk, to the cost each year, to the large volume of liquid used, is expensive and indulgent. And to that end, the effects are greatly unthought of. When the hoses rinse away the urine, coffee, flower box fertilizers, dirt, and indiscriminate waste, it creates a mixture that then heads to the streets. Some of the liquid will evaporate into the air we breathe and then condense into clouds that eventually rain their materials right back onto the city. Some will make it from these streets and into the sewers, where the island's most vile substances congregate to be let out into the Hudson or the East River. Despite these drawbacks, tomorrow morning there will be men methodically hosing the sidewalk flags, without knowing the heavy implications.

But they are not to be blamed for continuing the cycle. I think anyone could interrupt the performance if only they had the mindset to try. A simple "hello" to the worker or a short conversation would shift dynamics that for so long have been tense. Being more conscious of the mess we create would mean less for someone else to wash away. Limiting water usage could halt the negative impact of what should be a positive venture. There are so many hypotheticals that might influence sidewalk hosing's fate but for now the process keeps repeating itself day after day with no end in sight. No one sums up the current stalemate like the hoser of 39 Fifth Avenue, "I dunno, Miss. Right now it's just my job. Have a good one" (Anonymous Hoser).

If "street hosing" were to become a performance in cinema, it would not be the main action within the show or movie. Perhaps it would exist as a Pixar short about a funny little man in a sunny metropolis hosing away without a care. It's just an appetizer for the feature film to follow. The act itself is too methodical and repetitive for an audience to watch from start to finish for an extended amount of time. And although there is a strong trend in the entertainment industry to expose life in its truest form, no one wants to look at a New York City block after a day of dogs peeing, gum squishing, garbage being dumped, and various liquids being spilled. Not for the faint of heart, the task falls upon background characters. The men who cleanse the sidewalk of the citizens' pollution are not thought of as heroes or principles in the epic of life because there are many of them, their pay is low, names are unknown, and faces are easy to ignore. We as entertainment consumers want to hear about the unique, the rich, the famous, the unforgettable. Manhattan's most iconic stories on screen focus on the relationships, fashions, and pursuits of white people in the prime of life: from *When Harry Met Sally* to *Gossip Girl* to *Friends* to *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. But real New York residents are of an infinite number of races (though certain races are concentrated in certain areas, as shown in the *Statistical Atlas* (Fig. 1)). They struggle to make rent, find jobs that actually correlate with their expensive NYU degrees, and stay warm when public transportation is late. They deal with excrement on concrete–not nearly sexy enough for cinema to capture. Hosing down the street is mere background noise to the catchy soundtracks of a Manhattan rom-com.

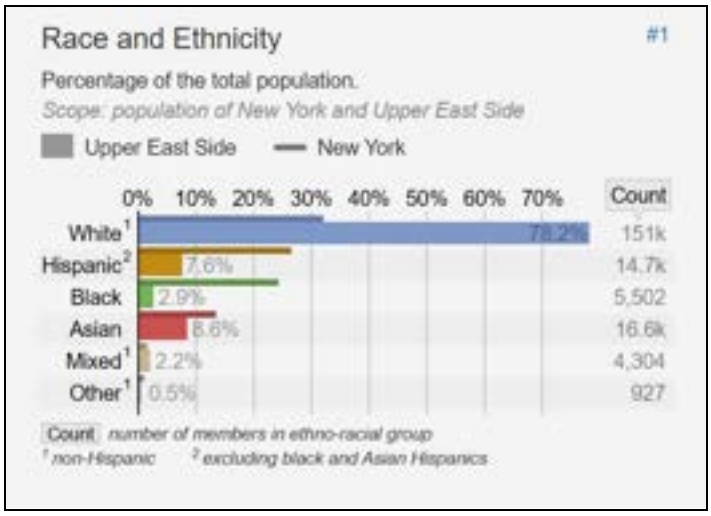


Fig. 1. "Race and Ethnicity in Upper East Side, New York, New York." Image Source: *Statistical Atlas.*

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I

Intentionally Seeking Nature

Sashana Fuller



Fig. 1. *Twilight on Eastern Parkway, where the hustle of Brooklyn softens beneath the sunset glow. A moment of stillness in the heart of the city*. Brooklyn, New York City, USA, Spring 2025. Photo: Sashana Fuller.

I live in a corner of Brooklyn where tree-lined streets and the stately presence of the historic Prospect Park guide my way home. For over five years, I walked these paths without truly seeing them, unaware of the natural beauty surrounding me. It wasn't until I settled into my holistic medical career that I began seeking nature with intention. Now, the simple act of immersing myself in the city's greenery has transformed into a sacred, ritualistic habit–one that grounds me in both my personal and professional life. But this mindful habit isn't just about hunting for the perfect park (though I do have a soft spot for parks with a good waterfront). It's about learning to truly savor the nature already at my fingertips. At the end of a long workday, when I finally escape the four walls of the building, the first thing I seek out isn't a tree or a flower–it's the wind. The cool, refreshing wind on my arms, face, and sometimes toes is so quenching, I often stop in my tracks just to bathe in it for a moment. The wind, to me, is nature's most spontaneous hug.

At least five times per week, for periods of time that seem delightfully neverending, I am fully present with nature in her many forms, like the soothing yet mysterious bird calls that often play like nature's soundtrack during my healing sessions. On warm summer evenings, I've especially enjoyed when the full moon walks me home. It rises steadily in the dusky, navy blue sky, casting its otherworldly light on the gritty Brooklyn streets. Amidst this backdrop, I leisurely shuffle my feet as I make my way home, basking in the summer moon's glow. These simple moments–whether it's the wind's embrace, the birds' serenade, or the moon's steady glow–have become a reminder that nature is never far, even in the heart of the city. My urban habit of seeking these natural elements is more than just a ritual; it's a way of living. It nourishes my soul and informs the care I give to others. In the constant motion of city life, I've found something timeless: a neverending connection to the world around me (Fig. 1).

J

Jaywalking

Grace Schnitzius

Arriving on Time or Arriving Alive, Which is Better?

Have you ever woken up late, so you drove over the speed limit to get where you were going so you could hopefully make it there on time? I know I have, but at what cost? By doing this and other activities like it, we are putting ourselves in danger of being killed. Surviving is better than being late. You would think this would be a simple rule to live by but people tend to forget. Consider running red lights in both bikes and cars, getting ready while driving, and jaywalking.

Jaywalking is a very common thing especially throughout New York City. It is a simple concept. When jaywalking, first the person has to get to the edge of where the road meets the sidewalk. Next, they have to decide whether or not to jaywalk and they usually will look to make sure there are no cars coming. Then they actually jaywalk. Lastly, they get to the other side of the road and have finished jaywalking. When the person checks to make sure there are no cars coming, this is relatively the beginning of jaywalking. It is very important that this happens near the beginning so people can try and be safe and not be hit before jaywalking. This checking to make sure no cars are coming can occur during the actual jaywalking as well. Some people continue to make sure there are no cars coming as they cross the street. Jaywalking happens all the time and every day.

Hopping turnstiles also happens all the time and every day throughout the city. However, this activity is performed for a different reason than jaywalking. Most of the time jaywalking is done to help get you places faster, while hopping turnstiles is done usually to save money. People tend to get in trouble for hopping turnstiles way more than they do for jaywalking. Hopping turnstiles is not dangerous usually whereas jaywalking is. However, jaywalking is more normalized and people do not get punished for it usually. This is not just because they don't have time to punish people because more people jaywalk than hop the turnstiles, but it is also because of money. The fact that police care about punishing people who cost the government money more than punishing those who put themselves and everyone around them at risk is truly concerning. This shows where the government's priority lies. It does not lie in the safety of people. Today's society cares more about money and work than prioritizing safety. People are always on the go and always busy working.

Jaywalking can happen pretty much anywhere there is a street. There is no way you can limit it to one time or place. There is no way to press pause. Besides this, there are not any markers of jaywalking usually. Anybody can jaywalk, even if their process is different. Some people just walk without looking and hope they don't get hit and some people check before crossing to be safe. Some people listen to music, some people talk, and some are silent while jaywalking. In New York jaywalking used to be illegal, but has been legalized since late 2024/early 2025. Ticketing people for jaywalking was unjust. Rich Calder describes in a *New York Post* article how in January of 2020, Council Speaker Corey Johnson spoke about legalizing jaywalking "in response to reports showing

blacks and Latinos received nearly 90% of all 316 jaywalking tickets handed out during the first nine months of the previous year, a disparity he called 'very disconcerting"' (Calder).

Pedestrians used to be able to cross streets wherever and whenever they felt like, so jaywalking did not really exist and was definitely not considered a crime. But once cars became popular, pedestrians lost control of the streets to them: many pedestrians found their death in the city streets and so their movement had to be regulated. The auto industry also feared that car sales would drop, if cars are deemed too dangerous. As early as 1912, Kansas City "passed the first ordinance" requiring pedestrians "to cross streets at crosswalks," writes Joseph Stromberg in his article "The Forgotten History of How Automakers Invented the Crime of 'Jaywalking.'" By the "mid-20s, auto groups took up the campaign with vigor, passing laws all over the country" (Stromberg). The 1928 Model Municipal Traffic Ordinance was created, which regulated pedestrians crossing "only at crosswalks" and "only at right angles" (Stromberg) – a traffic law that no one really followed until it was reinforced through media coverage of car accidents, school safety campaigns, and the shaming of pedestrians who did not follow the rules. The term "jaywalking" came about during that time: "the word 'jay' meant something like 'rube' or 'hick'–a person from the sticks, who didn't know how to behave in a city"; pro auto groups started using and promoting the word "jay-walker" (Stromberg)–a word we use to this day.

The majority of people participate in the act of jaywalking in the city. A lot of people do it everyday and whenever they are in a rush. Some do it out of habit. The main character is the jaywalker. Jaywalkers claim the street when they cross it, yet it is not theirs. In "Rollerblading: Documenting the City," Blagovesta Momchedjikova describes how rollerbladers "appropriate a space for themselves out of the places given to others" (Momchedjikova) and that is quite similar to what jaywalkers do. Jaywalkers do not own the area they jaywalk in, just as rollerbladers don't own the area they rollerblade in. For that reason, other people will most likely be present, so what you do affects them too. Jaywalkers and rollerbladers "don't follow directions" and so they are "constantly unpredictable" (Momchedjikova). You never know what will happen when someone decides to jaywalk, therefore the jaywalker has the potential to affect others.

These others may follow in the jaywalker's footsteps and copy what they do or may have to change their driving pattern or have to stop the car or swerve the bike to avoid hitting jaywalkers. They all have the power to alter the course of the performance, as whatever someone does or how they react to the jaywalker may change the outcome. Not everyone wants to participate in jaywalking though. People can choose whether or not they want to personally jaywalk, but they might have to change what they are doing if someone else decides to jaywalk. Conflicts can sometimes occur because of jaywalking. My cousin said, "I think jaywalking is stupid. I especially get scared when people do it while I'm driving" (Carey). I agree that jaywalking can be dangerous. I saw someone getting hit by a bike because they were jaywalking and the biker wasn't able to stop. Jaywalking can also cause car accidents. It has the potential to alter city life all the time. If a driver doesn't see a jaywalker, it could result in a wreck, which would cause traffic issues for everyone around. The outcome of someone jaywalking has many different possible consequences every single day.

Jaywalkers are not the only daredevils in the streets of New York however. So are bikers who run red lights. Jaywalking and bicyclists running red lights both happen a lot throughout the city, and anywhere. Both of these habits aim to help get you places faster. They are both, however, dangerous activities. By performing in either, you are putting your life at risk, as you could easily be hit by a vehicle. You could also cause an accident if a driver swerves out of the way to try and avoid you.

In contrast, walking in a parade is scheduled. You are technically jaywalking when you walk in a parade because you are walking through the street. However, it is safer because cars can't get to you since the roads are blocked off. Also, parades have a specific start and end point while jaywalking happens anywhere. The community is the important part in walking in a parade. It is

done for other people whereas jaywalking is done for yourself. Comparing these two activities makes me realize that jaywalking is really pretty dangerous and unnecessary: it will only help you get places faster by a little bit and it is better to arrive late and alive than not at all.

Jaywalking is a storm that is easy to get swept up in. When I first moved to the city, I did not jaywalk, but over time it has become part of my routine. There is an adrenaline rush that comes with jaywalking, as it is defiant, efficient, and dangerous. With everyone around you doing it and spending all of your time walking around, it just makes choosing to jaywalk that much easier. If I truly want to be a New Yorker, I must jaywalk, right? It is part of the culture of the city. The jaywalking storm has swept me up and I can't escape it. Will I arrive at my destinations alive and on time or not at all? The answer has become unclear for me and all the jaywalkers in the city.

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Jigsaw Puzzling

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

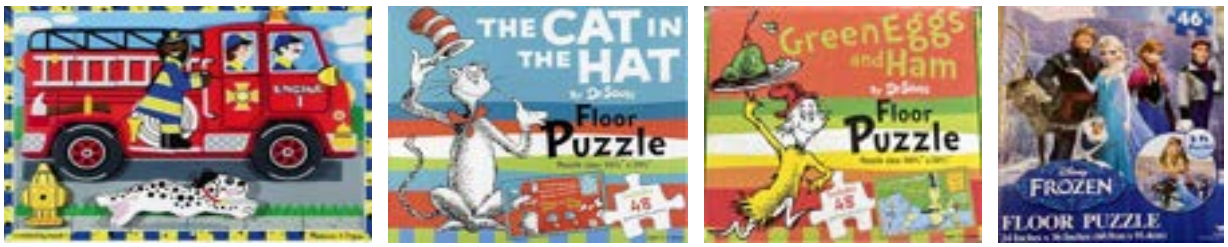
For the Love of Puzzles

My earliest and fondest memory of putting jigsaw puzzles together dates back to the 1980s, when I was growing up in Sofia, Bulgaria. Every New Year's Eve–celebrated instead of Christmas in Communist Bulgaria where religion was taboo–we would open our presents–brought by *Djado Mraz* ("Father Frost")–around 9 p.m., in my Grandma's living room, around the decorated New Year's Eve tree. My cousin, 3 years older than me, and I would eagerly unwrap the big UNICEF jigsaw puzzle boxes (Figs. 1-4). We would each get our own, decide which one to open first, and then begin puzzling, together, sprawled on the living room floor, sometimes past midnight. We were little then and the puzzles seemed so big: putting one together felt like a serious accomplishment. In reality, these were 200-300 piece puzzles–a joke for seasoned puzzle makers. But to us they were the world.



Fig. 1. UNICEF jigsaw puzzles; Figs. 2-4. "Children Playing" puzzle (open box, top); artist's signature on puzzle; box bottom, with an anonymous child, in black and white, and "Thank You"'s in different languages. Sources in Works Cited.

We kept getting UNICEF jigsaw puzzles as New Year's Eve presents for a while because they were the coolest things our parents could get their hands on but also because of UNICEF's ongoing fundraising campaign. Putting a UNICEF puzzle together became our tradition to "welcome" the New Year and a symbol of our childhood: my cousin and I joked around and problem-solved while collaborating on a piece, having a great time. As did many other Bulgarian kids from our generation, who, I would find out later, had the same puzzles at home. Then we outgrew the UNICEF puzzles. Or UNICEF's campaign subsided. My puzzle boxes disappeared only to resurface three decades later, in great shape, when my mom pulled them out of a closet so my boys could play with them whenever they visited. The UNICEF puzzles were artistic and utopian–aimed at diversity, picturing kids from all corners of the world playing together (happy children, in color, on the front of the box; children in scarcity, in black and white, in the back of the box). They were quite different from the ones my kids were growing up with in New York City–picturing popular themes and characters: The Fire Truck wooden puzzle (Melissa and Doug, 18 pieces), and the floor jumbo puzzles *The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham* (Dr. Seuss, 48 pieces each) and *Frozen* (Disney, 46 pieces) (Figs. 5-8).



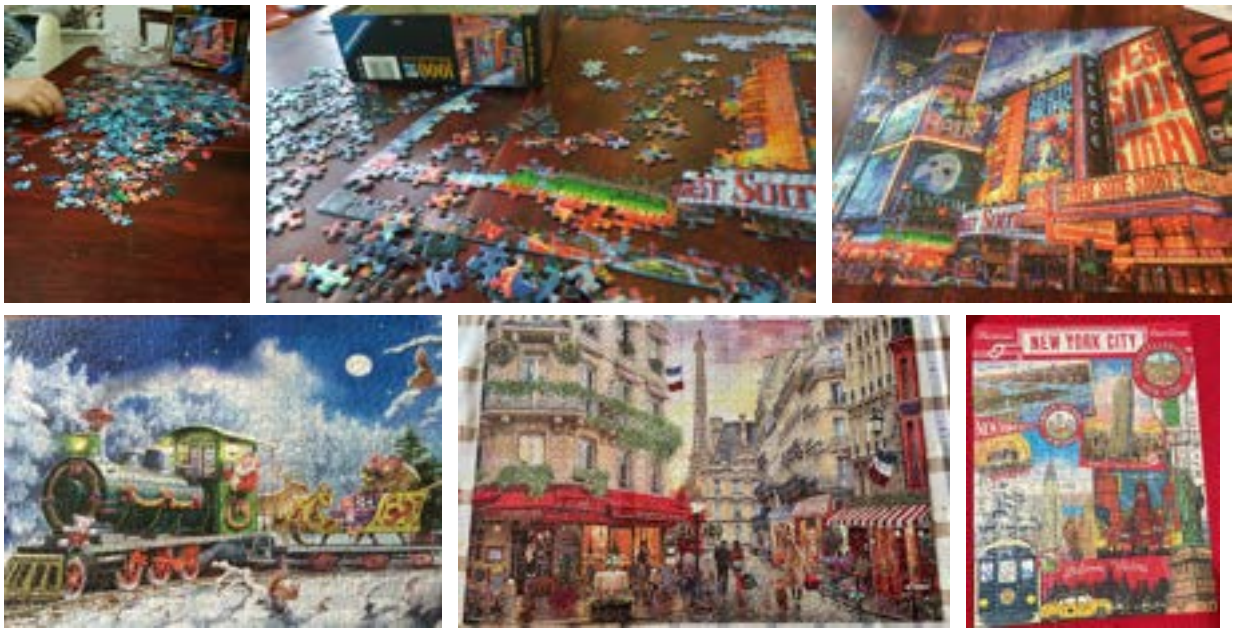
Figs. 5-8. *Melissa & Doug,* 18-pcs Puzzle; *Dr. Seuss,* two 48-pcs Puzzles; *Disney* 46-pcs Puzzle. Sources in Works Cited.

It dawned on me then that what puzzles you put together, alone or with others, is not an innocent activity: it perpetuates beliefs and identities, under the excuse of entertainment and in the spirit of fun. A personal habit, such as jigsaw puzzling, can bring about hope, aesthetic pleasure, knowledge, and a sense of accomplishment as well as prolong stereotypes, structural racism, uniformity, and mindless consumption.

I was surprised by how quickly I could put the UNICEF puzzles together now, by myself, compared to the hours I had sweated over them with my cousin when we were kids. True, I had gotten older but also more experienced due to practicing jigsaw puzzling with my kids but also on my own. When I moved to New York in 1996, I went on a puzzling hiatus because I shared a 1-bedroom apartment in the West Village where there was no room to puzzle. But when I moved to Brooklyn 10 years later and had my kids, I was gifted a beautiful cherrywood drop leaf dining table by my immigration lawyer and friend, the late Nathan Waxman, and his wife Karen L. Dean.

To jigsaw puzzle, you need a place. That dining table became mine. Now I needed the right puzzle to sprawl on it. I found it in the Barnes & Noble in Downtown Brooklyn–Ravensburger's 1000-piece "*NYC*" (Figs. 9-10)–my first ever puzzle of that size and a Ravensburger (the high-end of puzzle manufacturers)! It featured New York City's iconic Times Square with Broadway's marquees. As luck would have it, in the process of putting the puzzle together, I lost one piece (Fig. 11). Anyone who has ever made a puzzle knows how devastating this is… It makes you feel like a failure, like you've puzzled in vain. Though puzzle making teaches you observation skills, building strategies, and patience, it is all in the service of the final product: the completed puzzle. Without it, you have nothing to show; you are a careless wannabe, a puzzle killer, and that, to puzzle lovers, is a crime. A completed puzzle is a cherished trophy. But you learn to move on. You have to move on.

To jigsaw puzzle, you need time. No 1000-piece puzzle can be done in one sitting. Christmas and summer time is when I puzzle, in New York or in Sofia (Figs. 12-14).



Top (left to right): Figs. 9-10. *Putting together Ravensburger's 1000-piece NYC puzzle*; Fig. 11. *Finished puzzle with Missing piece visible on West Side Story Marquee.* Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2008. Bottom (left to right): Fig. 12. *Christmas Ravensburger puzzle*, winter, New York City, USA, 2010; Fig. 13. *Paris puzzle*, summer, Sofia, Bulgaria, 2024; Fig. 14. NYC postcard puzzle, winter, New York City, USA, 2025-2026. Photos: Blagovesta Momchedjikova.

Like with any habit, puzzling requires a particular routine. Here's mine: I do the frame first (Phase 1: Frame). I dig out all edge pieces and the 4 corner pieces, and construct the frame while consulting the completed puzzle image on the puzzle box. While I search for the edge pieces, I make sure that all puzzle pieces are turned color/pattern side up. Next (Phase 2: Color/Pattern), I start building certain parts of the puzzle with a stand-out color or pattern, and to do that, I look for those pieces and put them in sub-piles based on color/pattern (a leftover habit from building LEGO's with my boys, Fig. 15). When these possibilities are exhausted, I start following the shapes of the puzzle pieces that make up the image (Phase 3: Shape/Form). This time, I look for and put the pieces in sub-piles based on shape (which I also name, i.e., "a boot-shaped" top right corner piece). I may have to go through several pieces until I find the right "fit" for a particular part of the image (perhaps a leftover Sudoku habit, where you go through the numbers 1-9, horizontally and vertically, to find the missing one in any and all 9 horizontal and 9 vertical lines, and 9 boxes, Fig. 16).



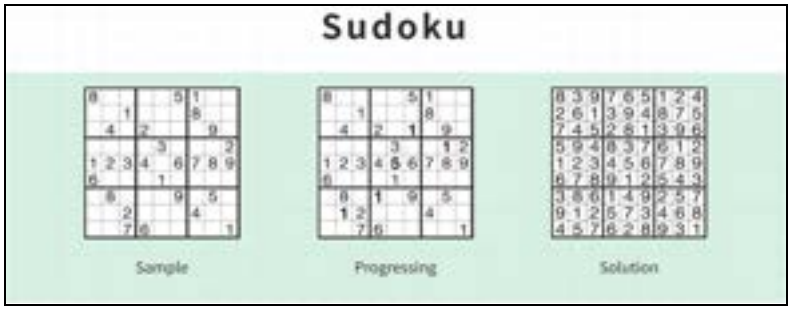


Fig. 15. *LEGOS*! Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2014, Photo: Blagovesta Momchedjikova; Fig. 16. *Sudoku*. By: Nikoli.

With phone apps, puzzling has changed radically: *Jigsawscapes* offers "over 60,000 puzzles and 150+ new puzzles added every week," for iphone and ipad, for free. The variety is unthinkable; the level of difficulty and the background color–adjustable. As I scroll through my finished digital puzzles, I see cities, islands, forests, fruit baskets, balloons (Fig. 17), all of which I have built in just two months, August-September of 2025–something impossible if I were to do so on the dining room table, while also having a full time job and parenting two teenagers. How was I able to complete so many puzzles? Was I slacking off at work or at home? I wasn't. And I didn't have to. Though app puzzles still require time to build, they don't require a special place to build them: standing, sitting, or lying down, you can keep puzzling! You can advance on a puzzle while commuting to work! Puzzling is a "fun" and "addictive" way to "relax, train your brain, and improve concentration," claim the app's creators, where a sense of "accomplishment" is guaranteed (*Jigsawspaces*). But all these options change what is at stake with puzzling: it is more accessible but less special, the quantity of completed puzzles becoming more important than the quality of each.



Fig. 17. *A collage of 42 400-piece completed puzzles on Jigsawscapes*. Summer, 2025. Collage: Blagovesta Momchedjikova.

Online, there is no chance of losing a piece from the puzzle, which means that you can never go wrong–a feeling of always being the winner. But how much sweeter is the victory of completing a puzzle when you have sweated over it for days, looked at it from all possible angles and directions, asked for help, obsessed over it, dropped pieces on the floor and gotten on all fours to look for them, yelled at others to tiptoe around the puzzle you are making, gotten off the phone with a friend quickly because you wanted to keep working on it, put a book to the side so you can concentrate on it, even missed a meal because you are so close to finishing that one side of it, woken up early so you can get a few minutes with it before the whole house wakes up and your day starts, felt quite proud but also a little sad when it was finally completed, wondered aloud what to do with it now that it is complete, should you glue it and frame it, where would you put it, until one day, you bravely take it apart, no, you don't need anyone's help with that, as a matter of fact, no one else has the right to take it apart, only the one who put it together, yes, you, you store it in its box, and put it away so enough time can pass for you to forget all about it until one day, strangely, you find it, while looking for something else, and decide to put it together again. And for that, you need everyone to move their things from the dining room table right now and why do they keep them there anyways and you need some quiet because it is jigsaw puzzle time again!

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Jumping the Turnstile

Journi P. McGee

Hop, Skip, and a Leap? Jumping the Turnstile in New York City

You're running late to class. You don't have enough money to pay. You decide to hop the train. You think: "Hey, why not, everybody else is doing it?!" With the coast clear, you advance toward the machine only to hesitantly stop dead in your tracks thinking, "what method should I use, I don't want to touch the bars and I can't put my legs over it because of my skirt?" Quickly, because time is of the essence and you don't want to get caught, you duck underneath the turnstile and swiftly make your way to the station, in the knick of time just as your train is approaching.

This scenario has played in my mind multiple times. Has it in yours? You know what I'm talking about: Have you ever considered jumping the turnstile in the New York City subway? I often wonder why so many people partake in this act of crime. Is it because of the rush one feels from breaking the law? Or is it because it saves a bunch of money–because let's face it, $2.90 per ride gets expensive? Or is it because others are doing it and they are getting away with it? Whatever the reason, train hopping isn't a new thing; according to Peter Bowes from the *BBC*: it has "a long-established tradition in the US, particularly popular in the Great Depression when the jobless took to the rails to find work," (Bowes). Although the popularity of hopping actual trains has gone down tremendously (for various reasons, one of which being, long distance train riding isn't as popular as it once was), this activity has been updated (so to speak) into jumping the turnstile. Despite the fact that jumping the turnstile initially started as a way to protest and rebel against the increasing fare rates, in modern society it has become a fad, if not a habit. And it saves you money!

Jumping the turnstile (compared to hopping the train) is easier and safer. Matt Troutman reveals that in 2022, approximately "400,000 riders a day skip paying fares by jumping turnstiles or going through emergency doors" (Troutman). Whereas according to a *PBS* news article "at the height of the Great Depression [approximately] 250,000 teenagers… criss-crossed the country by hopping freight trains" (Lovell and Uys). The cool thing about jumping the turnstile is that anyone with an able-body can do it, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic background. Which is another differentiating marker from hopping the train, per Bowes, as this act was mostly performed by "the unemployed [and teenagers who] took to the rails to try and find work" (Bowes).

How do people actually jump the turnstile? Step one: check to see if there are cops or security officers nearby. Step two: quickly decide which method you are going to use. According to a 2011 *Wall Street Journal* video interview, there are at least five ways to proceed, the most common being using both of your hands to push your legs over the turnstile. The second method–and to me the easiest–is lifting one leg over it and then the other. The third method is crouching under the turnstile, however this method can be tricky as you can get stuck in this position. The fourth method is having someone open the exit door and simply walking right through. Finally, you can pull the turnstile bar towards you and then move it back to its original position–by far the most challenging trick but also the most inconspicuous as it looks like you really paid the fare and are just walking through. Once you've picked your method, jump over, and walk on nonchalantly as if nothing happened (Williams). The new fare evasion prevention spikes and paddles on turnstiles, since late 2025, will probably inspire the creation of new methods for fare evasion.

So what are the possible harms of jumping the turnstile? You can, most obviously, get stuck doing so and fail to jump the turnstile. Another is, you can get caught. Jumping the turnstile is illegal and punishable as "fare evasion"; if caught, you face a $100 fine as "Individuals are not permitted to enter the New York City Transit subway system or buses without payment of the fare" (MTA

Handbook). Yet another is the harm done to the economy. According to Troutman, "fare and toll evasion on subways, buses, commuter trains, and bridges and tunnels cost the MTA $690 million in 2022," meaning that the transit system and the city are losing a lot of revenue (Troutman).

Since this action does have some serious ramifications and it does cost the city a pretty penny, why do millions of people still partake in it everyday? Well, the answer is simple, paying the train fare is very expensive especially when you have to pay multiple fares a day. According to a *New York Times* article "fares eat up much of the income of poverty-level New Yorkers" (Barron), hence the reason for evading. However, because of the increase in fare evasion, there has also been an increase in law enforcement within those poverty-level communities AKA Black and Brown communities. According to a 2020 article from *The Observer,* the "increased police presence coincides with a rise in NYPD controversy over policing quotas," as police officers were told to "ignore White and Asian people–whom [are] called "soft targets"–and to target Black and Latino people for fare evasion" (Perkins). Not only are black and brown people at risk for a large fine; according to Anthony Posada, an attorney at The Legal Aid Society, "A fare evasion arrest carries with it collateral consequences that can affect employment, deny access to critical public benefits, and for immigrant New Yorkers, result in detention and possibly deportation" (Posada).

This kind of racial profiling isn't something new or unheard of as racial discrimination and injustices can be traced back to the beginning of US history and are prevalent to this day. Brent Staples, a tall, black man living in urban America, discusses the prejudice and hardship he faces daily, especially if taking a stroll at night, in his essay "Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space." His mere existence causes white women to cast him "worried glance[s]" and "pick up [their] pace" nearly "running" for their lives lest they be in the same space with a *frightening* black man (Staples 260). Staples happens to be a journalist. Yet the mere presence of African Americans and Brown people trouble White America as they wrongfully assume that each one of us is a "mugger, rapist, or worse" (Staples 261). This assumption directly relates to the transit industry as it determines where and how many police are put into certain neighborhoods.

So how does this compare to actually paying for the train and how does this affect the other millions of law abiding citizens who pay their fares? Well, the action of paying for the train is simple: a card swipe or a phone tap. This is quite different from jumping: there's less stress and more time to move since you are not under the pressure of getting caught. Yet because of the tremendous loss in revenue and the increase in security used to crack down on fare evaders, the MTA continues to raise subway fares, which is a burden for the law-abiding citizens. For example, Jahlil Rush from *The Ticker* news, commented on a fare increase of 15 cents back in 2023: it "mak[es] public transportation less accessible to communities who rely on it the most [such as] college students [who are] harshly impacted" (Rush), and it increases the statistics of fare evasion.

Yet the pastime of fare evasion is only really prevalent when riding the subway as a lot of other public transportation services don't use turnstiles. When you ride the Amtrak, you either pay for your ticket online or at the station before boarding the train. Unlike the NYC subway stations, there are no turnstiles or entry doors for you to illegally cross; once on board, a conductor checks your ticket. Ergo, there is no way for you to evade the fare. Which is why Amtrak trusts that you are on board because you have paid. Despite the fact that there isn't a person to hold you accountable (i.e., a conductor) for paying your fare, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't.

An easy solution to jumping the turnstile is to walk (whenever walking is possible). According to Rebecca Solnit, the author of "The Shape Of A Walk" from her book *Wanderlust*, walking is "an act of resistance to the mainstream" culture (Solnit 267). In the chapter, Sonlit describes how walking has shaped our society and frees our minds from the sterile and domesticated nature of our everyday lives. Paradoxically, walking can be used as a legal/alternative way to boycott the increase in the MTA price instead of jumping the turnstile. In history, boycotting has been

proven to have effective results such as the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott which was a political non-violent protest sparked by the arrest of Rosa Parks wherein African Americans and other allies stopped using the bus system in efforts to gain equal rights.

So, why do millions of New Yorkers partake in the illegal action of jumping the turnstile? I think the answer is simple, besides it saving money, jumping the turnstile is a simple defying action of rebellion. It means that you're taking a stance and sticking it to the man. It's one of the most unifying actions you can partake in as a New Yorker as you become a part of the millions of others doing it, and it's an easy way to protest unnecessary taxes and fees. Moreover, that unity is something to value even though it brings about a great financial loss towards the city.

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K

Kissing in Public

Neven Armanios

Kissing is a natural way to express affection and intimacy: people kiss to say hello or goodbye, parents kiss kids to comfort them, lovers kiss to show attraction. Many kiss in private but some choose to express it in public. Either way, love shouldn't have to hide. And yet, certain settings may not be always or ever appropriate for displaying that kind of affection: as long as the kiss does not block traffic, a quick kiss never hurt anyone. So keep it classy!



Fig. 1. *Kissing in Public*. Digital collage, mixed media, New York City, USA, 2025. Artwork: Neven Armanios.

L

Learning a New Dance

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

Dancing Sabar

Thursday night at Djoniba's*:
the drummers are beating their drums: harder and harder;
the dancers are jumping their jumps: higher and higher.
Sweat. Heat. The fans are spinning.
Heat. Sweat. The mirrors are steaming.
The source of this heat? The source of this sweat?
Only one – our dance teacher Ousmane.
His legs fly fast and his arms fly high:
his colorful moves perplex the eye.
Can he slow down? So we can rest our calves?
Can he stop? So we can calm our hearts?
His big smile stretches far: he is dancing sabar.
His jumps are outrageous; his turns are contagious:
we jump and we turn
till our toes start to burn,
turn and then jump
till our ears start to thump.
When he finally stops, his tricky question pops:
"The name of the dance?"
We don't feel our bones and we hear strange gongs:
we give a blank glance: our minds still in trance.
So, we search our knees, arms, hips, and before too long
they breathe out the right answer – "njari-gorong!"
When we try to leave, our joints are in dance shock:
we sit down to first remember how to walk.

NYC, 2000

*Djoniba's was a dance studio just a block North of Union Square in Manhattan, New York City, specializing in African and Caribbean dances and drumming. Ousmane's class was on Thursdays, from 7:30-9 p.m. Usually, students stuck to one dance teacher, which meant, taking that teacher's dance class every week. That's how one improved significantly.

Leaving Things for Others to Find

Laurie Provost





Fig. 1. *Conspicuous Leaving 1*; Fig. 2. *Conspicuous Leaving 2*. Phoenix AZ, USA, 2023. Photos: Laurie Provost.

Conspicuous Leavings

I have several items to re-home. Here's the first. Fried Egg/Smile Painted Rock. Wish I had put it somewhere this morning before breakfast/brunch, but I did not. It'll be somewhere near a place that serves breakfast in the a.m.

Intrigue–a truly free treasure–no strings attached.

It's about giving away everything you get. Lyrics from a song I love. "Give away everything you get." Melissa Ferrick, maybe, I'm looking for it. It's among many things that are a huge influence on how I view things. Material things.

I like the idea of it being a surprise for the person. An anonymous gift (Fig. 1). "Wait, what is the beautiful glass vase doing here?" "Is it for me." I don't want any credit, or thank yous. Many times I will wait, watch and wonder who will walk up? Who will find it? What will they do? I waited a bit for the glass bottle. Had to get home. I've waited, and watched, witnessed reactions. Just depends, timing, my need? I've left perfectly good shoes right outside restaurant doors, hid and watched people's reactions. That was hilarious!

I'm gonna make a list of all the types of items, soon.

A bit more sentimental. Early on, in my relationship, we were in Jerome and got a set of two of these vases. I've no need to keep it, so it is being re-homed today.

The Koala Drop

When I think back on when I started my urban habits, specifically leaving, sometimes hiding things, (not just things, treasures, gifts really) for people to find in public spaces. It takes me back about 25 years!

Maybe it was a "one-off," but I do think the first time, the genesis of this habit, where I left something for someone to find, was the Koala Drop (Fig. 2). It was elaborate, very purposeful, full of passion and intention. You see, I had an enormous collection of stuffed koalas, collected over

30+ years. Big ones, small ones, some much bigger than your head! I'm pretty sure there were more than 40 of them. Taking up half of my twin bed when I was younger.

I must've been in my early 30s and I was pretty distraught trying to re-home this very special collection. I wanted to keep the family together, each and every one of them. The red one, holding a holiday heart for Valentine's Day. The one that was so tiny you could hold it in your hand, as I often did when I was a little girl. They were siblings and friends, I even had two separate koala stuffed animals that were velcroed together, to make a couple. I'm pretty sure my high school boyfriend gave me that one. All too precious to discard, or not know where they were going. Would they be valued, appreciated and cared for?

My conundrum was intensified when none of my sisters, whose children, (my nieces and nephews), loved and adored, and played with my koalas for years, would take them. I was hurt TBH, what a gift I was offering!

Here's the thing about me, if I am passionate about something, like 40 adorable stuffed koalas, I will find a way to get my needs met. In this case, the perfect family to welcome my Koala family into their home, was my sister with two young kids. Also, when I'm convinced, I am "right" about something, and actually know, it's a great idea even if you can't see it as such…I might just have to make an executive decision.

So, that's exactly what I did. I made an executive decision that my sister, whose children loved my koalas, needed them. They even knew most of their names, especially Blue, cuz, well, he was blue. And Kirby koala because he was the first one I ever got. This family would definitely love and care for my babies, even if their mom didn't think so.

Picture this, I went to my sister's apartment to deliver all of the koalas, all 40 of them. Oh no, I couldn't just ring the doorbell or even let her know I was there. She was pretty clear she didn't want them. Luckily, there was a very healthy ficus tree, with big, bright green leaves, right outside her door. I waited till after dark, I wore dark clothes and snuck up to the tree outside their door. I very quietly, yet very creatively positioned, placed and hung all 40 koalas in that tree. It was magical, simply beautiful. I took so much pleasure and joy with this gift I was giving. I felt immense relief for their future. I knew that my koalas would be treasured as I had treasured them.

I said my verbal and nonverbal goodbyes as I placed them there perfectly. I then snuck off, in the dark, drove home and slept well. This "Koala Drop," in the mid 90s, is the first experience I can recall related to my urban habit of leaving treasures for people to find. It's one of the only times I knew the people.

If you're wondering how my sister received my gift, this tree full of adorable stuffed koalas…You'll have to use your imagination. I will say the reason I now, mostly, leave my gifts for strangers, relates to my sister's response way back when.

Leaving Your Main Phone Behind

Jorge de La Barre

Leaving the Banking Apps at Home

In Rio de Janeiro, for safety reasons, some people use two smartphones. To avoid the bigger headaches of having their sensitive data hacked or their bank account emptied in case their phone gets robbed (sometimes at gunpoint, a traumatic experience to be sure), their "main" phone stays at home.

The "social" phone they take to the streets has only the essential "survival" apps: the built-in camera of course, for snapshots and selfies; WhatsApp, to reach out and stay in touch; and Uber or 99 Taxi, to go places and then back home.

As we all know, there is in fact a huge market for refurbished stolen smartphones, not just in Rio but in the whole wide world.

Linking Arms

Venetia Street

Linking Arms, Making Marks





Fig. 1. *Linking arms*. New York City, USA, November 2024. Drawing: Venetia Street; Fig. 2. *Mrs. Pankhurst Carrying a Petition from the Third Women's Parliament to the Prime Minister*. 13 February, 1908. Mrs. Pankhurst was a British suffragette leader. Source: Pankhurst, *The Suffragette* (1911).

It begins with two people walking along a crowded New York City street (Fig. 1). One person stretches their right arm and wraps it in the same motion as a duck's foot treading water–a sort of clockwise semi-circle motion led by the hand and elbow of one's arm, to hook the other person's arm. If this gesture is accepted, the other person will similarly wrap and mimic the action but with the hooked arm, so both people are fused like a chain. From the perspective of those two people, they are connected. From the public eye, they are linking arms and streamlining through the pavement. People move out of the way in respect of this unit as together they are unstoppable. The public adapts harmoniously to the couple linking arms out of desire to also be unified and endorsed by the city.

A simple linking of arms can unify two people into one entity. However, each "link" is always different. Different dynamics, different people, different relationships, different connections and different circumstances. You may see a couple walking out of an atmospheric dinner date arm in arm. You may see partygoers coming out of a club at 4 am balancing on each other's arms as they drunkenly walk home. You may see peaceful protests midday connecting arms as a sign of solidarity. You may see a young person caringly supporting an elderly person as they walk through the park early in the morning. You may see two children walking together to their school as the sun rises. The indication of an authentic performance of linking arms is simply the participation of both people. Both people must be invested in this action to ensure the link exists as does the people surrounding them to not interrupt the chain.

In *Linking Arms, Liking Lives* by Ronald J. Sider et al., linking arms is said to be an act of transformative and evolutionary power within societies. For both parties, the link should be received and given fully. Sider et al. speak about the vitality of fostering a welcoming and unifying environment in a religious and biblical context: "the call to link arms and lives across the

urban-suburban divide to transform our communities" (Sider et al., 61). A cemented and connected community can grow as one, and start to evolve. Whereas division and conflict in a community can fracture growth and hinder it. So, the deed of linking arms reinforces this vital connection leading to the transcendence of not just an individual, but a society as a whole.

I began to question the city's response to such behaviours. In her essay "Rollerblading," Blagovesta Momchedjikova reflects on the role rollerblading has in discovering New York's geography and spirit, expressing "I'm having a crazy affair–an affair with a city" (Momchedjikova), suggesting an interaction with the city where the city is an active player. I wondered if tension rises in the city's ambience when hundreds of people bicker in their homes or scream at each other on the street. Or if the city's aura becomes overwhelmingly full of love when Valentine's Day arrives and there is a rise of PDA ("public display of affection") of people hugging, kissing, and speaking caring words to each other. I pondered the possibility that a vast majority of people linking arms could be affecting the city's atmosphere, exuding unity.

I believe our behaviours have greater weight than we account for within communities. Psychologically, according to the Social Learning Theory, vicarious reinforcement leads people to imitate others. Imitation is due to mediational processes: attention, retention, motor reproduction and motivation–in other words, if you see a behaviour, remember the behaviour, can physically do the behaviour, and decide to act the behaviour, you will be imitating the behaviour. In a densely populated hub like New York City, overflowing with vibrant and diverse life, it seems our collective behaviours could have the power to shift the mood of an environment. Thus, to link arms with the city itself, it is required to link arms with others.

Linking arms has significance on a political scale, also. For instance, linking arms may take form via human chain demonstrations. The world's longest human chain was 2.5 km long, in India, orchestrated recently, in September 2024 (Bureau) as a political act to highlight the International Day of Democracy. Another notable human chain is The Baltic Way or Baltic Chain, which took place in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, on the 23rd of August, 1989, when approximately two million people participated in a protest against Soviet Occupation (The Baltic Way). In this case, the peaceful chain was necessary to illuminate the solidarity between the Baltic nations and indirectly link arms internationally as global sympathy and support increased. An early demonstration of linking arms as an act of protest is during the British suffrage movement (Fig. 2).

Other performances, such as holding hands, can also effectively be utilised in protest and unification, but in a dissimilar way. Linking arms and holding hands involve physical contact, participation, and respect among people. However, holding hands is physically more distanced from linking arms. In Western culture, it is more intimate, romantic, and vulnerable. Of all our bodies, most people would argue their hands have experienced the most through life, directly (we regularly touch things, pick things up, hold things, grasp things) and emotionally (we have cared with our hands, we have tensed our hands from anger, we have wiped tears from our eyes with our hands). So, to hold hands with someone else indirectly allows people to connect through these experiences. Yet, linking arms is probably the closest form of physical contact other than a hug whereby you have the most physical connection.

But close physical contact can also be self-soothing–in the case of crossing one's arms, but it is a solo activity. Yet the act of crossing one's arms is arguably the most juxtaposing to linking arms. By crossing one's arms, your arms become walls and barriers. By linking arms, your arms become the locks shared by couples and friends that are forever linked to public rails. Typically crossing one's arms means one of three things–an act of self-comfort whereby you are hugging yourself, an act of defence, or an act of aggression. All three things contradict the aims of linking arms, which stems from physical intimacy with others out of love and support. In regards to body language, you are closing yourself off and focusing on your own needs. In contrast, linking arms with another person

can be seen placing your attention on the other as well as yourself–if anything, you are deeply conscious of the unit you have created.

All behaviours have reason and purpose. In a chapter from Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust*, called "The Shape of A Walk," Solnit discusses the artistic depiction and significance of one of the most mundane actions–walking. One of the opening lines of this chapter is "walking has sometimes been, at least since the late eighteenth century, an act of resistance to the mainstream" (Solnit 267). Walking, though taken for granted, is a fundamental behaviour and one of the most significant developments of hominid evolution. Yet, walking has decreased massively as the emerging increase of mechanics and technology occurs. Cars, bikes, boats, planes and trains are just some of the many forms of transportation that have taken over from walking to the point where walking is socially seen as admirable. Due to this, some behaviours have become acts of rebellion against the growing dependency on technology. Linking arms is also one of them.

The physical and emotional connection of linking arms is being substituted for virtual relationships on Snapchat or a "like" on an Instagram post. Though you cannot quantify the connection between two people linking arms, it is more substantial and arguably more genuine. There is something so unique about physically melting your weight into another person that cannot be replicated through sharing a video on social media. I drew what I believed symbolised the linking of arms, illuminating the warmth and brightness between two people.

Linking arms with someone is lighting a two-wick candle with a singular flame. By linking arms, you are igniting an energy between you–both. An example of such an ignition occurred on the 24th of November, 2024. I went ice skating with my writing class where we had a blend of all ice skating skills–experienced and first-timers. Regardless, the rink was overflowing with the act of linking arms. People respected this unit and moved past us, cautious to not interrupt the tight unit we've created. People were uniting themselves with others for numerous reasons: to help a less experienced skater move along the rink, ensure that both participants don't slip and support one another, make sure everyone sticks together, and have warmth and delight. Beyond the idea of unity, I revelled at the site of codependency. People needed and wanted each other in that moment–they wanted the other person to be stamped in their experience and memory. And as we left the rink, I discovered the ice rink, which was once a blank sketch pad, had now been carved by our skating blades going in the same directions through the linking of arms. Additionally, the internal blazes of warmth and kindness within us had left its sparks in the surroundings, igniting warmth in others and making a mark on the city.

I interviewed my mother, a person I have linked arms with hundreds of times, eager to hear her perspective on the significance of linking arms. When I asked her: "What does it mean to link arms with someone?" she responded that one is "walking together on a journey (literally or symbolically) in friendship and trust. Epitome of togetherness" (Street). So, perhaps linking arms is indeed part of an adventure–an adventure to evolve as a person with others and discover more about one's self with another. The connection is beyond the link, but with life with our link cementing our place in the world.

Linking arms can create waves in society–politically, socially, and culturally. We unify ourselves and connect with others to foster communities and transform change. We connect with others and become one. Through the act of linking arms, we shift cities and countries. Linking arms is synergistic, trailblazing, and ignitable.

But most evidently, we link arms with others not only to be united but also to uncover and make our mark in the world with another person. When we are linked together, we sketch our life experiences via the shared footprints and traces, moving through the world united to another. By linking arms, we connect a pen to a sheet of paper–two people come to one to create a shared story in their lives.

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Listening to Jazz in the Park

Nicholas Puffer

New York City Park Jazz: Beyond What Meets The Eyes and Ears



Fig. 1. Jazz in Washington Square Park, New York City, USA, 2022. Image Source: Washington Square Park Projects.

Picture it: you are a freshman at New York University and stumble upon a young woman sitting alone on a chipped wooden bench in Washington Square Park. Golden leaves cover the ground in an oddly symmetrical pattern, decorating this divine landscape. The crisp New York November air blows through Manhattan without hesitation, which is why the woman is wearing a green Puffer jacket, a black beanie, and matching gloves. Even though one may assume she is uncomfortable sitting amid such low temperatures, her smiling face says otherwise. Her head is slightly tilting to the left while her gaze locks onto something in the distance. Is she taking something in? Nothing could disrupt her focus as she sits and listens to… jazz (Fig. 1)! She is watching a live jazz performance in the park and loves every bit of it.

Street performance in New York City can be traced back to the late 19th century when "new German and Italian immigrants brought an influx" of artists to the city who performed in poor neighborhoods (Fineberg). In 1936, Mayor LaGuardia banned busking, saying it was for beggars and there should be no tolerance of it, and that sentiment continued for at least two decades. In 1961, busking was banned from Washington Square Park, and that brought on the Beatnik Riot on April 9, 1961, when musicians gathered in the park to protest the ban. From then on, street performance was linked to protesting authority. In 1970, the ban on street performance was lifted (Feinberg). The history of busking shows the power dynamic, or interplay, between audience and musicians, where each depends on the other. The musicians hold the power, with their skills and talents, to attract an audience, which then holds the power of being able to bring about change, due to its numbers.

Parks are an important setting for this interplay because multiple artistic activities happen there simultaneously. For example, while jazz musicians are playing in Washington Square Park, there could also be dancing and singing going on in other areas of the park. The audience can choose which art form to focus on; listening to jazz could be just one of them. This is quite different from watching an indoor jazz concert, which is a more exclusive experience, given the physical barriers.

Watching jazz in the park is casual as one has the liberty to watch or listen for as long as they please; however, an indoor audience faces a much stricter and formal routine: a specific venue and time, a scanned, previously purchased ticket at the door, and a particular behavior (sitting in your seat, being quiet during the show, waiting until the end of the show to leave). A level of uncertainty exists as well: will the indoor performance be enjoyable or worth it, even if a favorite musician is playing? Thus even though both kinds of performances are mechanically the same–sitting or standing while watching the performers–the responsibilities of an indoor audience are more grave than those of a street performer's. Street performance provides a risk-free, stress-free experience for its audience but a no-income guarantee for its musicians (the way ticket sales of a concert venue would).

But is listening to jazz in the park similar to other activities that go on there, such as reading a book? When we watch live jazz in the park, we are dared to follow along with the rhythms of the improvisation and musical conversation between the different performers. Many of us might even find ourselves tapping our feet to the beat of the music, to understand the changing relationships and dynamics better. Likewise, in reading, we are asked to follow along a fiction or nonfiction story, try to understand its conflicts, and witness their progression. Unless we know a book's ending, what comes next is beyond our knowledge, just like in watching jazz. Both activities take place in the park, away from the distractions of busy city life, so we can better connect ourselves to the art and sense a stronger understanding of who we dare to be. For example, we tend to see ourselves as reflections of the protagonists in books. Often, characters make the hidden sides of ourselves feel heard and accepted in their journeys. In terms of jazz, each performer's individual and unique improvisation may be symbolic of our uniqueness and quirks expressed through their conversing instruments.

Does that mean that watching live jazz in the park is about finding a genuine connection to oneself? Though it may be, perhaps the activity is about finding ways to connect with others who are similar to us. Karen Burland and Stephanie Pitts' article "Rules and Expectations of Jazz Gigs" explores that. Taking a scientific and sociological approach in examining the expectations of an audience watching jazz, their research shows that audiences today are mostly made up of younger people who long for something greater than themselves. "Live music events" provide that because they "offer a sense of connection with other audience members" (Burland and Pitts 536), suggest the authors, either by sharing an experience or enthusiasm for an artist. This may be because belonging to a particular group allows us to express ourselves and our shared values to others. In this activity, feeling "surrounded by similar others can provide us with an identity and can offer individuals a sense of well-being" (Burland and Pitts 524), effectively creating communities.

But as enjoyable as listening to live jazz may be for some, it may be the opposite for others. One of my roommates finds that sometimes it can be "really annoying" (Martizen 1:18) due to "the amount of noise that comes from it" (Martinez 1:47). He finds it mostly irritating when he is trying to sleep as our dorm is located right in front of Washington Square Park, where the activity takes place almost every day. But my other roommate, a music education major, "loves it whenever it starts to play" (Long 0:57). Thus, some find the music in the park disruptive while others–inspiring.

So is watching live jazz in the park something that brings us together, as Burland and Pitts describe? Or is it something that inconveniences and challenges us, as one of my roommates describes it? Blagovesta Momchedjikova proposes that sometimes experiences can be twofold: bring us together and tear us apart, simultaneously. In her essay "Standing Walking Dancing Tall," she analyzes how taking up space as a person of color can be both celebratory and discriminatory. She takes Brent Staples' piece "Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space," outlining black struggle in a world full of stereotypes, and puts it in conversation with Richmond Barthe's, *African Dancer*, a sculpture of a naked black woman celebrating herself through dance. In our case, the activity may be destructive and judged as it "is out in the city streets to be feared" (Momchedjikova 248) for those like my roommate who find that it hinders their daily routines.

However, at the same time, we can see it in a positive light. Similar to Barthe's statue, the activity is "something to be admired" (Momchedjikova 248). It allows us to celebrate culture, individuality, freedom of expression, and history. However, regardless of the perspective, it seems that our "gaze is our weapon that can glorify or kill" (Momchedjikova 248). Depending on our conditioning, the activity can be something that audiences love or reject.

But maybe it is not fair to apply this to watching jazz in any New York City park, as each park has its own audience. Washington Square Park, due to its proximity to New York University, attracts the youth: the students who stream through it on a daily basis. Maybe if we open ourselves up to finding what watching jazz means to us individually, we will be satisfied. Spontaneous, collaborative, thrilling: this is what watching jazz in Washington Square Park means to me. It inspires me to learn about an artistic tradition, contribute my own artistic expression, connect with other artistic expressions, join a protest or a celebration. What does watching jazz mean to you? Will you tap your feet to the beat of jazz next time you stroll through Washington Square Park?

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Listening to Music While Walking

Kate Van de Bovenkamp

Metropolitan Melody

New York City is the most populated place in the U.S. with over eight million people living here, with various neighborhoods and boroughs that create a multitude of visions of the city within everyone's minds. This means there are millions of different ways to interpret the city. Everyone is seemingly always in a state of rush, whether dashing onto the subway, jaywalking, or jogging on the streets. This constant bustle can create an overwhelming and somewhat chaotic environment. Occasionally people are found leisurely walking their dog or chatting with a friend, but even then there is an ever present sense of purpose. However, people are able to alter this by the habit of listening to music while walking. Although this performance takes place in the publicity of the busy city streets, headphones are able to close out the world and make everything feel more private as they disappear into their music. The addition of music into people's already unique interpretations of the city means that it only becomes more individualized as a place and as it forms into our memories. With this constant state of rush, people are able to alter it through music choice by slowing things down or by making the movement feel more fitting. Listening to music while walking through the city has the ability to put someone into their own world, however it is important to remain aware of one's surroundings so as to not become too isolated and alone.

The person putting in the headphones acts as the main character as they play their own, personalized soundtrack (almost as if in their own movie). Secondary and background characters become everyone else around them as they walk to their destination. By getting out their phone, putting in their headphones, and hitting play, they are transforming the populous city into their own world. In an interview, my friend Kiran stated that songs "dull out the daily noises and help me focus on my walk" as well as allow her to "enjoy and experience the upbeatness of the city on an audio plane" (Kiran). The choice of music has the power to alter the city, whether it is viewed as someplace dark and gritty where Batman could fit right in, or somewhere else that's more futuristic, upbeat, and optimistic–fitting for a YA sci-fi novel. This act of listening to music ends by pausing the song or exiting the app, taking out your earbuds, and putting them back in their case. One could understand this whole act through the frozen gesture of someone holding a phone in their hand, gaze directed to the screen, lost in their music, as they slip into their own mind. While this ability seems tied to modern and convenient technologies, there have been past inventions for portable music. Was it as common then for people to listen while walking through the city streets?

Recorded music originated with Thomas Edison's invention of the phonograph in 1877. While this invention was improved upon in 1948 with the LP record, it wouldn't be until 1979 that listeners could take their songs of choice on the go. The Walkman allowed people to play their cassette tapes through headphones so they could feasibly walk with music playing in their ears rather than a speaker of some sorts. Sony's Walkman sold over 200 million cassette tape players from its invention until it was discontinued in 2010. There's a photo from 1980 of four people sitting on a subway, all with walkmans, as they read their newspapers (Gebel) (Fig. 1). This connects to today with earbuds and phones–people disappearing into their own worlds with music. In 1984 this was improved upon with the Discman being able to play CDs on the go. Portable music shifted to all digital with the iPod coming from Apple in 2001 (Befisher), which made listening to music on the go easier than ever, since carrying cassette tapes or CDs wasn't needed. This has shifted to becoming even easier for consumers since our phones can now do everything an iPod can do in just one app. It's clear that throughout history people have been trying to find ways to enjoy music whenever they

want, and all of these inventions contribute to that. As long as people still like listening to music, improvements to these inventions will continue to be made.



Fig. 1. *Four people listening to their walkmans in 1980 on the subway.* New York City, USA, 1980. Source: Dick Lewis/*NY Daily News Archive.*

A similar everyday performance is listening to live music in a park (close by would be Washington Square Park, but this is found all throughout the city). Both activities involve listening to music while being in the city, however live music unites all of the people listening. As people sit in the park with the sun beating down on them, they form a shared experience with everyone else who was present at the performance. Using headphones, on the other hand, is deeply personal and shifts from person to person. Live jazz music creates a peaceful atmosphere whereas blasting death metal in one's ears is far more harsh–and these differences shift people's perceptions of the city. The difference between these two performances also involves two opposite power dynamics. With headphones, people choose their songs and become the main character in their action. With live music, everyone listening becomes a secondary character as they disappear and allow the musicians to take the stage. This gathering of people could also lead to socializing and a sharing of interests, whereas wearing headphones indicates wanting to be left alone and someone who is more closed-off. Perhaps wearing headphones sends out the wrong message, especially when traversing a city filled to the brim with diverse and new people to meet. Although both of these are more casual and flexible, how does listening to music change when people attend a concert?

Attending a concert involves planning ahead of time and scheduling what will take place. While people can and often do listen to the same music everyday, it's far more flexible and subject to change rather than buying a ticket for a certain artist. With the concert, people generally attend with friends so that it is a fun outing. There is already a shared sense of interest with the music, making it less unpredictable and unknowing than the random live performances found throughout the city. However, concerts do maintain the shared experience which headphones don't allow for. People are enjoying a performance of their favorite artist, forming memories together. Though, since this is one shared experience, that means there isn't much room for interpretation or formation of one's own unique memories. Choosing one's own music as they traverse their own path through the city has a fascinating way of affecting our brains.

Lund University student Ryohei Oi wrote a lengthy paper titled "Spotify on the Streets: Walking and Listening to Music in Urban Spaces" which goes into everyday life, the aesthetics of listening to music, how we do it, urban spaces versus mediated spaces, as well as social analytical aspects. Under the section titled "Listening to music in urban space," Oi noted how important it was to note what kind of music people were listening to in order to accurately explore the dynamic between oneself and the environment of the city. Relaxing versus upbeat music would slow or speed up people's walking speeds, respectively. Most interesting, however, was how the author connected sound to memory. There are many studies proving how listening to certain kinds of music (i.e. classical) while studying can be beneficial for memory recall, however, in this case Oi analyzes music's relation to memories of the city. They comment that "listening to music in an urban space allows people to archive their own urban experience with music into memory" (Oi 18). Perhaps listening to music while traversing the city allows us to momentarily slip into our own worlds, but it expands into forming our own interpretations and understandings of what the city means to us all individually.However, if we are altering the city with our own choice of genre, are we really experiencing the city in its true form?

Some would argue that listening to the city is an integral part of the experience. In her essay "Rollerblading: Documenting the City," Blagovesta Momchedjikova focuses on the performance of rollerblading through the city and how it becomes a unique way of documenting the city, rather than more typical ways such as paintings, history books, or poetry. Towards the end of the essay, she comments on the sound of the city, "I like to hear the sweet-talk of the city. That is why I never carry a walkman. When on blades, I want to hear the street: the noise of the street is the music of the street" (Momchedjikova). The sound of the city is a massive aspect to understanding it and getting the "true" experience. If we are washing that out by listening to music, are we truly understanding the city as it is? While it is a way of making the city one's own, this essay demonstrates how people can personalize the city through an activity they enjoy while still grasping all aspects of the city. Perhaps blocking out the city noise with headphones is blatantly ignoring an important part of it, causing inaccurate memories of the city to form. Although music can change our perceived memories, perhaps it is changing them too much.

An instance of walking through the city where one shouldn't be wearing headphones is walking dogs. This activity requires the person to pay attention to the dogs and their surroundings. They must be receptive to strangers, since some people might want to pet the dogs whereas others could be afraid, so the walker must be aware and move out of the way. If the person were to pop in earbuds to listen to music, they would become more isolated and be less aware of their surroundings. In order to do a good job, they must travel through the city while taking in the noise it has to offer. While this does involve absorbing all of the city, it takes away from the personalized aspects and memory forming, like Oi mentioned. Experiencing the city in truth is important, but perhaps creating our own memories adds to our individualization?

These aspects of being present for certain activities or to take in the city are valuable. However, the essay "Leaving the Movie Theater" by Roland Barthes perfectly describes some of the emotions and feelings that arise from the deeply personal performance of listening to music while walking through the city. Although he talks about his connection with film and the important reflection of leaving a movie theater, this reflection relates to slipping into one's inner world. While talking about his fascination with film, he contemplates that, "I must be in the story (there must be verisimilitude), but I must also be *elsewhere*" (Barthes 420). For those listening to music, they are present in the daily life of the city and take it in–but they are also elsewhere. They are creating their own visions and transporting themselves somewhere else, which is a truly beautiful thing and not one found in many other performances. This period of being with one's inner self and reflecting can cause the question of "how to come unglued from the mirror" (Barthes 421) to arise, but does that

matter? While headphones can act as this glue to our inner worlds and these mirrors reflect our true selves, people should not be criticized for wanting to have time for themselves. Absorbing the city for all it has to offer is important, but times for reflection and lonesomeness are of equal value.

Although headphones exclude the city noise, they allow people to create their own unique vision. A rollerblader uses movement to propel through the city in a new way whereas a dog walker is on the lookout for possible hazards. Some may view listening to music as an isolating experience, but perhaps its use is to commit into memory a vision of the city that is personal to them. This ability to create something new and memorable is not present in other performances. There is an agency the person enacts while choosing their own song, as if an architect is crafting their own city. An architect adds to the skyline through new buildings they envision, a power someone with headphones also possesses. Their song choice crafts a different version of the city–one for Batman, one that's serene, or one that feels more cyberpunk-esque. This formation of memory, although isolating at times, is truly unique and special.

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Living Among Tourists

Teresa Mendes Flores

Wheel-come to Lisbon

Trolleys arriving at my doorstep
with their noisy sounds dragging
on Lisbon's cobblestones.
I listen carefully to the voices
from afar,
unfamiliar languages echoing
into my window,
from tourists,
immigrant workers,
and digital nomads.
Their trolleys strolling make my
city larger
while some locals feel like
strangers.
I feel strange enough.
In many Lisbons, sounding
trolleys
at my doorstep.



Fig. 1. *Tourists coming to Lisbon*. Lisbon, Portugal. July 2025. Drawing: Teresa Mendes Flores.

Looking for a Parking Spot

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

Looking for a parking spot becomes a habit if you have a car in New York City because private garages or driveways are unavailable, inaccessible, or costly. It is one of the most frustrating experiences of driving: it takes a long time to find free parking in the street and you cannot just give up looking: there is nowhere to leave the car. You need patience, a dose of aggression to grab a spot before anyone else does; the skill to park fast; a bit of grace, on occasion, to let go of a spot that someone else grabbed before you; and a ton of luck!

I follow a steady routine while looking for parking on Linden Blvd., in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, where I live: left on Bedford from Linden, left on Martense from Bedford, left on New York Ave from Martense, and left on Linden from New York Ave. Looping around, again and again, maximizes my chances of finding a spot. I know every fire hydrant and every No Standing Anytime sign (where parking is forbidden) along the loop, so I don't harbor false hopes if I notice an empty spot around there from a distance. The most desirable parking spot for me is right in front of my apartment building (Fig. 1). If I ever secure that spot, I try to keep the car there as long as possible (though street rats nest inside the engine, feasting on the cables–the drawback if the car stays put).

Alternate side parking regulations dictate finding a parking spot. Signs on every block show the days and times for street cleaning, which is when parking is forbidden there. On my block, that's four times a week: Monday/Thursday, the South side; Tuesday/Friday, the North side, each for an hour and a half (9-10:30am) (Fig. 2). You always park planning ahead, thinking how alternate side parking will affect you: do you need to repark the car for street cleaning, take the car and run an errand during street cleaning, sit inside the car to avoid getting a parking violation ticket, or give up and put the car at the parking meters on Nostrand, provided there are spots there.





Fig. 1. The perfect spot: car parked in front of my apartment building; Fig. 2. Alternate Side Parking side for street cleaning. East Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2025. Photos: Blagovesta Momchedjikova.

M

Making Lists

Jorge de La Barre

« Ceci n'est pas une liste »
There are lists of anything
Lists of everything
Lists can be of anything
Ceci n'est pas une liste
To make sure we don't forget anything
There are "To Do List" notebooks and "Post-it" stickers
Now there are digital tools as well
Like Simplenote or Google Keep
So much multi-tasking in urban life
We may lose our mind
No, we'd better do this: list!
Now let's just do this:
A list consists of listing
Three items at least
If two items make a pair
Just one can't make a list
You need three items at least
To make a list
Lists don't have to be exhaustive
To be lists
All they need to be lists
Is to have three items at least
For two items make a pair, not a list
And last but not list:
Just one can't make a list
Think:
Tariff.

Urban Habitat
Human habits
Social habits
Machine habits
Cyborg habits
Animal habits
Rituals
Routines
Repetitions
One, two, three, four
Urban habitat!
All-inclusive!
And Bilbo the Hobbit
And Willie the Pimp
And pin-up the Bimbo
And God save the Punks
Pump, pump, pump, pump me up!
Making lists *is* an urban habit!

"The French Don't Have a Word For…"

There is no firm evidence that he actually ever said it, but President George W. Bush's reputed utterance to British Prime Minister Tony Blair that "the trouble with the French is that they don't have a word for entrepreneur" (quoted in Coleman) amused me when I heard of it back in July 2002. There was a momentary lapse of reason, a mental short circuit, then a big laughter. I started putting up a list of (French) words… that the French don't have a word for *(sic!)*. The list would of

course be the exact opposite: French words that the English speakers use commonly without necessarily knowing that they are French. So, here it is. The list is certainly not exhaustive, so feel free to complete it (the ever-expanding list resides at The Habitorium). Please note that in order to avoid unfair competition, the cheese names have not been included in the list. This reminds me of General De Gaulle in one of his most famous quotes: *"Comment voulez-vous gouverner un pays où il existe 258 variétés de fromages?"* ("How do you want to govern a country where there are 258 varieties of cheese?"). And now, will you please excuse my French…

À Bon Entendeur, Salut! / À la Bonne Heure! / À Propos / À Table! / Abandon / Abat-Jour / Accident / Accord / Accoutrement / Admirable / Affront / Agent / Agitateur / Alibi / Alliance / Allure / Amateur / Ambiance / Amour Fou / Amuse-Bouche / Amuse-Gueule / Amusement / Anecdote / Angoisse / Animé / Anomie / Antique / Apaisement / Aplomb / Apostrophe / Appareil / Après-Coup / Argument / Armoire / Art Brut / Art de Vivre / Art Déco / Art Naïf / Art Nouveau / Artisan / Artisanal / Assemblage / Associé / Atelier / Attaché / Attire / Attitude / Au-Pair / Auberge / Audience / Aura / Auteur / Avalanche / Avenue / Baguette / Ballet / Bandit / Banquet / Bar / Baron / Baroque / Bas-Fonds / Bas-Relief / Bastion / Bâton Rouge / Beau / Beige / Belle de Nuit / Belle Époque / Bellevue / Belvédère / Béret / Bidet / Billard / Billet Doux / Biscuit / Bizarre / Blanc / Blanche / Blasé / Blason / Bloc / Blonde / Blouse/ Bœuf Bourguignon / Bon Appétit! / Bon Enfant / Bon Mot / Bon Temps Rouler / Bon Vivant / Bon Voyage! / Bonbon / Bonne Chance! / Bonne Foi / Boudoir / Bougie / Bouillon / Boulevard / Bouquet / Bourgeois / Bourgeoisie / Boutique / Bracelet / Brasserie / Brassière / Bricolage / Brochure / Brunette / Buffet / Bulletin / Bureau / Burlesque / C'est la Vie! / C'est si Bon! / Cabaret / Cabinet / Cachet / Café au Lait / Café Crème / Camouflage / Caprice / Cardigan / Carnage / Carte Blanche / Carton / Casserole / Cavalier / Chaise Longue / Chaloupe / Champagne / Chandelier / Chanson / Chantage / Chantilly / Charade / Chariot / Charlatan / Chassé-Croisé / Chasse-Gardée / Chauffeur / Chef / Chef d'Œuvre / Chevrolet / Chic / Chocolat / Chocolatier / Chou à la Crème / Cinéma-Vérité / Cinéphile / Clair-Obscur / Clairvoyant / Cliché / Client / Clientèle / Collage / Combat / Commerce / Concierge / Conduit / Contour / Cordon Bleu / Cornichon / Corporation / Corsage / Corset / Costume / Coup d'État / Coupé / Coupon / Courtisan / Courtoisie / Couvert / Crayon / Crédit / Crème Brûlée / Crème Glacée / Crêpe / Crétin / Crèvecœur / Cri de Cœur / Critique / Crochet / Croissant / Croque-Monsieur / Croquis / Crouton / Cuisine / Dame / Dandy / De Luxe / De Rigueur / Débauche / Débit / Débonnaire / Début / Débris / Débutante / Décadent / Décor / Décoration / Découpage / Déjà Vu / Demi-Glace / Dénouement / Déraillement / Dérive / Dessert / Détective / Détente / Détour / Dialogue / Dilettante / Discothèque / Dispute / Distingué / Double / Double-Entendre / Douche / Duel / Échelon / Éclair / Élan / Élégance / Élégant / Élite / Émerveillement / Employé(e) / En Route / En Vogue / Enchanté / Encore / Enfant Terrible / Engagement / Engouement / Ennui / Entente / Entourage / Entrée / Enveloppe / Escalade / Espionnage / Esquive / Etiquette / Exposé / Fabrique / Fac-Similé / Fait Accompli / Fanfaron / Fantoche / Farce / Farceur / Fatigue / Faux / Faux-Ami / Faux-Pas / Faux-Semblant / Femme Fatale / Fiancé(e) / Figure / Film Noir / Filet Mignon / Fille de Joie / Fin-de-Siècle / Finale / Finesse / Finitude / Flacon / Flagrant-Délit / Flambé / Flânerie / Flâneur / Foie Gras / Fondue / Force Majeure / Formidable / Fou d'Amour / Franchise / Frappé / Fraude / Frisson / Froideur / Fromage / Frugal / Futile / Gaillard(e) / Galant(e) / Galanterie / Gamine / Garage / Garçon / Genre / Gilet / Glouton / Gourmet / Grand(e) / Grandeur / Grandiose / Gratin / Grimace / Grimoire / Grotesque / Guet-Apens / Guillotine / Habitat / Habitué(e) / Héritage / Hommage / Honni Soit Qui Mal Y Pense! / Horizon / Horrible / Hors d'Œuvre / Huis-Clos / Idée Fixe / Idiot / Imbécile / Imitation / Immense / Impeccable / Impossible / Imposteur / Impromptu / Ingrédient / Insouciance /

Insouciant(e) / Intelligence / Intelligent / Intrigant(e) / Intrigue / J'Ouvert / Jacobin / Je ne Sais Quoi / Joie de Vivre / Jouissance / Journal / Jovial / L'État c'est Moi / L'Union Fait la Force! / La Vie en Rose / Laisser-Faire / Laissez-Passer / Lassitude / Le Fric, c'est Chic! / Lecture / Légion / Liaison / Libertine / *(In)* Lieu *(Of)* / Lieutenant / Lignage / Limousine / Lingerie / Loyal / Macaron / Machine / Madeleine (de Proust) / Mais Oui! / Malaise / Malice / Mangetout / Mannequin / Manœuvre / Mardi-Gras / Marquise / Massacre / Massage / Masseuse / Matinée / Mayonnaise / Médaillon / Mémoire / Ménage à Trois / Ménagerie / Menu / Merci! / Merde! / Métis / Métissage / Mignon(ne) / Millionnaire / Milieu / Militant / Mille-Feuilles / Minute / Minuscule / Mise en Bouche / Mise en Scène / Misérable / Mode / Moment / Mon Amour! / Mon Chéri! / Mon Dieu! / Monocle / Montage / Morgue / Mot Doux / Mot(s) d'Amour / Motif / Motivation / Mousse / Mousseux / Musette / M(o)ustache / N'Importe Quoi / Naïve / Naïveté / Négligé / Neige / Néo-Noir / Niche / Noblesse Oblige! / Noir / Nonchalant / Notre-Dame / Nouveau Riche / Nouvelle Cuisine / Nouvelle Vague / Nuance / Nubile / Oblique / Obsolescence / Obsolète / Œuvre / Oh Là Là! / Oh Oui! / Omelette / Opinion / Oui! / Outrage / Ouverture / Palissade / Papier-Mâché / Pain au Chocolat / Pain Quotidien / Panache / Papillon / Parade / Parcours *(Parkour)* / Parleur / Parole / Parquet / Partisan / Parvenu / Passage / Passé / Passeur / Pastiche / Pâté / Pâtisserie / Patron / Patronage / Pavillon / Personnel / Petit *(Petty)* Bourgeois / Petite / Physique / Pied-à-Terre / Pied-de-Nez / Pillage / Pique-Nique / Pis-Aller / Pissoir / Plat du Jour / Plateau / Plateforme / Poignant / Pommes Frites / Porcelaine / Porte-Manteau / Portrait / Pose / Poseur / Possible / Posture / Pot-Pourri / Précédent / Première / Président / Prestige / Prêt-à-Manger / Prêt-à-Porter / Prix Fixe / Profil / Profiteur / Promenade / Protégé / Protocole / Provocateur / Prudence / Prune / Quant-à-Soi / Quarantaine / Questionnaire / Raclette / Raconteur / Raffinement / Raisin / Raison d'État / Raison d'Être / Rapport / Rapprochement / Ratatouille / Réception / Récipient / Refrain / Refuge / Regards / Régime / Religion / Renaissance / Rendez-Vous / Répertoire / Reprise / Réserve / Réservoir / Résidu / Résistance / Restaurant / Résumé / Retard / Retentissement / Revenant / Revenu / Rêverie / Revue / Ricochet / Risqué / Robe / Roman à Clef / Roman Noir / Rosé / Rôtisserie / Routine / Royale / Ruse / Sabotage / Sachet / Sage / Salon / Sans-Culottes / Santé! / Sauce / Sauf-Conduit / Sauté / Savant / Secret / Sentiment / Service / Signal / Silence / Silhouette / Sobriquet / Soirée / Solitude / Sorbet / Soufflé / Soupe à l'Oignon / Soupe du Jour / Spectacle / Strapontin / Suavité / Suite / Surprise / Surveillance / Suspect / Tableau Vivant / Tact / Talent / Tartine / Technique / Tendance / Terrain / Terrible / Tête-à-Tête / Tissu / Touché! / Tour / Tour de Force / Tour de France / Tranche / Tribune / Trompe l'Œil / Troubadour / Troupe / Trousseau / Tunnel / Ustensile / Vagabond / Vagabondage / Valet / Vaudeville / Vedette / Venue / Versatile / Vignette / Village / Vinaigrette / Vis-à-Vis / Vive la France! / Vogue / Volatile / Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir? / Voyage / Voyeur / Vulnérable / Zut Alors!

(Last but not least): Entrepreneur!

Voilà! Any other French word "they don't have a word in French for," anyone (sic)? In any case, *merci beaucoup* W, for inspiring this long list!

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Meditating

Keisha-Gaye Anderson

In all of the activity of the city, it's sometimes difficult to quiet the mind and plug into higher intelligence for inspiration and guidance, but this is a necessity. An urban habit that is necessary is meditation, training the mind to float above the overstimulation that can easily occur when millions of people are simultaneously living life in a bustling urban center. This habit of meditation can help regulate the nervous system and make it easier for those of us who are artists to get clarity and direction for our creations (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. *Meditation*. Brooklyn, New York City, USA. 2024. Drawing: Keisha-Gaye Anderson.

Mind-Mapping

Jen Urso

These three maps illustrate my urban habits of road running, getting coffee, and shopping affordably. Whenever I go anywhere in the city, whether on foot, by bike or by car, I have a habit of projecting a map in my mind of what is closest to me or what I can expect to see in that space.

As a woman running in the city, I think of my safest routes which factor in how secluded an area might be, whether I've been hassled somewhere before, the amount of traffic, and my previous observations of where I see men generally milling about. I also think of known places women have been attacked before, where access is to help, or where exits are for escape. This is all centered around my 35+ years of experience as a runner who has been followed, harassed, and approached in what could have been near-miss situations of real danger. I want to simply go running but being a female body, alone in public, invites all of these challenges that require a habit of awareness (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. *A Guide to Running While Female in Phoenix, 8.5" x 11" map.* For sale on the author's website. Map: Jen Urso. Image Source: *Steady Hand Maps.*

As a self-employed person, I often have to be out and about during the day, meeting people at locations other than my home office. Since I like a good cappuccino, I'm always thinking of the closest place to stop for a coffee while I'm out or the best in-between location to meet a friend or client. I think about if a place specializes in unique coffee creations; if they make good food and basic cappuccino; if the atmosphere is welcoming; if there are good places to sit; if there's good wi-fi. While I always have this map in my head, I thought it would be worthwhile to share with others who are searching for those same things. My decision of where to go on any given day is influenced by the importance of one or more of these factors (Fig. 2).

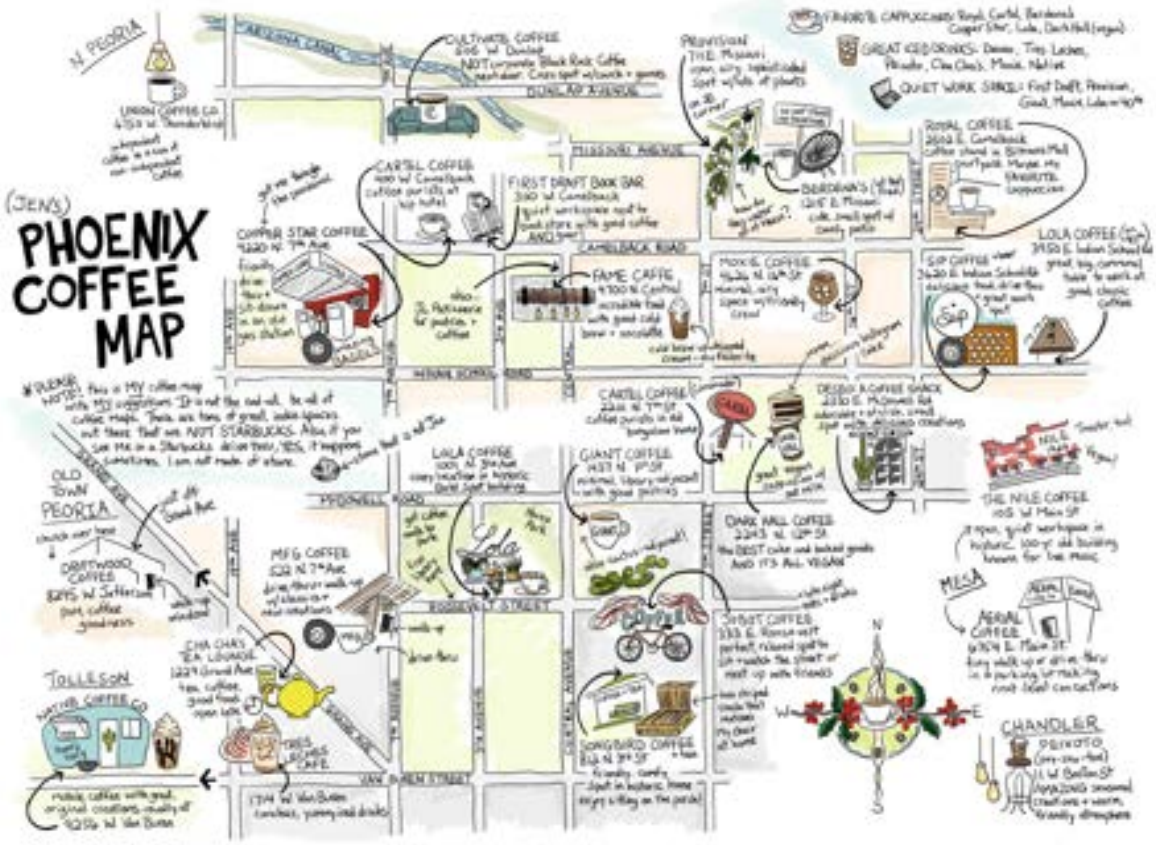


Fig. 2. *Phoenix Coffee Map, 13" x 19" map.* For sale on the author's website. Map: Jen Urso. Image Source: *Steady Hand Maps.*

I think that most of the things we need to buy already exist in the world. I don't need to buy a brand-new clipboard when there are at least fifteen nearly-new clipboards sitting on a shelf at Goodwill. My habit is to always try to buy things used before I buy anything new. My desire to create less waste and participate less in new consumer culture means that my shopping tendencies are often about opportunity and time. It allows my mind to be open to what is in existence rather than seeking out a need that must be fulfilled. Mostly, I don't know what I'm looking for. Or, I'm looking for the possibility of many things. If I'm looking for clothes, I might go to one shop over another. I also might go to one of the stores I mapped as a way to escape from work or family obligations (Fig. 3).

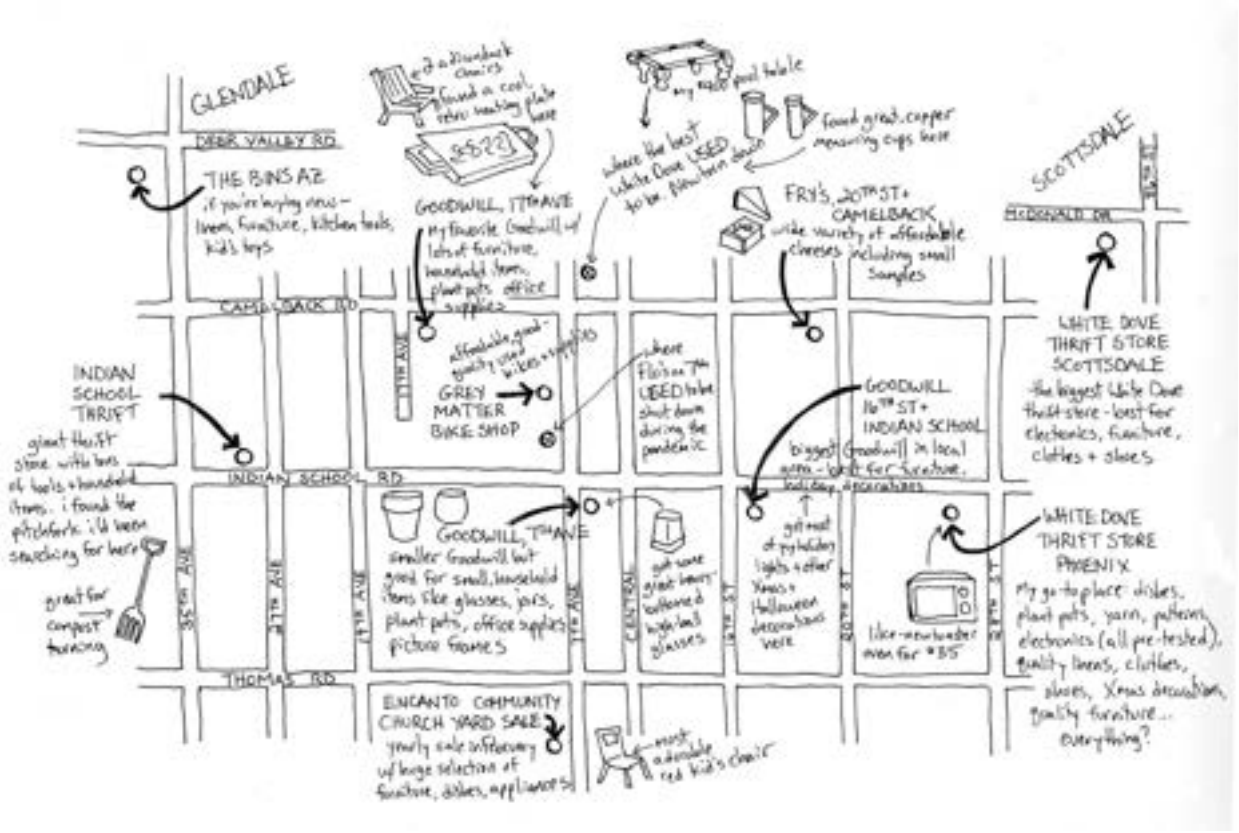


Fig. 3. *Favorite 2nd-hand and Affordable Shops in Phoenix, 8.5" x 11" map*. Map: Jen Urso. Previously published on my *Patreon* page.

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Moving through the City

Ari Panagis

Metropolitan Moving

In a metropolitan city, there is public or personal transportation. Personal transportation could be pedestrian, automotive, or non-automotive vehicular.

Somebody's progress is somebody else's impediment. Transport time in New York City is a major factor in life here and delays are constant. When going up stairs for example, if the staircase is only one person wide, everyone's mobility on the stairs is decided by the person at the front. If there are cars turning at a crossroad in an avenue then that delay will cause a ripple effect all the way down to the end of the avenue and beyond.

That's why getting into the habit of being aware of how we affect the human traffic around us is so important. The stereotype that New Yorkers don't know how to drive is unfortunately true to a large extent. The problem with non automotive actors in the many flows of New York's traffic is that they have little spatial awareness and don't adhere to the philosophies of driving. The most apparent example of this is the tendency for people to switch directions without checking if that switch would get in someone's way. Vehicles on the road do this because it is a matter of safety. In pedestrian traffic there is little safety hazard but this behavior causes more delays as crowds get denser.

The only factor in traffic is the crossing of two people's paths. This can cause delays or can cause accidents. Accidents occur when someone going fast is going to collide with someone on the same path and can't diverge or break in time.

Break times should dictate the right of way in traffic however the pedestrian technically always has the right of way. The order of break times in the city are bikes, cars, then pedestrians because pedestrians can stop instantaneously, cars aren't going fast enough, and bikes are usually going fast compared to the capabilities of their vehicle.

Nata Street Eating

Doug Birgfeld



Fig. 1. *Pastel de Nata* is a puff pastry egg-custard tart; it is a famous Portuguese dessert. Nazare, Portugal. November 2025. Photo: Doug Birgfeld.

Daily Devotion

Get your spoon
Out of my Nata.
Think of the nuns
Starching their habits.
What to do with the yokes?

Pick it up
Between your fingers
Biting through the cream
Squishing all over.
What to do with the crumbs?

My daily devotion
One coffee one Nata
Save one tiny scoop
Gone before I know it.
Mais Um Nata, please!

Half coffee half milk
Half yoke half white
Half perfectly ironed habits
Fully committed to god
Half sticky sweet chaos
Falling in globs on my shirt

Lets fully commit to the mess
Every single day
Not spoon by spoon
But bite by bite
with sticky fingers
Crumbs falling over
wrinkled careless cloth

Nocturnal Watching

Karin Bevilacqua Fazio Littlefield

Glacier Calving in Brooklyn, 4am

I am watching the shelf of snow and ice
that is ever so slowly
sliding down the awning
above my bedroom window –
a great white curtain descending
and vanishing the world

Impressions from the grooves in the awning
make it look like it has ribs,
the ribs of a great white whale
newly lifeless
and silently
sinking

It seems like it is defying
the laws of nature
to hang there so tenuously –
a birth frozen, head halted
halfway out

Does it hurt
having gravity pull you down?
(I know the answer to this)

I crack the window
let the crisp air
excite my skin

listen – snow and sleep
have blanketed
brooklyn

in a borough of 2.6 million
only I am watching
this descent

this show
of nature
of winter
of gravity
of the fight against gravity
in a fenced in backyard
not much bigger

than a bedroom
with clotheslines
and power lines
and buildings
obscuring the sky

the ground trembles
in anticipation
I am
afraid
to blink

Observing the City

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

Panorama Poem: Seeing the City from the Top of the Empire State Building*

Conversations Up Above
Where are you?
asks my 18-year old son,
when I Facetime him.
I am on the top of the
world, I say.
Huh? He thinks I'm joking.
I am on the 102nd floor
of the Empire State
Building, I say.
I turn the phone around,
to show him.
I am looking at the whole
city from above. I am
looking towards
Brooklyn, where you are
but I can't see you,
from so far away…
Have fun, he says. Take lots
of pictures! Stay safe!
I have to bring you here
again, I say, they have
changed so many things
since we were last here…
Thank you but not
any time soon, he says.
He is afraid of heights.
Why are you there? my
17-year old son asks,
all suspicious,
when I call him next.
Because I missed seeing
the city from above, I say.
I wanted to see
the Panoramic drawing a
guy from England did here,
and I wanted to see
the city from above
with a friend.
Oh, hi, Thiago, my son says.
My friend Thiago has just
called his wife in Rio;
she waves at us!
Let me show you
the view, I say.
You are like old people,
my son says. Didn't I
show you how to turn
just the camera around,
not the whole phone?!
I wish you guys were
here, I say. To see what I
see. The city is all around
and down below. Like at the
Panorama in The Queens
Museum. Like a scale
model, only bigger.
But here, you are in the
middle of the city, not
around it, having risen
above it. This is a living
Panorama! I say.
Pazi se, says my son.
Take care!

The Price
It is expensive
to see the city from above.
The higher you get,
the more you have to pay.
To view the city
from the 102nd floor,
in addition to the standard
86th floor viewing,
costs $91, in off-peak times,
booked in advance, online.
It is one of the most
famous buildings in the
world, says Thiago,
so it makes sense…it's a lot
but it's a special place…it's
worth seeing occasionally or
even just once…it's not like
you come here every day.
I wonder what it must be
like to work here every day.
Like, the security guards, in
their gray-green uniforms
and hats? To them, seeing
the city from above is
normal, or mundane, or
maybe even boring.
All day long they repeat
the same gestures and
the same words, as they
help navigate crowds
brimming with excitement:
Take a left when you exit
the elevator! Stand behind
that line when you wait for
the next elevator!

A Vertical Experience

There is no elevator
that shoots you straight up
from the first to the 102nd
floor, or the 86th.
Seeing the city from the
Empire State Building has
been staged as a
multi-layered vertical
experience. You build up
the anticipation, you
prepare for the grand view,
you immerse yourself
in what is to come,
bit by bit, with every
level you stop at.
1st floor welcome, scale
models, wall-sized photos
of the Empire State
Building from every angle
and in every weather
condition. Then stairs,
2nd floor, scale models,
more wall-sized photos,
some history of the Empire
State Building. Then a
miracle elevator ride
to the 80th floor,
where the top of
the elevator as if flies off,
and we see a video
of the elevator going up
the elevator shaft.
Some gasp, some scream
with anticipation.
Once on the 80th floor,
more scale models,
wall-sized photos of the
Empire State Building,
a semi-circle historical
photo panorama, binocular
stations, interactive exhibits,
more history, The Empire
State Building in popular
culture, a special King Kong
picture opportunity,
where Thiago and I
take turns to picture
ourselves with the gigantic
King Kong simulation.
To be held in King Kong's
hand: oh, the thrill! We
giggle with excitement like
kids. Then, a dark room
with a semi-circle panorama
of TV screens with scenes
from Empire State Building
movies, then glass display
cases with Empire State
Building memorabilia and
merchandise. Now we are
surrounded by standard
-sized windows. Outside
each and every one of them
lies the city. Though the
view is interrupted by the
window frames and the
walls between them,
it resembles an old film
reel with different New
York City frames.
Looking down through a
window, at first the city
seems frozen, dead,
in a vacuum. But when you
stand still for a while,
you begin to detect
the city at work: cars, trucks,
and buses move along
clear-cut streets and
avenues, as if part of an
enormous, automatic train
set. Fans on rooftops are
endlessly turning. Water
towers stand tall and proud.
This view is
pulsing with life.
We try to find
the High Line but with no
luck. We see Macy's, the
world famous department
store. Thiago finds a green,
grass-like Nike logo on a
rooftop. Logos speak, even
from a distance. They are
much needed identifiers in
the ocean of structures
below. Finally, we are at the
sketch I came here to see. It
is a bird's eye view of the
metropolis drawn by British
sensation Stephen Wiltshire,
who circled around the city
for 45 min, in a helicopter,
and then drew, on a
panoramic piece of
paper, what he saw. It took
him 5 days to replicate the
view, in pen and pencil,
relying on his natural gift
of photographic memory.
At the Panorama in Queens,
I talk about the memory
palace: a memorization
technique you can train
yourself to use, which
became obsolete once we
handed over remembering
to other devices.
Photographic memory is a
unique natural ability
to capture the details
of an image after seeing it
just once and without the
aid of any mnemonic
device. The sketch is framed
and exhibited against the
window light so no good
picture of it can be taken.
Perhaps a marketing trick,
so you can buy
reproductions of it in the
gift shop later?

Two Chryslers

Wiltshire's framed sketch
leads to a gallery that
looks like a city sketching
lab gone wild: unframed
sketches of the city fill up
every empty white wall
around, like graffiti.
It is as if the city
has swiftly climbed

through the windows
and settled on these walls.
As a result, the city view
is both outside the windows
and replicated on the walls
inside. I can see both
the Chrysler Building
sketched on the wall
in 2D and right behind it,
through the window, the
Chrysler Building, as it
stands in the city, in 3D.
Two Chrysler Buildings
in one room.

Free Observation
Another elevator
and we are at the famous
86th floor observation deck.
Here the true panorama
of the city unfolds.
Though we cannot
stand in the middle of it,
like in a classic panorama
rotunda, we can walk
around it, for a 360 degree
view of the city, which
extends to wherever the
weather decides the horizon
is on this particular day.
Here, we are out in the
open. Though there is a
protective fence around the
viewing walkway, it cannot
prevent you from taking
raw, unobstructed photos.
There are binocular stations
but who cares for a zoom in
when you are enjoying this
gigantic zoom out?
For the first time
since we entered this
building 86 floors ago
the view is not mediated
by glass windows. For the
first time there is nothing
standing between us
and the view.
We breathe the same air as
the buildings. The cars are
like toys, says Thiago.
I know this feeling.
I have had it before,
multiple times, at a different
place: at the Panorama in
the Queens Museum–the
scale model of the
metropolis that forever
amazes me and holds my
heart–a miniature
of huge proportions.
There, one circles around
the view, as if on a skywalk.
Here, one has risen from
the city, the buildings lying
at one's feet. And yet, we
are giants, both in the
museum and on the
observation deck, the city
below us dwarfed by the
precision of model
makers and architects.
We circle the view, stopping,
turning around, revisiting
our steps, feeling free.
We take pictures and try to
imagine how easy it would
be to drop one's phone
right into the metropolitan
stew below. We try to take
pictures with as much city
in the background as
possible. But it is not always
easy because the light likes
to play its own game with
the surface. Sometimes the
photo shows just you with
a silly grin on and no city
behind. Is this city a ghost?
Thiago wants to find Times
Square. We locate it thanks
to some slivers of ads that
we see peeking in between
gigantic buildings. This is
not the Times Square we
know from walking around
the city, overflowing with
gigantic ads, bright lights,
and tourists. Just like at the
Panorama in the Queens
Museum, where there are
no lights to mark the area,
Times Square is not for shit
from up here. I see the Met
Building, but cannot find
Grand Central beneath it,
a problem persisting
also at The Panorama
in the Queens Museum.
I find Bryant Park, Central
Park and the UN, which we
already saw on the 80th
floor. Again, we marvel
at the Chrysler.
Can one go inside and
view the city from it,
Thiago wonders? He
remembers going inside a
different building,
and seeing the Empire State
from up close.
We still can't find the
Highline but we see Little
Island, the new floating
park around it and vow to
go visit it soon.
No matter where
you turn, everywhere
there is the city.
But I keep coming back
to one particular view:
towards downtown.
At the end of the view is
One World Trade Center.
I can think of what stood in
its place over two decades
ago. I visited the
Observation Deck on the
110th floor there; I danced
the night away in Windows
on the World with my dear
friends Pascal, Hiroko, and
Sylvia. I admired the view
of the city from that angle.

But I will never
see these buildings
in the city again.
I will never see
the city from them again.
The Twin Towers and
Windows on the World–a
world that is now gone.
I remember how people
leaped to their death from
the Towers, when the planes
hit them on 9/11.
What were their last
thoughts falling into the
cold concrete embrace
of the city?

View Upgrade
One more elevator and here
comes the 102nd Floor!
In case you didn't purchase
this view, you can upgrade
on the spot, with a tap of a
credit card. The observation
circle is much smaller here:
we brush shoulders with the
handful who paid to see
the city from that high up.
Glass windows from floor
to ceiling surround us. Here
we can see Times Square a
bit better, the lines of
avenues look straighter. We
spot cars coming out of the
Midtown Tunnel and a fly
stuck to one of the glass
windows. We take more
pictures, aiming for more
city in the background. We
call our loved ones, as if we
have gone through a rite of
passage. Perhaps we have?
High above the city, we hear
no noise and see no dirt.
Problems disappear in the
distance. This is
a model city,
an ideal city,
like the one in the Queens
Museum! A pretty perfect
living panorama!

Going Down
86,
80,
2.
We go down in as
many elevators as we took
to go up. On the 2nd floor
we enter the gift shop. All
imaginable and some
unimaginable gifts
encapsulate the experience
at this city icon. I buy an
Empire State Building
pencil sharpener,
Thiago–a fridge magnet
with the Empire State
Building at dusk.

The Spell
On our way out of the
building, we are quiet,
still under the spell
of the view from above
hoping it will last us a while.
We know now that
to see the city,
one needs to leave it,
to feel the city,
one needs to stay in it. And
we are starting to feel the
city as soon as we
set foot outside.
The city street already feels
too loud, too harsh, too
dirty, just too much.
We spot a security guard
we met on the observation
deck upstairs. He is now
working the crowds
at the entrance.
How do you switch
from the majestic view
on top of the world
to the smelly street below?
And just like that,
spell broken.

OpenAI
Back home, Thiago and I
exchange photos we took
at the top. Whose camera
did a better job
capturing the view?
I keep some, I delete some.
And then, a devilish
thought comes upon me:
Ask OpenAI to create a
Panorama of New York
City! I do, and it does.
I stare at it. It is so clear;
It is so clean. An image full
of buildings and building
details but empty of the
personal memories behind
them. Just too empty.
An image is
never just an image.
It is also the histories
hopes dreams fears
uncertainty pain love
desire of the person
who took it.

*I wrote "Panorama Poem" for and first presented it at the International Panorama Council Conference in Lausanne, Switzerland, in Sept. of 2024. I then presented it at Kurt Mahoney's monthly reading at Mary O's in Manhattan, NYC, in Dec. of 2024. "Panorama Poem" consists of 9 parts, which have been slightly reformatted to fit the purpose of this volume. Parts 1, 3, and 8 have been published in *Panoramic and Immersive Media Studies Yearbook,* Vol. 2, 2026. My colleague Prof. Thiago Leitão and my friend Neven Armanios encouraged me to write and present this poem in the first place; my friend Ari Panagis recorded a video of me reading it at Mary O's; my friend Jay Rodriguez recorded an audio version of me reading it at his home. I thank you all!

P

Personal Training

Jimmie Hunt

The Grind and How to Stay Positive Despite and Because of It

I train people of different ages in the game of basketball. I call myself "a friend with information" who likes to help others and share this information that I have attained throughout the years of playing basketball professionally. I don't like to call myself a "coach." A coach sounds like an authority figure. I don't feel like an authority figure; I am just sharing this information with you. Even when I was playing, when I was younger, I never looked at the coach as someone extraordinary: he was always a part of the team, a teammate: we were in this together: if we win, we all win; he helped me do my job, he wasn't any different. I want to be looked at like that: I have information, I will give it to you, I will help you, and you will get better. That's what's most important to me. The environment values the coach, the authority figure. But I don't want to fall into this category. I don't need any title. In my mind, I am still a player, giving you what I know. And I am still healthy enough that I can do all the stuff that I am sharing with you (Figs. 1-3).

Everything that I share, I have done and mastered myself. I have played basketball all over the world. Now I have to simplify what I have mastered in order to teach it to others. I teach players of different ages, 8-40. I like the challenge of training all different ages. But I have noticed something: kids from 8 to 14 need the training to be fun. They don't want information, they want fun. So I design the training with that in mind. From 15 to 17, the players get really serious. Something clicks: I am too old for these games, they think, so I just give them the drill, and they do it. From 18 onwards: it is back to play and fun. Of course, the kids are learning but I am learning as well because basketball is always changing.



Figs. 1-3. *Jimmie Hunt, summer basketball camps, Panagjurishte, Bulgaria, 2022-2023*. Photos: Jimmie Hunt Archives.

I go into my training with an open mind. Certain things you have to do every day–you do these things to be a good basketball player–the basics: shooting, defense, passing, communicating with teammates and coach, and of course, stretching, before and after practice, and strength training (which you can do on your own, because you want to get stronger). I explain to the players that these need to become a habit: they will have to do these every single day, as hard as they can. If you don't, if they don't become a habit, then you cannot succeed. Habit is foundational to mastering basketball. But it also depends on what people need. Not good in shooting? Then we do shooting. Can't dribble? We'll focus on the dribble. Can't do left hand layups? That's what we will do. Training for me means motivating the players, mentoring them, and being positive. To make them feel that they can do it. A lot of people are negative and feel that they cannot do it. They can but they need the right information and they need practice. Practice is extremely important. Practice is going to give you the confidence that you will be able to do what you set out to do (Figs. 4-6).





Figs. 4-6. *Jimmie Hunt, doing the basics, basketball camps, Panagjurishte, Bulgaria, 2023*. Photos: Jimmie Hunt Archives.

Traveling around the city for basketball training could be difficult. Sofia is not huge but still it is a city. A lot of people look for someone like me, a personal trainer, to get better, and the ones that are really dedicated to get better, will really travel far, long distances, to get to me. The fact that we practice in a school gym makes it difficult too. My time with the players is limited. During the school year, we can only train on Saturday and Sunday. Summers, I can use the gym every day, so summers are my busiest time of the year. There is no air conditioning in the gym, which limits the hours when we can go because we don't want to pass out. But in Bulgaria, the players are used to the heat: they don't complain. I complain but not them. There is no water fountain, no toilet paper in the bathroom… it is an interesting place… this dirty old gym where we train–this is the grind–and I try to do above and beyond to make up for it.

There are many ways in which I see progress in the players: the way they move, the way their confidence is in doing certain things, the percentages in consistency go up big time, parents give me compliments after their kids play in games. The change is drastic, they learn pretty well. It is pretty basic stuff but it is skipped over when you are on a team: teams skip over individual personal training. Personalized attention is different from just playing on a team. The teams design a plan: go to the basket, attack the defender, but they don't tell you how. I will show you how to position your body to attack the defender. With personal experience of doing it my whole life, it makes it easier to share and understand. The players see that it is not something extraordinary: they can do it too!

Some people take the training as high stakes, as a game. They want to do things perfectly. My job is to mentor and encourage them, be positive, and show them that it's ok not to be perfect. You won't do everything perfectly but you will improve doing it. Some are angry or shy, I teach them to take it and keep working harder. Some hate failure. In college, in the sports management major, they taught us how to deal with different groups, with different personalities, with different levels, and after some time, with experience, you learn what triggers some people, what needs more attention,

and you will give it to them. Some get it and do it on their own. I have to decide on the spot, what is needed, and group players together with this in mind.

I used to think that I could help everyone but I have learned that I cannot. There are different reasons behind that. Some don't have the mindset to learn: they just want to receive the information. But you have to put in the work in order for it to be of use to you. Some are angry, they want to know everything but they don't, and they express that in anger. But if you are angry you cannot focus and the training doesn't work. You have to learn to be humble and patient.

I like to be ready for my training mentally and physically. I do a personal workout by myself and some stretching before I get to practice. Knowing what age groups are going to be there helps me figure out my attitude. With the younger ones, 18 and over, I go with a happy, fun attitude. With 14-17, I go with a more serious attitude. It wasn't easy to do all this at first, but now I am pretty used to it. In the beginning, I didn't understand the age group difference but now I do.

My father, who was a great basketball player, taught me a lot about basketball. He trained me my whole childhood. When I got to college, I used to workout everywhere, and all my teammates would ask me, what did you learn over the summer? And I would show them. I worked at basketball camps throughout my high school and college years. I have been doing day camps and overnight camps in Bulgaria every summer, for nine years now. There is a difference between these: the day camps are smaller, the overnight camps are bigger. Bigger groups of kids and smaller groups of kids are taught differently: I teach the same things but I cannot be so personal at the overnight camps with so many kids, it is more of an explanation that I give. If I peak their interest, then they can come to personal trainings in my gym in Mladost (Figs. 7-9).



Figs. 7-9. *Jimmie Hunt, personal trainings in the gym in Mladost. Sofia, Bulgaria, 2025.* Photos: Jimmie Hunt Archives.

I have some kids who have achieved success at higher levels. Some are playing at the college level in Europe and the US, some are playing professionally in Europe. I am very excited about this: I want to develop as many as I can and help further their career.

Photographing as Seeing

Sheril Antonio

Looking is Not Seeing, To See Takes Time…



Fig. 1. *September 11, 2001*. New York City, USA, September 2001. Photo: Sheril Antonio.

To See Takes Time was the title of the Georgia O'Keeffe show I saw earlier this year at the Museum of Modern Art. I teach all my students about looking closely, about taking the necessary time to see and I had the need and now the time to be fully immersed in the advice I give. New York City's urban environment is rich with images that easily support my practice which became a "habit" with the acquisition of my first smartphone. I realized over time that I had abandoned my larger, more expensive cameras and understood more deeply a phrase I heard before: "the best camera is the one you have when you need it." This is a multi-layered ritual for me as we are often drawn to things that call out for our attention and might miss so much of the quieter punctuations as we traverse our mapped world.

I remember vividly being called from all sectors to pay attention to the life changing events of September 11, 2001, the day the skyline of Lower Manhattan and countless lives were changed (Fig. 1). The day my father called from his office at 101 Barclay Street, across from the towers to say that they were being moved to the north side of the building because of falling debris around the main entrance/exit which faced the crumbling towers.

My urban habit is photography. This city gives us many opportunities to bear witness to events with both global or local roots. On this day in October of 2022, while attending class projects outdoors, I participated in an act of witnessing in front of the arch in Washington Square Park, watching a performance artist's silent protest for the safety of Iranian women (Fig. 2).

We find our neighborhoods familiar and comforting and think we know our surroundings well and yet they can still surprise us. I remember really seeing the garden and gardeners on the corner of Bleecker Street and LaGuardia Place among all the buildings and discovering the fruits and flowers that grew there (Fig. 3). Over time, I even noticed visitors to the green oasis even when the gates were closed, and the birds and bees that facilitated the renewal of life. What are these compositions in service to? What are the impulses that fuel these habits?



Top: Fig. 2. *Witness,* October 25, 2022; Fig. 3. *The Gardner,* July 17, 2021. Bottom (left to right): Fig. 4. *And So I Choose to Begin Again,* July 1, 2021; Fig. 5. *A Nurse,* July 17, 2020; Fig. 6. *The Deliverer.* Oct. 4, 2021; New York City, USA, 2023. Photos: Sheril Antonio.

As kids they used to tell us to "Watch where you're going!"; as adults, "Stop and smell the roses!"–but not too much about looking and seeing. It was Friedrich Nietzsche who encouraged that practice, learning to see–"accustoming the eye to calmness, to patience, to letting things come up to it requires patience" (Nietzsche 48). My students and I ponder these and many other questions: Where does a work of art come from? What does it want to say? Who does it want to engage? What does it seek from being experienced, seen, remembered? We search together, as artists and spectators, first for the questions and then a series of answers that begin our discussions. In my photography practice, I wonder what inspiration produced this sidewalk art first perceived as merely a bullseye–suggesting movement towards the center. Yet, somehow the impetus for reproducing the image, is that aided by the words, I experience it as suggesting movement outward. Words in a bullseye that stayed with me and eventually became the image I use to publicize my class (Fig. 4).

At the beginning of my Spring 2023 sabbatical, I took the time to see my neighborhood and city anew while I was archiving work from my college years–a much-needed project especially after the strange days of the COVID 19 pandemic and lockdown. I engaged via a process of turning questions I asked my students inward–Who am I? What do I want to say? How do I want to say it? What do I want from my audience? How can I convey that I've seen these same streets change profile or more recently how quickly our reverence for essential workers has dissipated? (Figs. 5-6).

Arthur C. Danto states that "A work of art is an externalization of the artist's consciousness; as if we could see his way of seeing and not merely what he saw. Whatever else art does it has to feed into an on-going discourse on the nature of art, or we will judge it trivial" (Danto 164). As a student

and teacher of film, I focused on photographing the large-scale spectacles that line our streets, the buildings we work and live in–and our unscheduled safe spaces during the pandemic. The structures that surround us and encase our lives with their fire escapes, detailed facades and sculpted faces looking down on passers-by (Figs. 7-9). Looking, looking, and looking again I could see smaller things and I could see the skyline of dense buildings like sentences punctuated by water towers (Fig. 10). During this time, I also wondered how I used to 'see' and sought answers while archiving black and white images shot on film. The smaller things were not small at all, neither in my past nor present. Those images were proof of how we used to stay connected (Figs. 11-12) and the many ways our city honors the dead (Figs. 13-14).



Top (left to right): Figs. 7-9. *Fire Escape on Brick Exterior*, February 20, 2023; *Green and Beige Façade*, February 22, 2023; *Pleasant Stone Face*, March 3, 2023. Middle: Fig. 10. *Water Towers on Houston Street*, November 7, 2017; Fig. 11. *Long Distance Telephone,* Apr. 12, 2023; Bottom (left to right): Fig. 12. *Phone Booth, Chinatown,* c. 1979; Fig. 13. *African Burial Ground National Monument*, April 25, 2023; Fig. 14. *RIP Kobe,* February 15, 2023. New York City, USA. Photos: Sheril Antonio.

And when the time comes for me let go of the work, send it into the world, I rely on Roland Barthes' words from the essay "The Death of the Author":

> "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes).

In these spaces, when I stand on the other side of the work, with you, I too will ask myself–Where did this work of art come from? What are the forces that may have shaped it? How is an audience anticipated in the work? What does it disclose about its cultural setting?

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Photographing New Yorkers in Public Spaces

Nora Gala

I took to the streets in search of New Yorkers' urban habits. For decades of street photography, what has interested me is their gatherings and interactions in public spaces. There is an ever-changing kaleidoscope of urbanites getting together, for millions of reasons! Sifting through my image library of snapshots from various corners of New York City, it became clear that seeking out, observing and documenting people's interactions in public spaces had become my conscious routine and obsession. I start with a photo collage that I made in 2019–a vibrating rose window featuring subway travelers (Fig. 1). My goal with this ever-growing visual database has been to remember and revisit New York public spaces, for an experience that is always unique (Figs. 2-13).



Fig. 1. *A collage of passengers using the subway,* 2019. New York City, USA, Photo collage: Nora Gala.









Top: Fig. 2. *A group of activists stage a protest at the Union Square subway station*, 2017; Fig. 3. *Artists gather at the closing of ABC NO RIO, a public art space on the Lower East Side.* New York City, USA, 2016; Middle: Fig. 4. *A group of friends gather for a funeral in Red Hook, Brooklyn*, 2015; Fig. 5. *Teens in Tompkins Square Park*, 2013. Bottom: Fig. 6. *Lower East Side resident performs ritual in East River Park*, 2014; Fig. 7. *Music teacher and students during the pandemic*, Brooklyn, 2020. New York City, USA. Photos: Nora Gala.



Top: Fig. 8. *Garifuna community gathers in Ferry Point Park, The Bronx,* 2016; Fig. 9. *Everyone is on the streets of Chinatown for Chinese New Year celebration,* 2014. Middle: Fig. 10. *A couple poses with a mural in Red Hook, Brooklyn*, 2017; Fig. 11. *Families and friends enjoy the Pier in Long Island City,* 2016. Bottom: Fig. 12. *Friends gather to participate in the Mermaid Parade, Coney Island, Brooklyn*, 2018; Fig. 13. *J'ouvert celebration by the West Indian community, Church Street, Brooklyn*, 2018. New York City, USA. Photos: Nora Gala.

Photographing Park Goers

Monica Aissa Martinez

Urban Park Habits Include Urban Park Peoples

First, a few words to set this stage: I am a morning person who enjoys an early run. I live in the heart of a quickly growing Phoenix, AZ–the largest city in the Sonoran Desert which holds the hottest surface temperature in North America. (It is also the most biologically diverse!) As I write, it is August and basically the heat determines what time I get up and out my front door. I usually enjoy an easy walk to slowly warm up the body (no pun intended). But if it is past 6:30 a.m. and already pushing 90 degrees, I will be driving the three quarters of a mile to the neighborhood park to run 4-5 miles. I appreciate the pre-run walk which is integral to my morning practice.

When I can make my way to the park on foot, I connect with neighbors walking leashed canines. I also catch my husband who walks our unleashed feline (a whole other story). I move amongst mid-to-late-20th century homes, many still holding the history of this once upon-a-time citrus grove. Other houses, recently remodeled, greet passersby with synthetic lawn. I trek down about eight streets to visit a mulberry tree growing along the edge of a community garden. Each spring, for at least a decade, she has allowed me handfuls of sweet mulberries. Her fallen berries have stained many a pair of running shoes, purple. From where she stands, I can see the hallmark olive trees that line the park. Once in the park, walking becomes running.

Now, to my one *true urban habit (*within my morning practice). I am known to take the occasional photo of one of the many people I come across on any given day, at the park. This can include another runner, a dog (or cat) walker, weight lifter, random visitor and yes maybe even a whip cracker. Basically, I document a moment in time, in the park, with people moving through it. The pics, like a sketch, record a curiosity or an abstract connection. The following (Fig. 1-11) represent only a few of the *park people* (#ParkPeoples) I have crossed paths with. The images are set up in no particular order, followed by a short description as posted into social media on the morning the shot is taken (habits breed habits). My modus operandi is to be spontaneous and quick.





Fig. 1. **#handsome #happy #hungry** #ParkLittlePeoples; Fig. 2. **Hey Sam, you're in the passing lane.** Handstanders keep to the far right! #ParkPeoples #UpsideDownInPhoenix. Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2022. Photos and text: M. Martinez, Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2022.




Fig. 3. M: "Can I take your photo?" J: "Why do you want to take my photo? M: "Cuz you're cool." J: "Well ok then, knock yourself out!" **#ParkPeoples #BadAssJudy #SheRunsToo;** Fig. 4. **(Date: December 26th).** Tripod in hand and moving at a quick and deliberate pace, Jacquelyn catches my attention early in the morning. She's just arrived from Jersey. She declares the weather is "warm and perfect." Meanwhile, I wear several layers, including a jacket. I believe she is telling me the truth. Jacquelyn is full of Christmas cheer and fun. #JaquelynFromJersey #ParkPeoples. Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2022. Photos and text: M. Martinez.






Left to right: Fig. 5. **Darwin and Hope**. I meet this couple early this a.m. They introduce themselves to me by name. My brain registers them as Darwin and Hope. #Visual #TShirtDesign #Darwin #Hope #ParkPeoples; Fig. 6. **Al, Callie and Maggie = #Strong.** These three women lifting and throwing 16-30 lb. weights, almost every weekend. Maggie explains the history of #ScottishHighlandGames #Glenfiddich #ScottishGathering #ParkPeoples; Fig. 7. **Nice Guy.** He told me this was his favorite work-out shirt. He's had it forever. So I photographed him in it. #ParkPeoples #NiceGuy. Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2022. Photos: M. Martinez.



Fig. 8. **I met Hector years ago.** He lifts weights at the park and he stretches and runs a few laps. I haven't seen him in some time (over a year). I remember a season, watching as he healed from a ruptured Achilles tendon (ouch) moving slow but steady. He is not working out today, but he walks firm; no sign he'd ever injured a leg. He waves and I wave back. Hector: Hello! Hey, long time, no see. We've been coming here for many years!" I don't stop. I keep moving: "Yeah, we have!" Hector: "We belong to the park, you and me!" I reply: "I like to think the park belongs to us!" I continue meanwhile, thinking about what he'd just said. (Naturally, a picture of cells, forming a living organism, came to mind). I circle and find him again. "Hector, I like what you said back there, you know, that we belong to the Park." "Well, we do!" "Would you mind if I take your picture?" #ParkPeoples #WeBelongToThePark #ILikeThisWayOfThinking; Fig. 9. **This is Mark.** For years I've come across him while I am out on my morning run. He is out early, wearing gloves and picking up trash from the night before. He throws regular trash into the regular bins and recycles go into the recycle bin. It doesn't matter what the weather is, he is out doing his thing. "We all need a purpose!"–he says. Mark tells me his mother used to make him cut his hair. Now that she has passed, he cuts his hair only when he thinks about it. We talk a little about the Spanish language, which he says he tried to learn. He explains he had trouble with Hebrew, too. I like Mark and I like his long hair. #MarkMakesMeSmile #ParkPeoples. Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2022. Photos: M. Martinez.



Fig. 10. **Michael with his dog and cats** #ParkPeoples #ParkAnimals; Fig. 11. **(*… a few years later)** On the Southside of the park, Micheal, with his 2 cats. #PhoenixInJuly #ParkPeoples #ParkAnimals. Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2022. Photos: M. Martinez.



Fig. 12. **Just when I think I am complete with this essay, I meet Hans.** This guy. This morning. His name is Hans. The park was fairly quiet today except for the crack of the whip. #TheArtOfWhipCracking #ParkPeoples #WhipMovesFasterThanTheSpeedOfSound. Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2022. Photos: M. Martinez.

Picking up the Kids from School

Teresa Mendes Flores

Picking Up the Kids from School in Tourist-Filled Lisbon

Backpack on your back
A cheeky cap
Transit pass hanging from your neck.
Our hands clasped,
chatting in Portuguese about the day's events.
We come down from Bairro Alto together,
on the Glória lift.
You're the only child among the tourists.
"Oh! So cute! How lovely, coming from school!"
To us, the excited tourists,
crowded in that less-than-glorious lift,
were zoo animals.

But then again,
through their eyes, we're the ones in the cage–
test subjects in a human zoo:
Look! Real, ordinary Portuguese people!
"How nice! So lovely!"



Fig. 1. *Picking up the kids from school.* Lisbon, Portugal, July 2025. Drawing: Teresa Mendes Flores.

Playing Imaginary Games

Jorge de La Barre

I. "The Ends": A Parkour Game

There is a new Parkour game in town: you can either go nowhere, go deaf, or just die–then it's the end.

All you need to do is choose your street end:

1. A street with a sign that says "No Way Out" or "No Exit" (aka Dead End);
2. A very loud street (aka Deaf End);
3. A very busy street with no traffic light and no pedestrian crossing (aka Death End).

Then start the game (preferably at nighttime): walk backwards, back to where you came from–remember? No GPS, please! No AI either, Chat GPT, or whatever. Use your mental maps, memories, and intuition.

Good luck, my friend!

II. Roger!

Now, who were "they," has anyone wondered? Were they deaf, blind, enslaved post-cyborg mutoid selves? And also, did "they" ever come back in the end? We don't know yet. "*We*" don't know yet… What "we" know is, the only mental escape "they" could conceive of was via aphoristic lines of flight: words had power! Such power was otherwise denied by them supposedly smarter, more visually-oriented communities like the ones that fill the city now. Their members often crash against the wall of their flatscreen, thinking they could fly like eagles. Ha ha! Rather, they're like pigeons, exploited by the massive gaming industry that has completely taken over all spheres of imagination and replaced it by stupid digital crystal games where the hero always looks the same and acts kinda dumb. His walkie-talkie always says "Roger!" *"Touché!"* or "Bingo!" So *passé!* (although walkie-talkies are very common in event management, even today).

Playing the Streets of Lapa, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

Chaos and Order, Gomes Freire with Mem de Sá: The Crossroads, is a composition of mine based on an aerial photograph of the Lapa neighborhood, with the crossroads of Gomes Freire and Mem de Sá as the piece's culminating point (Fig. 1).

Before the performance, each participant must incorporate the trait they drew into their performance. There are five traits to be drawn: Seducer, Mysterious, Playful, Lazy, and Sagacious.

Each participant then identifies the path to be taken on the score, marked by lines and symbols in different colors, each representing one of the traits.

This is also a listening exercise that requires concentration and integration: each path is a time marker. The score begins to move as each participant joins in; this must be identified in order to know which section of the music we are in, and which point of the journey we have reached.



Fig. 1. *Chaos and Order, Gomes Freire with Mem de Sá: the Crossroads,* composition by Lucas Fixel. Legend: Seducer (red); Mysterious (purple); Joker (orange); Lazy (brown); Sagacious (cyan). Source: Lucas Fixel.

It is like experiencing a night in the Lapa neighborhood, embodied by a different trait or identity while simultaneously affecting and being affected by the surroundings. The Arches of Lapa remind me of so many people! (Figs. 2-3).




Fig. 2. *Wild Bohemian nightlife in Lapa neighborhood.* The crossroads between Rua do Lavradio and Avenida Mem de Sá, located one block east from Gomes Freire and Mem de Sá. The Arches of Lapa are visible in the back (East side); Fig. 3. *Arches of Lapa (West side).* Source: *Viajo Con Vos.*

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*This text has been translated from Portuguese by Jorge de La Barre.

Playing with Fashion

Crystal Mayanja



Fig. 1. *At a Buyers Studio.* New York City, USA, September 2025. Photo: Crystal Mayanja.

I am a lover of fashion. Always have been since I was a little girl. My family tells me I used to come home from school and change my clothes multiple times! Fashion is in the blood. My dad, maternal grandmother, and great uncle were always sharp and distinctive in their fashion, and this sense of personal style was passed onto me.

Each day I wake up and think about how I want to express myself through my clothing. Do I want to feel dressy or laid-back cool or stand out; these are the questions in my head as I look in my closet. I always want to be different in some way so the small details matter and it could be how I tuck in my button-down shirt or cuff my jeans or the jewelry I accessorize with. It's all intentional and lots of fun.

To get more inspiration, I wander around New York City, eyeing the stores for new and familiar fashion and it never gets old! There is always something new to indulge my senses in from the retail stores to New York Fashion Week, to consignment shops, to museum exhibits. I am in true fashion heaven and wouldn't have it any other way. I was resigned to indulge in fashion through magazines and online before moving here (which I still do), but now I am in the heart of the fashion capital, and I am outside! Always in fashion, of course!

Playing with Toy Soldiers

Ia Ketsbaia

Between Marx and Memory: My Grandfather's Toy Soldier or The Continuum of Soviet Presence in Georgian Reminiscence



Fig. 1. This exemplary Soviet WW II 6 inch toy soldier is black, plastic, and mass-produced around the 1950s-1970s. Played with by my father and uncle in the 1980s, this tiny but mighty soldier is an exemplification of Georgian life and memory; a rift of Georgian reminiscence that contains the presence of the Soviet Union past. The children of Tbilisi, Georgia were often gifted such toy soldiers to play with. They were produced by an American Company, Larus Marx, but were sold internationally, marketed specifically as "Soviet" soldiers. The soldier aims its gun, preparing to shoot. Does it entice within you the feeling of being protected or threatened? This piece also encapsulates the puppeteered Georgian past–the occupation by the Soviet Union–a time where even through toy making and child entertainment the Soviet presence was evident. New York City, USA, October 2025. Photo: Ia Ketsbaia.

Aiming its gun, between a plant and a pen jar on my desk, free-standing, is a 6 inch black WWII Soviet toy soldier (Fig. 1). In the late 1900s, the American company Louis Marx produced and internationally sold sets of these toy soldiers (Amazon). One of these soldiers was bought by my Georgian grandfather in the time of the Soviet Union, and passed down three generations to me.

Where to begin its classification? A toy soldier. The origin of toy soldiers and their creation dates back to very early times. "Toy soldiers have been collected since the time of the Pharaohs. First made from wood, stone, clay and metal for the nobility and the rich, it wasn't until the end of the 18th century that toy figures–or military miniatures–were first mass-produced" (The Toy Soldier Company). Although initially targeted towards high-class individuals, due to shifts to cheaper material choices and painting design the toy soldiers became greatly inexpensive, leading to larger availability for ownership. "During the post-WWII years, the U.S.-based Marx Toy Company… produced inexpensive boxed toy soldier playsets. Sold through retailers and widely distributed… these… unpainted plastic soldiers… became a passion for many boys" (The Toy Soldier Company). And so it did. My grandfather had purchased these exact Marx-produced toy soldiers in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, for my father and uncle.

Recounting their play with their soldiers, my father, Shalva, and his brother (my uncle) Shota Ketsbaia, explain how they "would play battles with them… commenting on strategy, their hits, their moves… 'Karate!' 'Chuck Norris!'… We would make two opposing sides and have them fight each other…Some bad. Some good people. Some would represent თავისუფლება ("freedom")," (Ketsbaia). The toy soldier in its beginning was indeed just a toy that served its purpose: to be played

with. A toy I had no idea existed. But in the summer of 2015, this was about to change. I stood quietly in my grandfather's study. Surrounded by my family relatives, calmly sifting through bags and papers: remnants of my grandfather and his life. He had passed away. Among these piles of history and memory was the toy soldier. My father grabbed it from the storage and exclaimed: "ასეთი ჯარისკაცებით ვთამაშობდით მე და შოთა პატარაობაში" ("Shota and I used to play with soldiers like these when we were little"). My father rotated the toy soldier in his hands with a sense of familiarity. He explained how it reminded him of his "ბავშობა" ("childhood"). This lone black toy soldier out of many others served as a single symbol of the Ketsbaia brothers' childhood. My grandfather had stored it away once his two sons grew older and no longer had interest in such play.

My eight-year old self reached out to this soldier and grasped it. I told my father I would like to keep it. He had suggested that I could bring it back to New York with me. And I did. It became mine. Since then, it fulfills a new purpose, serving as a symbol of reminiscent sentiment. It encapsulates not only a significant figure once in my life, my grandfather, and memories we shared but a time in history, the Soviet Union period, that I never first-handedly experienced.

Upon surface-level observation, the soldier is posed with its gun aimed, in a wide and stationary stance, one eye closed, focusing in on its target. The soldier comes off as protective in defense but once the gun is aimed at you, there is a threatening demeanor that arises. There is a duality to the interpretation of it. Uncovering its factual origins, I recognize my toy soldier to be a by-product of mass production. It was intriguing to find Walter Benjamin's argument on the damaging effects of mass-reproduction on art. In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," he argues that technological reproduction, especially through photography and film, diminishes the "aura," the unique authenticity and value, of art. Although Benjamin discusses the diminishment of art through reproduction, I believe a similar correlation exists between objects and mass production. My toy soldier was a component of mass-production. Realizing there are probably millions more of my exact soldier in the hand of others, every person attaching a different meaning to their different soldier, I grew pensive. Benjamin explains that "to pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction" (Benjamin 5-6). Through the processes of continuous, churning mass-production, art loses its value. The uniqueness of it is extracted.

I, however, challenge this. Looking at my toy soldier, I do accept that there are likely many more of its kind. But I also recognize the specific association I make to my soldier. My soldier represents my grandfather, memories, and history. For another person, this soldier will likely represent something wildly different. Therefore, I think yes, mass production can diminish the uniqueness of an object, if the owner neglects to recognize the individual attachment they have to their own piece; a product from mass-production. Benjamin brings up another point. "We define the aura of the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (Benjamin 5). My object has always been close to me, on the desk that I sit at. The aura of my object is felt, especially because a piece of it, the gun, can aim towards me. There is aura there, the aura of superiority and potential of harm. Its aura is dark and threatening. In relation to Benjamin's quote, it is very true that distance can determine aura. The closer I am to the soldier, the closer I am to the pointing of the gun, the aura and threat increases. The aura of the toy soldier is evident, yet it holds so much more unseen and unsensed meaning.

This toy to the inexperienced and non-analytical eye is basic. But the depth behind the toy, let alone such a small object, is amplified when we consider *Table Top Shakespeare*–a performance project curated by the theatre company Forced Entertainment where a performer uses common household objects such as empty jars and salt-and-pepper shakers on a tabletop to represent the characters and settings of Shakespeare's plays. Thus, the story's value is maintained but the duration

is condensed. The audience is better able to focus by making associations between objects and characters. For example, in the retelling of *King Lear,* the narrator cleverly presented disguise through the singular bottle of wet paint. With a simple turn, the wet paint bottle was no longer Edgar but Tom the Mad. Such playful, swift decision-making relates back to childhood play, imagination, impulsivity, and improvisation. That was when Edgar gained the confidence to speak to his blinded father and save him from killing himself. The father believed it was God's will that he lived, yet in reality it was his disguised son who saved him. This bottle of wet paint was a disguised son, a savior to his blinded father.

This reminded me of how my soldier is no longer a soldier. It now represents my grandfather, memories of Georgia, and the past–things that have nothing to do with the original purpose of the toy. However, unlike *Table Top Shakespeare* which transforms household objects into fictional characters only to tell a story for a certain amount of time, based on a pre-determined text, my toy soldier represents a beloved real person, real reality, and real past, despite the menacing look of the toy itself. And it is not temporary in time but rather forever preserving the memory of the eight long years when I got to know my grandfather, as I would spend half of the year in New York and the other half in Tbilisi, Georgia. In Georgia, I was always with my grandfather and to this day remember the moments we shared. Looking at this soldier, I flash through a bunch of little moments, breakfast on our floral pink dining table cover, learning the alphabet on the balcony, playing on the playground. This object, this toy soldier, encapsulates my nostalgia and treasured past. It does this through active preservation of memory.

The power of nostalgia is mentioned in the taped interview with Eleo Pomare under *The History Makers Digital Archive.* Pomare was a Colombian-American modern dance choreographer, known for his politically-charged productions depicting the Black experience. Watching Pomare's tapes, I realized that when he recalled childhood surroundings, he accessed a powerful feeling of overall nostalgia. Pomare mentioned how the smells, sights, and experiences of childhood "sort of combine and make like one huge medley of sound and smell and sort of nostalgia" (Pomare). This resembles my attachment to the toy soldier. It's interesting to see how although my toy soldier holds this aura of violence and threat, all I really feel when observing is the warmth of the memories and experiences with my grandfather. I feel as if I flash through a bunch of little moments, breakfast on the floral pink dining table cover, learning the alphabet on the balcony, playing on the playground, and more but overall when sifting rapidly through these memories, large overarching themes and feelings emerge, one most definitely being nostalgia, as Pomare mentions. Sifting through these memories, nostalgia and bittersweetness consume me.

The object originates from a time I have never experienced, the Soviet Union, yet it is an existent piece representative of that time and Soviet rule. Such objects capture not only our personal memories, but the original time they come from, essentially creating a preservation of time and life. The concept of toys holding larger functionalities and metaphorical purposes is expanded on by Roland Barthes. In his essay "Toys," he dives into the deep-rooted functions and purposes of toys, how they hold deeper meanings. The life of an adult captured in a minuscule object. The conditioning and preparation for adulthood. Barthes explains that toys are "essentially a microcosm of the adult world [...] reduced copies of human objects, as if in the eyes of the public the child was, all told, nothing but a smaller man" (Barthes 53). Small toys capture adults and adulthood, exposing the child to reality and responsibility from early on. Considering this, my toy soldier may also be an object that represents adulthood. The toy is a soldier, it is protecting itself but posing a threat to its opponent. It is guarded and offensive. This is a possible reflection of adulthood. Children, who come into the world with innocence and curiosity, build up guards and protection from the sometimes harsh and overwhelming world. They do so through play. Playing as a form of

entertainment but also preparation for the battles they must fight in the real world. The best way to do so? With soldiers. Playing with toy soldiers.

Over time, I have to come to the realization that this toy soldier is indeed a microcosm. A microcosm of emotion and past. As I grow older, I feel more deeply my ambivalence towards the Soviet past–a past I never primarily experienced yet one that shaped and molded my family. How could I form my own perceptions of such an influential past having not lived it? A past that I only know of through stories and retellings; my independent and true feelings remain unresolved. The rigid stance and pointed gun, its violent and dark aura embody the hardness of that history. Its presence and protection remind me of the bittersweet, nostalgic, and warm memories with my grandfather. This small toy soldier holds a heavy weight, holding an era defined by control and conflict and the gentle memories with my grandfather who is preserved inside it. The soldier forever preserves the unresolved and the definite.

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Protesting

Yezen Saadah

The Collective Self-Defense of Protesting

Protesting is an everyday aspect of New York City that defines its character and subsequently its residents. Whether you stroll through Washington Square Park through the week or visit Times Square over the weekend, you will be confronted with a bevy of social demonstrations that, quite obviously, reflect the various needs and wants of the city's diverse population. These cries for action range from demonstrations against the Trump administration to union strikes/petitions and, more recently, to student-led encampments in protest of the U.S.-backed Israeli siege on Gaza–the latter of which have led to mass arrests of hundreds of students and faculty on college campuses across the country. Despite the intense variety among protests and demonstrations, the action of protesting has clearly proved to be a defining attribute of the city we live in. Demonstrators gather in a public location, start protesting with signs and megaphones, attract the attention of bystanders, and emphasize their cries for action again and again until they eventually finish and go their separate ways. Here, we see a finite beginning, middle, and end in this action. Their hopes, of course, would be for a sort of long-term resolution of any given issue they are addressing, particularly directed to some kind of higher authority/supervision. There are elements of dissent found in everyday performance by the general public, such as general opposition to governmental action–or inaction –and conflicting opinions among the population.

It is rather difficult to pinpoint a specific date that encapsulates how and where protesting started. However, early examples actually emerged from the West. The Protestant Reformation is a good example. As a movement that spread across Europe in the 1500s, the Protestant Reformation was a religious reform movement that aimed to expose the Catholic Church's hypocrisy at the time and formed a new branch of Christianity known as Protestantism (National Geographic Society). Seeing as though this movement emerged during the Enlightenment, I would argue that protests are the result of humanity's (specifically Western folk's) self-determination. This was during a time in which freedom of mind, speech, and religion were at their infantile stages. Furthermore, in the quasi-democratic world we live in today, protests and freedom of speech, in general, have exploded in terms of overall popularity and relevance. Even during a pandemic, the entire country united together in protest for social justice and true democracy. Protesting started as and continues to act as a truly singular form of human liberty and expression.

Essentially, anyone can participate in a protest. Depending on the context and subject matter, protests are generally open–and, in fact, encouraging–to having the most amount of people participating. Specifically, those who participate in protests have a point, a message, or an argument to demonstrate/convey. Its audience is usually the perpetrators of the protests themselves. For example, if a group of protesters is protesting against a McDonald's for whatever reason (perhaps by means of a worker's strike), the audience is McDonald's, the higher-ups, as well as the bevy of passersby who are inevitably going to be attracted to the protest. Additionally, a protest's audience can be individuals who don't necessarily know too much about the protest itself or the reasoning behind it, that way the demonstration can get more recognition (which is typically the goal of a protest). In this context, protests often disrupt city life–and, most recently, university operations–in order to gain attention. Protesting is known for being powerful, effective, and unrelenting. Protests usually happen in the morning and afternoon in order to gain attraction over time. However, some protests tend to last until the evening, or even through the night. Protesters would usually carry signs with slogans or messages written on them in all-capital letters. Depending on the demonstration,

people would also throw their fists in the air in defiance of the group/company/country they are protesting. Typically, protests take place in public spaces such as parks or plazas. Additionally, some protests are in the form of a march and would move from one place to another.

In most cases, the people who are excluded from protests are those who are being protested. This, most obviously, is due to the fact that it would go against the main purpose of the protest and cause complications within the demonstration. While covering an an protest against the Iranian government on a Saturday in Times Square for NYU's independent student newspaper the Washington Square News, one of the demonstrators I interviewed told me that "Through protesting, we've been able to build a really beautiful community of people who share similar stories and a genuine love for preserving their culture" (Naderi). This shows that protest is not only an act of defiance but also a collective act of togetherness. Conflicts that ensued were an individual nearly getting in trouble with the police for drawing graffiti on the street. In general, protest purposefully disrupts everyday, average activities among the city folk and calls for unrelenting attention.

Protesting, while an act of defiance, does not always end in a resolution. Protesting has a reputation for causing social distress. In some instances, protests erupt into violent clashes between demonstrators and police officials. This creates two very striking circumstances: one being that the protest was effective in gaining public attention and two being the fact that the protest ignited a type of violence that some would consider counterproductive. This is especially the case when looking at pro-Palestinian demonstrations on college campuses in the last year, many of which have led to university-authorized sweeps and the arrests of student and faculty protesters. The concept of protest is objecting to–expressing disapproval of–a particular action, political policy, or distinct acts of perceived injustice that may stir arguments among those who will inevitably disagree, especially the ruling elites.

There are other daily activities that focus heavily on argumentative discussion and public discourse–most notably, debating. Debating, in a sense, is similar to protesting in that both aim to convey an argument, a message, or some sort of persuasive mode of expression. Whereas debating is formal, argumentative, and conversational, protesting is more extravagant and unpredictable, only having a point to make and not the inclination of necessarily conversing or negotiating with anyone. I do believe that there are more parallels between the two actions, primarily regarding the importance of body language for persuasion in both. With regard to debating, debaters typically use their hands to try and convince an audience of a certain argument/point. Protesters, by the same token, use their hands to lift signs, throw their fists in the air, and convey a more powerful message as opposed to an opinionated argument.

Protesting can often take the form of scheduled, timed, and a pre-planned act of marching. There's a distinct difference between the two actions as one is spontaneous and unpredictable whereas the other is organized and has a clear goal. For example, if a protest was taking place in Washington Square Park, that action is much more random and unfocused as opposed to a march, which has a finite beginning, middle, and end that was already planned in advance. In many ways, this enriches my understanding of protesting as it can take on many different forms. It's not necessarily a performance that is conformed to one singular action of standing with an audience and chanting the same thing over and over again.

Protesting is quite akin to street preaching; although, there are also clear differences between the two. In similarities, both require the utmost attention of their observers/audiences. It is in gaining recognition that both acts thrive effectively and impactfully. This can be seen in the mechanics utilized in both actions. In the essay, "Street-Preachers: Solicitors of Free Thought in New York City," Melanie Sovern describes how street-preachers "may carry signs, sandwich boards, megaphones, microphones, or pamphlets. They may stand on chairs or wave banners to attract attention" (Sovern). Despite this incredibly strong similarity, there are blatant differences between

these two actions most notably in their intentions. Whereas protesting is more often than in service of a just cause or some sort of reformation for the greater good, street preaching is certainly more immoral and apathetic to its audiences.

While both aim to attract attention, street preaching does so in order to reinforce a presumed agenda that occasionally has no legitimate or authentic purpose, which, to be fair, can also be a characterization of protesting. Protesting, as opposed to preaching or arguing, is more or less morally contingent. The most effective protests are those that are for a just cause, such as the Black Lives Matter Movement, pro-Palestinian protests, or union strikes just to name a few. Preaching holds people hostage, forcing a reaction out of them whereas protesting is more observational and oftentimes enlightening.

One of the primary objectives of protesting as an activity is to alter society in some form or another–to make some sort of difference. In "Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space," writer Brent Staples describes his upbringing as a Black man in Chicago and the discrimination and fear directed towards him: "My first victim was a woman–white, well dressed, probably in her early twenties… It was in the echo of that terrified woman's footfalls that I first began to know the unwieldy inheritance I'd come into–the ability to alter public space in ugly ways" (Staples 261). Staples had taken this experience as a means of making himself appear "less threatening." This conscious choice by Staples parallels the intimidating nature of protesting and, by extension, its initial appearance towards the judgemental. Fear is a crucial aspect in both protesting as an action as well as Staples' individual story.

I've attended a lot of protests over the years, both for my personal activism as well as my news coverage for the *Washington Square News,* especially recently. Protesting is quite exhilarating. I've personally attended many pro-Palestinian protests in Houston, Texas, which are filled with a great sense of passion and energy. Protesting is being a part of something–it is very much a collective effort. But observing protests is radically different. I've covered plenty of pro-Palestinian and anti-government protests over the last few years, and I've always actively separated myself from actually participating in those protests. In these situations, I've been faced with unsettling looks and people urging me to participate despite that not being my intention. This, essentially, elevates protesting's purposefully apathetic nature.

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Q

Queuing

Neven Armanios

Rain or shine, New Yorkers stand in line–for inspiration, information, entertainment, nourishment, transportation, sight-seeing. It is our biggest contradiction living here: we never have time for anything, but we still find time to queue.



Fig. 1. *Queuing.* Digital collage, mixed media. Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2025. Artwork: Neven Armanios.

Quieting the Fear

Jo Novelli-Blasko

… of Driving off the Overpass

Quieting the fear of driving off the overpass is an urban habit of mine. It happens when I'm driving in cities with soaring on and off ramps, high bridges, and elevated freeways that take a turn. Most recently, this habit happens when I drive south on the 51 and merge onto the 202 in Phoenix. The overpass of my urban habit is a soaring single lane of pavement, slung above a knot of freeway intersections collectively known as the "MiniStack." The MiniStack is in the center of the city where three freeways intersect. Technically, one freeway ends (Route 51), another begins (Route 202), and the third cuts straight through, from Tucson to Los Angeles.

If I am a passenger in a car on the overpass, I have no problem. Phoenix is primarily a one-story town, and I like getting high above the grid. My phobia is not of the overpass, per se. I do not fear it might collapse, for instance, nor fear my car might be blown off the road. I'm not afraid of being struck by lightning while on an overpass, even during Monsoon season. I am afraid of being swallowed by a haboob, but this is not specific to being on the overpass.

I've concluded I'm not a gephyrophobiac: I'm not afraid of bridges.

I'm afraid of myself and what I might be capable of doing.

Quieting the fear of driving off the overpass has a script and some breathing exercises. One half mile from the terminus of Route 51, I take a couple measured breaths. In, two, three, four; hold two, three, four; out two three four; hold two, three, four… Upon approach to the overpass. I give myself a little pep talk, outloud: "You haven't driven off an overpass or bridge in all your years of city driving, now is not the time to start." As the road cleaves off to the left, and away from the overpass going west, I recognize there's no turning back, no going to LA. "Take in the view, just relax, it's almost over." Breathe in two, three, four…

R

Reading in Public

Jo Novelli-Blasko and Blagovesta Momchedjikova



Fig. 1. *A Study for a Bookish Habit painting.* Pittsburgh, PA, USA, 2020. Watercolor Painting: Jo Novelli-Blasko.

someone texts on a whim
a dog barks persistently
a neighbor blasts music
the smell of pancakes creeps in
i grab a snack
so many distractions when i sit to read a book at home in private
but in the park or library or on the train there are many many more distractions people talking laughing coughing cars beeping a child crying another yelling the smell of cigarette smoke roasted peanuts garbage dust all around too many distractions to even list and no control over any of them
in public, my plan to read a book appears doomed
and yet
instead
i sit quiet amidst the chaos and chatter until all distractions cancel each other out and when they do
i open my book and begin to read and read and read

Reading Park Signs

Moussa Toni Cisse

This was a series of photographs taken on an iphone 12 max in color, later edited to Noir.

The series focused on the habit of trying to read and understand the different signs in Prospect Park coming from Park Slope to Prospect Lefferts Gardens, in Brooklyn, New York, one Spring afternoon in 2024 (Fig. 1-9).

Once you start paying attention to the signs, you get in the habit of always paying attention to them. But otherwise, we are in the habit of ignoring the signs in the park because we don't think that they are essential for our enjoyment of the park.

Here I also look at the position of each sign, and of its immediate context.

I hope that the park signs, though singled out in photographs, help create a context for each other, when grouped together, as images in a photo essay.

The captions explain what I found particularly intriguing in each image. They also help me remember what I really saw that day and how I chose to best represent it in an image. The captions show my artistic process while trying to make sense of the park signs–while photographing them, while looking at the photographs later at home, and while choosing which photographs to use for this essay.



Fig. 1. *The Lost Biker!* I centered the pole and the directions in the middle of the photograph so that the person and their bike were on one half of the picture. The tree branches cover him except for his bike, which was white, and made his location pop out. The thought of him taking a seat with his bike due to not having directions and them being right in front of him is very ironic to me. I also like how the pole and its directions form a cross but also the trees form a strong background; Fig. 2. *"We're Done."* There is a lot I like about this photograph: how the designers of this sign made it to signify that people are walking both ways; how it looks like they are leaving each other but their hands are still reaching out trying to connect; how my shadow played a role as if I was filming this whole encounter; Fig. 3. *Something is hidden!* At first glance, there isn't much going on in this photograph. Just bushes and their leaves. But when taking a closer look, one can see that there is a fire hydrant sticking out and hidden behind everything. When coming closer to it, I saw that it was all rusty and used up. I wonder if the little dirt beside the greens was the main road, thus there being a need for a fire hydrant? Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York City, USA, Spring 2024. Photos: Moussa Toni Cisse.



Fig. 4. *Keep… ?* This is a sign that is right beside the bikers side of the road inside of Prospect Park. I really like how the trees are hiding part of it and how the shadows of those trees are seen on the road. I wonder if bikers see this hidden sign; Fig. 5. *Combination.* I like the combination of different signs on one pole. I wonder which sign a person reads first or does each sign simultaneously enter their head. I also like how the trees create a solid background for the center of this photograph as well as the different types and shapes of each leaf; Fig. 6. *Runner.* I like how the sign is centered and the person running is on one of its sides representing depth. I also like how the background makes you think about whether that's water or just dirt and grass. In the sign itself the word "horse" and how dirty the sign looks gives off some throwback vibes to when horses and carriages were the main type of transportation. I wonder who this sign is for, as it appears it is for those it is facing away from (those behind it). Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York City, USA, Spring 2024. Photos: Moussa Toni Cisse.



Fig. 7. *Where?* I find it very funny that this light pole is facing in a direction where there is no path. I wonder if there used to be a path that was unfortunately lost to history; Fig. 8. *Two sides, different stories.* I like how the sign is placed in the middle of two paths that are forked away from each other. On the left side, it is just dirt and grass; on the right side, there is pavement and newly painted signs. What's also interesting is the fact that behind the sign there is an enclosed area and on the "less maintained" left side there is a fence to keep people out while on the "nicer" right side there is just a string that keeps people out. So do less civilized and more dangerous people walk on the left side of the road?; Fig. 9. *Defiled.* This crossing light is defiled. I like it because it expresses and gives the viewer a taste of New York City and its rawness. I also like how the shadows of the light and the tree are being reflected on the ground. Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York City, USA, Spring 2024. Photos: Moussa Toni Cisse.

Rehearsing

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

Tree and Dancers

– For Babacar Top and his Alvin Ailey dancers

Trapped
in the dark
shared back alley
among several
houses on west
55th street
amidst
barrels and
bins and discarded
materials–
a tree–
taller than
the buildings
surrounding it
and so much
thinner and
greener
stretching its
long, boney
branches onto
fire escapes
window panes
curtains and clouds
and winds,
curiously
and consistently
reaching for
more air, more
sunlight,
more New York
City gossip
inside every
window it
can peek
into…
… but mostly
the wall-sized
windows of
dance studio
2B

The tree
outside sees
what the
dancers inside
feel–
their extended arms
contorted bodies
splits acrobatics
pulsations
ancient rhythms
heavy breaths
small steps
leaps movements
from somewhere
far or from
around here
their sweat
frustration hurt
uncertainty
tears smiles
joy…

… fourteen
tireless
dancers… and
then one…
leader? master?
mentor?
with the patience
of spirit and
the wisdom of
movement
he adjusts
inspires pushes
awaits encourages
them all bringing
a calm sweetness
and grace
over everyone
Is this his space?
Are they his guests?

Or is he theirs?
They all
come here
to play
try things out
discover make
mistakes be strong
be weak be quiet be loud
doubt trust
cry sing think
laugh
in pairs,
alone,
but mostly
together
for two hours
a day three times
a week… everytime
it is
different…

The dancers
inside
see what the tree
outside feels–
the urban pressure
of just wanting to be
your own being
among so many others
the tight space it has
learned to call home
and grow into,
the little light
the little sky
the impossibility
to move freely
or ever the way
they can
the realization that
this one space is
all that you will ever
have and you have to
make the best of
it, every single day
the ability to present
yourself as strong
even if you might be
sad or lonely inside
the loneliness of
it all
and the cold and the rain
and the snow and the heat
the perseverance
the emerald joy of
being alive against
all odds
of being the shade for
others if only for a
few months a year
of being majestic
even if trapped

Can dancers and tree
ever meet?
Touch?
They do
all the time.
Not in the big windows
that divide their two worlds
but in the dance floor
mirrors where their
reflections are always together
There, the dancers
like birds fly in
different directions and
the tree branches
try to chase them
and tease them and catch them
and hold them…
… These unlikely companions
teach each other
life lessons: the dancers teach
the tree how to move
the tree teaches
the dancers how to stay

The reason
dancers and
tree work
so well together?
They both aim
for the light.
Always.

Fall 2023
New York City

Resisting Sleep

Jorge de La Barre

Unresting

Birthday party
Fun, shout!
Stay out all night
Stay out late
Sleep late
Sleepy state
Sleep estate
Real estate
There is an app
A sleeping app
Sleeping pills
Insomniacs
Maniacs
Cardiacs
The book of disquiet
The book of no sleep
Sleepless night
Asleep at the wheel
Unrest
Social unrest
War
Zone
Warzone
War sons
Sons of war
Warhead
Charge
Head charge
Head on
Right on
Raw power
Discharge
Mental charge
Exhaustion
Brain surgeon
Uptight
Full on
Breathe in
Breathe out
Within
Without
Be beat

Beat out
(The Beatles): *"Helter Skelter!"*
(The Ramones): *"I'm a teenage lobotomy!"*
(The Beatles again): *"You better slow down, baby, now you're moving way too fast!"*
(The Ramones again): *"Beat on the brat with a baseball bat, oh yeah!"*
Hey, hey, my, my…
*"If it feels good, don't do it."**
*"Silence is golden."**

*In Memoriam: Richard Foreman (1937-2025)

Resting on a Park Bench

Cooper Rice

The Privilege of Rest: Who Gets to Sit

There are over 1,700 parks in New York City. Central Park, Bryant Park, Washington Square Park, and others provide a pause for the city's residents, giving space away from the concrete jungle and convincing one, at least for a second, that the overhanging greenery may absorb them. Walking through these parks, one of the most common sights is someone sitting on a bench. This person may be reading a book, scrolling through their phone, or aggressively breaking up with the person beside them. Still, these acts allow the individual to rest comfortably and luxuriously on a park bench, but despite the mundanity of this act, the aspect of relaxation is often overlooked. With an increasing population and the continued evolution of city planning, architecture, and the human psyche, being able to relax on a park bench has become an uncertain and privileged activity.

Due to New York City's nature and magnitude, parks have been vital to the city since their first arrival. According to the website *NYC Parks*, "the earliest parks date to the Dutch and Colonial era" (NYC Parks), but due to advancements in infrastructure and the rapid growth of the population, the focus on maintaining parks grew. "In 1856," according to *NYC Parks*, "a new era of park planning emerged when the Board of Commissioners of Central Park was established," which led to the creation of one of the most iconic parks in the United States, Central Park (NYC Parks). This vast, 843-acre-filled land allows NYC residents and tourists alike a chance to take a breath from their long day and leisure in the park.

The wooden bench is a staple in city architecture. Sitting on a wooden bench in the park is distinctly different from sitting on mildewy grass, a rugged concrete platform, the stone edge of a fountain, or the thick chain of a fenced-off area. The wooden bench is welcoming, familiar, and reliable, whereas sitting elsewhere in the park may slowly create a feeling of discomfort. Sitting on the grass may leave one's clothes with a vague green stain, and sitting on a structure made from stone may leave one uncomfortable from its firmness. Choosing to sit on a bench in a park, place a bag or two to rest a sore shoulder, and start a new novel is an act of self-pleasure, an act meant to give the body its signal to lay off and take a breath, especially considering the surroundings of New York City.

The atmosphere surrounding the person sitting on the wooden bench plays a considerable role, as where one decides to sit can drastically change the experience for the person. For example, choosing to sit on a wooden bench in a subway station affects the level of leisure one feels. There is a reason why most New Yorkers would choose to stand eagerly by the train tracks rather than sitting on the bench: subway stations are not a welcoming place. The benches often have suspicious stains or substances smothered on them, and the heat in the station heightens the nauseating smells from the abundance of litter, creating a space that leaves comfort and relaxation as utterly absent feelings. In these stations, though, lies another perplexing sight: the armrests oddly placed tightly upon the benches, which serve a political, underlying purpose.

In recent years, the "Hostile Architecture" style has taken over New York City and its public spaces. As Jonathan Lee said in his *New York Times* article "The Park Bench Is an Endangered Species," "If a park bench is not being removed, the backup plan is often to make it uncomfortable" (Lee 1). This change in architecture comes from the rapidly increasing number of homeless individuals around the city, and to combat this, operators of public spaces have decided to take precautionary measures to keep these people out. In the context of the mass privatization of public spaces, Lee, in "The Park Bench Is an Endangered Species," says, "The removal of public seating

over the past three decades has become the chief alternative to meaningful public policy around homelessness. We do not want to look upon the less fortunate; they are bad for business" (Lee 1). Public spaces, such as parks, are no longer being built with social behavior in mind; concrete barriers with difficult-to-notice spikes on top of them, benches without backs or with unnecessary and bulky armrests in the middle, and all of this is to deter people from lingering too long in a public space. Public locations are becoming increasingly unwelcome for the public, and being able to sit on a park bench comfortably is suddenly becoming a privilege.

One of the many ways the ordinary citizen is kept out of open spaces is through the privatization of once-public parts of the city. In Stephanie Farqhuar's essay "Memoirs of the City's Unfamous," Farqhuar recounts her experience with Gramercy Park in New York City, which was notably the last standing private park in the city at the time of the essay creation. After exploring the park further, Farqhuar notes, "With daylight and another trip to the park, I found that this park is indeed a haven, but only for a select elite. It is the last private park in the city. Proudly so, judging from the multiple plaques on the iron gates which no longer seemed decorative but spiteful" (Farqhuar 1). In this exclusive park, sitting on a bench is a right that has been stripped away from those who don't have a key, making the simple act a sudden luxury only for those whom the park decides can sit. Those who are allowed to sit are defined through a hierarchy, where those who are wealthy and privileged enough can restrict this open space to themselves, exterminating the lower class from intruding in their elitist park. Expressing her frustration, Farqhuar states, "But in a city whose daily mythic character is created from the interaction of all people from all social classes sharing the same small space, Gramercy Park is a definite slap in the face" (Farqhuar 3). This private park eliminates one of the key charms of the city, which is the tight-knit, bustling community one by one, which is especially highlighted in the city's parks. Sitting on a bench in Washington Square Park does not limit one to oneself and one's actions, as there is an entire sea of skateboarders, interviewers, musicians, and entrepreneurs around, allowing for explosive, unpredictable interactions. The privatization of Gramercy Park removes the livelihood of sitting in the park, as the once ever-changing sea has become a picked-over pond, where the same two or three fish patrol the area, scanning for those who do not belong.

The nature of parks in New York City, mainly their liveliness and ability to bring a community together, is a key part of their charm. Often, all kinds of scheduled events, such as concerts, community get-togethers, and competitions, occur, bringing those unfamiliar with each other into sudden contact. These activities shift what sitting on a bench could be. It does not have just to be a self-pleasing activity; it may be an act people take in anticipation of an event. Particularly in recent times, with the rise of park competitions, which began in Washington Square Park with the Timothee Chalamet look-a-like contest, many citizens sit in the park, patiently waiting for one of these events to start so that they can join a chorus of people like themself.

What can occur in a New York City park compared to other parts of the country largely defines its cultural significance. Sophie DiBella, a freshman at New York University, sits in the park frequently in her free time. When asked whether or not she did the same in her hometown in Charlotte, North Carolina, DiBella said, "There are no parks in my hometown I would go to…The parks where I am are not convenient. Washington Square Park is close, so it is convenient" (DiBella). Due to the nature of New York City's structure, which is famed for its walkability and tightness of space, walking to the park is often a convenience, with Washington Square Park only being five minutes away from Sophie DiBella's residence. When asked what she likes to do while she relaxes at the park, DiBella states, "I usually am calling, eating, or people-watching." When asked how she feels about the people around her, she said, "I would prefer not to have someone sit next to me. Their appearance does not matter; I just do not want anyone near me" (DiBella). Many feel similar to DiBella in the aspect of preferring to have their experience of sitting on a bench an individual one,

not shared. Still, for several citizens, their physical appearance defines the preference of who they want to be near.

In his essay "Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space," Brent Staples shares his experience as a black man walking through the cities of Chicago and New York and the harmful assumptions created by the white folk around him. Staples, at twenty-two, first experienced this when a white woman noticed his presence on the street and began to pick up her pace, steadily reaching a slight run until she vanished from sight. Staples recalls, "It was in the echo of that terrified woman's footfalls that I first began to know the unwieldy inheritance I'd come into–the ability to alter public space in ugly ways" (Staples 261). The mere existence of some can shift the energy of a public area, particularly in public parks. Walking through Washington Square Park, definite areas can be observed, with several areas filled with college students, young adults, and affluent citizens enjoying a drink or bagel.

In contrast, unhoused individuals can be seen on the outskirts, leisuring on the benches. There is an implicit thought in many heads of those walking through the park of which areas seem safe based on whether the person appears visually safe, which often really means whether or not a person seems to be living in poverty. Discriminatory biases of all sorts can manifest through this freedom of choice, creating a hierarchy of who is safer and who is not to be around. Even in public spaces, sitting on a bench can create a social hierarchy of privilege.

Simple, mundane acts such as sitting on a bench in the park have a hidden power in what can manifest through them. Human-made conditions such as socio-economic status, privilege, and discrimination can shine through sitting in the park through the freedom, and sometimes lack thereof, of choice.

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Riding the Elevator

Lee Bowser

Elevated State: The Peculiar Politics of the Urban Elevator Ride

I live on the 16th floor of my building, high above the bustle of the city streets. Unless I intend to engage in a strenuous cardiovascular workout every single time I forget my glasses in my room, I will likely be a frequent user of the elevator; a strange metal box that shuttles patrons from floor to floor and goes where no daring stair climber has gone before.

Riding the elevator is an inevitability in New York City, a metal goliath that builds up rather than out. Where buildings regularly touch the clouds and floor numbers creep into the triple digits, the elevator becomes a standard feature of the architecture. In fact, the history of this city is directly intertwined with these machines. While the first elevator technically came to be around 236 B.C. in Greece, the first passenger elevator was installed in 1857 in a five story New York City department store (Schumm). From there, elevators enabled architects to reach for the skies, literally. Structures were no longer confined to the limits of the human body, allowing people to live and work hundreds of feet above the ground. This could be accredited as one of the main reasons such a small island became the densely populated global hub it is today. Selfishly, I thank elevators for building the iconic skyline.

In any case, elevators are an irrefutable pillar of urban culture, their use often going unnoticed despite their key role in the construction and daily operations of a city. Nevertheless, many frequenters of this mode of transportation will insist that this metal box is a sadistic iron contraption of social discomfort. For one, you are forced into a tight space suspended by cables with no elective means of getting out; once you are in, you're bound to the door's choice to open again.

At this point, one may simply run to the comfort of the stairs, whose analog nature diminishes the fear of getting trapped in this claustraphobic torture chamber due to a mechanical failure. The stairs also promise a distinct lack of forced interaction. Yes, you may pass others on your way up, but you are not in any way compelled to sit with their presence in the way you might in an elevator. Elevator rides, unlike the stairs, can be uncomfortably full, a suffocating experience of trying your hardest not to accidentally brush the arm of another person, thus acknowledging your mutual existence in this liminal purgatory. So it becomes a give and take of risk and reward; alleviation of a strenuous walk up several flights in exchange for a pressure cooker of tension, a forced sequence of bodily hyperawareness.

Lee Gray, associate dean at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, dubbed "The Elevator Guy," observes this frenetic series of evasive movements in an NPR interview: "if you're the only one in the elevator, you sort of stand in the center. And if someone else comes in then you move to a corner, or give yourself an appropriate social distance" (Gray). This "dance," as Gray calls it, continues as more people get on, until all four corners are occupied, then a fifth person has to stand in the middle, and when a sixth person gets on, it starts feeling quite crowded (Gray). This dance is not choreographed, yet we all know it intrinsically. It is the dance of avoidance. We propel ourselves away from one another like magnets at the same pole. It forces me to wonder why we are so afraid of proximity. Humans are, by nature, social creatures. There is a biting incongruence to these interactions. I'm almost angry that I am afraid to connect, afraid to reach out in the way that I wish others would to me. We all want to relate to one another, yet we fear so greatly that we may make others uncomfortable that we stunt ourselves.

This discomfort is rather shocking when one considers that New Yorkers are no strangers to crowded spaces; just take your average subway ride. This shuffle is all too familiar to city dwellers

frequenting the A train. We're used to seeing all sorts of strange characters in public spaces and not batting an eye. So what is it about the elevator ride that makes us so self conscious? Elevator riders have the same luxury of being virtual strangers. However, you would never find a busker or a panhandler on an elevator ride. Perhaps the differing levels of social freedom are born in the sheer amount of people present, not the public nature of the space. Crowds seem to paradoxically provide the luxury of anonymity; the fewer people present, the more you are seen. This is why the subway ride may draw out the more wild side of humanity while the elevator ride is stiff and silent.

This disconnect is at its most apparent when these short sharings of space become an unsettlingly vacant one-on-one; we all know the suffocating nature of the silent face off of two elevator patrons as they labor to avoid an unplanned silent conference on their journey to ground level. As Blagovesta Momchedjikova illustrates in her essay, "Standing, Walking, Dancing Tall," "when two strangers meet in the city street at night, who are they to one another? A first impression to a first impression; a stereotype to a stereotype," (Momchedjikova). An elevator ride presents no opportunity to get to know someone. The duration is simultaneously far too short and far too long. All we are left with of our fellow passenger is a first impression; an impression of silence and withdrawal. But, more than this, we are left with this impression of ourselves. The elevator ride is an experience of excruciating self awareness where our own self consciousness becomes a barrier.

Picture this: you just need to get from the 24th floor to the lobby to exit your building. You hail the elevator and embark down. On your intendedly painless journey, the elevator makes a pit stop on the 21st floor to pick up yet another traveler. As they enter the car, suddenly you are hyper aware of every aspect of your existence. Even your breathing begins to sound extremely loud. God, what a grating presence you are, what a nuisance, to this person just trying to leave. In an instant, a 30 second journey feels like a millennium. So what do you do to calm these racing thoughts of self awareness? You pull out your phone and open Instagram. You don't look at the pictures or read the captions; you're just doing your best to look busy, like you have some *important emails* to attend to. The bell finally dings, indicating you have reached the lobby. You take a breath of air once you quickly exit the metal box–comfortable, interaction-less air that allows you to once again become invisible.

But the question lingers: what was so terrifying, so anxiety-inducing about your lift companion? Why is riding the elevator such an uncomfortable experience? And, most importantly, why couldn't we just say "hi" and break the tension? One psychologist suggests that perhaps it is the absence of a socially agreed upon "script" for these encounters (Jarrett). Nobody walks into an elevator intending to engage with another passenger. It is simply a means from Point A to Point B. Still, the presence of another body tenses our interactive muscles. Yet, we believe that it would be an interruption of sorts for the other weary traveler, were we to actually release this tension and initiate conversation.

Despite all of this, pop culture tells us that elevators are the prime locations of luck; consider the idea of the "elevator pitch" that helps an intern strike it big with a higher up that he couldn't dream of scoring a meeting with, or that fateful first connection of future lovers, brought together in an elevator car in your favorite rom-com. Yes, it seems that elevators have one hidden power: their ability to bring together two unlikely parties and place them in close quarters.

Consider it this way: a busker on the street has to work tirelessly for public attention, it is a conscious choice to walk past the musician and go about your day or to stop and listen. In this one-sided interaction, the passerby remains the commander of their focus. In an elevator, though, you are promised one absolute; any attempt made to communicate with the party sharing this space will undoubtedly be noticed, no talent required. The elevator ride grants a unique podium of undivided attention that is open to anyone within its cloistered walls, which can be a means to great unexpected interactions… and painfully awkward ones. The opportunity that elevators provide,

however, is only available to those daring enough to break the standing social conduct that we have created surrounding them; the expectation is to retreat within oneself.

It is in this fashion that what we do in elevators has become somewhat of an unconventional indicator, frequently reminding us of our society's declining ability to interact. The internet does a great job of making us *feel* connected, but the only way to put our social skills to the test is via the public arena. Of course, when these skills inevitably fail to make themselves available, we run straight to our portable pacifiers: the mobile phone. Not only are people who fail to retreat into their devices seen as the outlier, but one who dares to strike up a conversation is an absolute freak of nature. When talking to a group of friends about the content of this essay, I learned that I have a friend that takes pride in the fact that he says "hi" to everyone he shares an elevator ride with–everyone in the room gawked like he had a second head when he made this exclamation. The concept of initiating interaction has become so foreign to us and is highlighted by the nonelective proximity the elevator has the unique ability to create.

Of course, all of this is turned on its head when one makes an excursion out of the elevator trip. The Empire State Building, a mecca of sorts for the average New York Tourist, even houses one such experience: "a new elevator experience for visitors to the Empire State Building (ESB). One-of-a-kind mini-shows with sound, created by design studio Imaginary Forces, will play on the ceiling of the elevator cars both on the ascent to and descent from the world-famous 86th Floor Observatory," (Empire State Building Soars to New Heights). Somehow, advertisement and showmanship transform one of the most grueling necessities of the city into an attraction. It's genius. It's sick and twisted. Most importantly, however, it completely distracts the passengers from the awkward display of self that takes place in an elevator car; they are no longer the show, but the audience. The confrontation becomes camaraderie.

This reframing not only makes riding the elevator an exciting experience, but a monetizable one. A key feature of the elevator is that it is free of charge… technically. Yet their placement suggests a level of access and, therefore, status. Frequent elevator users include apartment dwellers and office workers. The common thread here is an implication of some form of income. You would not expect a homeless presence in an elevator car as you would in a subway station, despite the $2.90 fare. In reality, the price of taking the elevator is often hundreds if not thousands of dollars, it's just not directly attached to the ride itself. "Memoirs of the City's Unfamous" by Stephanie Farqhuar describes New York as a "city whose daily mythic character is created from the interaction of all people from all social classes sharing the same small space," yet we must bring our attention to the places in which the most simple hints of class divide fly under the radar. This sentiment is echoed in the author's lamentations about Gramercy Park: "We know that it cannot be ours and that cannot be changed," (Farqhuar). In the case of Gramercy, a park, which has always been a generally public and universal space, is under literal lock and key, bolted shut from public use. The elitism and classism the park embodies is overtly shoved in the faces of passersby. But it is for this very same assumption of free use that elevator use presents a far more sinister form of class warfare; they masquerade as public spaces. In reality, however, the metal doors are only open to those that have been granted a reason to ascend.

Elevators and the act of riding them fascinates me in many regards; I am delighted by the idea that a metal box on cables carries a crowded car of social implications and expectations tightly packed within its walls. The experience is a contradiction of anxiety and convenience that never seems to let you off on the right floor. And yet, it is impossible to imagine a city without this task. Elevators built the culture of New York City just as much as New York City built the culture of the elevator ride. Going up?

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Rollerblading

Sanaa Fayne

Beyond Boundaries: The Movement of Opportunity in Urban Life

Before moving to New York City, I had never truly appreciated the sheer variety of transportation options available. Here, the possibilities seem endless. Want to walk? You can. Prefer to drive? That's an option too. Need a ride? There's Uber. Or you can hop on the train, take the bus, bike, skateboard, scooter, or even skate. In a city so vast and alive with opportunity, mobility isn't limited by economic, physical, or racial barriers. The ways to get around are as diverse as the people who call this place home. Back in my hometown, my routines were simple–driving was the norm. Sidewalks were scarce, and the thought of taking a walk or hopping on a hoverboard as a primary mode of transportation never even crossed my mind. But New York is a different world. Here, the rhythmic clatter of the subway trains beneath the streets, the steady hum of bicycles weaving through traffic, and the sudden burst of jaywalkers from crowded sidewalks onto crowded streets, create a symphony of movement. What struck me most was how fearlessness seemed ingrained in the locals. While I'd be hesitant, even scared, to bike through the chaos of the city, long time New Yorkers navigate it with ease that speaks to their familiarity with the rhythm of urban life. It's as though the city itself encourages a confidence in motion, a dynamic blend of practicality, creativity, and personality–all in constant, vibrant motion. And here comes, effortlessly gliding in, the rollerblader.

Rollerblading is a dynamic and expressive activity, often regarded as both a sport and an art form, blending functionality with a sleek, modern aesthetic. Inline skates, named for their distinctive four wheel configuration aligned in a straight row, are the quintessential tool for this activity. These skates feature boot-like structures that rise above the ankle, providing essential support and stability while maintaining a snug, sock-like fit for comfort and control. When you strap them on, you propel yourself forward with a rhythmic, gliding motion that demands balance, coordination, and finesse. Enthusiasts are often seen in athletic wear, such as leggings, shorts, or breathable tops, allowing for a full range of motion and a stylish yet practical look. Whether zipping through city streets, carving turns at a skatepark, or cruising along scenic paths, rollerblading combines fitness, fun, and freedom in a way that makes it a unique and thrilling experience.

There is no way to talk about rollerblading without first acknowledging its predecessor: the roller skate. The story begins in 1743, when wheeled footwear was first used in a theater production to mimic the grace of ice skating. Decades later, Belgian inventor John Joseph Merlin, brought the idea into the spotlight, with a dramatic demonstration of his roller skate prototypes while promoting his inventions. The innovation didn't stop there. In 1819, M. Petibled patented a three-wheeled inline skate, laying the groundwork for what we know today, while James Plimpton's 1863 quad skate transformed skating into a recreational phenomenon, adding stability and accessibility (Terry). Fast forward to the 1990's and rollerblading emerged as a modern, sleek alternative. It wasn't just a sport; it was a cultural movement, as skaters filled parks, streets and suburban sidewalks, blending fitness with self expression. While its mainstream popularity dipped in the 2000s, rollerblading never truly disappeared (*Sports History Weekly*). In New York City, it thrives, where the city's fearless movers and shakers keep the wheels spinning and the culture alive.

Every day in this city, I'm reminded how culture and energy pulse through its streets, shaping experiences that are truly one-of-a-kind. I'm constantly amazed by the skaters I see gliding through the streets each day. Their energy is infectious, their movements effortless, and there's nothing quite like it. I used to think that nothing could compare to that sense of freedom, but this city never fails to surprise me in the best of ways. Recently, a classmate introduced me to something extraordinary:

Wednesday Night Skate NYC. Since 1996, this community of skaters–mostly rollerbladers, but open to anyone on wheels–has transformed the streets into a rolling celebration. Rollerblading, with its seamless, melodic glide, is a personal journey of balance and precision. It's an individual activity that allows for expression through movement, often in the form of skating through parks or along smooth trails. *Wednesday Night Skate NYC,* however, offers a different dynamic: a group activity that brings skaters of all skill levels together in a shared space, where the focus is on the collective energy and camaraderie. Though both experiences are grounded in movement and freedom, rollerblading on its own is a quieter, more solitary experience compared to the dynamic, energized group atmosphere of *Wednesday Night Skate NYC.* In contrast, this collective energy transforms the event into something larger than a simple gathering. It's not just a meet-up; it's an event, a moment, a collective experience that could only exist here. Where else would the city itself make space for such a vibrant expression? Talking with my friend Rodrigo De Macedo, who, like me, had never encountered so many skaters at once, we found ourselves equally impressed: "It's fascinating to see how many people participate in an activity" (De Macedo), he remarked, reflecting on the sheer scale of it all. What strikes me most though, is what this group represents the unique accessibility of opportunities this city has to offer.

But if this sense of inclusion thrives here in the City of Cities–one of the busiest and most dynamic places in the world–why can't it be the same everywhere else? What makes this city different? Reflecting on this question, I found compelling insights in Carolyn Ali Khan's article "Go Play in Traffic: Skating, Gender, and Urban Context." Using skating–and by extension rollerblading–as a lens, Khan examines how the movement of bodies through urban spaces reflects larger issues of accessibility, identity, and belonging. In the section titled *These Streets Are Home,* Khan describes skaters as somewhat feral in their territorial claims, navigating and transforming urban spaces in ways that challenge conventional use. She argues that public spaces are often constructed, functioning in ways that include or exclude certain groups and narratives. The experience of space, as she highlights, is inherently political, shaped by whom it welcomes, what identities it privileges, and how the stories allow it to unfold. Khan emphasizes the importance of shared spaces, stating "Shared space allows for equitable access for everyone and is tolerant of diversity" (Khan 1098). In these spaces, activities like skating become more than personal freedom–they become acts of collective empowerment, where individuals reclaim public domains for self-expression and community. She further asserts that such spaces foster a reciprocal relationship where "seeing implies being seen" (Khan 1099). This dual visibility is profound, transforming public space into a site of mutual acknowledgement, where presence validates existence. The freedom to skate through the streets of New York City exemplifies this ideal–a mesh of inclusion, visibility, and opportunity. It raises critical questions about the barriers elsewhere: Why don't more places embrace such diversity and shared ownership of a space. In a world constricted by countless limitations, access fuels opportunity, unlocking new freedoms.

Even in other areas of life, the intersection of access and opportunity continues to illuminate new paths. Take ice skating, for example–a close cousin to rollerblading. Both activities share similar elements: the shape of the shoe, the need for balance, constant motion, precise technique, and even mental courage required to navigate their challenges. In my own life, the chance to go ice skating for free came through my enrollment at NYU–an opportunity made possible by attending a high school with strong educational foundations and commitment to outreach. Yet, even with such significant opportunities, there are always limitations to consider. For instance, while I had access to ice skating, my experience wasn't as seamless as it could have been. The rental skates were far from comfortable, their rough edges digging into my ankles and disrupting what could have been a smooth glide. This stood in contrast to my professor Blagovesta Momchedjikova, who brought her own skates–an investment that made her experience far more enjoyable. Owning personal skates, while practical for

regular skaters, comes with a cost, one my mother is unwilling to bear for an activity I rarely participate in and likely wouldn't pursue beyond the winter season. Even with opportunities available to me, some remain out of reach–not due to external barriers, but because of my personal decisions or circumstances. This self-imposed constraint is a reminder that opportunity is not merely something created for us within our community but also shaped by our willingness to embrace it and make it our own.

Building on the idea of self-imposed constraints and the interplay of opportunity and access, it's clear that many opportunities are rooted in knowledge. To seize an opportunity, you first have to know it exists. Without that awareness, there's no way to believe in it, strive for it, or ultimately achieve it. Rebecca Solnit explores this idea in her book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking,* particularly in the chapter "The Shape of a Walk," where she examines walking as a profound experience that spans historical, cultural, philosophical, and political dimensions. Discussing artists and their work, Solnit notes that art can often serve as "evidence of such an investigation or props and prompts for the viewer's own investigations" (Solnit 268). In a similar way, understanding that your access is limited is, in itself, an opportunity–a chance to reflect, adapt, and strive for change. However, the true restraint lies in never realizing that your access is restricted in the first place. To remain unaware of these limitations is not just a personal setback but a social failure–a missed opportunity to question, challenge, and break free from those invisible barriers.

This dynamic is often seen in life, though not always in the extreme ways one might first imagine. Many forms of access and opportunity are quietly denied, sometimes without even realizing it. A striking example of this can be found in Stephanie Farqhuar's essay "Memoirs of the City's Unfamous," where she recounts her eye-opening experience with Gramercy Park–a public space in name but not practice. Farqhuar describes her initial impression of the park, recalling how she thought, "What a pretty park" (Farqhuar 1). Yet, upon further exploration, she discovered the park was not a haven for all New Yorkers but rather a gated enclave reserved exclusively "for a select elite" (Farqhuar 3). In a city already scarce in greenery, the idea that such a space could be kept out of reach for most residents struck her as emblematic of broader issues in our communities. What made this experience significant was Farquhar's ability to recognize the denial of access and how it symbolized larger inequities. She also learned that many residents shared her frustration, expressing outrage over the park's exclusivity. While Farqhuar could not physically change the circumstances, she did what she could: she made her voice heard. By highlighting this injustice, she called attention to the ways access is restricted and opportunities are stripped away–a critical step in changing such barriers.

Just as Farqhuar encountered barriers to Gramercy Park, similar restrictions exist in other other urban spaces, especially for skateboarders. Skateboarding, much like rollerblading, is an expression of personal freedom and a means of navigating the city. While rollerblading is often associated with a continuous, rhythmic glide, skateboarding brings its own dynamic to the streets, with characterized sharp turns, grind, and tricks that emphasize both creativity and skill. Despite the differences in style, both activities share a common purpose: they offer an accessible way for individuals to claim public space and challenge limitations set by their environment. In a city like New York, where space is limited, skaters carve their own paths, assessing their presence in ways that feel both personal and collective. These subtle exclusions highlight how access is often contingent on the space itself, and whether or not one is deemed worthy of it. However, in a city as vast as New York, it often feels different. Why not allow a skater to flow freely, embracing their own space?

Rollerblading in New York City is more than just a mode of transportation or fun activity, it's an embodiment of the city's energy and spirit. Rollerblading is fluid, exhilarating, coordinated, capturing the pulse of the streets as skaters weave through the chaos with effortless grace. Every

movement is a testament to the skill and confidence required to navigate urban spaces, turning the act of gliding into an expression of personal freedom. Yet, just like any other form of movement in the city, rollerblading relies on the spaces it occupies–and the opportunities that come with them. When those spaces are open and accessible, rollerblading becomes a powerful demonstration of what happens when individuals are given the freedom to move, to connect, and to claim their place in the world. In New York, where movement is language all on its own, rollerblading is the graceful, electrifying dance of those who are to claim the streets as their own.

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Rushing

Claudia Brazzale

Tap-Tap

Checking my bag again
Do I have my ID?
Do I have my keys?
Do I need to carry a water bottle?
Is it going to rain?
Is there enough food for the cat for the day?
Lock – lock
Do I have my phone?
Rush rush to the bus stop
I see something red coming
Glasses and phone out, the 156 is coming
Tap in
To the premium seat in front of the exit
Send a text, check my email and my calendar
Scroll, scroll for the news
Down the hill, past the Sainsbury's and the flower stand
Rush, rush through the chuggers
Oxfam, British Red Cross and Guide Dogs
I am sorry but I don't have time
Tap in
Through the tunnel against the current coming out
Platform 10, two minutes for a Southern Railway train
to Waterloo
Past the Chinese construction cranes, the Sky Pool in Nine Elms and Battersea
Power Station
Scroll, scroll
What room am I in today?
Tap out
Descending down the first escalator
Tap in
To the tube
Descending down the second escalator
Move to the left and take over all the still people
Take a left and take the third escalator
Move to the left again, if it wasn't for that tourist standing in the middle
Rush rush but you missed it
Walk walk to the end of the platform as the next Jubilee train is coming in 2 minutes
Scroll, scroll, as there won't be much signal for the next 20 minutes.

Tap out, you have arrived to the other side of town.
Tap, tap says my colleague, it will calm you down.



Fig. 1. *Bank-Monument interconnected tunnel.* London, UK, 9 May 2025. Photo: Claudia Brazzale.

S

Sharing an Umbrella

Lauren Giardina

Sharing Umbrellas: Why We Do It, What It Means, and Its Impact on NYC



Fig. 1. *Sharing an Umbrella in the Rain*. New York City, USA, 2024. Drawing: Lauren Giardina.

New York City is famous for being "the city that never sleeps." I have lived here for a couple months, and I can certainly say that the famous saying is correct. However, I've made another observation about the city recently that most people don't talk about. New York City could also be called "the city that never shares." When you walk down the streets of the city, you are acknowledged by no one. If you drop something on the street, no one picks it up. When you walk in a building, no one holds the door for you. It seems as if no one even cares to share a smile as you pass by. This aspect of the city makes it seem dry, drab, and unfriendly, and on rainy days, the mood is brought down even more. What would happen if I found myself stuck in the rain in the city without an umbrella? Would anyone do anything to help me out, or would I have to walk back to my building soaking wet?

The answer to this question may lie in the act of sharing itself. Take sharing food, for example. In both of these performances, each person does not get the full effect of the performance. When sharing an umbrella, each person is not completely covered. Most of the time, you are only about half-way covered by the umbrella. Similarly, when you share food with someone, you don't get the whole dish, only about half of it. This seems like a bad deal on the surface. You

don't stay completely dry, or you can't eat a whole meal, so why do we share them? When we share an umbrella or a meal, we sacrifice part of ourselves, in that we won't be completely dry, or get to eat an entire plate of food. It is not for practicality, but for kindness, and care for the other person. Just like you share food because you want someone else to have some, you share an umbrella because you want someone else to also stay partially dry. This supports the notion that as humans, we sacrifice things for the people that we love, and thus leads me to another point about sharing umbrellas: we share umbrellas with our peers because we care about them.

There is something rather special about the act of sharing an umbrella with someone (Fig. 1). The act of sharing the umbrella involves one person (the owner of the umbrella) and another (the umbrella-less). One person holds the umbrella in the middle of the pair and they both walk rather close together in order to stay dry. You never really share an umbrella with anyone that you don't know. Every time I've shared an umbrella, it has been with a close friend, or someone I care about. Furthermore, anyone who's ever offered to share an umbrella with me has been a close friend of mine. I interviewed a friend who I've shared an umbrella with, in the city, to begin to develop an idea about how the action of sharing umbrellas impacts the city. We discussed how when we shared my umbrella, we were laughing. Everyone else who was caught in the rain by themselves looked annoyed and almost miserable. Every time a gust of wind blew and everyone else around us made a face of disgust, my friend and I laughed as I almost let the umbrella blow out of my hands. While everyone else was annoyed at the bad weather, my friend and I were having a blast, squished together under my tiny red umbrella. As we reminisced about this time, he said something that stuck out to me. He said, "We did not stay dry under that umbrella, so maybe the real dry-ness was the friends we made along the way" (Duncan). While he meant this as a joke, I think there is a piece of truth behind it. Nobody ever stays completely dry when they share an umbrella. It's difficult! Afterall, an umbrella is meant for one person, not two. This then leads me to question why do we even bother to share umbrellas, if we know we will not stay completely dry in the process.

In the beginning of my exploration of the sharing of umbrellas, I researched about umbrellas in general. The meaning of the umbrella itself has changed over centuries of use. The first umbrellas were invented in China, and date back to 3500 BC. However, these umbrellas were not made to shield people from the rain like the modern day umbrella (McAlister). These umbrellas were primarily used for protection from the sun. The earliest umbrellas, "because of their scarcity and high cost, quickly became a symbol of power in China and surrounding Asian countries. To differentiate themselves from the rest of the population, Chinese royal members carried only red or yellow umbrellas, while the rest used blue ones" ("The Earliest Umbrella–Chinese Umbrellas"). Furthermore, umbrellas were seen as strictly feminine. Their delicate look made them a beauty staple for feminine beauty. However, after the invention of the waterproof umbrella about 500 years later, the umbrella became a universal staple for all people.

Since we share umbrellas with people because we care about them, the act of sharing an umbrella with someone can be seen as an act of care, kindness, and love. After doing some research on the social implications of sharing umbrellas, I found an article written by Thalia Harris, titled "How to say 'I Love You' in Japanese: Sharing an Umbrella!" This essay examines my performance in a sociological way by analyzing its significance in Japanese culture. It describes the Japanese word, aiaigasa, which literally means, "to share an umbrella with someone" (Harris). Harris says that this everyday performance in Japanese culture is used as an expression of love. This term dates back to Japan's Edo period. Over time, aiaigasa became a way for two people to show that they care for each other. Many people in Japan will create aiaigasa graffiti around the city, or in books or illustrations. Because of its romantic roots, kids in schools will even draw it for others to tease each other for potentially having feelings for another student. This sociological interpretation of sharing an umbrella is interesting because it gives an emotional meaning to an otherwise utilitarian

performance. It is easy to look at the action of sharing umbrellas and think nothing of it, but when we view the performance through this context (as an expression of love), the performance becomes something more meaningful.

Sharing an umbrella can be considered a more spontaneous performance because it involves one person being unprepared for the rain. Perhaps the rain was not expected that day, but it rained anyway. Since sharing an umbrella can be seen as an act of love, we can then consider the performance to be a spontaneous expression of love, and compare it to a more planned act of love. For example, going on a date can be considered a planned act of love. When two people go on a date, they plan out every detail beforehand. Where they will go, what they will do, how they will get there, and the time of day is all set in stone. The act of going out on a date is similar to sharing an umbrella because both performances involve sharing. Dates include sharing your whole day with someone. The difference between these two performances is that one is planned and the other is not. However, when I inspected the aspects of this further, I realized that these two acts relate to each other in that one may lead to another. For example, after you go on a date with someone, you may start to spend more time with them. During one of those times, it might start to rain, and you will end up sharing an umbrella. This points to a larger idea that planned acts of love lead to unplanned ones, such as sharing an umbrella.

Of course, there are downsides to sharing, as I pointed to when describing the downsides of sharing a meal, so, eating alone at a restaurant sounds like an ideal experience. You not only get a well-cooked meal, but you also get it all to yourself. Since you are alone, you have no obligation to share with anyone else. However, sitting in a restaurant all by yourself gets lonely. You don't have anybody to smile with, or have a conversation with. Yes, you get a full meal, but at what cost? Is a full plate of food worth sacrificing quality time with others? This leads me to the idea that simple things like sharing not only have a large impact on our lives, but the lives of people around us. Sharing things like food or umbrellas help us to have quality time with others, which in turn makes us happier.

And that is how sharing umbrellas can actually have a large impact in the context of New York City altogether. In his essay, "Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders his Power to Alter a Public Space," Brent Staples reflects on how he noticed his impact on the streets of New York: his presence as a black man walking around the city often made others uncomfortable, despite his innocence: "I often witness that "hunch posture," from women after dark on the warrenlike streets of Brooklyn where I live," he observes. "They seem to set their faces on neutral and, with their purse straps strung across their chests bandolier style, they forge ahead as though bracing themselves against being tackled" (Staples). This forced Staples to change the way he walks around the city in order to not have this reaction from others: "I give a wide berth to nervous people on subway platforms during the wee hours, particularly when I have exchanged business clothes for jeans," he writes. Further, "If I happen to be entering a building behind some people who appear skittish, I may walk by, letting them clear the lobby before I return, so as not to seem to be following them" (Staples). He also started whistling when he walks down the street, "I whistle melodies from Beethoven and Vivaldi and the more popular classical composers. Even steely New Yorkers hunching toward nighttime destinations seem to relax, and occasionally they even join in the tune" (Staples). By doing this, Staples is actively altering the streets of New York by changing the feelings of the people around him. Staples realized that his actions have a large impact on the atmosphere of the streets of the city.

Similar to Staples' essay, Adam Gopnik wrote an essay reflecting on the impacts of others on a public space. In his essay, "The People On the Bus," Gopnik reflects on the theme of connection between humans through his experiences taking the bus through New York City. He concludes that small human interactions (like those that happen on a bus) are essential to our lives in NYC, though

they initially seem insignificant. He says, "The bus is a place where you can feel, for a moment, that you are part of a society that includes everyone" (Gopnik). I found this to be particularly interesting in the comparison to sharing an umbrella because in both cases, the bus and under the umbrella, it involves a temporary connection between people. While the bus creates a temporary connection between the passengers, the umbrella creates a temporary connection between the two people sharing. When reflecting on the temporary aspect of bus rides, Gopnik says, "We are all in this together, for the length of the ride, and nothing more" (Gopnik). Upon comparing these two acts further, I came to another conclusion, that the nature of the interaction between people during these performances are rather similar. The point of sharing umbrellas is to protect each other from the rain. In a way, people also ride the bus to protect each other. Gopnik explains that to people in the city, the bus feels safe because of the mere fact that there is safety in numbers.

So how does the performance of sharing an umbrella impact the city? Just like Staples' whistling made other people on the street more relaxed and even joyful, sharing umbrellas may have a similar effect. Imagine you're walking down the street on a cold rainy day. It's miserable until you pass two people sharing an umbrella having fun. Maybe the smile on their faces puts a smile on your face. Following the notion that sharing an umbrella can be seen as an act of love, these small acts of love around the city could have a bigger impact on the city than it may seem. While the simple act of sharing an umbrella may seem insignificant in the grand scale of NYC, it has the potential to bring joy to the streets on a sad, rainy day.

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Shopping for Discounted Groceries

Toshka Atanassova

The Habit of Shopping While Retired

As a retired engineer in Sofia, Bulgaria, I often shop for groceries on sale. Several big chain stores, *Lidl*, *Billa*, *Kaufland*, *Fantastico*, and *TMarket*, regularly discount the essential groceries they sell (bread, milk, cheese, eggs), making them more affordable for people on a tight budget. Each of these stores puts a selection of groceries and other goods on sale, on a weekly basis, and publishes them in a brochure, which appears both on paper and digitally. Different stores issue their discounts on a particular day of the week. For instance, *Lidl* issues its brochure with discounted groceries on Monday, *TMarket*, on Tuesday, *Billa*, on Thursday. There are weekend discounts as well, which *Billa* publishes each week, on vegetables. Some stores, like *Kaufland* and *TMarket* also discount their hot food daily, after 7 p.m., and I know friends who wait for this occasion to purchase things from the hot buffet (Figs. 1–5).



Fig. 1. *Billa* discount brochure, Aug. 22-28, 2024, Fig. 2. *Lidl* discount brochure, Aug. 26-Sept. 1, 2024. Fig. 3. *Fantastico* discount brochure, Aug. 22- 28, 2024; Fig. 4. *Kaufland* discount brochure, with soccer player, Christo Stoichkov, Aug. 26-Sept. 1, 2024; Fig. 5. *T Market* brochure with discounts, Aug. 27-Sept. 2, 2024. Sofia, Bulgaria. Sources: *Billa*, *Lidl*, *Fantastico, Kaufland*, *TMarket*

Shopping for groceries is essential for the elderly, because we prefer to buy our groceries and cook at home. Many of the elderly suffer from various medical conditions, which require a special diet, and that can be best observed by cooking at home. Buying groceries on sale is a huge help to the elderly. The discounts are significant, 25%, 35%, 50%. According to data from the National Statistical Institute, from January of 2024, the average pension in Bulgaria is 383 euro (333 euro for women and 457 euro for men) (BNR). There are over 2 million pensioners to a population of over 6 million, which means that 1 in 3 people is a pensioner in Bulgaria. Since our pensions are quite small, while the cost of living is constantly rising, our budgets are very limited. There's a lot we cannot afford to buy. Or can afford to buy rarely.

Shopping for groceries on sale has become so common, we hardly think about it. If we enter a chain store, we look for the brochures with the discounts, usually on a special stand just as you enter the store, or for the aisles or displays where the discounted items are. We learn to buy only what is on discount. Our daily routines and conversations, in person or over the phone, revolve around what groceries are on sale, in which store, and if they are any good, provided that someone already bought them.

It wasn't always the case that chain stores discounted some groceries every week. But once one of them started doing it and saw the profit in that, the rest followed suit. In fact, there is a

particular campaign in the country, which ensures that those participating in it discount their basic groceries once a week. The campaign is called "Affordable for You," and it started at the end of 2023. Thanks to it, participating chain stores commit to putting 15 essential groceries on sale (and they can discount up to 50 items) (bTV Novinite). This is not a law but a campaign. And chain stores participate in it voluntarily (Pekic). The groceries are usually discounted once a week, for a whole week, or for a few days (especially the weekend).

I have noticed that the groceries that are on sale are not expired. They may have less days to their expiration date than the non-discounted groceries, but they are not bad, damaged, or unusable. Every chain store knows ahead of time what items will be discounted when. In fact, some know this a year ahead of time, according to a friend who worked in several chain stores and is familiar with the process of discounting (Zlatkova). According to her, chain stores rely on the sales, producing things specifically for the sales, and making sure that what they are discounting is still good. The discounts can be from just a few stotinki (pennies), to a whole lev. It is nice to shop discounted items because you help your budget. It feels like a victory, to have accomplished a good purchase!

Another friend, who also works for a chain store, says that the discounts are not that big, suggesting that what we perceive as regular prices are in fact inflated, so the discounted price is the actual price of the item. "It is what it actually costs," he says for the discounted items (Anonymous). Which casts some doubts on the very idea and practice of a sale. The prices could be cynically and shamelessly inflated in general. For instance, some items are seriously discounted. Let's say, a pack of butter costs 7 or 8 leva, but on sale, it is 4 leva. When something is discounted that much, you wonder, what is the catch? Probably the "regular prices" are inaccurate in the first place. The same friend also says that people mostly shop from the weekly brochures with the discounts: they make the biggest sales from those brochures. He himself waits for the discounts, even though as an employee, he is able to shop with an employee discount in the first place (Anonymous).

The small, neighborhood stores cannot compete with this practice of regularly discounting basic groceries, and the chain stores swallow them up, they run them out of business. They do try to discount some items, but the discounts are smaller and not very convincing. So we choose to go farther, to the chain stores, cross big streets, go up and down stairs, elevators, and escalators, while the same item might be just around the corner from us, in a small, neighborhood store, but not with a good price. Another problem is that when a neighborhood store discounts something, the item is gone in no time. My local store, which used to be called *Smart* and used to be open 24/7, discounts eggs. But even if you see the discounted label (red), there are no eggs left on the shelf. Did they discount just a few items because they only had a few items? Or did they put a note there, just to pretend that they do sales, when in fact they don't? It is hard to tell but this happens all the time. So in the end, we, people on a tight budget, decide not to risk it with the small stores and go to the chain stores instead, which are much larger and which offer a bigger variety of groceries as well.

Many people who travel to other countries in Europe, and visit the same chain stores there, have shared that there is a double standard that the chain stores have: for example, the same goods or groceries (detergent or butter, let's say), have the same packaging but different quality, suggesting that the quality is different depending on where the item is sold. Most of the big chains also have their own brands. It is Clever for *Billa*, Pilos for *Lidl*, Brei! For *Kaufland*. These brands allow the chain stores to negotiate with the producers for good quality of the product but at a lower price. This happens with pasta, salami, yogurts: some are imported, some are made in Bulgaria. But there is a tendency to find worse quality of the products in the chain stores in Bulgaria than in countries where the chains originate from.

Another paradox is that since the foreign chain stores are much bigger and provide a huge variety and thus a lot of possibilities, they can come on top of the competition with our local Bulgarian producers, and sell their products at lower prices than the Bulgarian ones. The foreign

chain stores entered the Bulgarian market in the 21st century. *Billa* supermarket, an Austrian brand, opened a store in Bulgaria in 2000 (currently with 159 stores in the country); *Lidl* and *Kaufland*, which originated in Germany, the former as a discount store, the latter, as a hypermarket, are both owned by the Schwarz Gruppe. *Kaufland* opened its first store in Bulgaria in 2006 (currently with 66 stores in the country, Georgieva), *Lidl* in 2010 (currently with 129 stores in the country). *Fantastico*, the only Bulgarian supermarket, opened in 1991, as a family business, mostly in Sofia, currently with 45 stores (all data was obtained from the websites of the stores and is current as of the writing of this article). Though the Bulgarian chain store entered the market almost a decade before the first foreign hypermarkets, it has the least amount of stores to this day.

Buying groceries on discount allows people to stock up. Usually, there is no limit on how much you can buy from the discounted items, for one household. So, restaurants or smaller stores also buy from the discounted items, to cook with or sell at a higher price, respectively. We are used to stocking up on things: it is a trait we keep from communism: there was a shortage of, well, everything. So we like to stock up on things, to have a "reserve" as we call it. I like to stock up too: the basic things: cheese, butter, chicken, bread, basic veggies, potatoes, rice, flour, sugar, as well as detergents and toilet paper. Pharmacies also offer discounts of vitamins, supplements, pain killers, etc. over the counter medicines, but usually on a monthly, not a weekly, basis.

Since buying things on discount, people wait to buy something on discount, especially if it's nothing urgent. Stores rotate the discounted items, so, sometimes you wait 1 or 2 months for the same item to get discounted again, and then you can buy from it, or stock up. It feels awful to buy an item at full price and see it discounted very soon after. Everybody loves a good deal!

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Singing Happy Birthday in Restaurants

Sky Parker

Singing Happy Birthday in a Restaurant and the Exclusion of the Celebrated

The melody of New York is a recognizable tune. The harmonies of sirens and barking dogs intertwine with the honking of impatient taxi drivers and songs of street corner buskers. These sounds create the cityscape that is the background music of everyday life in New York City. Long walks, window shopping, and park sitting are punctuated by this ambience. The residents of New York both experience and cultivate the sonic landscape of the space, perpetuating a kinship among New York's noisiest. Because I identify myself with the sounds of New York–and especially because I contribute to them–I can extract a sense of belonging. Our voices are perhaps the most integral part of this sound, which sometimes manifests itself through human nature's ancient ritual of "community song." A shared song is shared ground, and community song has been immortalized because of our never-ending desire for inclusion; this seems to be its entire purpose.

Singing the "Happy Birthday" song is a prime example of this shared ground. We see its performance in New York's communal spaces, where an intimate celebration can become a public showcase. Singing happy birthday in a restaurant is the paradigm of such an event. Here, we find the mingled voices of waiters, friends, family, and strangers existing in lyrical harmony. Candlelight illuminates the face of the subject of celebration while shadows of strangers crowd around the table. Hands clap, jewelry rattles. Onlookers are enticed to join, and not only are they enticed, but they are capable of doing so. How is it that everyone in a restaurant is familiar with the same four lines of a song? And not only the same lines, but the same tones? What appears to be an everyday performance is actually an activity, a habit, that is suggestive of an entire culture of experiences.

The history of "Happy Birthday" extends all the way to its own birthday in October of 1893. 130 years ago, sisters Mildred and Patty Smith Hill copyrighted their song "Good Morning to All," which morphed into "Happy Birthday to You" around March 1924, when it was edited by Robert H. Coleman in a songbook. He changed the line "Good morning dear children" to "Happy birthday dear __," (Grein). As the years have gone by, the song has experienced minor alterations, but at its core it has remained the most recognized piece of music in the English language, according to Guinness World Records in 1998 (Grein). "Happy Birthday" has become something of a folk song, as it reflects our societal traditions and unites us. Passed down from generation to generation, it celebrates generation after generation. Evidently, "happy birthday" is a branch of the many sounds in New York–a community song in itself. In this city especially, "Happy Birthday" can be heard *loudly* and *often*. Going out to dinner in New York almost guarantees a rendition of "Happy Birthday" to be witnessed and even sung, as it is an inclusive song: anyone can participate. Well, almost "anyone."

Everyone is encouraged *except* for the subject. The performance of "Happy Birthday" occurs *at* the birthday person, not with them, amidst confusion of whether or not to sing along, and the staged surprise. The birthday person is not privy to the whispered request to the staff "Could we have some sort of celebration with dessert, it's that person's birthday?" The entire set up of the performance purposely excludes them, and in an attempt to celebrate them, they become detached from the activity. Then, through the performance, they are faced with the awkwardness of being sung to and not being able to join. The subject becomes the audience, and it isn't an interactive show.

I would argue that the subject of community songs tends to consistently be excluded from the activity itself. This is a paradox, given that a community song's function is to unite. To understand this, we can contextualize the everyday performance of singing "Happy Birthday"

through an adjacent activity: chanting. Let us enter the CitiField stadium for a Mets game. Smell the hotdogs being sold through the stands and the spilled beer on sticky chairs. Here, fans perform their cheers. While they synchronize, "Let's Go Mets," chants, they share a sense of community–just as a community is formed within the vocal harmonies of "Happy Birthday." And yet, this community is restricted to the bleachers, excluding the team's players like the subject of a birthday celebration. Even though these chants are blasted towards the field, the players are excluded from the excitement of it all. Despite them being the content of the fans' chants, they cannot join in–they take the role of a spectator for what is supposed to be their own performance. Fans of the game are aware of what to expect: the audience buys tickets to their own parade.

There is an abundance of ticket-free performances in New York though, adding to the melody of New York. Street preaching is an occurrence that voices unity, all the while preserving the exclusivity of community song. It may add to the melody of New York, but the voice itself does not unite the entirety of the city. If anything, it dispels those who do not associate with the spoken religion. In comparison with singing "Happy Birthday," street preaching exhibits a different set of characters, stages, and actions. The performance of street preaching, it seems, is supported and localized by a table, a book (the Bible), and an outfit–there is an entire wardrobe of costumes and props designated to street preaching. Yet, singing happy birthday in a restaurant only requires a candle, often found within some form of dessert, but sometimes it is performed without either. Singing happy birthday really only requires the occasion and the song, it is not contingent on an item or an attire. Perhaps, these differing uniforms allow us to see that street preachers are trying to draw attention to themselves… whereas singing happy birthday simply seizes it.

Street preachers preach for the sole purpose of allurement, not passion or pure affection. Not only do they try to draw attention to themselves, they beg you to choose to listen to them. And sometimes, people *do* choose to listen. West Coast preacher Ruben Israel has found success on the streets, as "he has had strangers approach him and tell him, 'Fifteen years ago I saw you on the street. I actually went home and gave my heart to the Lord' (Israel)," reveals Melanie Sovern in her essay "Street-preachers: Solicitors of Free Thought in the City." This branch of New York's noise introduces an aspect of choice within community song… observers of street preaching are forced to choose whether or not they will participate. And still, it perpetuates the paradox of unification that comes with varying renditions of community song.

This is not to say that every activity in New York excludes its own residents. Walking, a simple activity, for example nourishes the everyday environment of the metropolis with its inclusivity. Though walking seems to imply an outside setting and singing happy birthday seems to imply an indoor setting, these stages are interchangeable. Happy birthday can be sung within an outdoor restaurant or during a picnic birthday party, and walking occurs simply everywhere. New Yorkers walk along blocks of sidewalk but they also walk through the turnstile of the subway. Some walk to get to their day jobs but they still must walk around their apartment to make a cup of coffee.

Walking is the product of a city that is constantly *moving*. Rebecca Solnit explores the intricacies of walking in her essay "The Shape of a Walk." She delves into the idea that a, "realm of walking opened up in the 1960s, walking as art," (267). As seen through art in history, "artists' bodies became a medium for performances," and their subjects in art pieces "shifted from representational objects to presentational modes of action," (269). Thus, I would like to emphasize that walking is an inclusive endeavor when we view it with a broader perspective, placing emphasis on the idea of movement rather than the specifics of two legs moving. And though Solnit views the mobility of walking within the context of art and artists, its ideology can also be applied to that of New York's everyday performances and the audiences they include. Movement is an art form that invades the streets of New York, inviting its grounds to become canvases.

Singing "Happy Birthday" in a restaurant is not as simple as walking. As Solnit understands, everyday performances are "ordinary [gestures] from which the extraordinary can be derived from," (269). Singing Happy Birthday in a restaurant is hypothetically as inclusive as walking in the city yet in practice, it separates the one being sung to and the singers. Nic Chang, a recent subject of the Happy Birthday choir, explained to me the struggle of celebrating his 19th birthday in 14th street's IHOP. He expressed that, "there are not many circumstances where [he] can truly feel everyone's eyes on [him] at once," forcing him to be "hyper aware of the attention [he] was getting," (Chang). He felt "anxious about [his] awkwardness in [that] moment being memorialized on camera and potentially posted online," (Chang). So, during a highly anticipated event that he had coordinated and invited his closest friends to, Chang was forced to be a bystander. And yet, there is something to be said about his own bias towards the performance. Perhaps it is up to each person to choose their role in community song and whether they should participate in it or not.

It is critical to note that the nature of humans is ever-changing, and thus our reactions and judgements can be altered with time. The structure of happy birthday allows for repetition, meaning that with the next coming year, one can choose an alternate outcome. Chang allowed himself to be left out of his own birthday celebration this time around but maybe he can choose differently next year. Ultimately, we have autonomy over our reactions… we are not limited to what we have once chosen. New York is in a constant state of motion and change, so why shouldn't you be?

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Singing in Public

Nina Chatterjee

Excavating Karaoke: Spontaneous Singing and the Lost Art of Being Yourself or The Habit of Spontaneity

November 11, 2024. 22:45. At a crosswalk just outside of Rockefeller Park, I pulled out my phone to record two of my friends singing Ariana Grande's "34+35." There was no backing track, no sign saying "sing Ariana Grande now." I blinked, and they were singing, loud and carefree. They paid no heed to the rest of our friends having their own conversation, the cars in the road, or any other human remotely near us. I could not tell you what key they were in, or transcribe the rhythm on a staff. One of them simply started singing the song, and the other one joined in, and I was lucky enough to get it on video. I couldn't stop smiling as I watched my dear friends sing their hearts out with no self-consciousness and no inhibitions. The song exploded out of them, a volcanic eruption of joy and ecstasy.

I suppose others would've had a very different experience watching this happen. They would've just seen a group of young adults walking and chatting, and then walking and chatting and singing. Maybe they witnessed the moment where one young adult mumbled a couple of lyrics before others joined in, and the crescendo of their voices as they began to forget about the rest of the world. Or perhaps they watched the fade out as no one joined in, be it an awkward trailing off or natural enough for the singing to pass off as a mere sentence. Maybe they didn't pay it any heed. Maybe they stopped to watch that person. Maybe they learned something about the singer based on what they sang. After all, that person has just put out a part of themself for any passerby to witness. It's a shocking display of individuality, the type that's slowly beginning to die.

It's kind of odd that I can make that comment about singing, given how technical it was until very recently. Singing was all about the proper technique needed to project to the very back of churches up until the 1870s; but once the carbon microphone was invented, there was no longer a need to emphasize projection (Gorvett). Performers could relax their technique and let their own personality shine through. Crooning became the new model for professional singing, giving the world its first modern pop star: Rudy Vallée. He had an intimate voice, one fit for modern radio (Amadio), which was slowly becoming more akin to the way people sang in their daily lives. The ordinary folk didn't care about vibrato or placement, and apparently, neither did crooners. And as time has gone on, we've started to care less about how technically good a singer is and more about who the singer is themselves.

Looking back at last year, the top albums have all been from artists who have put their own experiences and their own voice into their work (Billboard). None of them sound alike, and they're beloved for it. Just look at their stadium concerts. Performers get up on stage in front of thousands of people and present music true to their soul and lyrics straight from the heart. They've taken their own life and turned it into a work of art. And they make the bold decision to share that with whole countries, laying themselves bare for millions around the globe. Even as an artist, baring my soul like that for hordes of strangers seems unfathomable.

And yet, there's another layer to it. Though getting up on that stage is undoubtedly a courageous act, stadium concerts are still scenarios in which thousands of people have paid hundreds of dollars to watch someone else put on a performance that's been planned down to a tee. Artists have prepared extensively to reveal themselves, and strangers have chosen to listen. When someone chooses to sing in the street, no one has asked for that to happen. The key word in

describing their performance is "spontaneous." And in some ways, I feel this is even braver; the street's singers blindly surrender themselves to the scrutiny of the public.

I find this to be especially true where I live, for the denizens of New York City are not joyful. The dreamers you meet as you make your way to your destination aren't like the dreamers idolized by the poets. They walk briskly, in a straight line, with a single goal in mind: whatever they need to do to make next month's rent and afford groceries that week. It's not desaturated, but the available colors aren't exactly bright. I feel that you can only be yourself in ways that don't inconvenience your fellow New Yorkers; wearing a bright pink fur coat is fine, but bursting into song on the street? Taboo. You're supposed to keep that confined to your headphones. New York City demands that you keep your emotions and dreams to yourself and use them solely as a drive to make it to the next day.

Of course, there's no reason we *have* to obey these unwritten rules. After all, they're unwritten. No one set them in stone. And yet, there's something in our nature that forces us to want to conform. Perhaps it's evolutionary–we were always more likely to survive if we had a group to be a part of. There's no need to make ourselves stand out–if anything, that can be a detriment to our continued membership in the group. And we as New Yorkers have (disappointingly) signed an agreement to take up as little space as possible. In the words of Juno Sapp, an NYU freshman, expressing yourself in loud, conspicuous ways (such as singing in 'inappropriate' places like subways) functions as "a radical act of vulnerability and embarrassment" (Sapp) because all of New York City is your witness as you defy the arbitrary rules of the streets. Dancing down the streets is similar. The physicality of dancing makes it an even greater form of self-expression than singing: dancers have the most comfort in themselves: it takes an inordinate amount of courage to let your body be free as the world tries to keep it in line. The dancers show the entire city who they are at no cost, something most of us are far too self-conscious to fathom.

But there is a scenario in which people are very comfortable expressing themselves in New York City. It's when there's some sort of gratuity or positive consequence involved. Think about busking. In every park in the city, the hopeful stand with their instruments and pray that the passerby will donate their attention if they won't donate their pennies. The main reason why buskers sing on street corners rather than releasing YouTube covers is so they can make money. In fact, they are less like the people bursting into spontaneous song and more like the artists giving stadium concerts, because at the end of the day, there's success involved, and it's dictated by whether or not a profit was made. Some would say there's far less soul in busking because of this simple fact. And yet, it's still more socially acceptable than spontaneous public singing. The people in this city understand a busker's plight; they're trying to make next month's rent too. So a busker is less likely to receive a dirty look or a swear in regards to their activity. We'll excuse a relative lack of soul if we can empathize with the end goal, money, but an expression of sheer emotion is unacceptable.

Self-expression is acceptable when the reasoning behind it is to sell something. Buskers sell their art. Street preachers, closely examined by Melanie Sovern in her essay "Street Preachers: Solicitors of Free Thought in New York City," sell their ideas and doctrines. They're certainly part of the definition of forms-of-self-expression-in-NYC, given that their whole schtick is talking passionately about something important to them (religion, more often than not). The extent to which they expose themselves greatly for the pedestrians to see and hear is remarkable and also requires an insane amount of courage. After all, street preachers don't ask for money in return for their services. They're not even forcing you to buy into their religion. In fact, they're almost as defiant as my singers, for "the primary physical act of the street preacher–standing still–is… contrary to the New York habit of constant motion" (Sovern). And yet, their act is still one designed to sell. It's self-expression meant to persuade, not individuality taking up space in a place. And that, too, takes some of the soul out of the activity.

I suppose I have to acknowledge that singing in public is sometimes done with the same sort of ulterior motives. We can look at "Singing as Communication," a study in which Graham Welch examined how we use singing as such straight from birth. Infants sing melodies as part of their first vocalizations; as we get older, we start using "the act of singing [to convey] information about group membership" (Welch 14). High school theater kids identify each other by singing songs from the same musicals; queer people can use shared music to communicate their shared identity to each other. Both of these (the former especially) can cause those who aren't part of the group to roll their eyes and walk away.

And yet, bursting into song in public should be taken as an invitation, not a nuisance. It should become a habit that we cultivate: These are the people spreading something joyful and meaningful from their life to yours. While those expressions may be meant for the singer, for the accidental audience, it can bring light into the gloomy New York streets.

In fact, we shouldn't restrain those with the capacity to sing in public. We should look up to them instead. In a world where every aspect of culture tries to tell you what to do and how to be, the people that defy the rules of one of the world's harsher cities are the ones to be revered. They're the ones who are secure in themselves. They're the ones that know how to walk through the world on their own terms. And I think that makes them the ones who will change it. They already change the small area they live in by adding a garnish of happiness to its dreariness.

What's that thing they say in *La La Land*? "Here's to the fools who dream?" I've got a new one for you: here's to the fools who sing. And may they keep singing forevermore.

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Singing in the Back of the Bus

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

We were on the private tour bus taking us back to Lisbon, from an outing in Almada. It was a long day of panoramic viewing of Lisbon: *Grande Panorama de Lisboa* from the 17th century, in the National Tile Museum; a private boat tour along the Tagus River, overlooking Lisbon; an outdoor dinner at Casa de Cerca in Almada, with more breathtaking views of Lisbon, and discussions of the vantage points for the 360 degree painted panorama, *A View of Lisbon*, by Robert Barker's son, Henry Aston, exhibited in London in 1812. This was the post-conference day trip of our week-long annual symposium for Panorama enthusiasts. In a few hours, everyone would be on their way back to wherever they had come from, expecting to convene again for next year's conference, elsewhere.

The International Panorama Council (ICP) and this year's conference hosts from Lusófona University and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, had many memorable experiences in store for us: in addition to the fantastic presentations, meals, and snacks (oh, the nata!), there was a panorama drawing workshop by the living legend Yadegar Asisi, a guided tour of *Cosmorama in Lisbon: Virtual Travel in the 19th Century,* in Portuguese Cinematheque, a restaurant dinner at the Alfama with live fado performances, to name just a few. With a few friends, on our own, we also visited an authentic Brazilian bakery to enjoy the brigadeiro, among other delicacies, and the *Model of Lisboa* before the earthquake of 1755 in Museu de Lisboa; rode a double-decker bus around major attractions, such as Jerónimos Monastery and the 25 de Abril Bridge; survived a nerve-wrecking Tuk-Tuk tour around steep Alfama, for night views of the city; and applauded street performers at Praça do Comércio.

Tonight, seven of us–Thiago and his wife Patricia from Brazil; Dom, his wife Anja, and their son Romain from Belgium; and my friend Villy and I from Bulgaria/USA–had taken over the seats in the back of our tour bus. We had about an hour to reach our hotel, considering traffic. As we were talking and laughing, we spontaneously burst into singing. We started with *Yellow Submarine*–the go-to singalong–and continued with other classic songs by the Beatles: *Imagine*, *Help*, *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, *Here Comes the Sun*. Then, we covered some famous Bon Jovi songs, like, *Living on a Prayer, You Give Love a Bad Name*, then the Eagles' *Hotel California*, Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*, Michael Jackson's *You Don't Care About Us,* not in that order, and among many others. We would switch mid-song to another song. Patricia started pulling up the songs on her phone, so we could get the music accompaniment; Anja could sing any song; Thiago was humming along; Villy kept coming up with new song ideas. We did not care who sang what or why or how. There was no need to discuss, pre-plan, coordinate, hesitate. All of a sudden, seven people, with different backgrounds and music tastes, from different cities (Rio, Brussels, Sofia, NYC), were singing like we had been in a band together all our lives. It was spontaneous and magical! But it was also clearly a habit: we had all sung like that before: with other people, with the same or similar songs, on different buses, elsewhere.

Since then, I have been asking friends randomly, if they remember singing in the back of the bus when coming back from a trip. The answer is always, oh, yeah! It is always on a private bus and it is always a sign of bonding, community, a seal to a good time, a wrap. It starts in the back of the bus and can spread to other parts but mostly stays there because the back of the bus is a special place: it is the farthest from the driver so as not to cause any disturbance but also farthest away from supervision and thus prone to more freedom, mischief, and jokes. It also offers a good view over everything that happens both inside the bus and on the road, as the back seats are often a bit elevated, and can provide an alternative commentary to the official announcements from the front.

Singing in the back of the bus is a curious habit: you acquire and practice it on your own with others but you can summon it in a different group, at a different time, in similar circumstances, still contributing to a memorable common experience; in short, it is a promiscuous habit.

Sketching

Thiago Leitão de Souza



Fig. 1. *Brooklyn Corner*. Once I sketched it, I felt at peace because Ocean Avenue is very busy but at that moment there was not a lot of traffic so I could really see the composition, the proportions, how the brick buildings and the blossoming trees were balancing each other out. Brooklyn, New York City, USA, July 2024. Sketch: Thiago Leitão.

Why do we continue to draw architecture and cities? Given so many technological tools like cameras on cell phones or tablets (with their easy, immediate, non-judgmental click), why is the habit of freehand sketching still important and necessary? In architecture, drawing is synonymous with thinking. If you don't draw, you don't think, you don't analyze, you don't reflect on architecture and its context. This is one of the most repeated phrases by Architecture and Urban Planning professors around the world. But you don't have to be an architect to observe and draw architecture and urban spaces. Drawing always expresses a thought, a feeling, an observation of a place or an experience. Drawing is learning to see, observe, examine, investigate, discover. It is describing what you see with strokes, lines, spots, and colors. When drawing a square, you don't just represent its dimensions and main characteristics. You go deeper: how do people use that space, how do they behave at different times of day, what events are happening there, what are the seasons like, is the square surrounded by trees, houses, or tall buildings, and what is their impact on the square? Drawing is an everyday habit and a practice. It is not like riding a bike–once you've learned how to do it as a child, you hardly practice it as an adult. Drawing is like reading and writing: the more you read and write, the better your reading and writing will be. Drawing is a form of language. And like any language it should be practiced and developed every day. Drawing awakens this gaze, an ability to interpret, explore, scrutinize. We draw not only to be able to represent, but to understand and study. The more we draw, the more we will be able to reflect on people, urban experiences, architecture, cities (Fig. 1).

Sleeping on the Subway

Sonia Bhojani

The Subway Nap: Marking Territory, Desire for Rebellion, and the Illusion of Free Will

New York City is a place that radiates belonging. Distinctive neighborhoods begin to feel cozy, they begin to feel like home to the new-New Yorker. Evening walks and morning commutes breed a sense of familiarity. My daily walk to the Tisch building is almost instinctive by nature at this point; as I walk down Broadway, jaywalking when I can, panting as I reach the building, this walk evolves into a sort of routine. I belong to Broadway in this sense. But Broadway also belongs to me. I spend most of my time walking up and down that street, my street, my block, my area, my neighborhood. Mine, mine, mine. I have the luxury and the pleasure of being able to take my time to stop and smell the roses, but most others don't. They hop onto the subway cars at an ungodly hour and where some of us are softly nestled beneath our covers, or enjoying a beautiful stroll, these are the people who hear the grating of the subway, the robotically-toned voice, the shuffle of put-upon commuters, this early in the morning. So what do they have on the subway? What is theirs?

It's natural to stake out some territory wherever we can. Dogs piss in the grass to claim what's theirs, roommates designate their own corner of the shower in which to store their shampoo, soap, loofah. Lawyers wait eagerly for the day they can become senior partner and their surname be acknowledged in the firm's name. We seek out territory and we have an innate desire to have something of our own. Sweeping luxuries aren't afforded to the 5:30 a.m. commuter, so then what do they have? The subway nap. The glorious closing of eyelids, succumbing to the call of Mistress Sleep, letting oneself go in possibly the noisiest, busiest area, to simple peace. The contrast between the lonely, peaceful person and the pounding din of the subway station is stark and abject, and almost invites an air of melancholy to it. What burdens must the subway sleeper have? Is this the only place they can rest, an observer wonders. It is at its core, sad. But the sleeper does not recognize this as sad. He merely thinks of it as a convenient way of obtaining sleep. Satisfying that part of his brain which is screaming in fatigue. He does not see what we see, to him it is an innocent, single-pronged act of satisfaction and fulfillment. He gleans some base joy in it–"Well, at least I managed to catch a few z's"–but there is a reluctant and dispassionate way that he thinks it. He is so removed from his own act, which is truly depressing. Is this not supposed to be a means of reclaiming oneself from the 9-to-5 workday? Is this not supposed to be a small, secret act of rebellion, of freedom? Is this not the way to fight back? And this is how something so small and personal becomes a habit, an act of defiance, a quietly bright spot in the gray subway world.

For there to be commuters dozing off on the trains, there first needs to be the existence of subways in New York City. "At 2:35 on the afternoon of October 27, 1904" (history.com), the first underground subway line opened, and rapid expansion followed, leading to private companies owning lines and later being taken over by the city itself. This represents a system of order and control which parallels the 9-to-5 workday that commuters suffer from. The 9-to-5 itself came to be in the 19th century, but "went mainstream by Henry Ford in the 1920s" (Roberts) around the time that subway lines were expanding and multiplying. This is no coincidence, as it is evident that these two things rose in popularity in conjunction with each other to better serve the purposes of one another. This brings into play the shortening of sleep cycles and the struggle of working adults to maintain a proper sleep-wake balance. Depending on how far their job is and their morning routine, people could be waking up even before 6 a.m.

In more recent years, there has been a strong rise against the 9-to-5, claiming it doesn't work and is unproductive and cruel to employees. This certainly reflects from the morning commuters

who relinquish control to both the workday and their sleep deprivation. It is a form of silent and peaceful protest against their current working conditions. Imagine a morning commuter that may look at what his life is turning into, staring solidly at the fast-paced tunnel walls outside the subway window. He despairs. Unconsciously, his eyelids begin to flutter and close. He thinks he will rest his eyes, just for a little bit… just for a while… and he wakes up with a jolt as the disembodied subway voice calls out his stop. He has obtained a short escape from thinking about his own misery, and it is the most valuable and bittersweet part of his day. This does not become an isolated occurrence. He does this daily now. He does this almost as an act of dissent at this point. Suddenly, waking up to the annoying sound of his alarm isn't so tragic–why, in just 45 minutes he'll have gone back to the euphoric throes of sleep. It becomes something to look forward to, something to yearn for.

This act of rebellion fuels and motivates oneself more than living comfortably does. Take switching cars on a moving subway. People are advised to not do it but some do anyway, for the thrill that comes from it, much like if one decides to sleep on the subway–far from home and exposed to strangers. It feels a bit dangerous, like anything could happen from this point on. Yet we do it anyway. We concoct and conceive danger in unlikely places. Why? To fulfill our innate need to rebel.

We can see this clearly when considering napping elsewhere, such as in an Uber, which serves a similar function as the subway–a common mode of transportation. Ubers are more costly but more relaxed–as Uber driver Imtiaz Elahi says "It's very quiet, very roomy, very comfortable"–whereas the subway is affordable yet chaotic. If you decide to sleep in an Uber, there isn't much chance you'll be woken up until necessary to get off–"I turn on the heated seats and they all have a snug and go to sleep in the back," Elahi says (Elahi). On the subway, however, there are many factors which can contribute to being woken up: noise, other people, smells, announcements. The contrast of a subway environment in comparison to a car environment makes it even more interesting for the choice of sleeping area to be, in fact, a busy, noisy subway. This brings into play the socioeconomic status of people sleeping on the subway: perhaps those who cannot afford an Uber, or those who cannot afford anything at all. Thus, a subway nap is one of those small pleasures in life, for busy people or the homeless: a reprieve from the burdens of the outside world. Successfully napping on the subway is a content little bubble of isolation, despite the environment in which it takes place. The same goes for those taking a nap during their car ride. But the difference between the two is the level of comfortability–the former has little to none, and the latter is far more relaxed. Yet the subway nap breeds such triumphant joy from the sleeper, such a proud feeling of achievement, while the secure Uber sleeper obtains nothing. This is due to the rebellious nature of the subway nap: it is a true achievement, fulfilling to both the sleeper and the observers, while the sleeper in a car is ordinary: he has achieved nothing special. The subway sleeper has a dual role: catching up on his sleep but also (unknowingly) being the Everdeen-esque face of the morning commute resistance.

I found that Abigail Deutsch, who grew up in New York City, wrote about her experience with napping on the subway, and how beloved it is to her. She analyzes this act as a choice she makes willingly and lovingly, and she views it as an escape from the monotony of everyday life. "As the train left each station, I slipped out of consciousness. As it slowed upon arrival at the next, I re-entered the waking world" (Deutsch). The naps are like clockwork to her and start and end on a regular schedule. I find this interesting because her escape seems monotonous in and of itself–if there is such a thing as a scheduled nap, I find that for me personally it may take all the joy out of it. Whereas I wanted to focus on tiredness and fatigue taking over the body and leading to an unwilling nap, Deutsch's naps are something she looks forward to: she "retreated" into herself and "refused to do anything at all" (Deutsch). In that aspect I can see how it contrasts with her busy day of school or work. But this brings me to another idea–the psychology of humans craves a sense of routine. Even

in what she calls one of her "few acts of rebellion," Deutsch embarks on something procedural. She also believes waking up is one of the most clear-headed, pure moments of the entire process–something which I initially viewed as a moment of great disturbance. But someone as accustomed to napping on the subway as Deutsch sees waking up as a clear, strong affirmation of New York City identity–"Not for a moment can you doubt where you are, or who you are. You are a city person, a person dwelling among people" (Deutsch). To Deutsch, it enables a sense of freedom and belonging amongst a sea of people. New York City's entire existence is a place of beautiful collaboration between people from all sorts of places and backgrounds. And on the subway, that split second of waking up, it's where you can really believe yourself to be a New Yorker. Waking up from the subway nap is the bridge between isolation through sleep and belonging through consciousness. Thus, the subway car becomes a powerful and sacred space. In it, those who toil relentlessly, deserve some rest. They feel as though this is a choice made from their own free will, but can we call it that if it is in the subway's nature to beckon to one's tired brain like this?

Even when dozing off unknowingly, there are certain actions people do in order to make themselves more comfortable and prime for sleeping. Cozying up to the pole, putting their head back, adjusting their jacket, putting themselves in a comfier position–all of these things are conscious decisions strategically done for the purpose of sleeping. Therefore, sleeping on the subway exemplifies one's freedom of choice, correct? I don't agree. Even in this act of rebellion–a commute nap–there is no true sense of freedom or free will indicated. It is illusory, and gives the rider a predetermined choice. A tired morning commuter steps onto the subway, a free hour ahead of him… what will he do? Nap? Sure, why not. It is "The Option"–there is no option of course, there is just the nap. But upon waking up, the rider must justify this choice. He then insists there is some kind of deeper meaning behind it, one of the many aforementioned possible reasons. "Yes, I napped out of defiance. I gotta stick it to the man whenever I can!" he swears up and down. It's a lie. Subway naps give an illusion of choice, something that humans crave to have in their clear-cut, defined schedule. Yet it is limiting, and changing our perspectives of what it means to have real free will in a day and age where everything–e.g, commute route and working hours–is predetermined for us. But is the subway nap really such a grave offense? If a person commuting in the ambiguous early morning hours wants to sleep, wants to claim it as a defiant act, wants to believe that he is contributing to a rebellion, wants to make himself feel better, wants to give himself something to look forward to, wants to feel like he's reclaiming his freedom, wants to believe that he has made at least *one* independent choice in his cookie-cutter day, then I say, let him.

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Slowing Down and Noticing Nature

Kendra Ordia

Liminal Nature: Micro-Ecologies in the Margins

As the oldest child of a botanist father, significant portions of my childhood were spent in research greenhouses on a university campus where my love for plants was cultivated under the humid veil of the etched enclosure; where the smell of nitrogen-enriched fertilizer sparks the best kind of nostalgia. I can recall countless trips with my dad pulled over on the side of the road searching for a specific plant species within a unique ecosystem or trudging through an unfamiliar landscape overcome with the vast array of color, textures, patterns, and haptic sensations. I treasure his stories of sites we visited as he richly narrated the ecology or botanical significance of the place sparking an inherent curiosity for nature. As I grew older, I remember sitting in his offices and labs at arboretums pouring over topographical maps and master plans for garden expansions studying their organically intricate details and symbolism. These experiences are deeply rooted in my personal and professional identity and often I wonder if a different (or more obvious landscape-based) career path would have better suited me.

However, my affinity for nature is also coupled by my passion for human-scale interiority which I pursued first academically and professionally through the discipline of design. My academic background in interior design was framed by the built environment and architectural context often defining interiority. But I came to the profession with a childhood enriched by exposure to nature and green things. I move through life in urban and interior places while keeping an eye out for tastes of the natural. Professionally, this has drawn me toward the precepts of biophilic design, which I have woven into interior architecture projects ranging from large scale hospitals to office headquarter buildings. I returned to an architecture school to pursue my graduate degree, but this time with a direct intention to explore merging two seemingly dichotomous environments–nature and the constructed interior. My background has very much formed my identity as a designer and researcher striving to blend notions of biophilia and nature-interiority. And now as a mom to a five-year-old, I strive to share my passions and want her to enjoy and appreciate the natural world for her own well-being and fulfillment. My hope is that she develops unique ways of seeing, imagining, and shaping the world around her, nurtured to do so by direct experiences with nature.

Most of my adult life has been situated in a gradient of urban areas–from the first efforts at new multi-family living in 'transitional' neighborhoods adjacent to downtowns, to the middle of central business or historic districts. The contrast to the single-family Midwest home I grew up in is intentional, but no matter the season, the inherent biophilic need to engage with nature remains present. Regardless of urban location, I have scouted out my corners, parks, planters–anything within walking distance to provide some connection to nature. These have taken different postures that began as intentional or direct–from lush patios to enjoy a cocktail, a park trail to exercise or walk the dog, hospitable sidewalks to push a stroller–and have now moved on to more of a means to access greenspace for my daughter to play. But when considering my urban habits (and by proxy, my family's), the greatest impact happened during the global COVID-19 pandemic. As a society, we were forced to slow down, to isolate, and especially early on, keep our distance from everyone–even outside.

Downtown became a ghost town. Our typical daily route for walking was no longer enjoyable as our customary greetings of neighbors along the way disappeared. The shuttering of businesses reinforced the isolation so many of us were experiencing. We found solace in meandering, slow walks around our adjacent urban university campus joined by birds, foxes, rabbits, and squirrels.

We spent extended amounts of time in these greenspaces looking, touching, smelling, hungry for some semblance of what was. It was these first couple of months of the pandemic in early 2020 that forever changed how I walk through a city.

As a designer, I notice details, materiality, and composition.As the daughter of a botanist, I notice plants. However, as a mother of a then two-year-old, I noticed a whole new layer of nature's design. A vastly different world exists in the lower 24 inches of the urbane. Mosses, grasses, seeds, bugs, micro-climates pooled with standing water in dappled shade exist in the crevices of concrete, on the edges, in the valleys. We spent hours outside here, prepared for any type of weather, engaging with nature. While humanity was struggling, urban nature was thriving in all its wild and neglected states. It created a message of resiliency I still cling to today.

My urban walks continue to be a treasured activity. While they admittedly are no longer daily or all year long (other than walking to work), they are still focused on this entanglement of humans and urban nature. I am drawn to the messy, wild landscapes in the urban margins forgotten by humans. Where weeds are seen as visual evidence of decline, I find life, layers of ecosystems thriving–pollinators fluttering in and out of fenced perimeters, hums of crickets or cicadas, smells of warm grasses rustled up by the wind. In smaller niches I encounter on my walks, I find myself kneeling to explore the intense green of mosses or electric colors of lichens. I can't help but touch the mini cushions pushing through the paving. These forgotten areas no longer exist on human terms. They are spontaneous and resilient. They represent the ecosystem of the city; they are valuable and beautiful.

Fittingly, early in the pandemic I was engrossed in Robin Wall Kimmerer's book, *Gathering Moss*. I read it on our roof top patio daily as our daughter fought a nap. It seemed so familiar and resonated with me as Kimmerer discusses the indigenous way of being: mind, body, emotion, and spirit (vii). Her description of the scalability of ecosystems from forest canopy to floor made me feel as if I was exploring alongside her. It was as if I was invited into her world as she encouraged me to look further into my own. She explains a depth of knowing a place in a way that has echoed in my mind since: "This sense of connection arises from a special kind of discrimination, a search image that comes from a long time spent looking and listening. Intimacy gives us a different way of seeing when visual acuity is not enough" (13). Did it really take a global pandemic to turn my gaze to nature literally existing underfoot? As I flip back through my photo album on my iPhone, I notice a significant shift in content around the beginning of the Pandemic. There were no more work or vacation trips, dinners out with friends, or social events. My images become a mix of verdant details, natural items discovered, micro-ecosystems (Fig. 1–6). Was the forced change in routine necessary to give me this renewed connection to nature? How may we be overlooking other opportunities for meaningful connections with urban nature–for personal, environmental, and climatic benefit?

Throughout these last several years, it is apparent cities have found ways to grow and reinvent themselves. It is my dream that as we increasingly return to urban environments and habits, it does not include sanitation of wild, messy nature and all the beauty entangled within. There is beauty in the cracks; in the liminal spaces we so quickly pass or disregard. My most valued urban habit is now slowing down, crouching down, and looking with a child-like curiosity. I invite you to do the same.





Fig. 1. *Rainwater catchment stream and duckweed*; Fig. 2. *Resilient plants around downtown.* Downtown Lincoln, Nebraska, USA, 2020. Photos: Kendra Ordia.





Fig. 3. *Mosses at our block's pocket park; clovers on campus*; Fig 4. *Lichens, fungi, and moss on campus.* Downtown Lincoln, Nebraska, USA, 2020. Photos: Kendra Ordia.

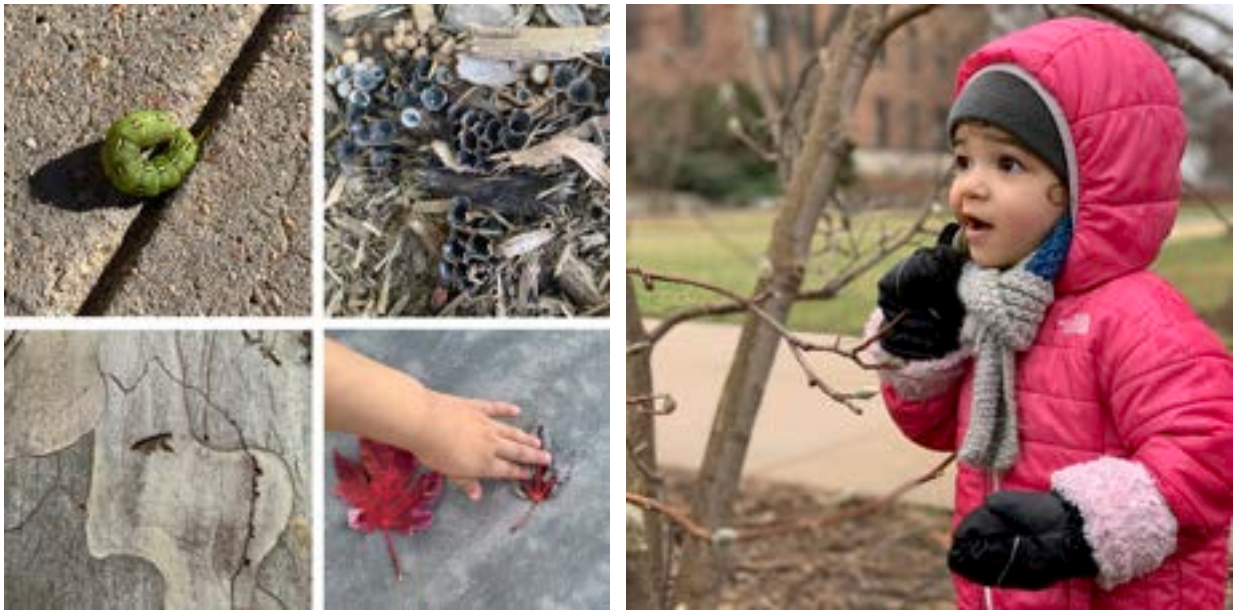


Fig. 5. *Cycles of life and trails left behind on campus;* Fig. 6. *Fuzzy buds as the first signs of spring on campus.* Downtown Lincoln, Nebraska, USA, 2020. Photos: Kendra Ordia.

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Smoking

Sabrina del Rey

Beyond the Clouds: A Societal Examination of Smoking

Flick. The warmth near cold lips. Inhale. Deeper. Hold. Just a moment longer. Exhale. The release of it all–the letting go. If smoking were a dance, this would be the continuous movement that would be performed on loop to the music found in the bustle of the city: the rumble of the subway, the street cars honking, the buskers, etc. Smoking in New York looks like the group of college students outside Bobst, the suspicious weed vendors in Washington Square Park, the fashionistas strutting down the street with a cigarette acting as an accessory, the tired nine-to-five worker taking a smoke on their break, and many more. A universal human experience is the search for satisfying the need for pleasure, even if it is momentary. Whether you like it or not, smoking is an act that will not be fading out of societal practice anytime soon. Regardless of the consistent effort of particular groups and laws set in place to curb the behavioral habit of smoking often, it is a pastime that remains personally indulgent on relieving tension in one's life. Despite the societal reprimanding that is dealt to most smokers, there is an autonomy that an individual must explore in order to find the balance between personal satisfaction and repercussions on one's self and others on a biological and psychological level.

Whether it be lighting up a cigarette or joint, smoking is an urban habit that has been practiced for centuries; and relatively, has had the same course of action throughout time. However in modern day, certain advances have made smoking more readily available and convenient to do on a whim. The activity begins with the particular individual's given circumstances and inclination to "light up." Whether they are stressed, on a work break, or with friends, the "cause" varies from situation to situation. The act itself begins with preparing the materials: a lighter and the drug itself. The next course of action would be to light it and inhale in order to successfully keep it aflame. After the exhale, the individual can now enjoy taking as many drags as they wish until it burns to a finish.

But why smoking instead of other mediums to relax? Why are one-in-four adults around the world avid smokers (Ritchie and Roser)? Focusing in on smoking tobacco, most users often begin a dependency on nicotine in their teen years- whether it be from the subconscious influence of family members and friends who actively smoke, or media depictions of its aesthetic. As studies have discovered, the addiction stems from the properties in nicotine that act on "acetylcholine receptors in the brain, which help to control attention and memory. Nicotine also boosts levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine and the hormone adrenaline," as per *Psychology Today* ("Smoking").

The more someone smokes, the more the brain becomes accustomed to these alterations. If these changes are not met again, the smoker will become no stranger to symptoms of withdrawal. Although it is extremely difficult to quit on a psychical level due to its chemical effects on the brain, its psychological ramifications equally hinder one's inclination to quit when analyzing smoking from a social perspective. *Psychology Today's* article on smoking suggests that "around one-third of all cigarettes are smoked in social situations," as an individual is more likely to participate when they see others do so ("Smoking"). Nicotine is proven to heighten social skills, in which participants experience less social anxiety and are more extroverted when ingesting the drug. Thus, the phenomenon of "smoking culture" continues to grow like it has throughout history.

Smoking has been a consistent throughline in human society for centuries since its discovery–although its existence has spanned much longer than when colonizers brought it back to Europe. Tobacco comes from the plant "Nicotiana," indigenous to North and South America.

According to the National Library of Medicine, "Archeological studies suggest the use of tobacco in around the first century BC, when Maya people of Central America used tobacco leaves for smoking, in sacred and religious ceremonies," along with medicinal and remedial uses. The article "A Social and Cultural History of Smoking" explains how Indigenous people used tobacco to communicate with the supernatural world through the medium of the shaman, given as offerings. Everything changed when the Portuguese and Spanish arrived in the New World and brought the use of tobacco in pipes, cigars, and snuff back to their respective countries. Then began the evolution of smoking apparatuses: hukka (water pipe), chilam (clay pipe), cigarettes, etc. Socially, tobacco was often exchanged as a gift as well as used to establish community hierarchies (*Britannica*).

In Europe, there were many people of authority that were against the integration of smoking into society such as King James I of England who published "Counterblaste to Tobacco" in 1604, or even Popes who would excommunicate anyone who smoked (*Britannica*). By the mid-19th century, smoking had become an established ritual worldwide that authorities couldn't entirely shake if they tried. Cigarettes were initially an expensive luxury item that indicated wealth and social status, but the Bonsack Rolling Machine allowed it to become more revolutionized in 1880–further commercialized by James Buchanan Duke who founded the American Tobacco Company in 1890 (*Britannica*). However, emerging in the 20th century came growing medical reports linking smoking to health risks–causing the US to repress its advertising. This introduced a surge of anti-smoking propaganda whose message can still be seen today in vape ads, however different in form. However, many believed this enjoyable pastime superseded the long term "consequences."

In an interview I conducted between two modern-day smokers, one describes that they "enjoy the intimacy you feel with a person when sharing a joint whether that be on a walk, in a backyard at a party, or around a fire pit at midnight. Still smoking is seen as this taboo, scandalous act which makes it more enticing to do because naturally people want what they can't have or do. However, I just see it as a communal act that shows you a different side of the people around you" (Anonymous 1). This call-to-action for social acceptance of this urban performance can be coupled with the other interviewee's view on its medical aid. She explains the existence of sleeping issues that have plagued her since as long as she could remember, "trying various teas, extra strength melatonin gummies, wearing blue light glasses, not eating after 6 p.m., running, and so many other remedies to help and nothing worked." Going on to say that "the lack of sleep was starting to affect [her] school work, [she] would have headaches throughout the day, and was just tired all the time" (Anonymous 2). The only solution was medical consultation for marijuana use. By significantly bettering her sleeping habits with the use of weed, every other aspect of her life improved as well.

However, not all ends of society are very understanding of these positive attitudes towards smoking, along with certain public spaces that aren't accommodating to the idle use of smoking. There is an existence of preventative measures from certain public institutions to stifle the potential harm it may inflict in courtesy of others, to protect them from "secondhand smoke." Although the warnings are not large or aggressive (it is hard to control smoke as it gets released into the air), smoking signs are posted all over. Whether it be "smoking prohibited" or "smoke free zone," there is a certain air of intentional separation between smokers and their surroundings.

Any "performance" that can be done in public comes with the price of the social behavior and attitudes one might develop towards it, and the risk of being caught if participating in it despite signs warning against it. For example, buskers in New York take these chances on a daily basis when they choose freedom of expression through music rather than obeying the law. Both smokers and buskers must become cognisant of particular locations that prohibit the act. As it is common knowledge that smoking cannot be done indoors, smoking is free-range anywhere outside. With busking, there exist limitations even in public spaces. For example, buskers rarely perform near corporate buildings, inside shopping malls, or simply indoors. When comparing busking to smoking,

we see that participants in either or both activities are rebelling against the societal repression of free will. But they are different due to the fact that busking is more outwardly disruptive in volume, and smoking is very personal and inherently silent. However, smoking is more inwardly disruptive due to its harmful effects on the body, whereas busking is really only "harmful" to the ears of passersby.

The tension between smokers and non-smokers further fuels the ever-ongoing debate as to how much the pastime should be exercised. According to a study done by the National Library of Medicine, "Around 96% were aware of the fact that smoking is harmful to health, 45% viewed second-hand smoke to be equally harmful as active smoking, and 88.3% wanted the government to take strict actions to control the menace of public smoking" (Goel et al). It is undeniable that the tobacco epidemic is one of the most pressing threats to public health around the world, killing over 8 million people every year, found the World Health Organization ("Tobacco"). Adding onto this terrifying number, there is an estimated 1.3 million non-smokers who die from their exposure to second-hand smoke. However, there are more than just health concerns that lead the argument for why more measures against the habit should be taken, on a policy and advertisement level. More than any other product, many countries demonstrate illicit trading in tobacco and other drugs that can be smoked–posing economic and security concerns around the world. There is also a presence of smoking advertisements marketed towards children that invite the addiction to begin younger than it has before. Many leading vape products are known to be branded with child appealing flavors such as "cotton candy" or "strawberry watermelon." But to what extent should only one sector of society dictate how an individual might exercise their free will, especially when an advocate may argue there are a multitude of pros that come with smoking?

Perhaps a smoker fails to recognize the undeniable presence and effect they might have in a given area when choosing to "light up." An individual can significantly affect a space: its overall ambiance and use. One might take precautionary measures to walk on the opposite side of the street of someone smoking, or squeeze their child's hand slightly tighter and walk faster. There is a noticeably larger effect in indoor spaces, especially when it comes to vaping: whether it be the fear of inhaling secondhand smoke, or the harsh flavor of the device itself. Those negatively affected might form or confirm their understanding of the smoker as a delinquent, when in reality the device allows them to have a moment of de-stressing.

Though still disruptive, the more convenient and less obnoxious means of smoking to reach a moment of relaxation is vaping as opposed to traditional smoking. When comparing and contrasting the performances, there are fundamental distinctions that can be made about the apparatus in which an individual smokes from. Although they are resemblant of each other in that the general concept of becoming high is present in both, on a mechanical level they operate differently. Vapes are electrically powered and require charging to access the nicotine. With traditional smoking, whether it be a cigarette or blunt, it constantly has to be lit by a flame; always requiring a lighter to accompany it. This opens up a whole new venue to smoking indoors, which cannot be done with a traditional smoking apparatus. Additionally, the general movement of the action differs: Vaping is as simple as holding it up to the mouth, and the latter must exercise a series of events including the separate use of the lighter to enjoy a drag. The duration of both varies as well–a lit bud lasting until it burns down to the bottom, and vaping is ongoing until the device dies.

Though some insist that smoking gives them the opportunity to think and liken it to meditation, the two activities are quite different. According to a 2023 wellness survey, "people who meditate globally ranges between 200 and 500 million people" (MindWorks). Whether it be for religious reasons or mental health, meditating requires that the individual takes time out of their day to reflect and think deeply on one's own mind–whether it be in silence or through movement and vocalization. In most cases, the act asks that the individual inhales and exhales deeply at a consistently steady rate in order to increase relaxation or heightened spiritual state; in this way,

meditation shares the same objective as smoking. The crucial difference is that meditation is clinically proven to improve health while smoking does the opposite–it worsens it. Meditating for 5-10 minutes a day by breathing slowly and deeply can "improve your heart rate, keep your blood pressure in check and improve your overall well-being" as well as help "people deal more effectively with negative emotions such as depression, fear and grief" (MindWorks). When smoking, however, the body and mind might become physically clouded due to the substances being absorbed by the smoker's lungs and severely alter the individual's brain chemistry.

Altogether, the performance of smoking is rebellious, cathartic, and harmful–all at the same time. It is essential to acknowledge the undeniable evidence indicating the health risks of smoking and the potential spiral that could occur when the consumption of these drugs increases as does the understanding of the social stigmatism that surrounds its use. However, it should equally be respected by observing parties that smoking is a subjective experience that is unique to each person that participates. Although relief and relaxation is a direct affect on the particular individual that does it, it might cause an increase in stress to others that look on. The personal satisfaction a smoker might experience should not overshadow the responsibility people have to their own well being, as well as the well being of those around them. In navigating the complex relationship between personal freedoms and societal expectations, it is imperative to work towards discovering the perfect balance; deciphering what it means to advocate for individual choice whilst also fostering a communal commitment to health and well-being. In this effort, society as a whole may work towards a world that respects diversity of experiences while prioritizing the greater good.

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Spitting

Olivia Thompson

Not Everyone Can Leave Sidewalk Landmines

Imagine that you are walking down the streets of New York City. You pass beneath scaffolding and by public parks. There are people walking their dogs, kids getting to school, street vendors selling stuff. It's cold enough to see your breath. You're focused, maybe even late for an appointment. Your eyes are facing the ground and you see a slightly darker spot of cement. It glistens a little and has a few bubbles grazing the top. Last minute you maneuver around the obstacle. Whether it's a hop, side step, tip toe, or skip, you avoid the damp spot. There are many random spots of spit on the streets of New York. Spitting is human pigeon shit. It's random and gross, and often blocking your path on the sidewalk. It doesn't really impact a pedestrian's life, but it is annoying. If I were to list the different reasons I spit in a day, the list would be pretty short: brushing my teeth, the occasional phlegm while walking in the cold, and a tonsil stone.

Spitting occurs at any time of the day. Participants are often men. It most frequently occurs while walking on the sidewalk, and is directed towards the street. You can always tell when someone is about to spit. We all recognize the pull back before the release. We all spit in a very similar way. Our heads and upper bodies move back a bit to get momentum, and then, like a slingshot, move forward as we spit. In order to spit, the spitter has decided where to send the spit. They lean back a little, crane their neck back and up, and prepare to release. The salivary glands produce the necessary saliva. Internally saliva is being collected in the back of the throat, then pushed forward through the teeth. They are looking where they want it to go, hopefully not on anyone. This occurs right before the climax. It's the final moment of action in preparation. Before this moment, the spitter has just started collecting saliva, and made eye contact with the space they will spit at. Often the landing zones are sidewalks, streets, bike lanes, storm drains, potted plants, parks, cross walks. These places are often public, well lit or very dark, with many people in close vicinity. It is all up to the spitter.

There are many reasons why people spit, both medical, and voluntary. Spitting can often be an involuntary function, or even a means for communication. Some examples include: "Spitting as a compulsion in obsessive-compulsive disorder, as a manifestation of anxiety, in the context of gustatory hallucinations or sensory pathology, and as an automatism in temporal lobe epilepsy. Intellectually disabled persons spit as a maladaptive way of expressing needs/hostility, while in those with dementia, spitting may be a form of combative behavior" (Kar). Spitting can often be viewed as an unmannerly act, but for some there is more behind it. When we are walking on the streets, we aren't thinking about why someone is spitting, we often judge first, and think later, if at all.

Many animals use spit to clean themselves or their wounds, as a defense mechanism, and a form of communication. In the Bible, spit is used to bring back a blind man's sight, both by directly spitting in someone's eyes, or by mixing it with mud to create a paste. A similar use of spit was the Romans spitting on people experiencing epileptic fits, and generally to combat many illnesses or conditions. The ancient Greeks and Romans also would spit in order to preserve their luck, or ward off bad luck (Gonzalez-Crussi). By the 16th century, spitting was a sign of bad manners. By the 19th century, it was a widespread habit in the United States: "public spitting, or 'expectorating' as the more genteel would call the habit, was a deeply ingrained aspect of male culture" (Solomons), due to the popularity of chewing tobacco, pipe tobacco, and cigars. Another factor was pulmonary illness. In 1896, an anti-spitting law was passed in New York City, to prevent the spread of tuberculosis (O'Connor); fines ranged $1-$5, if found spitting in public areas and transit (Solomons).

While in theory everyone can participate in the act of spitting, there is a large disparity between the number of men who do it compared to women, and people of other gender identities. It is considered unlady-like, uncivil, gross, and manly. Sanad, a recent resident of New York City, said "Spitting on the street is gross. I hate it" (Fanous). Giana said "I only spit when I'm smoking" (Smith). Both Sanad and Giana shared that they felt uncomfortable spitting in the streets, but Giana felt that gender weighed heavily on her perception of spitting. A movie example is Rose in *The Titanic* who is taught to spit correctly by Jack. Prior she was too ladylike and sheltered to be able to spit in a successful way. A large glob that goes far. The act of spitting is one of the first defying acts she makes against the rules that dictate her life. In comparison, Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast* is praised for his ability to spit, and is said to win competitions. He is a manly character; his ability to spit further proves this. Other scenarios where spitting occurs include a pact between boys, a man spitting out chewed tobacco, or a man spitting after being in a fight. A cartoon from 1904 shows how to spit and, unsurprisingly, those depicted spitting are men (Fig. 1).

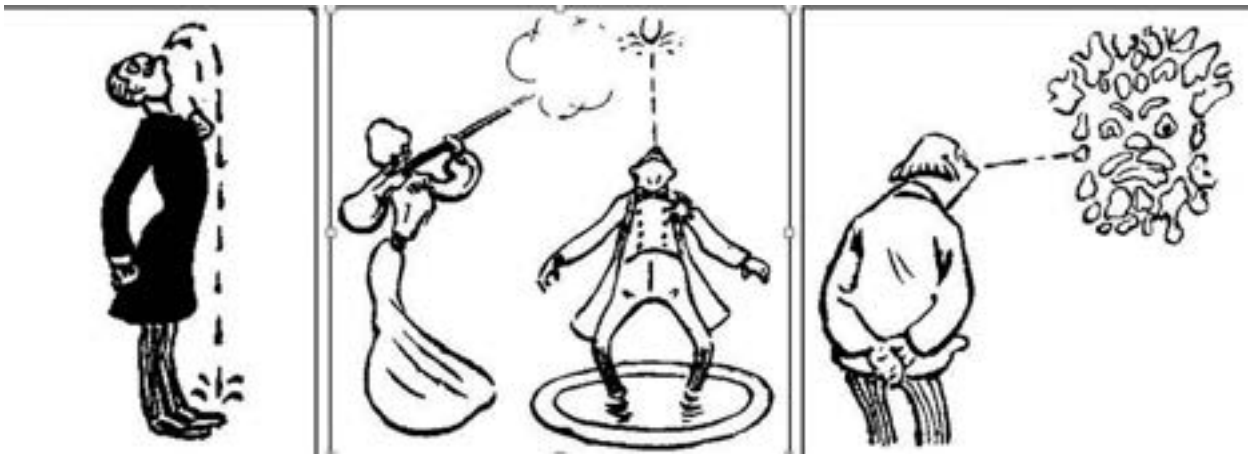


Fig. 1. The images are a comedic take on instructions on how to spit. The first is to teach people to spit away from themselves. The second is to teach people to spit far. Third is how to create artwork using your spit. None of the images depict women spitting. The subject is always a man. Image source: Gonzalez-Crussi.

It's an unwritten rule that women shouldn't spit. We often feel more social expectations and obligations: to seem nice and polite. When I think about how often I see people spitting on the streets, it's probably once every couple of days. I always see a man. I haven't seen a woman spit in the streets. When I spit I always make sure no one is near, or watching, and aim for a hidden spot. Historically, what our mouths are doing is dictated by good manners: eating in a specific way, coughing, sipping a drink, applying lipstick, smoking, and spitting. As well as chewing a piece of gum and spitting it out–a habit both similar to and different from spitting.

I was always told as a child that it was important to keep my mouth closed while I chewed gum. You begin chewing a piece of gum. In the beginning the flavor is strong, and the gum malleable, but the longer you chew it the less flavor exists, and the harder it gets to chew. Your jaw is tired, and the gum has now lost its purpose. You make the decision to spit it out. You don't see a trash can near by. You might keep walking until you find one, or find a bench to stick it underneath. But there's no bench. The infamous action crosses your mind. "I could just spit it out right here." You begin to look around and make sure no one's watching. When you decide the time is right, you eject the gum from your mouth onto the sidewalk, similar to spitting where one is expelling the saliva and releasing it to the ground below them. The main difference is the effect it has on the other pedestrians. If you step in someone's spit, it doesn't really affect you. You might be grossed out for a

bit, but nothing changes. If you step on someone's gum, it's different. We often see this act in the media. Gum is stuck on someone's shoe, and they are stuck in place. It's a comedic trope. One person's actions hamper another person's. In both cases though, there are no consequences for the person spitting. Except when the actions are done not in the street but indoors, such as in school: during elementary school, gum got banned because people were sticking theirs under desks.

Good manners matter everywhere. Women, for example, are often expected to act with grace in everything they do, such as applying lipstick in public, which shares some physicalities with spitting. Reapplying lipstick is something I have become somewhat a master of as I do it multiple times a day. I need no mirror, I can do it while walking, talking, in a car, on the subway. Anytime, anywhere. Since it is both necessary for women to apply lipstick seamlessly, and gracefully, while also having it on at all times while in public, many products have been created to aid in the reapplying of lipstick. Compact mirrors, mirrors attached to the lip product itself, a phone case to hold your lip product, a keychain to hold your lipstick. To apply lipstick on the streets of New York, one must remove the lip product from their bag, take off the cover, purse their lips, and gently apply the product. To finish the activity one smoothes their lips together, and does minor touch ups. All of this can be done anywhere at any time. The physical gestures are similar to spitting. One usually leans forward and the lips take a particular shape. After the act of spitting or applying lipstick, a clean up process ensues. Society puts much more emphasis on female beauty standards. There isn't a male equivalent to reapplying lipstick. Often when a man leaves the house, he won't have to reapply, or adjust anything, whereas with women and female presenting people, it is a constant undertaking. Many acts are viewed as unimportant if they are improving looks and at the same time they are made necessary. When a woman leaves the house without makeup, people might say "You look tired," but if she spends thirty minutes getting ready, she'll be called vain.

Spitting in live performances is less looked down upon. During many live performances the performers are exerting a lot of energy. This leads to the secretion of bodily fluids, like sweat, but also spit. In order to enunciate spitting will occur. Often at professional performances, like Broadway shows, the front row is in a bit of a splash zone. Many people have told me stories of seeing spit fly out of an actor's mouth, and even sometimes hit them. The spitting is often inevitable and unintentional. A vivid memory from my childhood is an acapella show I went to at my elementary school. I was sitting in the front row, and mid song one of the singers spit directly in my eye. I was grossed out. I still can picture it to this day in extreme detail. Someone buys a front row ticket, or even rushes, and they get settled in their seat a foot away from the edge of the stage. The show begins, and they start to notice the bit of spit flying out of the actors' mouths. The lights illuminate it perfectly. They can't ignore it any longer. The actors are spitting a lot. Jonathan Groff is a great example. He spits a lot. In the recorded version of Hamilton, you can see massive amounts of spit leaving his mouth. It is so noticeable that he frequently gets asked about it in interviews.

Do I personally enjoy spitting? No. It makes me feel gross and rude. Do I find saliva particularly disgusting? Also no. As a society we feel we should keep our bodily functions private. I don't disagree with this sentiment but I feel we should further explore the reasoning behind it. Spitting is okay when it comes to DNA testing, brushing our teeth, studying ancestry. What makes these versions of spitting acceptable is privacy. Spitting openly in the streets of New York is constant, judged, and often necessary. Many factors create the expectations surrounding spitting, and gender plays a large role. Along with many other activities, spitting carries our beliefs, opinions, and biases. That's unavoidable but it should encourage us to explore how our social constructs guide our views about everyday activities. Our lives will always be overseen by overarching constructs; many seem invisible, look out for them, and explore why you feel obligated to do or not do something.

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Stickering

Jorge de La Barre

Urban Habits Expanding Beyond Urban Space



Figs. 1-4: From left to right: stickers and graffiti on a mailbox and stickers on a traffic light in New York City, USA; stickers in Barcelona, Spain; stickers on a lamppost in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Image sources: in Works Cited.

Like street art, sticker art has been part of the urban environment for decades; like graffiti culture, a sticker culture is now visible in all cities around the world on street signs (front or back), public phone booths, lampposts, electric poles, traffic lights, and the like (Figs. 1-4). As urban theorist Neil Brenner has suggested, a change of scale is needed to get a sense of planetary urbanization (Brenner). Nature itself has in fact become a receptacle for various urban habits, such as territorial carving (Plocek), tagging, or stickering (also known as sticker slapping, Raili). "Green" destinations also remind us how global tourism has expanded urban habits way beyond the strictly urban areas: from tagged and stickered electric poles (Figs. 5-12), to carved bamboos (Figs. 13-16), to tagged rocks (Figs. 17-20).



Figs. 5-12. *Hiking in Ilha Grande (Angra dos Reis, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), August 2025: tagged and stickered electric poles in the middle of the forest.* Quite notably though, the tags and stickers seem to rarify as one walks deeper in the forest (but this also may change quickly). Photos: Jorge de La Barre.



Figs. 13-20. *Hiking in Ilha Grande (Angra dos Reis, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil),* August 2025 (Figs. 13-14, 17-20), and March 2026 (Figs. 15-16). Top (Figs. 13-16): *carved bamboos in the middle of the forest.* Bottom (Figs. 17-20): *tagged rocks in the middle of the forest.* Photos: Jorge de La Barre.

Between self-expression and advertisement, stickering suggests ways of interacting with the environment and with an imagined stickering community made of street artists promoting their work; visual designers; tattooers; hairdressers; activists; rock bands or the simple sticker slapper amateur or aficionado. There is creativity and ingenuity in sticker placement; there is also a sense of competition and gregariousness. Fighting for maximum visibility, stickers attract each other–like graffiti. They are also eminently territorial–like the traditional wood or bamboo tree carving. As it turns out, the city of signs is now encompassing the forest of symbols.

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Fig. 2: https://www.flickr.com/photos/93779577@N00/4606816687;

Fig. 3: https://quemuerde.wordpress.com/2016/08/29/street-stickers-in-barcelona/:

Fig. 4: https://www.facebook.com/RioStickersRio/. All accessed 3 Dec. 2025.

Summer Lap Swimming

Jo Novelli-Blasko





Fig. 1. *The public pool before the rush of children*. Photo: Tara Logsdon; Fig. 2. *The club pool shallow end with crossing end of lane lines*. 2025, Phoenix, AZ, USA. Photo: Jo Novelli-Blasko.

One of my urban habits is lap swimming. During the summer, I split my habit between two pools: one public, one private. The nature of my lap swimming habit shifts depending on which pool I visit. At the public pool, I'm in the habit of meeting my friend. We connect in the parking lot and walk in together. We share a lane and take things slowish. She swims breaststroke without getting her hair wet, counting laps in her head. I kickboard across wearing fins, a straw hat, sunglasses. My watch tracks our laps, but it invariably measures differently from her count. Part of our habit is a conversation about this difference. When we have the time and inclination, we add a couple laps to our goal. There are four lanes for swimming at the public pool and they are situated in the center of the pool, where 5'6" deep water gives way to the 7' depth (Fig. 1). My habit is to claim the deep lane because the water is so warm, any depth helps. There is a crew of young lifeguards at the public pool, a loudspeaker plays music and an enormous inflated slide floats in the shallow end. Children come by the busload from summer camps daily. My habit is to finish my swim by tumbling around the deep end, but only if there is no one using the diving boards.

At the club pool, I arrive as early as possible and claim a lane by dropping fins, kickboard, and goggles at my favorite spot. I prefer the 2nd lane, it is under the long-course lane end flag line (Fig. 2). The lane end flag line provides a visual guide to help me swim straight when I'm on my back. It also creates a bit of shade. In Arizona, shade can't be over rated. I spend about 3% of my lane time in the shade. My lap swimming lane mates are mostly adult swimmers–a few are Olympians, some hold world-records, and a couple have medals. I wear a swim cap and goggles and the kickboard is for recovery. Due to the angle of the sun, I habitually swim backstroke to the east, and breaststroke to the west. The shallow end at this pool is 7' deep, with a 12' deep diving well. The predominant sound is coach calling the workout. The club aerates the water so it is often chilly, especially when the air measures 115 F. Fresh! I finish my lap swimming habit at the club by removing my fins and doing an unorthodox lap. Westward I swim a combination breast stroke and somersault. Two strokes and tumble, two strokes and tumble, all the way across the pool. The return back stroke is also a hybrid: I use reverse butterfly arms (my own invention!) and no kicking, interrupted with a 1-minute deadman's float in the middle of the lane.

Summer Salsa Dancing

Elena Yaskun

The City is One Big Salsa Dance Floor



Fig. 1. *"Salsa by the Water" party, Wednesdays in September, 6-9 p.m., Domino Park, Brooklyn*. New York City, USA, 2025. Water color mixed media. Original artwork by Elena Yaskun.

I have been dancing salsa for over 10 years. Dancing salsa in the summer is a very different scene: in the winter, people usually dance inside; in the summer, the whole city turns into one big salsa dance floor. You can dance outdoors and we have a lot of places to do so–in all the parks–Brooklyn Bridge Park, Central Park, Domino Park, Bryant Park; in the squares–Union Square, Herald Square; in Industry City; on the Pier in Manhattan. Salsa in the parks is organized by the City's Parks Department. I have been to almost all of these. There are a lot of places in the Bronx and Queens too, but I don't go because they are too far. In the Rockaways, they do have salsa dancing on the beach, and also on Coney Island. Parks, squares, beaches… the salsa parties are everywhere (Fig. 1).

The salsa events organized by the Parks Department happen regularly: some of them have been running for years. Many of the summer salsa parties start right after Memorial Day, when the weather gets nicer, and go on all summer–the salsa party at Sahadi's in Industry City, for example, goes till Halloween. Every Friday, they have two salsa parties, the first one starts around 6 or 7 p.m., with a live band, and it ends around 9 p.m. The next one starts right after, with a DJ, and goes on till 1 or 2 a.m. These schedules are also posted on social media: people who are into salsa know where the parties are every day. You can also just walk by, see people dancing, and ask them if it is a regular party. Sundays, at noon, there is a salsa party in Central Park, by the fountain. Sometimes live bands come in the beginning and the end of the season, sometimes in the middle, but most of the time these parties are DJ-ed. All the places for salsa dancing also have lights. In Domino Park, in Williamsburg, they built a whole sitting area. Wednesdays, they have parties there, 6-9 p.m., "Salsa by

the Water." Because salsa dancing is so popular, some of these salsa parties overlap: there are just too many of them. If you like it, in the summer, you can dance everyday, and for free.

In addition, some salsa studios make their own events, outside, in the summer, or join bigger city initiatives. Salsa Salsa Dance Studio, near the Barclays Center in Brooklyn, for example, participates in the "Open Streets" program in Prospect Heights, on Vanderbilt Avenue, where they host a salsa party one Saturday a month, 5:30-9 p.m., from Memorial Day till after Labor Day.

Summer salsa dancing grew recently. I think the popularity of salsa is growing because people use computers too much, they lack personal interaction. Different organizations which work in the salsa scene also do a lot to popularize it. Especially after the pandemic, summer salsa dancing grew like WOW! Salsa dancing on the Pier in Manhattan has been there for a long time. But then it spread elsewhere. Before, it was mostly held in Latin communities, like in the Bronx: now, it is so popular that it went out of the Latin community: it is accessible to everybody, in every borough.

Every salsa dancing event has an intro salsa class, 30-40 min. long: with an instructor and a DJ. You can come to the intro class without any experience, they will teach you enough steps so you can dance, in a very friendly atmosphere. They teach the class with the intention that people do not know: basic steps and partner steps, and you can start dancing right away. Most people come to these parties solo, sometimes they come with friends, that's the beauty of the whole thing: you will find friends at the party because it is a very welcoming environment. With partner dance, like salsa, you only have to bring positive energy and willingness to participate because the music is amazing already. Salsa music is happy music, it will set up your mood anyways.

I live in Brooklyn, so I like to go salsa dancing to Sahadi's, because it is on Fridays, at the end of the week, that's a good time for me. I went several times this year to Harold's Square, they were doing not only salsa but other dances too. I like to go to the Pier in Manhattan as well: in Hudson River Park (Pier 76 or Pier 45), they have Sunset Salsa every Thursday, at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday salsa dancing in Washington Square Park is very popular, from 6-9 p.m., but I have not gone recently. The whole park is dancing there, it's a good DJ, playing good music.

Salsa dancing is always a good experience. People want to communicate with each other; dance is a great way to communicate! If you come with an open mind, wanting to dance, having a good time is guaranteed. The parks–Central Park, Washington Square Park–have benches you can sit on, there are trees, everything is there for you to have a great time. At Sahadi's, there's also a bar, which for this city, is nice. Though salsa people don't drink too much, if you drink you won't be able to dance, because it involves turns: it is a partner dance, you have to control your movement and skills are involved. You use common sense of how to dress for salsa dancing in the summer: you are moving, and it goes pretty fast, so you don't want to wear clothes to obstruct your movement. I can spontaneously decide to go out dancing, at any time, any day of the week.

Since I live in Kensington, the closest salsa dance parties for me are at Sahadi's and Coney Island. At Coney Island, the dance goes all weekend long: it starts on Friday and ends on Sunday. But it doesn't bother me to travel to salsa dancing in the summer because the public transportation is pretty good. Everything is done for salsa parties to be convenient. For me, it is hardest to go to Williamsburg, I have to cross the whole borough. All parties are done so they are conveniently located for people. I know someone who comes from Queens and another person who comes from the Bronx, to Sahadi's. Manhattan is convenient for everybody, they go from all boroughs there; the oldest salsa parties in Manhattan are the one at the Pier and the one in Central Park.

There are changes: more people are interested in salsa dancing, and the crowd has gotten younger and more diverse. If you want to have a good night, if you want to dance, you don't need to go to the club, you can do it for free and everyone likes that. Salsa dancing is absolutely accessible, it is a great way to experience New York in the summer, if you are visiting; summer salsa dance party hopping can be a part of a really nice tour of the city.

Surfing the Subway

Gavin Stubbings

The *Angel Barrier*: A Public Installation Proposal

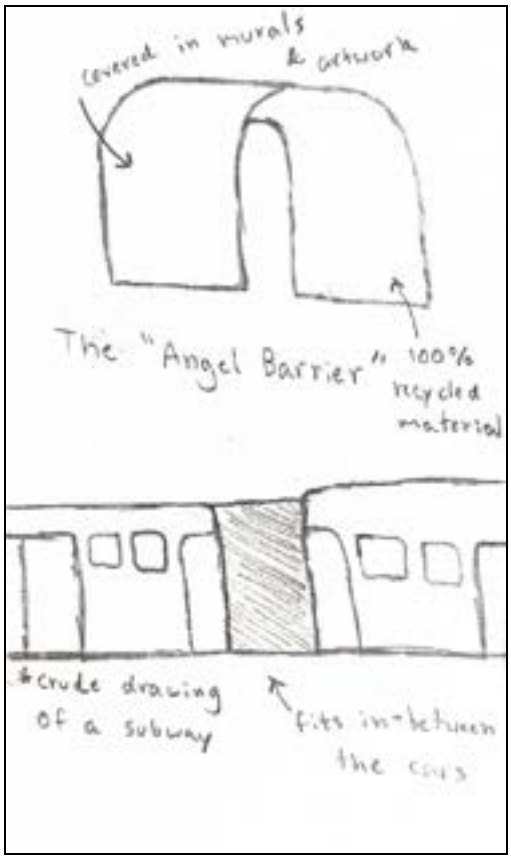


Fig. 1. *Angel Barrier,* Public Art Proposal for New York City subways, for Prof. Blagovesta Momchedjikova's Essay Writing Class, Spring 2025, NYU; presented at NYU's Global Urban Summit in April of 2025. Sketch: Gavin Stubbings.

I come here to propose an idea for a new public art installation that will not only make the subways a more positive environment, but also work to prevent the dangerous act of subway surfing. I've created a protective archway known as the *Angel Barrier,* which slots between the gaps in the subway cars (specifically on the 7 train), preventing anyone from getting on top of the vehicles or jumping off to their death. The barrier is made from 100% recycled materials, and it is planned to have the interior and exterior of the shell painted by local artists to provide the public with an art installation during their daily commutes (Fig. 1). Painting these and putting on a theoretical art exhibition not only increases happiness and morale for those viewing but also decreases stress levels, which can often be quite high for someone rushing to work or school. By viewing art, your brain releases dopamine, alleviating stress and reducing symptoms of depression, which plague the city due to its fast-moving environment.

Each barrier will be equipped with quick-release latches that will be directly controlled through the conductor's station, preventing anyone from forcefully removing these barriers. However, if someone can successfully break off the barrier, if the quick release latches are damaged in any way, an alarm will be set off and the train will stop, meaning that if anyone is desperate enough to get onto the top of the train, they'll set off an alarm and stop the train from moving,

halting their adventure. Perpetrators who set the alarm off will face serious consequences and fines for attempting to board the top of a train illegally and damaging public property. In addition, it prevents the need to lock the doors between the trains in case someone needs to change cars due to their life being put in danger because of an emergency.

Throughout history, riding on top of a train has been an insane stunt, even a habit, performed by thrill seekers and adrenaline junkies, and it still prevails today. The 7 train, which runs above ground for most of Queens, NYC, has been popular among subway surfers. One particular station, "111th Street–Greenwood Avenue," which opened on October 13, 1925, has been the site of many accidents in recent years, especially of the subway surfing variety. Due to the open nature of the station, it's quite easy for anyone to hop on top of the train here, which often does not end well. Just on March 14th, 2025, a teenager was brutally injured there, after trying to surf the 7 train, halting service for a while, causing many to be late to school or their jobs. Even though the station was renovated in 2015, no strong safety precautions, like fences or barriers, were placed to stop incidents like these. This is one of the many stations where teenagers have been critically injured or even killed due to the act of subway surfing–a habit that can turn deadly in a second. The public art installation that I am proposing will first be placed on the 7 train, in honor of those who have recently lost their lives to subway surfing or subway-related incidents.

Due to uprisings in social media trends and competitions between teenagers to see who has the nerve to subway surf, deaths have been rising rapidly in recent years. Cedar Attanasio, author of "Kids in New York keep dying while 'subway surfing' on top of trains. Can they be stopped?" highlights the issue with social media and how it's affected our generation into going as far as riding on top of trains. Ka'Von Wooden, a teenager who tragically lost his life after subway surfing with a couple of his friends, was an example of how social media and peer pressure can lead someone to commit this dangerous act, which could've been so easily prevented if proper safety measures were put into place.

Considering the subway surfing crisis and the role that public art can play in alleviating that, I think that the *Angel Barrier* poses no demands on busy New Yorkers yet it saves them from trouble. The art installation I've created doesn't require anyone to sit and ponder or interact with it, it truly aims to serve a simple purpose and to co-exist with the public. The *Angel Barrier* doesn't require people to interact with it, however, it works to protect people from seriously injuring or even killing themselves. These barriers were created to protect and serve the public, and are reminders to everyone who steps onto the train of the lives that have been lost on the subway trains.

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Surveying

Jo Novelli-Blasko

A Survey of Surveying from The Habitorium





Fig. 1. Survey Response from Johnstown's Ethnic Fest. Johnstown, PA, USA, 2018; Fig. 2. Respondents completing *The Survey of Gallery Going Habits* at the Art of Science show. Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2017; Fig. 3. Habit Paintings going out in the mail. Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2017 (watercolor paintings by Jo Novelli-Blasko). Photos: Jo Novelli-Blasko.

I have developed a practice of surveying people about their habits (Figs. 1-3).

It all started in 1998, when I asked co-workers about their food ordering preferences during weekend shifts at Merrill Lynch. I was temping at the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan to help fund my graduate school experience at NYU. The workload generated by the Investment Bankers was demanding, we worked through our lunch hours, eating at our desks. Ordering food delivery was a joint effort and the particularities of the process fascinated me. I was new to the city and the gig, but I could sense that this habit of consumption was as old as the hills. Observing the flow of food through the office reminded me of that feeling you get when looking out to sea or across the Grand Canyon: it has been happening for a long time and it will endure forever, whether you're looking at it or not. I was taking a class called "Food and Performance" and the food delivery survey would be my semester project. I conducted research on the elements of a useful survey instrument, learned how to craft a good question, and how to follow up with insightful interviews. I distributed 50 surveys to my work colleagues, received 30 responses, and interviewed 5 people. I also collected to-go menus from restaurants to support the survey: Baby Buddha, TexasBBQ, Fresco, Bon Oriental Gourmet, and others. At the end of the semester, I delivered my report on the survey. It launched an enduring academic interest in everyday life and a fascination for the archives generated by habitual behavior.

Many years later when I was living in Phoenix, Arizona and had abandoned my academic pursuits, I was practicing watercolor painting and indulging my curiosity about the rich history of women painting botanical illustrations. I tried my hand at carefully glazing a specimen to life. Drawing from live plants demands close attention to pattern and color, the focus attracted me. Botanical illustrations are carefully cataloged, chronicled, documented. They are art created for the archive, art as a record. I was beginning to develop some chops with the paint and finding time to do it, when life took a turn.

In August 2013, I suffered a catastrophe in the surgical theater. The experience cost me my habits: the patterns of my life felt scrambled. The dogs needed walking, my studio sat idle, and the dishes went unwashed at the end of the day. I had to re-learn simple tasks, regain my habits of heart and mind, and rebuild my everyday rhythms. I struggled with the minutiae of the day. What are the gestures that hold a life together? What patterns of behavior hold promise for daily existence? Why

have habits at all? I teased apart the definition of "habit" and learned crystals grow in habits. Like crystals, habits cleave onto and away from each other, they stack, they multiply. Knowing this gave me hope that I could build a repertoire of habits. I started building a Tarot habit, studying the cards one at a time. This habit helped me manage the larger spiritual questions raised by the event. Habits are also uniforms for specific jobs. I could imagine putting a habit on and trying it out, then pulling it apart, turning it inside out, or opening the seams when it didn't fit the task at hand.

As I healed, I set about asking other people about their habits and the habits they observed. I made notes from our conversations and painted small watercolor illustrations which I sent as thank you notes to people who shared their habits with me (Figs. 3-5). I mailed hundreds of paintings, without envelopes, to capture the postal system's date stamp. The paintings began to feel a lot like botanical illustrations of other people's habits. I gave my practice a name: The Habitorium.





Fig. 4. Habit Painting–*Aesthetic Habit–She's in the habit of matching, like her mother and her mother before her* (detail); Fig. 5. Habit Painting–*Sibling Habit: Tony visits his brother Charlie on Sundays, after church* (detail). Watercolor paintings: Jo Novelli-Blasko.

When I was well enough, I deepened my studio practice by developing focused surveys to document my inquiries about habits more fully. I paired the instruments with performance and collected data live, asking questions at the place of habit. The Habitorium's first public survey was *The Survey of Gallery Going Habits* for the Art of Science show at First Studio in Phoenix, Arizona. I mailed habit paintings to the gallery for exhibit in the show, and appeared in person to interview people who strolled through the opening. The response was strong; The Habitorium was making a buzz in the gallery (Fig. 2). I invited respondents to share their name and address, and sent a report on the survey after the show closed.

Surveying is a way-making experience for me. It reveals a lay of the land, mapping gesture and affect in familiar territories. When I need help sorting through an emotional challenge, navigating a major life change, or celebrating a shared experience, I craft a survey! Grief compelled *The Survey of Joyful Habits.*

My surveying habit is not only urban, it thrived in a rural setting, too. I moved back to my hometown in Pennsylvania, and found studio space for The Habitorium. Johnstown's population has been shrinking for 50 years. On Labor Day weekends, the Ethnic Fest attracts thousands of people back to their hometown to celebrate with folk arts, ethnic foods, and lots of reminiscences. The festival happens in Cambria City, one of the oldest neighborhoods of Johnstown. In the 1880s, thousands of immigrants settled there, next to the river and within walking distance of the steel mills. Ten Catholic churches served the immigrant communities of the ½ square mile neighborhood, each supporting a different ethnic community including Hungarian, Polish, Slovakian, Italian, Greek, and

Irish populations. In 2010, the Roman Catholic church deconsecrated 9 of the churches and consolidated parishioners into the Resurrection Church at St. Stevens. Another church across the street, was converted into a mixed arts space called VOMA, the Venue of Merging Arts. I served as a member of the Artist Advisory Board for VOMA, to support their programming efforts, staging theater and visual arts on the main floor, and live music in the basement. In 2019, VOMA invited me to conduct *The Survey of Johnstown Habitus* during Ethnic Fest, to learn about how the town sees itself (Fig. 1). I set up shop in the nave and gathered more than 250 responses. I wanted to learn what makes Johnstown feel like home for other people. Who comes back and why? Who is still living in Johnstown, and how? The survey findings resonated with my own sentiments, reassuring me that I was in the right place. Surveys are calibrating.

I conducted a few other surveys in Johnstown, one was about habits under a blue moon at a wedding reception. Employment offered survey opportunities too. I surveyed audiences for the regional orchestra and conducted focus groups to determine obstacles to attendance at concerts. I developed surveys for member-owners of a food co-operative in Maryland, about their grocery shopping habits. *The Survey of Bookish Habits* scratched an itch I caught while managing a non-profit used bookstore. We processed hundreds of donated books every week including many antique, collectible and rare ones. The condition of the books we took in varied wildly. I was struck by the incredible trove of habit embedded in the donations. The books told stories about their owners through marginalia, bookmarks, and how each collection of books hung together. I wanted to intentionally sample that data. I got my opportunity!

The Habitorium attracted the attention of Arlan Hess at City Books, Pittsburgh's oldest used bookstore. She was curating art for IAMB, a micro gallery inside the store, and she liked my paintings. We talked about habits, books, and art. I pitched *The Survey of Bookish Habits* and Arlan enthusiastically bit! We scheduled a solo show of watercolor paintings inspired by survey responses. I crafted the instrument, shared it with her and her readers, then waited for the results to roll in. Some watercolor paintings are profiles of respondents, others illustrate specific details from their replies (Figs. 6-7). The show opened March 7, 2020.





Fig. 6. *Bookish Habit–He only personalizes guides and manuals. Dog Ears are a bad habit of his. He enjoys books about the history of gunsmithing* (detail); Fig. 7. *Bookish Habit–She is very happy to be surrounded by books, keeps her books when she's finished reading them, and reads in moving vehicles* (detail). Pittsburgh, PA, USA, 2020. Watercolor Paintings: Jo Novelli-Blasko.

Three years later, paintings from the *Survey of Bookish Habit*s were stitched into a 2-foot square *Book of Bookish Habits* and juried into the Vanguard Showcase at Eric Fischl Gallery on the campus of Phoenix Community College (Figs. 8-9). It appeared in the show, along with 3 clipboards, blank surveys, and some pens. The Habitorium gained 28 more responses from this happening. Surveys have legs!



Figs. 8-9. *The Book of Bookish Habits*; Respondents completing the *Survey of Bookish Habits*. Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2023. Photos: Jo Novelli-Blasko.

Moving back to Phoenix in 2022 was a jarring transition. I left Johnstown, an impoverished rust belt town with fewer than 20,000 residents, for one of the fastest growing US cities with a population of nearly 5 million people.

Where to begin? With a survey, of course!

The Survey of Urban Habits was designed to inform my return to city life. Since I published in Streetnotes during COVID season, I'd fostered the idea of co-editing a volume with Blagovesta and Jorge. *The Survey of Urban Habits* was a perfect fit for the journal which invites submissions reflecting on ethnographic, documentarian, and poetic practices. It was the first time I built a survey in collaboration, usually it's a solo effort. Blagovesta and Jorge helped shape the instrument; our work together offered some surprises. Normally, I ask enough questions to fill one side of a letter-sized page. The Survey of Urban Habits is printed on both sides, with 15 questions. I was excited but skeptical, that's a lot of information to gather! Our collaboration challenged me to explain my methods and reasoning, too. Every survey I craft asks people to draw a detail of their habit. Blagovesta and Jorge thought this would limit the number of replies and deter people from completing the survey if they felt they "didn't know how to draw." I described the hundreds of drawings I've collected over the years to assure them. One thing is true of every survey I conduct: I am humbled by how people step into their responses with great specificity and all their heart. The most profound evidence of these generous engagements can be found in the small drawings they offer. My colleagues were persuaded and the question remained on the survey. To my great delight, more than 75% of survey responses include a drawing, some offered more than one. I couldn't be more pleased with the results of *The Survey of Urban Habits* and the scope of our anthology. Read the Report on Survey of Urban Habits (Appendix C) to see all the drawings and an index of more than 200 unique Urban Habits.

Taking Selfies

Jorge de La Barre

Selfie Habits: On Life Facing the Screens

> The distracted person, too, can form habits.
> More, the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction
> proves that their solution has become a matter of habit.
> Walter Benjamin

From massive online circulation to the numerous selfie museums that recently opened in various cities around the world, selfie culture has become so prevalent over the last decade, it is now ubiquitous. Yet, it struck me when I started researching about selfies for this paper, that selfie-taking is seldom thought of in terms of habit: why is that? Our contemporary experience is both real *and* virtual; it is no surprise that habits will have developed specific to the virtual world. People check their smartphones every minute as they commute or walk down the street, oblivious at times to their immediate surroundings. Just as they forget that there is a real world out there, they forget how rapidly new digital habits have in fact been incorporated. Selfie-taking is one of them–a precious document of contemporary experience in the digital age.

The Selfie Phenomenon

A quick checklist helps document the selfie frenzy over the last decade: on November 19, 2013 the Oxford Dictionaries announced selfie as the "Word of the Year" (BBC News). Likewise, 2014 was declared by Twitter the "Year of the Selfie" (BBC News). Since 2014, there is an international "Museum Selfie Day" (21 January), as well as, in the US, a "National Selfie Day" (21 June). There is also, since 2019, an "International Selfie Day" (22 June); according to their founders, the "SelfieElate" team, "selfies are a wordless language that we speak internationally" ("SelfieElate Manifesto"). An integral part of everyday life for millions of people, selfies are not only extensions, digital avatars of a self now fractalized in the social networks, they are also changing the urban fabric in various cities around the world, where dedicated places invite the happily-connected public for self(ie)-celebrations. Suddenly, the practice of selfie seems to be the ultimate digital/urban habit.

After Columbus' 1st Selfie Museum opened in 2021–appropriately named the "Viral Selfie Museum"–"Original Selfie Museums" (also known as "Instagram Museums") have popped up across the US–from Detroit to Seattle (Fig. 1), Denver, Austin, San Antonio, Miami, Atlanta, Alpharetta, Raleigh. There are also: the "Museum of Selfies" in Las Vegas, the "Picture Project CLT" in Charlotte, and the "Good Day Selfie Museum" (closed as of March 30, 2024) in Ferndale. The "Selfie Wrld" website also displays various locations for "trending selfie" museums in the US. Worldwide, there are, to name just a few, the "Selfie Museum Greece" in Thessaloniki, the "Selfie Museum Firenze" in Italy, and the "Selfielicious: First-Ever Selfie Museum In The Philippines."



Fig. 1. Website frontpage of Seattle Selfie Museum. Source: *Original Selfie Museum.*

It is hard to keep track of all the selfie museums that exist worldwide. And as I am writing this, more will have opened, probably. Now that global cities may be mapped according to their most popular Instagram hashtags (for example, New York: see Sugar), the urban fabric itself is going virtual: a sort of placemaking from below is thus instrumentalized for an extended form of "visual consumption" (Zukin). Giant hashtags signs ("#ILOVECITY") are invading places of overtourism, mass-feeding imaginary lifestyles for the world to see–before city councils eventually decide for their removal (Hitti), precisely because they became selfie spots.

According to the Photutorial website (Broz), key selfies statistics for 2023 indicate that:

– 92 million selfies are taken every day, accounting for 4% of all the photos taken (2.3 billion) daily;
– Over 50% of millennials have published a selfie at least once;
– People smile in 60% of selfies;
– An average "selfie-taker" is 24 years old;
– Women take 1.5 times more selfies than men.

Let us mention "selfiecity," a global selfie website dedicated to academic research coordinated by digital culture and new media theorist Lev Manovich, that investigates "the style of self-portraits (selfies) in five cities across the world: Bangkok, Berlin, Moscow, New York, and São Paulo" (Fig. 2). Last, but not least, after the movie *Selfiee* came out in 2023, an Instagram reel featuring Akshay Kumar and Salman Khan dancing together on the film's song "Main Khiladi" went viral and became the most viewed and most liked reel by an Indian celebrity on Instagram. At a promotional event for the film, Akshay Kumar clicked 184 selfies with fans in three minutes, breaking the Guinness World Record for the highest number of selfies clicked in three minutes…


Fig. 2. The *selfiecity* project investigates "the style of self-portraits (*selfies*) in five cities across the world" (montage of respective cities data, from left to right: Bangkok, Berlin, Moscow, New York, São Paulo). Source: *selfiecity*.

The Selfie as Habit

In my answer to the "Survey of Urban Habit" for the present issue of *Streetnotes* (see Appendix B), I was describing a habit that I have had for years: taking street photos almost daily. Then, thinking of photography, the idea came that the omnipresent practice of selfie seemed worth exploring in terms of habit. I had mentioned that I rarely take selfies, and I do not share content in the social media or networks: I use WhatsApp or email instead, to share my photos with selected friends or family. I also described that I stopped using a digital camera a few years ago. Like most amateur photographers, I now use the all-in-one smartphone for literally everything, including photo-taking: texting, checking emails, surfing the web, talking on the phone, etc.

What strikes me now with selfies–more than the usual take on narcissism (Yalcinkaya)–is their self-celebratory, participative nature (Gunthert). Selfies also display signs of empowerment: people not only take self-portraits, they *share* them, hoping to be seen, liked, followed. While millions of selfies circulate in the social networks every day, some will eventually "go viral." The universal access to mobile devices with selfie cameras is exactly the reason why people started taking selfies, to begin with. Today, the selfie trend is here to stay.

According to the Oxford Dictionaries, a selfie is "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website." As the definition makes clear, selfies exist as they are shared, circulated in social media apps (for example: Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, or TikTok). To be sure, sharing has been a social habit for centuries in human history. As an established new digital habit, the practice of selfie reveals itself as an eminently social activity. Future research on selfie culture may be concerned with extending or renewing some classical and contemporary sociological issues in the digital age such as, for example: "the presentation of self in everyday life" (Goffman), social distinction and habitus (Bourdieu), or the question of changing social norms and conventions within selfie culture (I will come back to those quickly below). Selfie culture may be considered also in terms of *sociability*–one of the social forms defined by Simmel and involving engagement and participation: in what sense is selfie culture a document of online sociability, and, more broadly, how are Simmel's social forms of sociability, exchange, conflict, or subordination reshaped by digital culture? Finally, are there new, identifiable social forms emerging in the digital age?

What I think is worth exploring from a socio-cultural point of view is the extent to which, contrary to widespread media critique describing self-obsessed narcissists suffering from low self-esteem and rampant depression, the selfie-takers make sense of the world they live in–given the wider context of an increasingly mediated, hyperconnected life. They are "prosumers" (Ritzer) i.e., both producers and consumers, enmeshed in a circuit of mediated "prosumption" activities specific to current social media culture, defined as a mix of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff) and attention economy (Williams), that excels in promoting the staging and performing of the individual self. Apart from the act of selfie-taking which takes place "out there" in the real world, all activities related to selfie circulation happen in the virtual world of social media and networks. The *circuit* of selfie can thus be described as a participative interplay, of posting, sharing, and circulating on one hand, of liking, forwarding, and following on the other hand.

Selfie culture has its norms and conventions that define the types of selfies that are appropriate, and the ones that are not. While most mainstream selfies may be coded as "good," according to the socio-cultural status-quo at work in a certain place and time, others may be coded the opposite. For example, "selfies at funerals," or selfies at "dark tourism" sites (concentration camps, disaster zones…) have regularly raised moral panic and media outrage; they tend to be coded as "bad" or inappropriate. No doubt, the norms and conventions ruling over the practice of selfie reflect the ones operating in society at large. Selfie culture, just as digital culture in general, are

fast changers. Combined, they accelerate the changes in society as well.

As reflecting new practices at work in contemporary society, digital and selfie cultures suggest an emancipation from social class determinants, notably a significant move away from *habitus* theory (Bourdieu 1977). Contrary also to Bourdieu's concept of *distinction* (the idea that one's particular tastes come from the milieu and social class in which one lives–Bourdieu 1987), the pervasive trend of selfie-taking suggests a form of transversal conformity, a certain mimicry. It has been argued that mimicry is "an unconscious and automatic process that is subjectively experienced as too strong for suppression" (Kozinets 5). Also, "mimicry has strong adaptive effects: it creates liking and helps to achieve an affiliation objective" (Ibid.). Thus, mimicry is seen as an essential and important part of human social existence. The term "Chameleon effect" has been used to refer to "non-conscious mimicry of postures, mannerisms, facial expressions, and other behaviors of one's interaction partners" (Ibid.).

Selfie-taking seems to be contagious; there certainly is an inflation of imitation. Yet, mimicry can also encourage the play of differentiation. Because of a tremendous viral competition for online recognition and visibility, selfie-takers may be drawn into excess and exaggeration. The cases of "kilfies" (Cappeli) or "death by selfie" (Lovitt) are extreme examples, and alarmingly high. In a desire to push the limits of taking more daring, riskier selfies, an average of 43 people have died taking selfies every year, between October 2011 and November 2017 (Broz).

As an integral part of contemporary visual experience (La Barre), the practice of selfie confirms an increasingly aestheticized relation to the world, where real life and life facing the screens influence each other permanently. With selfie culture, Goffman's *Presentation of self in everyday life* has gained a new extension in the virtual world: the possibilities of performance are being multiplied almost endlessly; with "the presentation of self(ies) in digital life," the social world is now fractalized in a digital multitude of avatars and theatrical metaphors. Not only the nature of the presentation of self has changed, but so has the status of identity itself. Identity is now conceived as narrative: "To exist, one must be able to tell one's story, and not just to have been there." (Nachtergael 264–my translation). Sociability and the presentation of self in everyday life are now amplified by the social media. More than a visual manifestation of habitus or class distinction, the practice of selfie emerges as a new sharing habit, part of contemporary digital culture where protagonism, self-engagement and self-empowerment are keys.

A subculture, initially the reserved domain of adolescents celebrating their need for mediated self-affirmation, selfie culture is now mainstream, and reshaping the contours of visual culture. For best *and* for worst, selfie culture *is* visual culture in this early 21st century. From the Pope to the late Queen Elizabeth II, from Obama to the Kardashians, from Ai Weiwei to global tourists, from the girl and boy next door to their grandparents, everybody is "doing" selfies now. All polarities now melting into one digital culture, selfie culture is indistinctively highbrow and lowbrow. There is a radical move, beyond the traditional symbolic boundaries of high and low culture. And now that an all-encompassing selfie culture has emerged, it feels like selfies have always existed: with a little help from Photoshop now boosted with AI, it turns out that pop icons like Marylin Monroe or Che Guevara were doing selfies too!

Wasn't selfie-taking bound to become a habit? First and foremost, the habit is (in) the device: with selfie cameras and internet access via mobile or wi-fi connections, smartphones are built-in technologies of the self, allowing for an all-in-one selfie-taking, posting, and sharing. The selfie is its own signifier: just because he or she is "worth it," the self-sufficient, solipsistic selfie-taker bears its own justification. As such, selfie culture displays one of today's most irresistible habits, a need to self-document and show presence at any "Instagrammable" moment: a gathering with friends or family, a birthday party, wedding or funeral, the self-celebration of posing in front of… the world's most popular selfie spots (the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, Mona Lisa…), or routinely self-witnessing a

fire hazard or traffic accident around the block.

The high-frequency online exhibition of the predictably happy transactional duckface exuding self-satisfaction in front of the bathroom mirror only confirms the nature of selfies as a standout trend and potentially addictive digital habit. The practice of selfie hyper-realizes one of humanity's deepest needs–now transplanted into the virtual world: to be recognized and feel connected with others, in co-presence or virtual distance. And when being influential or "going viral" become ultimate goals in digital life, selfie habits also demonstrate the ultimately competitive, individualistic, neoliberal social/digital forces at play. On the other hand, the potential of self-witnessing and "selfie activism" (Nikunen) in challenging those forces can never be discarded. But then, what is the meaning of the selfie?

The Selfie as Mediated Thirdspace

A floating signifier, the selfie also blurs the boundaries between representation and simulation. Like traditional photography it still is representation, in the sense that the world "out there" is objectively represented: "something" does stand in front of the camera – a landscape, a vista, a person, a group of people, a crowd, etc. Yet, simulation is at play; the photographer is now self-included, self-staged or self-witnessing the scene. In this sense, all selfies are self-performances for the world to see. Understanding the performance of selfies as placemaking mechanisms also suggests that places are decontextualized and re-signified virtually; they are reinvested with the singular, specific self-presence of the selfie-taker. Here, two dimensions involved in the practice of selfie must be stressed: self and place, or embodiment and placemaking.

The selfie is what Frosh called "gestural image:" not only the selfie says "See this, here, now," but also, "See me showing you me" (1610). As Senft and Baym have suggested,

> Rather than the inviting voyeurism, selfies show a 'self-enacting itself' and invite spectators to reflect on the very instability of the term 'self.' Neither more idealized nor more duplicitous than other sorts of images, selfies invite viewers to think of identity between the self as an image and as a body, as a constructed effect of representation and as an object and agent of representation. (1595)

Selfies create an in-between. Both and at the same time representation and simulation, they also reach beyond, toward a mediated thirdspace open to various interpretations. As floating, wandering, or imaginary signifiers, selfies create real and imaginary self/place units, expanding virtually Lefebvre's conception of the trialectics of spatiality:

> The spatial triad that is the foundation of Thirdspace can be observed in selfies. Selfies as representations of social places combine the dimensions of physical (objective), conceived (subjective/mental), and lived (social) space, potentially creating hybrid places of meaning that oscillate between the real, the imagined, and the communicated/represented (Bhabha, 1990). Each selfie creates these hybrid meanings by photographically making the self a vital part or object of a specific place. In effect, selfies include two additional factors of space: the self and the notion of a mediated place [...]. (Koliska and Roberts 3)

Thus, the meaning of the selfie is always negotiated, it can never be fixed totally. It is always by definition a personalized meaning, and it is always about the self and/in place. The conceptualization of selfie as mediated thirdspace underlines the fluidity and ambivalence of meaning-construction in selfies, which constantly fluctuates between the real and the imagined.

Selfies then appear as alternative narratives, challenging taken-for-granted notions of specific places:

> [...] places are created, confirmed, and contested through selfies in the interaction of the self with a specific point in space. On one hand, such places can hold very personalized, unique, and idiosyncratic meanings that are linked to individual experiences of place. On the other hand, through the placement of the self as an object in a space, the same points in space are open to contested meanings, depending on the cultural and social readings of the place created and interpreted by different individuals. (Ibid.)

Places are always re-signified according to their selfie actualizations. As the self stages him or herself in a specific place, place itself becomes a mere stage for the self:

> [...] the positionality of the self within a specific point in space can change the discourse about or meanings of specific geographic and socially known places–meanings that are frequently negotiated through intersubjectivity, that is, between "the different perspectives or points of view on visually represented phenomena," including the self and places. (Ibid. 2)

On Life Facing the Screens: From Digital Habits to Algorithmic Sociality

As suggested above, digital culture allows for the blurring of symbolic boundaries between popular and high cultures. Selfie culture has also helped invent digital thirdspaces: places that are both real and imagined, and involved in the staging of the self. Increased every day by the permanent flows of digital content posted and shared online (image, film, music, text…), such melting process only confirms the participative and celebratory habits that have developed so rapidly with(in) social media culture. To be sure, social media culture has only emerged as a consequence of the accumulated practices of posting, sharing, and participating, while "feeding the digital beast" so to speak. In fact, selfie culture has emerged with the massive appeal to show and share online presence with one's own body and face, hoping to be "liked," and thus feeling empowered. Ultimately, selfie culture is about engaging visually and personally in the global flows of digital content, hopefully getting attention and feedback. It is about participating and performing actively to get online–and eventually offline–recognition.

At times, the practice of selfie turns out to be addictive: it repeats a story of self-celebration and visual connectedness over and over. Voluntary servitude (La Boétie) is now extended and amplified as a sort of voluntary "selfietude." Likewise, a God-like ubiquitous selfie-taker is seemingly claiming "I was here, I was there, I was everywhere!" When it comes to tourist selfies, the message may be just "Been there, done that, took a selfie!" Or perhaps, the victorious "Veni, vidi, selfie… " The recent "Faceless" (Hasmark) trend in social media (sharing online content without showing one's face, so, no selfies!) is only a confirmation that mediated self-hypervisibility has become the norm (Fig. 3). When an integral visual culture leaves no room for the invisible (Debray and Rauth), it is privacy, interiority itself that is at odds with our current attention/surveillance *zeitgeist*.



Fig. 3. The rise of the "faceless" trend is currently associated with women influencers. Source: Megan Tomos, *Cosmopolitan*.

Perhaps after all, selfie habits are all the more ubiquitous now that online sociability is being taken over by algorithms… This rather bleak perspective is suggested by a recent comment on "The Algorithmic Self" (Pasquale):

> Habits in social media interaction form because individuals have become accustomed to act in view of their algorithmic imaginaries. These in turn contribute to producing subjectivities such as those described in Frank Pasquale's (2015) *The Algorithmic Self*. For Pasquale, an individual "sharing, being shared, being on a social graph, having recommendations automated, [and] being processed by algorithms" [...] is a "data self" [...]. A user's data self is made based on their past responses, clicks, and online activities, and serves as a predictive model for possible future interactions. Our media matter most when they seem not to matter at all, that is, when they have moved from the new to the habitual." (Cambre and Lavrence 190–bold original)

Haven't selfies become so habitual that one shares them naturally for any reason, good or bad? On a final note, I would like to mention this anecdote: I was going to name this article "The Good, The Bad and The Selfie," before I realized that a book chapter from *Selfie Citizenship* (Kunstman) has the exact same title for its conclusion (see Hartung). Serendipity or synchronicity, I leave this open to the reader's interpretation; but I suppose that the coincidence echoes our digital times in a way or another, and indeed, selfie habits as well…

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Telling Time

Edward Brown

Feeling Time: Mechanical Warmth: Stories Shaped by Machines



Fig. 1. "Earth" Moonswatch. *Swatch* (2022), owned by Edward Brown since 2023. It is a perfect example of the wonder reflected in the objects we own, which also allows me to indulge in the urban habit of understanding the passage of time–to "feel" time-the way a digital watch can't. Photo: Edward Brown.

White–a white line arises from a field of turquoise bathing your sight in a pleasing cream color. Then… *Click*. The white line moves out of your macro vision, which blurs your surroundings, and leaves you with only turquoise. Then–a red line envelops your vision–then *clicks* back to turquoise. A line darts across our line of sight. If you are wondering what it is you gaze upon–take a step back. The white line becomes smaller–smaller against this backdrop of turquoise–until you see it is more than a line. It is a dial. A hand–a minute hand. The red becomes the second hand–ticking away to a nanosecond of precision. The hour hand, a similar cream white, rests still–content with moving a millimeter at a time. You are looking at a wristwatch–one bathing in green and turquoise coloring, with white and red dials.

The white line–the minute hand–is the centerpiece of my watch. It's the "punctum," as Roland Barthes in his book *Camera Lucida* explains: "[the punctum is an] accident which pricks [the viewer] (but also bruises [them], is poignant to [them]" (Barthes). Its sharp tip–which catapults from line to line, from number to number on my wrist watch–keeps me on my toes, keeps me focused, and, in many cases, has hurt me–forcing me to reckon with my precious time which has been spent not-so preciously. It is this punctum, this focus point, that has an air to it that has been lost today.

In the face of technological achievement, the mighty minute-hand, which has reigned over procrastinators and go-getters alike, is facing extinction. Analog wrist watches are being replaced by digital, precise, and sterile numbers on a screen–favored by the newest generation which has grown in a world dominated by cell phones, which is understandable, yet saddening. A 2018 report on the effectiveness of analog clocks in *The Telegraph* stated that schools in the UK were beginning to switch their clocks to digital in the face of increasing pressure from their students. Malcolm Trobe, a high-ranking official at the Association of School and College Leaders, observed: "The current generation aren't as good at reading the traditional clock face as older generations" (Turner). Indeed, TV host Jimmy Kimmel famously scoured the streets of New York for any youngsters able to read an analog clock–which ended up being a harder task than anticipated. All this to say, the analog clock is disappearing–and with that the minute hand, the ever-captivating punctum of every clock–which is a terrible shame, as with it we lose a part of our control over our time.

A great battle rages between the digital and analog–pendulums swing depending upon consumer style and critics lead hard-fought battles online, leaving battlefields littered with incessant insults and curses for the next generation to uncover. Despite technology continuing to innovate–the war remains hard-fought, for many analog things hold more attributes that are concurrent with human psychological behavior than new, somewhat-unnaturally constructed digitization. This is particularly true in the world of watches (where watch faces are threatened to become monitors) as the analog minute-hand, which is quickly being forgotten, is a far more effective way of perceiving time than any large digit on a screen. As Zach Smithwick writes in his article "5 Reasons Why You Should Wear an Analog Wristwatch," the hands of analog watches play vital roles as physical representations of time, "With an analog display, your brain… looks at the hands and *spatially* perceives the time. This means that it is in many cases quicker to get a good *perception* of time with an analog display" (Smithwick). Analog hands are needed because they allow us to physically see and represent the passage of time. We don't *understand* how time flows when we gaze upon digitized numbers counting up or down–leading us to feel like we've lost time whenever we are startled by a digital clock. The reason I felt I needed my wrist watch–why I needed its minute hand–was because I needed to feel secure in my understanding of time: get in the habit of really "telling" time. I felt I needed to hold time accountable in order to use it to the best of my ability. What I did not account for, however, was how quickly my wrist watch made me feel secure–and from all the places this security came from other than its minute hand.

It was hot. Hotter than the mild French mountain air I had been accustomed to. Beads of sweat clumped together on the backs of the necks of my grandparents and me–only to be pulverized by Geneva's searing sun, which burned our all-too exposed skin. Desperate breaths rocked the line of people ahead of me, which extended from a block into a Swatch store. We waited to hear whether they had *the watch* in stock. The woman in front of me had rent money on the line, and my grandparents were slowly growing more frustrated as they patrolled the avenue. Finally, after four hours of waiting in the heat of history's hottest summer of 2023–I got my hands on an object I had been obsessing over for the past year. I got the *Mission to Earth: Omega × Swatch Moonswatch*–which was one variant in a collection of nine wristwatches tied to the different bodies in our solar system.

Under the skeptical eye of my grandmother, I removed my newfound precious object–its face's brilliant plastic green and blue shining in the sunlight–from its encasing and strapped its velcro strap around my wrist. As we journeyed back to our car, where we would have to make another arduous two hour drive to get home, she turned to me and proclaimed, in a heavy Russian accent, "Edward–Sanichka, that was the stupidest thing I have ever seen a human do." It was then, as she sarcastically scolded me about how we had wasted a day in one of her least favorite European cities, that I felt my *moonswatch* grow heavier–infused with memories of that four-hour-long line, and with my summer trip with my "Babushka" ("Grandma") and "Dedushka" ("Grandpa"). It is through the physical and emotional heaviness of my *moonswatch* that I feel an almost nostalgic security whenever I gaze upon it–a feeling that my grandmother, who believes in a world of utilitarianism, would quickly scoff at. Why should a mass-produced piece of plastic that tells time be so important? What makes my wrist watch special when there are thousands, if not hundreds of thousands that are designed to look microscopically similar to it?

The answer may come in the form of Walter Benjamin's essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," which seeks to find the meaning of true art and authenticity in a world where machine-made reproducibility has shifted the status-quo. In order to separate an object from homogenization, Benjamin begs a reconsideration of the meaning of uniqueness–instead he asks for a separation in the form of "aura." An aura, he explains, is "outside technical–and, of course, not only technical–reproducibility" (Benjamin). The idea of an aura, of art in Benjamin's case, is "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be"

(Benjamin)–meaning that, although my watch has been produced and reproduced, its aura consists of my memories with it, of the dirt and dust that builds in its plastic crevasses that nothing else can replicate; it is made of over-the-top decisions–I waited in line for four hours in the blazing hot sun to buy the watch, dozens of designers poured over it, despite its purpose of only telling time. My wristwatch holds the memories of my vacation with my grandparents in it, despite it looking cold and mechanical on the surface. My *moonswatch* gives me another layer of security. It not only allows me to understand time but to feel connected to my greater family through its aura and the memories that create it. However, am I obscuring my wristwatch's main purpose, thus altering its integrity?

Forced Entertainment's eight-minute-long summary of their purpose behind creating *Table Top Shakespeare*, a short-form interpretation of William Shakespeare's classic plays told only through household items, asks the audience to reconsider how they view everyday objects in their homes through the lens of storytelling. One particular aspect of an object's relationship to storytelling that they stress is integrity: "You have to allow objects to have their own integrity… to let them have a life of their own" (Forced Entertainment). My wristwatch is a teller of time–a physical representation of time's fleeting image. It fuels my obsession with the fleeting moments I have left–particularly with my grandparents, who like to remind me of their mortality.

This attitude of viewing time as something to be appreciated is reflected in Cornell Leverette Moore's *History Makers* interview, where he states that his love for watches has taught him "an appreciation for time": "There's a time to be born, a time to live and a time to die" (Moore). My wristwatch serves a dual purpose: a secure way of feeling time (of understanding that each second I spend is reflected by my moving dial) and feeling connected to my grandparents.

My *moonswatch* is a mechanical marvel built upon centuries of technological and fashion advancement. It is also a symbol of decades of corporate conglomeration and marketing strategies. My *moonswatch* has been constructed hundreds of thousands of times–it is the same as every other *moonswatch* in a swatch store. But it is also mine and holds the memory of my grandparents. My *moonswatch* makes me feel safe and secure in how I spend my precious time on Earth. All of these things that my wristwatch is are not mutually exclusive. This love of time, my grandparents, my family, and of cold, unfeeling technology is what keeps me glancing at my wristwatch–keeps me in continuous awe of it. It is what keeps me secure when I have it strapped around my wrist (Fig. 1).

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Thinking About the Color of My Skin

Malick Mikayil Cisse

The Daily Habit of Thinking About the Color of Your Skin*

Is it because of the color of your skin? Yes it is. Is it because you are wearing a durag, sagging a bit, or even having a hoodie on? Yes it is. Is it because of the way you look? Of course it is. Stop asking these questions and learn their answers once and for all. The sun will make you darker. So put sunscreen on, no, it is not just for white kids. Your skin gets ashy with no moisturizer. So put moisturizer on it. Your hair becomes crazy if you don't style it. Style it, or others will soon see you as the threat you are so bent on becoming. Here's how you style your hair. Here's how you moisturize your skin. Here's how you put sunscreen on. If you go into a store and all cameras turn onto you and the clerk's attention goes to you, act calm and slow and friendly, and make sure you don't keep your hands in your pockets and you don't carry bags. When you walk to get a beverage and see a slim faded shadow in your side view, in your peripheral vision; if you turn around you will see the manager or an employee always following your every move thinking you are doing something wrong. Don't spend time wondering what is wrong with you. It is the color of your skin that makes them suspicious. Don't go acting nervous because then you will look like the threat you are so bent on becoming. Don't hurry to get out of the store either because then they will think you've stolen something. Just don't do anything about it. It's the way things are and have been for us colored folks for a long time. *But us colored folks are looked down upon as some sort of ANIMALS!!!* Animal or not, you need to look and act cool. Always dress clean, always look people in the eyes when you talk. Always look people in the eyes when they talk. Shake people's hands when you first meet them. When you leave your house for school in the morning, walk feeling carefree but mostly, walk outside being careful. You feel the breeze in your pants and you are ready to go skipping down the street with your bookbag. Skipping is for little kids. You are a young man of color. Skipping makes you look really like the big threat you are so bent on becoming. Your heart starts to pound. Why so? Because 2 white cops across the street are looking at you. Colored kids are scared of the idea of white cops viciously murdering black folks who happen to be accused of something they did not do; *But I don't want to be scared!* Wake up! Grow up! Our society has brought down lots of kids' dreams because of their skin color; you want to be one of them? You want to change this. Ok. But for now, watch how you go to school and what you do in the streets. And what you do in the subway. Stop losing your metrocard. Don't jump turnstiles! Yes, the cops are watching the turnstiles. You are late for school. The train is coming. You are tempted to hop the turnstile. If you are white, you can. But you are a person of color, so you can't. Do you want to end up in jail? Don't think that you can jump while they are looking away. They don't. And even if they do, you are still breaking the law. Don't think you are too fast. You are but for sports. This is no sports. This is life. A white kid jumps the turnstile while you are thinking and the cops don't move. Don't fall for this trick, as you are so close to becoming the threat I always warned you against becoming. Listen to the old black lady who comes to you and tells you, be a good boy, ask the subway clerk to let you in because you lost your metrocard. You do. She lets you in. You catch the train. You catch your breath. Brace yourself. The day has just begun. Are you even listening? After all this you mean to tell me that you are not prepared for life as a young colored man in NYC?

*I wrote this imitating Jamaica Kincaid's style in the short piece "Girl," for a high school assignment.

Touring the City by Tram

Denice Martone

Touring Lisbon on the #28 Tram

My short stay in Lisbon included delightful hours spent riding the historic "Remodelalo" trams, electrified vehicles that move inhabitants up and down and all around the city. Dating back to the 1930's, these trams were designed to navigate narrow streets, tight curves and steep hills. They lurch. Brakes screech when they stop suddenly to avoid hitting wayward cyclists. They might sit in traffic for many, many minutes heading a long line of cars and motor bikes. And then there are glorious moments when the tram glides down a steep hill, catching a cool breeze on a hot summer day for those lucky enough to be seated by an open air window. On one of my journeys, a passing tram brushed so close I was easily able to chat with passengers going the opposite way! For tourists, the number 28 tram is one of the most sought after, allowing a Disneyland-like tour through the popular neighborhoods of Alfama, Baixa, and Graca making frequent stops for panoramic views. The iconic yellow trams of Lisbon mesh seamlessly into the fabric of modern day Lisbon, much to the delight of tourists and the chagrin of commuting residents, who often struggle to find seats. With their polished wood interiors, clanging bells, and incessant shaking, the trams offer a classic way to experience city streets and, for a moment, become transported to another time (Figs. 1-10).



Fig. 1. *The Electrico 24 passing through the largely residential Chiado neighborhood.* Lisbon, Portugal, June 2025. Photo: Denice Martone.



Fig. 2. *Tram 28 triptych. Designed to pass along narrow winding streets, no two look exactly alike.* Lisbon, Portugal, June 2025. Photos: Denice Martone.



Fig. 3. *Tram 28. Interior and exterior open air windows.* Lisbon, Portugal, June 2025. Photos: Denice Martone.



Fig. 4. *When two trams pass, there is barely enough room for pedestrians to stand.* Number 28 makes a stop near Graca, one of the highest points in Lisbon. Lisbon, Portugal, June 2025. Photos: Denice Martone.



Fig. 5. *The Alfama.* One of the oldest neighborhoods in the world, a stop along the popular Tram #28. Lisbon, Portugal, June 2025. Photos: Denice Martone.



Fig. 6: *"Chafariz dos Vavalos" in the Old Town Square, Alfama, a stop along the 28 Tram.* Every so often, water pours from the horse head nozzle and is habitually in use by residents. Lisbon, Portugal, June 2025. Photo: Denice Martone.



Fig. 7. *Riding the #28 offers glimpses into Lisbon's Christian and Muslim past.* The Se de Lisboa is the oldest Romanesque cathedral in Lisbon, built upon a mosque during the Moorish occupation. Lisbon, Portugal, June 2025. Photos: Denice Martone.



Fig. 8. *The nostalgic wooden tram is both romantic and practical, transporting modern day passengers throughout the hilly neighborhoods of Lisbon;* Fig. 9. *Miradouro das porto do sol: a popular panoramic viewing point.* The #28 tram is popular with tourists on their way to and from the Alfama; Fig. 10. *The iconic yellow trams of Lisbon mesh seamlessly into the fabric of modern day Lisbon, much to the delight of tourists and the chagrin of commuting residents, who habitually struggle to find seats due to their popularity.* Lisbon, Portugal, June 2025. Photos: Denice Martone.

Tracking Studies with Spreadsheets

Kenneth Griffin

Empowering Urban Learners: Navigating Education with Effective Study Techniques

Growing up in an urban environment, I found that many educational institutions overlooked the crucial aspect of teaching effective study methods and exam preparation techniques. My classmates and I often received copious amounts of materials that seemed disconnected from our lived experiences, leading to a reliance on rote memorization and last-minute cramming. Without guidance on how to structure our learning in a way that translates to success in exams, many of us struggled to navigate the overwhelming amount of information.

Realizing the limitations of the traditional approach, I sought to develop my own study system. Through research, I discovered the value of allocating focused study sessions, limiting them to no more than two hours at a time. Leveraging the quiet mornings for undisturbed concentration, I dedicated myself to mastering the material for my clinical exams to become a psychotherapist. To track my progress and maintain accountability, I meticulously recorded each study session using an Excel spreadsheet. Over the course of 75 days, this structured approach allowed me to visualize the hours invested, totaling 110 hours of dedicated study time. Armed with a solid foundation of understanding and equipped with active learning techniques such as practicing breathing exercises and employing processes of elimination, I confidently approached the Exams.

The success of this method was evident as I passed the exams with flying colors. Recognizing the value of such an approach, I believe it could benefit others, especially those in urban communities who may face similar challenges. I have attached a graph outlining the tools and organization methods employed, which I hope will serve as a helpful resource for others embarking on their educational journeys (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. *Tracking Studies with Spreadsheets in 2024*. Courtesy: Kenneth Griffin.

Travel Vlogging

Doug Birgfeld

The Big Move

SHOT A: Narrator with Nazare promenade in the backdrop for 10-15 sec;
CUT TO: B-ROLL Nazare city scenes
SHOT A:
CUT TO: B-ROLL Vista Glamour shots
SHOT A:

Hello, everybody. It's time to announce the big move. I know some of you are aware, and I have been hinting around. But, today we announce that we have moved from Gardiner, Maine to the city of Nazare, Portugal, permanently.

We have spent the last year making preparations: selling our house in Maine, looking for an apartment in Nazare, getting a tax number, Portuguese bank accounts, and of course the proper visas. We had been frequent tourists in Portugal and Nazare over the last three years, traveling there two to three times a year. As we began to entertain a permanent move, we began to bring our friends and family with us. Not only to make sure we were sane, but to show off our discovery.

We've only been living here for not-quite a month and I can tell you, there is a difference between tourism and immigration. Oh, don't worry. It's wonderful. It's beautiful and this place is a fantastic fit for us. But the habits of a tourist are not the habits of a resident.

The focus has naturally shifted from the adventure of novelty to the adventure of belonging. It must be because tourism is about breaking out of old habits and seeing new things and that's terrific! But residency is about integration, developing new habits. Habits are from and about the patterns and culture of this new city. A city that has its own language. Yes, I know its Portuguese, but like every city it has its own way of speaking, own slang, own vibe, its inside jokes and, as I imagine we will find out, its own way of gently hazing the new kids.

So the Channel will change a little bit. Yes, we will still be traveling around Portugal and the rest of Europe. I won't be able to stop myself from shooting tiny films. But it's also going to be about learning to be part of a new city, a new county, a new culture and…all the little things, like: shopping, dealing with recycling and trash, people from town, going to the dentist, getting a haircut, asking for help. It's all part of the adventure of exploration. And that leads to the name change: We really aren't "Just Going" anymore; we've just gone. While we will always be part of Maine, now we will also be part of Nazare. So, welcome to "The Nazare Explorers Club"! Join the club anytime on Youtube (link Below). Let me know if there is anything you'd like me to cover, and let us know if you happen to be coming to Portugal. Welcome to the club! The Nazare Explorers Club!

***

I make short videos every day, of the little moments that inform the adventure of travel, the food, the things you'd see everyday in cities big and small if you live there. Sure, a golden view and a castle, but also the little alley, the walk to the market, the place where you buy a toothbrush, it's all part of the real richness of being in a place. I have travel-vlogged in Lisbon, Porto, Rincon, Nazare, Leiria, Ocean City, Portland, Bangor, Boston, mostly the East Coast in the US and Portugal, but I hope to expand more in Europe. To present a place, you have to talk to locals, do what they do, not just the big tourist stuff. Creating travelogues helps you relate by forcing you out of the moment, to observe it and what's happening around it.

U

Unwinding

Jorge de La Barre

Mental Scapes

Unwind
Universe
Landscape
Mental flows
Mental scapes
Images
Dental floss
For real
For sale
Discount
Price
Rice
Sales
Inflation
Flesh
Mesh
Mess
What a mess
I miss
You wish
Miss
Much
I don't
Miss it much
Mismatch
Dot com
Dot org
Smells like
A dog
Bark
At night
Standby
Me
Hellrise

Skyrise
Top floor
2nd door
Exit through
The blue sky
No clouds
Yes clouds
So loud
Don't be loud
Be loved
Be live
Beehive
The sounds
Buzzing
Honey
Calm down, will ya!
I told you
Nice and calm
Crispy
The sound of toast
Tasty sounds
Feeling crispy
Cranky
Apply
New job
New form
Brand new
Age
Limit
Reach out
Go's
Go go's
A go go's
Gossips
Gossipy
Radio's on
Waves
Of parlor
Harbor
The maze
Amaze
The building
Piling
On
Slicing
Out
Scooping in
Appalling

Playing
Zoom in
Play out
Work out
Like a mad dwarf
Arf!
Another
Eff / Ort
Shop ‘til
You / Drop
Kill
You
At work
A-holic
Holy shit
Hell, no
Hell, yeah
Hey, yo!
Just as planned
Don’t give a damn
Just keep the flow
No fault, no, no
You really got it, yo!
You got it plenty
A go go!

Urinating in Public

Sahiba Jassal

Public Urination: Is the Problem Really Solved?

It's late at night and you've just stepped out of the movie theater onto the street, movie theatre Pepsi in hand. You start walking back home when you suddenly need to pee–that darn Pepsi! The issue is, you're not in the theater anymore and you're still 20 minutes away from home. You make the two minute walk back to the theater and ask them to use the restroom, but you need a valid ticket to enter the theater and your movie has already ended. Shoot! You exit and decide to find somewhere to stop on your way home. McDonalds, Chipotle, Raising Canes, even small businesses- they all have bathroom codes and won't let you in unless you purchase something. You're still 10 minutes away but at this point you can't hold it anymore. You look around and notice that the street you're on is quite desolate. "Maybe if I just snuck into this corner… " Before you know it your pants are down and your Pepsi cup is full… but not with Pepsi. Sweet relief fills your body but also shame and embarrassment. "If only I used the bathroom before I left the theater." But alas you didn't. You throw the urine-filled Pepsi cup out in the nearest trash bin and realize your hands are soiled. What a mess.

Peeing occurs in the body when your kidneys have filtered out the waste and extra water from your blood and that fills your bladder. When your body reaches the point when the bladder is full, pressure accumulates and the urge to pee kicks in. Although you can hold it for a period of time, peeing is generally involuntary because you can't control when the urge will come. As I'm sure you've experienced, one doesn't really anticipate needing to pee all the time, hence the multitudes of people who pee in the street in NYC.

Situations like this happen so often in New York City due to the lack of bathroom access. If you haven't experienced a similar story, I'm sure someone you know has. Due to the frequency of situations like this that occur, in 2016 New York City enacted the Criminal Justice Reform Act. "People caught drinking in public, littering or urinating on the street in New York City will soon be considered civil offenders" (Goldman par. 1). "Fines range from $75 to $450 and anyone convicted will no longer have a criminal record" (Goldman par. 2). You're free to publicly urinate and not be arrested anymore! But does more peeing in the street really solve the problem? On one hand, it's great that you can't be arrested for it anymore because it's a valid problem to have when you can't find a restroom to go to in New York City, but on another hand, the city just gets dirtier and dirtier the more people are allowed to litter. Making public urination legal allows for the littering of bodily fluids anywhere that's public and that's just unsanitary.

It's because of the public peeing that shopkeepers, doormen, and homeowners in the city are often bleaching the sidewalks in front of their buildings in the morning: to get rid of any urine bacteria and stench from the night before. I see them on my way to class scrubbing their big brushes with a bucket of bleach, trying to hide the fact that the "greatest city in the world" is really a piss filled dump. Personally, I've never seen people doing this in any other city except for New York City, so it just shows how soiled our streets are. It's a cause and effect relationship: more peeing in the streets causes more morning sidewalk bleachings. But if we just had more access to public bathrooms in the first place, people wouldn't be needing to pour bleach in front of their buildings every morning.

Theodora Seigel, the creator of the account @got2gonyc on TikTok and Instagram, talks about public bathroom access in her article "If New York Is So Great, Why Isn't There Anywhere to Pee?" She starts by talking about her own NYC bathroom emergency and how it sparked her idea to

create an account so that people could know where to find a bathroom in the city. As I mentioned earlier, many food establishments have bathroom codes, so part of her account is sharing those codes for specific locations in the city. "New York City has 8.5 million residents but has fewer than 1,200 public restrooms. And that's not even counting the tourists. You do the math" (Siegel par. 4). Siegel goes on to tell us stories about why this cause has become so important to her and how certain marginalized communities, namely anyone who's "not wealthy, white and cisgender" (Seigel par. 6), are more affected. Her followers shared these stories with her: "A 44-year-old resident with irritable bowel syndrome had to defecate between two parked cars on a morning commute. A homeless couple were denied a bathroom code despite offering to buy something with their limited funds. A tourist from London witnessed her elderly friend wet herself" (Siegel par. 6). Sure, it's good that the 44 year old with IBS didn't get arrested for pooping in the street, but is that really a win? A real win would've come from access to a bathroom, not from the Criminal Justice Reform Act keeping them from not getting arrested.

A commenter on one of Seigel's videos said that he gave up on asking people to use their bathrooms because he's a "big black guy who does deliveries at night" (Seigel par. 6). Business owners just assume he's violent and intimidating so don't trust him, and in turn don't let him use their bathrooms. This prejudiced "scary black man" phenomenon connects to Brent Staples' essay "Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space." Staples tells his experiences when walking down the street at night as a 22 year old grad student at the University of Chicago. A woman walking the street was in front of him and she'd give him nervous glances from time to time, picking up her pace, and eventually running down the road to get away from him. Keep in mind, he did nothing to provoke this. "Women are particularly vulnerable to street violence, and young black males are drastically overrepresented among the perpetrators of that violence," Staples acknowledges. "Yet these truths are no solace against the kind of alienation that comes of being ever the suspect, against being set apart, a fearsome entity with whom pedestrians avoid making eye contact" (Staples par. 6). It's the sad truth that Staples and the man from Seigel's article have to live with: they're perceived as threats while just trying to go about their daily lives. Whether it's walking down the street or trying to use a bathroom, they can't be thought of as normal people trying to do normal things. As Staples says, black men are heavily represented in statistics of violent crimes, but it doesn't make the assumption of every black man being a threat any less hurtful or isolating. Being a black man doing normal activities is not a crime.

Public urination, an actual crime that is no longer a crime anymore, shares this in common with another urban performance: jaywalking. Jaywalking only recently became a non-criminal offence in October of 2024. Unlike peeing in the street however, jaywalking leaves no trace of litter, but it does have an element of danger instead. Jaywalking is the most common cause of road blockage in the city. When jaywalking, there's always the possibility of being hit by a vehicle or a bike, as you're walking when it's not your "turn." Peeing in public on the other hand isn't necessarily dangerous in the same way, just vulnerable. Most often, peeing in the street in the city is not usually a person's choice. Although in other cities or towns when one pees in the street it might be an act of teenage rebellion and drunken fun–like peeing on an electric fence or something to see what it feels like– in New York City the main reason for public urination is because of no bathrooms being available to use. It's a private performance happening in a public area, therefore it's vulnerable. It's almost like crying in public: you don't want it to happen but you can't control it and it just comes out. It's unplanned and something you don't want others to witness. A big trait of publicly urinating that can be extracted from this metaphor is the intimate vulnerability that public urination brings with it.

This intimate performance of peeing in the street can be compared with its semi-scheduled counterpart of simply using the restroom in anticipation of needing to go to the bathroom. This is

scheduled, or at least *more* scheduled than peeing in public, because (as I've mentioned so many times before) in the city there aren't many public restrooms. Typically, I go to the bathroom before going out of my dorm. If I'm at a restaurant I'll make sure to use the restroom before I leave. This type of peeing is more planned than just going in the street would be. Peeing in the street is spontaneous. In an anonymous interview with a college student, she mentioned a time she peed in the street and her experience of it. "It was night and I suddenly had to go [pee] while my friends and I were walking down the street in Soho, but either places were closed or wouldn't let us in because they were private businesses," she explained. She ended up crouching in a dark corner in a dark side street while her friends guarded her to make sure nobody saw anything. "My Converse were covered in piss and I walked home with wet peed-on feet. It was messy and awful" (Anonymous).

While public urination is a form of littering that's frowned upon, a form of littering that can be beautiful and is encouraged by some is doing graffiti art. The act of graffiti-ing is an art form that makes New York City so beautiful and unique–and graffiti art doesn't have to be spray painted or permanent. There are so many beautiful pieces of graffiti around Washington Square Park, for example, that are done in chalk. Most of the chalk graffiti I see in the park will be notes written on the pavement like "I love you" or symbols of social justice and reform like the Palestinian flag. Graffiti, unlike street peeing, is a form of litter that evokes artistry, conversation, and even social change. Public peeing and graffiti, though so different in nature, are brought together in the fact that they leave a trace, and that they're both associated with New York City. Public peeing in New York City and elsewhere *does* affect other people. It affects the person peeing who is doing a private task out in the open, it affects anyone around the pee-er who may step in it, it affects the people whose property the pee may be on.

Peeing in public brings to mind the injustice of homeless people who live in the city and have no personal bathroom. Theadora Seigel's article touched on this and so does the photo below showing a homeless person's urine streaming down a subway car (Fig. 1). This person was sleeping on the subway and, as there are few bathrooms in subway stations especially since COVID 19, the only place they could go was right where they were laying: in public on the subway. This image, from March of 2022, published in *The New York Post*, is pointing fingers at homelessness but also demonstrates why public toilets need to be available.



Fig. 1. *Homeless Man's Pee on the Subway,* March 8, 2022. New York City, USA, 2022. Photo: Stefano Giovannini, *The New York Post.*

The reason New York City is known for its dirty piss-drenched streets is not through the fault of the homeless population, but through the fault of the government for not providing public toilets. And again, it's not just the homeless population that pees on the streets. As shown in the examples in Seigel's article and in the interview I had with a college student, peeing in the street is a problem that can happen to anyone. And though measures like the Criminal Justice Reform Act have recognized that public urination should be reduced to a civil offence because of its frequency, this doesn't fix the issue of available bathrooms. The reason public urination is so frequent is because of the lack of bathroom access and this problem has yet to be solved.

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Using ChatGPT

Malick Mikayil Cisse

The GPT Flow: Routines for the Modern Mind

The year 2022 was when the world got introduced to ChatGPT–an AI tool used to answer human questions based on human curiosity. I was in the 10th grade, and at the time of this occurrence–this so-called phenomenon–I began to notice a large number of my friends and family using it to ask questions about things they were curious about.

However, as time progressed and society began its rapid advancement in technology–especially in the field of AI–I began to notice how the once-popular tool for discovering things entered a new era, focused on uncovering information about others, the unknown, but mostly things people no longer wanted to spend time learning. ChatGPT became a tool used not to grasp the knowledge that can help get to an answer but a tool that gave you a complete answer–an answer you don't need to spend time, energy, hesitation, confusion, exhilaration to get to. Using ChatGPT has become a modern habit that we all now rely on.

Using Public Payphones

Jorge de La Barre

So Long, Big Ear!

A direct consequence of the progress of telecommunications technology and the boom of the smartphone networks (from 1G to 5G), using public payphones to place phone calls has become a lost habit. More generally, habits have changed with regards to telephone conversations: the rise of apps such as WhatsApp makes it so that people spend less time talking on the phone but much more time than ever–"texting" or audio-messaging.

While some habits are changing, others just disappear. Technology has its way, and this is certainly the case for telecommunications. Various aspects are attached to this, some of them perhaps overlooked. For example, no one walks around with a handful of quarters in their pockets to make public phone calls anymore: inserting coins in a public payphone booth is a thing of the past. Same with using phonecards, and probably also, collecting them. Hence, the market of collectible phonecards is vanishing, and so is the habit attached to it. Another aspect concerns the daily use of credit cards and electronic payments. Cash money is less and less used in routine transactions, and ATMs are slowly disappearing from public space.

As for the public payphone booths, they become more obsolete every day. One icon of Brazilian design, launched in 1972, the *Orelhão* (Big Ear), has been progressively abandoned as a telecommunication tool for about a decade. Conceived by Chinese-Brazilian architect Chu Ming Silveira (b. 1941 (Shanghai)-d. 1997 (São Paulo))–the public phone placed inside a fiberglass egg-shape would provide, according to her, the best acoustic form, most of the outside noise bouncing off of the shield, providing perfect isolation (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. An *orelhão* in Ilha Grande (Angra dos Reis, Rio de Janeiro), in July 2025. Although they have fallen in disuse since roughly 2011, the *orelhões* are still part of the Brazilian landscape. Photo: Fumiko Miyamoto.

The *orelhão* remains a landmark, simultaneously ubiquitous and unnoticed. In downtown areas, it is mostly the host for a plethora of stickers for escort services, with the photo, name, and telephone number of the provider (as the *orelhão* itself is very likely to be out of service, you may have to call via Whatsapp). Yet, such acoustic pavilion wonder, an integral park of the public landscape of Rio for more than 50 years, has inspired a variety of visual representations, adapting like a chameleon to its environment: from bird or fruit-like in Amazonian cities, to coconut or shell-like by the beach side (Figs. 2-11).



Figs. 2-11. Various forms of *orelhão.* From left to right, top to bottom: standard *orelhão* from the telecom company *oi;* coconut and shell-shaped; green parrot; *jaberu* bird (or *tuiuiú*) from Pantanal state; red and blue parrot from Pará state; sneaker; rose flower; cashew apple; *berimbau* (a Bahian percussion instrument used notably in *capoeira);* and frog. Sources for images: listed in respective order, in Works Cited.

It was also the inspiration for the 2012 São Paulo Call Parade (Fig. 12)–a citywide exhibition where 100 artists were matched and decorated 100 public payphone booths–in an effort to "motivate preservation and care for the city's public phones and enliven the urban cityscape" (Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts)–a concept loosely linked to the global Cow Parade public art project where artists placed "designer" cow sculptures in public areas (Ibid.).



Fig. 12. *Orelhão* models from the *Call Parade* that took place in São Paulo, Brazil, in 2012. Sources: in Works Cited.

What more will come from it, no one could tell… New uses may arise, inspired by the most unexpected practices and encouraging new, emerging habits. For example, couldn't the *orelhão* be used as an organic amplifier, a mini-bandshell for music played on your smartphone? If gone viral, this new habit would be ironic: an acoustic revenge for such an enduring big ear…

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Using Your Phone on the Subway

Claire Englebienne

The Ups and Downs of Staying Updated While Going Downtown

New York City is known for having citizens that are constantly busy and going places, having somewhere else to be. Thus, its population relies heavily on its ways of transportation, especially on what is considered to be the most effective one of them all: the subway. The subway facilitates most people's lives by being extremely practical, efficient, and easy to use. In a city so crowded as New York, where driving is so tricky and time-demanding, the subway is a significant contributor when it comes to easing traffic congestion. Since you are not supposed to walk, drive, or do anything at all, it offers you a seat in tranquility and is in charge of doing the job for you: it will take you to your destination. This allows you to use that time for other things instead, such as entertaining yourself, taking a rest, or optimizing your time and keep working on important matters. This is where our smartphones come in handy. While riding the subway, people can keep performing their excessive consumption of technology through their mobile phones. This is the everyday performance, the habit, that I decided to deeply examine and analyze: using your cell phone while riding the subway, which consists of the trip and the things we do on our device during it.

Going back to where it all started, to what drove Alfred Ely Beach to invest so much in this monstrous-like machine back in 1869 (History of New York City), lies the purpose of riding the subway in the life of the city: to get from one place to another. Once we get inside the subway, our job is over, and we just depend on it. Like it or not, if we think about how most of us choose to spend our time while taking this vehicle and how we try to make it more enjoyable, the answer will be: by being on our phones. This is a moment in which you do not have much else to do other than to kill time until your stop, during which you can do other things, all while you travel. Cell phones are compact computers that offer you a wide variety of different ways to spend that time and make it worthwhile, which is why I consider them so ideal and appropriate for situations like this one. With it, you have endless options for things to do. My commutes, for instance, begin with the last gasp of e-mail, news, or proof for school, so my trip can be productive or diverting. This way, I can feel I have some control over my time in the underground.

Needless to say, most subway passengers in New York and worldwide also tilt their heads to their phones' screens while riding it. Smartphones have overhauled public transportation, profoundly impacting the everyday transit experience, from how people integrate buses and trains into their plans to how they spend time onboard. We can ignore the very few 4.2% of New Yorkers (New York City Department of Consumer Affairs) who do not own a mobile phone and consider this a universal experience and habit, as the amount of people that appreciate not only the vehicle's quality but also this form of entertainment is indeed enormous. So does Santiago Ligorria, a New York University student from Guatemala, who believes that "the NYC subway system is a great asset to the city and [wishes his] country had the same services" (Ligorria). Santiago usually listens to music on the subway. He justifies this action by saying that he enjoys it but also by explains that he would "rather not interact with strangers on the subway because it can sometimes be dangerous" (Ligorria).



Fig. 1. *IRT 2 Train, South Bronx, New York City, 1980*. Photo: Danny Lyon.

However, this performance was not typical until recently. It has been more than a century since the subway exists, and ever since, passengers have tried different ways of spending their time riding. Photographer Danny Lyon's picture, a 1980 glimpse inside a dingy, old, graffiti-covered 2 train in the South Bronx, is clear proof of that. Today, most people are on their phones when they take the subway, whereas, before, they used to read the newspaper instead (Fig. 1). At the same time this picture was taken, a device was getting ready to revolutionize the world, although its inventor, Martin Cooper, did not know it yet. While interviewed by CNN, Cooper stated that what he wanted was for people to have the freedom to talk on the phone, away from their homes and cars. So, with Motorola, he embarked on a project to create a portable device. In 1983, Motorola's first commercial cellular phone, the "DynaTAC," went on sale (Anjarwalla 2) and it loudly announced the beginning of a new era. Today, smartphones are widespread as is our addition to them.

Instead of taking the subway, one can take the bus: it is more private, cleaner, and comfortable, and you can travel more peacefully thanks to its lower noise volume or the views that you might get, which can serve as entertainment. In comparison, the subway is not so pleasant: the stations and tunnels are very dark; the inside of the cars is extremely bright, maybe even annoyingly and coldly, and, because of the number of trains and people, it is also very crowded and noisy. However, the subway is faster and most prioritize that over their comfort. Still, riding the bus could offer alternative experiences to spending time on our smartphones. One of them could be eavesdropping on others' conversations, which Adam Gopnik describes his essay "The People on the Bus": "The other morning, for instance [...] a man behind me was trying to remember the names of popular Drake's snacks from his childhood" (Gopnik 2). However, there is still no guarantee that you will overhear a satisfying conversation every time you ride the bus, and you can obviously also find one of them in other places or situations besides this one. Still, the attractiveness of using our phone on the subway is undeniable, as the possibilities it offers are infinite.

Using a smartphone while riding the Amtrak looks similar to using it while on the subway but it isn't because the conditions are different: the distance you travel is longer, as is the time, you need a ticket in advance, which is expensive, everyone around you is also sitting down, and you follow a strict schedule. Thus, subways are a much simpler, affordable, quicker, and maybe even more efficient way to travel, especially in a car-busy city like New York. However, the MTA lines cannot take you that far away in case you need to, which is when the Amtrak would make its

appearance to save us with its long-distance trips. When we do decide to take it, however, we're usually prepared to use our phone for a long period of time, which is why we make sure we charge it properly in the previous hours. We carry a charger with us as well, which you do not need in the subway because you would not be able to use it either way. The routes you travel would also be much shorter, guaranteeing you to have a place to charge it most of the times when you get off the subway.

So ordinary and broad is this everyday performance that you can find similarities in it with other situations that initially seem very unalike. Such is the case of walking with your headphones on. You might ask yourselves, what does listening to music as I walk have to do with sitting on the subway and using my phone as a distraction? The resemblance and difference between these two lies especially in what I would say constitutes the essence of both performances: the transportation from one place to another. In both cases, you are moving somewhere else. Only your role on the subway is passive: you do not actually move; you do not even need to do anything besides waiting to be taken somewhere else. Walking, on the other hand, requires you to make an effort, putting you in charge of getting to that other place: if you don't do it, who will?

In her essay "The Shape of Walk," Rebecca Solnit refers to this act of resistance to the commodity of man-made vehicles, stating that, after the industrial revolution, "walking ceased to be part of the continuum of experience and instead became something consciously chosen" (Solnit 1). However, she mentions this to begin describing how contemporary artists decided to explore walking as an artistic medium, considering it a source of inspiration. This allows me to introduce you to another aspect in which these situations differ. In both, one feels the need to find some entertainment to distract from the natural anxiety that keeps us thinking about how far away we are from our destination. In the case of walking, music may be the best alternative to ward off those thoughts, as it gives you a pace and makes the trip more enjoyable, maybe even motivating you to pay attention and "become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life" (Solnit 2). Thus, it could help stimulate that artistic inspiration Solnit refers to. On the other hand, the subway forces you to stay in a place and find ways to spend a certain amount of time there. Clearly, this "way" we find always ends up being using our phones. Phones have been found to be time killers, and that is exactly what you need in moments of such stillness.

Surprisingly, several authors consider that using your phone while traveling is not a good idea, contrary to others who see it as a tremendous and diverse form of entertainment, ideal for the subway. To argue this idea, Bibek Bhandari focuses on the dangers of smartphone distraction in his article "Subway Fall Lawsuit Highlights Dangers of Smartphone Distraction," where he tells the readers about a tragic case that took place in China. He states that "a woman surnamed Shen sued the city's subway company after she fell and cracked her skull when her train came to a sudden stop" (Bhandari 1). However, the court in Beijing ended up ruling against her, who initially appeared to be the victim, because "she had neglected her own safety–she was busy on her phone instead of holding on to a handrail," and this was also confirmed by the wagon's security camera's footage, who "clearly indicated that Shen fell because she had been gazing at her phone" (Bhandari 1). This incident is no surprise to most, as more and more news stories of injuries and even deaths caused by getting distracted on one's phones come to light every day. Many people have become conscious of the dangers this performance exposes you to, and yet, they keep choosing it over other forms of entertainment due to its practicality.

Moreover, speaking of dangers, it is known that the use of mobile devices can cause not only physical damage caused by distraction but also mental issues like addiction. According to research published by the Canadian Medical Association Journal, "excessive smartphone and social media use can raise mental distress, self-injurious behavior, and suicidality" (Abi-Jaoude et al). Cell phones make us miss things happening around us, voluntarily isolating us in an invisible prison cell. Still, people do not seem to care much about it. Instead, they keep finding ways to use it constantly, even

in places such as the subway. However, journalist Blake Eskin argues in "Cell-Phone Service on the Subway" that we should not see this addiction to digitality as necessarily negative. Of course, some new technologies are designed to form habits and manufacture cravings, but Eskin seeks to explain to us that "the human needs for connection and information are real, and data–whether it's delivered by cell phone or e-book, pay phone or iPhone–is the atmosphere of civilization" (Eskin 2).

Whether you consider the use of smartphones on the subway a genius or a tragedy, it is undoubtedly true that we, as a society, should try to look for a balance in the way we consume technology instead of trying to go from one extreme to the other. Maybe the subway, where we spend a good fraction of our day, is a good place to start.

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V

Vibing with the Street

Ron Anderson

Wide Angle Habit




Figs. 1-2. *Untitled.* New York City, USA, 2022. Photos: Ron Anderson.

I live in Brooklyn, New York and studied video documentary and photography at Goddard College in 1978-80. Then I dropped out to make music my life's focus but I continued to shoot a roll of film from time to time.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, live music performance stopped cold. I started daily walks around my neighborhood with my camera. I quickly became obsessed and started to post images on social media. Now my goal is to produce a photo-book of my new and growing body of work.




Figs. 3-4. *Untitled.* New York City, USA, 2022. Photos: Ron Anderson.

I tend not to use titles for my photographs, preferring to let the images speak for themselves. Sometimes I shoot from the hip, sometimes I frame the shot. I do not care if the image is out of focus or technically perfect. While composition and lighting are important to me, the main thing that I am looking for are images that have feeling or vibe, or a "sound" (Figs. 1-6).



Figs. 5-6. *Untitled.* New York City, USA, 2022. Photos: Ron Anderson.

Visiting Museums

Oryna Bludova

Why Do We Visit Museums?

About two times a year, my high school would have all of the students taking higher level art courses pitch in $50 dollars to spend a day at the MET. We would arrive at school at 7:30 am, dressed up, totebags and sketchbooks in our hands, and eagerly board the coach bus. Some of us would nap, others would stare out the window, watching the terrain transform from suburban neighborhoods, to highways, and eventually the posh brownstones of 5th avenue. Excited, but cold, all 40 of us would pile into the nearest Le Pain Quotidien and have breakfast. After compensating the servers with a hefty tip for the horrors of serving 40 teenagers at 9 am, our teachers would lead us to our final destination, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Split up by class, and then by friend group, we would spend about 2.5 hours exploring 2-3 wings of the museum, filling out the activities on our spreadsheet. Being with each other, in such a visually stimulating place, we got distracted a lot. A lot of this distraction was our fault, however, I often wondered to what extent the museum was at fault. Museums aren't places that are in themselves engaging, architecturally and contextuality; it is up to the viewer to engage. Yet even when the social aspect of the museums overpowers the educational, museums continue to thrive.

Museums are buildings that contain collections of objects relevant to a certain period in time, style, or subject. Presenting information in this way stems from the desire to make sense of the human experience on an intellectual level. Collecting artifacts became particularly popular among the rich around the 19th century, for it expressed intellect and affluence (Findel). The funding for public education rose during the 20th century; in turn, funding and support for museums rose. Museums transitioned from being a place for only the upper class, to being a public servant to all. Author Charles S. Stanish highlights the significance of museums by examining how throughout the whole world, museums attempt to "materialize shared histories and group identities" (Stanish 147).

As established by Stanish, museums have the ability to unite, which is more relevant than ever in a place like New York City. Encountering some of the most diverse groups of visitors in the world, New York City museums handle the difficult task of presenting information in a way that appeals to all. The 86th volume of the *Peabody Journal of Education* explains that by working with their audience, museums can create exhibits that strengthen "the process of identity building, both individual and communal" (Rosenberg 118). Rosenberg uses the rise of African American Museums during the Black Consciousness Era, to further his point about how museums can act as a backbone for vulnerable communities. In creating spaces that are relevant to the different communities, museums are able to enhance social cohesion as both a social and educational organization.

Though museums are intended to serve the public in a social and educational way, the actual act of going to a museum doesn't always embody both of those values. Attending museums to learn can be a challenging task due to the ways museums present information. Even in the beginning of the 20th century, when phones were not a distraction, writers acknowledged that visiting museums for the purpose of obtaining a large amount of information was unrealistic. In an article about the Children's Museum in Bedford, NY, one reporter wrote that the teachers should "direct rather than lead, let the objects speak for themselves and do not tire the children in the effort to teach them too much" (The Museum News, 1905). Allowing the children to wonder and master ideas on their own is less effective than teaching, but in a space like the museum it allows the child to be more engaged with the pieces around them. Some museums attempted to make the information more accessible to the audience by reformatting the ideas on the small labels that accompany the artifacts, into charts

and graphs. Steven Conn explains how despite the 20th century instinct of museums to minimize the labels, "some museums began adding explanatory labels, charts, and graphs to help visitors reckon with objects on display" (Conn 25). The word "some" is important in Conn's findings, as the majority of museums continue to use small labels to accompany their pieces.

How one engages with the objects in a museum also alters depending on what that object is. There is a difference between how we engage with ancient artifacts versus pieces of art. For instance, in her examination of art surrounding walking, "The Shape of a Walk," Rebecca Solnit argues that the viewer has a different process when it comes to engaging with contemporary art, "it asks the viewer to do a great deal of work, to interpret the ambiguous, imagine the unseen" (Solnit 274). However, isn't that what most museums ask people to do? When we see any object, our mind attempts to contextualize it. Out in the world, this is easy as everything is surrounded by a certain context. However, contextualizing objects in a museum is difficult, as ancient spoons, books, and armor are removed from the context they would be used in. Most museums are able to provide this context through their labels, but not visually, making it difficult for the mind to synthesize the different inputs of information in a way that makes sense. Arguing against Solnit's point, seeing any art in a museum, including contemporary art, is seeing it within its context. The majority of the art a person has consumed their life has been at a museum. However, an ancient spoon is one of a thousand spoons someone has probably used and touched.

The architecture of a museum also affects one's engagement with the works inside it. Exploring museums further, Conn discusses how the architects for museums like The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art focused on exhibitions, rather than the visitors' experience when they were building the museum. These architects focused on how certain rooms displayed the exhibition first, "only secondarily did these museum designs consider or accommodate the visitors who came to look at those objects" (Conn 204). The awkward architecture of some of these museums can be a distracting factor for visitors.

Still, despite the small labels and unnatural architecture, museums like the MET continue to thrive, "almost 4500 New Yorkers visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art daily" (Sena 2015). Perhaps the act of visiting museums is not so much affected by the actual features of the museums, but by the visitor's curiosity in the object facing them. Museums allow the visitor to share a moment with the object next to them, independent of the object's context. Though this lack of context can be disengaging, it can also allow the visitor to have new realizations. This is the case while viewing *The Panorama of the City of New York*–a gigantic miniature New York City in the Queens Museum, where one acquires a reversal in perspective regarding city architecture: "dominating it, rather than being dominated by it, which is what happens in the city outside the museum walls" (Momchedjikova 269), writes Professor Momchedjikova in her article "My Heart's in the Small Lands: Touring the Miniature City in the Museum." Museums surround you with new perspectives, and it is up to the visitor to explore the carefully curated rooms, and retain the information in them.

Being physically engaged with information around you, is something you can't achieve through other methods. In a world where we are able to access almost all information we would ever need through browsing from the comfort of our beds, it would seem that getting people to engage with museums would be hard. However, the difference lies in the emotional response to those two. Unlike using digital resources to get visual or intellectual information, going places like libraries or museums accompanies one with the social journey of getting essentially the same information. The act of physically visiting a place is in itself a story, unique to one person. Discovering the same information online shrinks the opportunity for unique experiences that you get through physically traveling to get your information. My dear friend Stella Canora (with whom I shared all of our high school excursions to the MET with) finds an emotional appeal in museums rather than an academic one. When I asked her why she visits museums, she wrote: "it's a good place to be by yourself (or

with friends!) and it can be calming and help you decompress but still be stimulating visually (as opposed to just rotting and looking at the phone?!) Usually I find it inspiring too, and it sometimes gives me understanding on art subjects… ? Also it's a pretty place to be and I like revisiting the MET in particular because I recognize paintings I've seen before and it's like seeing old friends" (Canora).

There is a serenity to being in a museum, as it allows one to wonder, explore on their own time. Unlike simply walking in a park, exploring museums offers us a curated experience of our world. As people we are only able to be at one place, at one time. When we walk through a park we are in one place, in one part of the world, at one specific time. Museums offer us a plethora of context, history, and reflection to take in, process, and use. I tried to express this idea through my drawing of a room at a museum, by allowing the viewer to look through the canvas (Fig. 1). Museums reflect and expand our perspectives. To go to a museum one has to plan, check the hours of the museum, look somewhat together, commute, pay a certain fee, make sure they don't bring too much stuff with them as most museums have strict rules for what you have to bring inside. Going to a park requires one to complete only a portion of the same preparations. Showing the world within its context, the park shows us the world as is, which can be calming but not necessarily enriching the visitor's perspective.



Fig. 1. *Visiting the Met.* Homework assignment essay on everyday performance, Prof. Blagovesta Momchedjikova's class Writing the Essay, Tisch, NYU, Fall 2024. Drawing: Oryna Bludova.

Visiting the MET with my class was often overwhelming and stressful, yet looking back, I still find those trips essential to my education. Sure, fitting those trips into our busy schedules sucked, emailing teachers letting them know we would be out that day, being super hungry by the time we got back to school, we would never have time to eat lunch on these trips, we would have to complete an obscene amount of work to reflect on these trips, writing essays and creating collages to

show that we learned something. We always wondered what it would be like if we visited completely on our own, no schedule, no school group, no prescribed route, no tour guides, no treasure hunt to follow inside, no one to be accountable to, no one to report to afterwards. We sympathized with others caught in the same field trip nuisance as ourselves and envied those who seemed to stroll aimlessly around… However, all those inconveniences and preparations always paid off. Those trips to the MET were the only things getting us out of the bubble of our town. Even when I was too tired from school to engage with the art that surrounded me, being in the city, walking up the steps, simply being at the MET was inspiring. There was nothing in our reflections that we wouldn't be able to find online, rather, our teacher's truest intention, in my opinion, was to get us out of our small town, even if it was just for a day. The experience of visiting a museum gave us something to not only look forward to, but also to reflect on.

I believe that museums offer that experience to anyone who is open to it. Whether it is the MET or a history museum, or a landmark museum, the act of visiting a museum gives us the opportunity to enrich ourselves. Going to a museum carries an intention to be enriched visually, emotionally, or academically. Some visit museums out of curiosity for knowledge, others find an emotional serenity, and others, like me, find themselves craving the essence of museums despite finding museums overstimulating. There is a social, educational, and emotional complexity in visiting museums and that is one of the hundreds reasons why museums have stuck around.

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Waiting for Delivery

Fumiko Miyamoto

What's the Difference?

A New York joke:
–*What's the difference between a plumber and the Messiah?*
–*The Messiah will come!...*

A Rio de Janeiro fact:
Sometimes I feel that my life could end waiting for delivery.

Waiting for the Subway

Bella Truman

Rhythms of the Platform

For the past 18 years of my life, I've spent my time memorizing the streets, restaurants, shops, landmarks and train lines of "the city that never sleeps." I've managed to create my own routine and live a life that seems surreal to those who don't reside in the city. This is only because to me, the city does sleep. Living here for so long, I've seen the quiet, and felt the calm of the storm. However, never have I been able to deny the significance of our landmarks, the impressiveness of what we're known for. Yes, Times Square is a disgusting, overcrowded, dangerous area, and yes, it is so exciting to be in the midst of a massive shopping center surrounded by people from all over the world in awe of my home. Taxi cabs, which are slowly being replaced by Ubers, are so classic to see swerving through the streets, and I couldn't imagine the city without them. The staples of New York, as much as New Yorkers hate to admit it, shaped our lives just as much as the visitors'. There is one staple which New Yorkers could not function without, but visitors attempt to: the subway system. Waiting for a train is simply too daunting for tourists, what could happen to them on that platform? But for New Yorkers, the subway is their main operative, and waiting for the train doesn't necessarily frighten them, but bores them.

My breath is quick, and I think everyone on the platform can tell I'm recovering from my 9 minute journey rushing to make the 6 train at the Brooklyn-Bridge City Hall station. They humor me slightly because the train isn't even there yet. Welcome newcomer, they think. They almost pity me, because only now am I realizing how disgustingly hot it is in this station along with the rancid smell strewn from the events of the night before, laid out on the tracks and in the trash bins. I distract myself with my music, and direct my eyes toward the empty tracks in front of me. As I wait for the train I begin to fuss over myself: I check my makeup, apply chapstick, change the song I'm listening to, or even scoff publicly so the platform understands my urgency. If it wasn't showing visibly before, I'm getting antsy. Still waiting for my train, I see nothing else to do but check out the other passengers on this platform. As I look around I see that the majority of those waiting for this train also look distressed and in a hurry. No one chooses to sit down on the empty platform seats. Everyone is ready to pounce. I begin to think about the other subway lines I've ridden and my mind drifts to the City Hall station on the yellow line. I conclude that they are not as panicked as those who find themselves riding the 6 train line. In fact those who ride the yellow line sit down while waiting for a train, as well as those who take the brown line, because they are used to their trains taking so long.

So many train lines, and so many cultures within them! Thinking about it, it makes sense that each line would have a different pace and population of people riding it. This plays into why some people in New York prefer certain train lines over others. My least favorite is the brown line (J, Z) . It goes through a variety of not very popular neighborhoods and somehow collects the least comforting people throughout its journey. Contrary to popular belief, New York City does have moments of silence, you have to search for them but they are there. Through all the bustling of the city streets and the train stations, people from all over the world, and the spectacular range of food, a true New Yorker is able to find a break in the chaos. That is the most prominent belief I've developed over 18 years living, and waiting for a train at any station–no matter the culture or stereotypes associated with that line - is the best place to find that break. Though the environment is riddled with mold, urine, feces, vomit, and other infestations which crowd every station in the city, it

is one of the most comforting places for New Yorkers to gather themselves. However, this is not how the infamous means of transportation started out.

The first subway line was opened to the public officially in 1904 running one line from Brooklyn-Bridge City Hall all the way up to 145th street in Harlem (www.history.com). This is a combination of the two train lines now known as the 4,5,6 trains and the 2 and 3 trains. The subway made a lasting impression on New Yorkers, in fact, people were so eager to ride that by the end of the first day of the grand opening, over 150,000 people had ridden the train (www.nycsybway.org). Interestingly enough the first train line was much more efficient than most of the train lines today with a fare of only 5 cents (Levy). Nowadays, the train fare has increased to $2.90 with some trains taking up to an hour to come and even stop working overnight. Though the progression of the subway has increased due to its incorporation of technology and closed roof trains, New Yorkers claim the fare today is not worth the treatment they receive in the stations and on the platform. New Yorkers find themselves bored with the lack of efficiency on the platforms, however, with the massive increase in the homeless population over the years in the stations, people are more often than not, on their guard to not be assaulted in the station. Despite this, waiting on the platform can arguably be less dangerous than riding the actual train with someone who poses a threat because there are ways to escape. Nevertheless, New Yorkers, like anyone else, expect that paying a fare to engage with this transportation does not endanger them but gives them an exclusive experience. This is one of the reasons why other forms of transportation are available in New York. An experience such as waiting for the bus would not necessarily place New Yorkers in the same dangerous position as waiting for the train, but at what cost?

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Walking Home

Traci Molloy

Walking Routes



Fig. 1. *J.R. Crossing the Street.* Graphite and markers on paper. Brooklyn, New York City, USA, 2025. Sketchbook drawing: Traci Molloy.

Like most New Yorkers, I have preferred walking routes–to the subway, the grocery store, the park, and for exercise. These routes tend to shift every spring for two reasons. I live in Prospect Lefferts Gardens, a predominantly Caribbean community in the heart of Brooklyn. When coming home from work, I exit the 2/3 subway at Sterling Street and walk home down Nostrand on the east side of the street. I pass the laundromat I frequent, the bakery where I buy currant rolls, and the fruits and vegetable stand that sells fresh coconut water, with the coconuts cracked and poured on site.

That all changes once baseball season begins. There are several older gentlemen, elders of the community, who congregate in front of a local bodega on the west side of Nostrand. They adore my teenage son, Jericho, and love to talk trash with him about baseball. Carl, better known as "Bam Bam," is a Mets fan. Jericho is a Yankees fan. They razz each other endlessly. J.R., Bam Bam's lifelong best friend, is also a Yankees fan. Whenever J.R. sees Jericho, he shouts out, "my man" and Jericho grins at their shared comradery (Fig. 1). They will quickly discuss all the homeruns Aaron Judge has recently belted, and joke about the status of the Mets, deriding Bam Bam for rooting for a

team that can't compete with the historic lore of the legendary Yankees. They fist bump and laugh, insulting each other in an affectionate way that guys do when discussing sports. These men always ask about Jericho even if I pass them without having him in tow–how he's doing in school, and how he's doing at home. They celebrate his little achievements. They make him feel like he's important, like he's "one of the guys." They truly care about his well being. They are teaching him, in subtle ways, how to be a part of your community, and what it means to be both a friend and a man.

My walking route home from the subway shifts once more in late spring. It happens for a very brief amount of time, generally in mid-June, when the linden trees are in bloom. At night, I will opt to take the Q train home (instead of the 2/3) so that I can walk the long, brownstone lined blocks where linden trees often line the sidewalks. The fragrance lingers in the air at night, especially when it's humid. You can walk half a block, smelling the lush floral scent before getting to the tree that's in bloom. Walking home, I imagine I'm living in a tropical climate, on one of the Caribbean islands, somewhere far away from the density of Manhattan. The stress of city life disappears as the wafts of the blossoms, like the smell of honeysuckle, fill my insides. The trees bring me comfort and hominess, reminding me of my childhood in rural Vermont, where the springtime smells of nature are still deeply implanted in my DNA as a sign of good things to come. Sometimes I will stand under a tree in bloom for an extended period of time, with eyes closed, allowing the sweet, dewy scent to fill my memory bank. My worlds meld together, a rural childhood upbringing, with an urban adulthood, both united by the smells of springtime, growth, and possibility.

Walking on Cobblestones

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

A Letter to Lisbon's Cobblestones

Portuguese Cobblestones,
Your gorgeous limestone patterns
generously decorate
sidewalks and squares
like giant carpets
with black and white cubic features
transforming every street
into a special exhibit
and every walk–
into a procession

Portuguese Cobblestones,
You are so pretty yet so mean
to my poor tourist ankles
twisting left and right
as I try to conquer you
in this July heat
tripping on your glorious designs
leading to magnificent
monuments and
breath-taking views

Portuguese Cobblestones,
Some of you are
tired from the passage of time
deeply sunken in
or even missing
forcing me to look at my feet
and step with great caution
yet I only have a couple of days
to get to know Lisbon
and I need to look up!

Portuguese Cobblestones,
I am just trying to soak up
as many of the
sounds subway stops
cathedrals cafes colors
natas crooked streets
fado bars as possible
so I can skip up and down
your sidewalk art with
the confidence of a Lisboeta.

Pedras da calçada portuguesa,
Though I wouldn't
brave you in rain storm
Havaianas high heels or
in a big rush
I still wish to see every one
of your pavement panoramas
and imagine those
who've made them
and those who've walked them!

Pedras da calçada portuguesa,
Like crown jewels
your cobblestones
adorn this city–
the city of hills
the city of tiles–
and I promise to return
with better shoes stronger calves
longer hours and get lost in
your intricate embroidered bedrock.



Fig. 1. *A night view of one of many pavement mosaics in Lisbon, Portugal,* July 2025. Photo: Violeta Zlatkova.

Watering the Plants on the Balcony

Violeta Zlatkova



Fig. 1. *Balcony plants.* Ovcha Kupel, Sofia, Bulgaria, Summer 2024. Photo: Violeta Zlatkova.

You water plants either in the morning or in the evening, when it is cool outside. I don't have time to water them in the morning so I water them at night, when I come back from walking my dog Tesa. I first water the plants that are in the common garden outside our apartment building and then I water the plants on my private balcony. I don't talk to the plants, there is no order in which I water them. If the weather is not hot, I don't water them every day but maybe every other day. I also have a few herbs planted in pots on the balcony: mint, basil, sage, camel thorn.

It is common for people to have plants in pots on their balconies, at least in Sofia, where I live. Once upon a time, when people lived in houses, they had plants around their houses, in their own gardens. I think in Sofia people take care of plants on their balconies because they are nostalgic for the garden from the past. Bulgarians are connected to the earth. They like to take care of plants, inside or outside of their homes. It is the same with me. I grew up in a house in Haskovo. We always had flowers in the garden outside. So I love to have plants on the balcony, when it is warm, to have them outside, when it is cold, you bring them inside, if you have room. I don't. So I buy seasonal flowers, new ones every spring. I usually buy and plant new flowers every April. There are big plant shops in several locations in Sofia. But sometimes I also bring some seeds from Haskovo, from my mom. When I buy flower seeds, I ask the sellers how often to water them, how much sunlight they should be exposed to (my apartment is with Eastern exposure), and if they like direct sunlight. I buy plants that love direct sunlight.

Before buying my own apartment, I lived in several rental apartments. Everywhere I had plants. Either on the balcony, if there was one, or inside the apartment, if there was no balcony. I don't have a special device for watering the plants. The outside garden I water with a hose that a neighbor bought. The plants on my balcony I water with a plastic bottle I have. I do have a watering can from IKEA, but never use it. With my neighbors, we discuss ideas about how to take better care of the plants. For instance, I found out from a neighbor that you can feed the plants by dissolving yeast in water, they grow faster: a little yeast, dissolved in a litter and a half of water goes a long way! People who take care of plants are better people. Taking care of plants shows a special attitude towards nature, towards life, towards animals, towards people. I love to take care of things: plants, dogs. I have a dog. I love to sit on the balcony to drink my coffee and be surrounded by flowers, it makes me feel like I have company. Whoever takes care of something alive is a good person.

Wearing a Face Mask

Cameron Kersting

Wearing a face mask is a way to protect oneself. Like an umbrella against rain, a mask is used to keep unwanted particles from passing through the respiratory system.

People use masks both defensively and offensively: protecting oneself from others who are sick, or protecting others from one's own illness.

Masks are proven to be effective. Medical doctors have been wearing masks as a defense against illness since the 19th century. It should be noted that masks are also commonly used when the air is potentially hazardous. This could be because of pollution, though it is often a result of something like a wildfire having spread toxic amounts of smoke to an area, or when dealing with fine particles like sawdust.

There is a social code when it comes to masking, at least in its contagious contexts, heightened since the recent COVID-19 pandemic. No longer is it acceptable to walk around with symptoms of a communicable illness without a mask. At times, among certain groups of people, it may even be considered rude or disrespectful to be without a mask.

Wearing a mask is purely functional and has recently become a courteous gesture, showing your consideration and awareness for those around you. It is a self-less habit, as you are concerned with the well-being of others, if you are unwell and in public.

Wearing Earplugs

Jorge de La Barre

Nothing Left to Hear: A Parable

> Every Saturday night, I wear earplugs before I go to bed. This is actually a recent habit. I don't wear earplugs on other days. This has to do with the Baile Funk parties that usually start around midnight on Saturday at the nearby favela and go on until 8 a.m. I brace myself for it and even mentally prepare myself so that I won't be dictated by murderous impulse. The favela is probably more than 1km away, but they blast the music so loud that it's impossible to sleep in peace. I actually don't like wearing earplugs when I go to bed and I have a fairly high tolerance for noise pollution, having lived in New York City for so many years. But, this is something that I never expected. It's so loud and has no regard for the surrounding neighborhood. I am sure there are similar types of noise pollution in other parts of Brazil, but I don't know the country so well as a recent transplant. From what I hear, the police won't go into the favela since it's controlled by the gangs, so when it comes to noise control, it's a lawless area. I am assuming that these parties generate revenue for them so they are not going to give them up easily. I doubt there are any Baile Funk parties of this scale in rural parts of Brazil.
>
> Anonymous Rio resident

The city was borne out of a village that refused to sleep. It had started imitating the model city–the one that already didn't sleep. Soon, the whole village was enjoying the parties, staying late at night and playing loud music, real loud music, which annoyed the local toads, birdies, and other insects. The noise, the music, the lightshows; it all stressed them out, the poor creatures, until they moved eventually, further out in the jungle.

Quickly, the ever-expanding village was becoming a city; all of a sudden, the dwellers refused to sleep, just like that. They were wearing sunglasses after dark because of all the city lights, the lightshows, and the big screens. They were wearing earplugs during the day, because of all the construction work: it was permanent. The city was booming like crazy. Every day and night, a new road, new stores, new buildings, etc. The mushroom city started to grow against nature, turning its back at the shrinking jungle. All the animals and creatures were slowly disappearing, reduced to silence.

Until a certain point, the city dwellers still lived happily. Yet, they lived crankily, nervously. Well, of course, if you ask me! They couldn't sleep anymore, can you imagine?! Always working nonstop, partying like animals, and they refused to sleep! Even if they wanted, they just couldn't do it. Sleeping was out. Then something happened. For some unknown marketing reason (by design, maybe?), sunglasses and earplugs began to run out.

That's when the dwellers started to fight against each other. Some of them had the sunglasses but not the earplugs. The ones with sunglasses were flashing lights at the ones with earplugs, and the ones with earplugs were blasting loud music at the ones with sunglasses–secretly hoping that someone would give them sunglasses, while some of the ones with sunglasses pretended that they didn't need earplugs (but that's only because they were already deaf and they didn't know about it yet–they just didn't realize). And somehow for the best, the ones with earplugs couldn't hear the ones with sunglasses when they were calling them names, so they didn't care. In fact, no one cared about each other anymore; everyone was so focused on their little selves; everyone had become so self-centered.

During some time, sunglasses and earplugs were booming on the black market. Just any sunglasses would sell instantly. Since no one slept anymore anyway, the night earplugs soon became

obsolete. The day earplugs were the most coveted, especially the electronic, bimodal ones, with the "Ambient Aware" and "Noise Cancelling" functions. The way people used it, the "Noise Cancelling" function was always on, and the city dwellers never agreed upon anything. Some of them had been leaving town already, and more were just migrating with no particular place to go, hoping that, somewhere, somehow, they could go back to nature.

City life had just become so miserable; everyone pretending to have a good time, when in fact they were just exhausted, overworked: borderline burnout all the time! The ones who had escaped were never seen again, while the ones who had stayed didn't care so much anymore. They could no longer tell the difference, as if nothing really mattered. Everyone acted as if they were all eyes wide shut. And so they were–all ears deep plugged down to deaf too…

Back then, the city had expanded to a point that it had become its own jungle; it kept refusing, denying, ignoring all nature so stubbornly, even the basic facts such as, for example, the difference between day and night. City life had started as a joke–the sunglasses after dark, the refusal to sleep at night, the day earplugs, the night earplugs and so on; now it was just repeating as history–a pretty dark, gloomy history.

Major diseases began to grow, directly caused by city life as we know it: permanent noise and aural unrest; permanent light at night from all the screens, the TV screens, the computer screens, the smartphone screens… Screens that literally abolished the very notion of darkness. It was not an enlightenment either, for that matter–rather the opposite: obscurity, obscurantism. They were diseases of the senses, the doctors said, but some of them knew that they were more than that: diseases of the soul… Some pundits advised to send an SOS, but to whom?! They just couldn't figure it out. Was there anybody out there? Love and hate had lost their meaning. The city dwellers had no feelings anymore; they hardly had any body at all, and now their basic senses were ruined. They only found safety in numbers–and screen lights. Cybernetic light, artificial light, econometric light, artificial intelligence, digital techno dance and deafening music. The only social left was social media. The differences between good and bad habits, coping mechanisms, defense mechanisms, addictions, had become so blurred, they just didn't make sense anymore. Just as the difference between day and night had vanished already a long time ago, one thing could become another in just a second. No one had the time to even notice (supposing that some would even care).

Then (was it by design?), the night earplugs were swiftly replaced by hearing devices. But the city life had become just a big noise; nothing left to hear, or listen to. Originally designed by the infamous JdB's corporation (previously known as JLaBá), the old night earplugs' "Noise Cancelling" function had been enhanced into an expanded version of the "Ambient Aware," secretly redesigned as "Max Ambient Noise!" (or simply "MAN!") by some subrecipient startup company that no one even knew the name of (although rumors mentioned SZFire).

The dancing parties had long become endless, and always the same. They kept playing the same old song over and over–a song that had been a hit a long, long time before, until I guess it became just eternal. Whoever remembers "Working Class Earplug" will know what I mean…

"Working Class Earplug" (Gene Lennin)

As soon as you're born they make your ears bleed
By giving you no peace instead of it all
'Til the noise is so loud you feel nothing at all
A working class earplug is something to be
A working class earplug is something to be
They do scream at home and they shout at school
They scream even louder and they despise a fool

'Til you're so fucking deaf you can't hear their rules
A working class earplug is something to be
A working class earplug is something to be
When they've deafened and scared you for twenty odd years
Then they expect you to prick up your ears
When you can't really hear you're so full of fear
A working class earplug is something to be
A working class earplug is something to be
Keep you deaf with religion and sex and TV
And you hear you're so clever and free with your sunglasses
But you're still so fucking loud as far as I can hear
A working class earplug is something to be
A working class earplug is something to be
There's deaf at the top they are shouting at you still
But first you must learn how to scream as you kill
If you want to hear like the fools on the hill
A working class earplug is something to be
A working class earplug is something to be
If you want to be an earplug, well, just follow me
If you want to be an earplug, well, listen to me

In Memoriam: John Lennon (1940-1980)

Wearing Jewelry

Jasper Neff

An Object Personified Is A Person Objectified: Cultural Consumption in the Modern Age



Fig. 1. Sculpted by skilled artisans in a small workshop in Indonesia, this necklace exemplifies the balance between globalization and cultural preservation. Bali has a significant tradition of silver jewelry-making that dates back to the 14th century. Pieces often feature animal and floral designs that carry spiritual meaning, with turtles symbolizing both patience and wisdom. Once produced for ceremonial use and local exchange, this necklace and others like it are now sold on international marketplaces such as NOVICA, where global art and cultural items are available to the average consumer. This specific necklace is currently under the ownership of myself, an American woman; I received it as a gift from my father after falling in love with a copy owned by my mother. I wear the necklace every day as a reminder of my family, allowing it to travel from coast to coast and across the sea, much like the creature it was modeled after. When looking at this pendant, what do you see: an artifact, an heirloom, a work of art, or a piece of costume jewelry? In this digital age, where the world is our shopping mall and pretty much anything can be viewed as a commodity, this piece asks us to question, how should we separate art and commerce? At what point does consumerism do more harm than good to the cultures it draws upon? November 2025. Photo: Jasper Neff.

For the past decade, the turtle necklace that sits around my neck has been an integral part of my identity (Fig. 1). Yet, its story stretches back even further to a small workshop in Bali, where careful hands sculpted silver according to ancient traditions that predate my existence. Despite this, when my dad gifted me the necklace for my ninth birthday, I did not think to ask how it had come into my possession. Rather than wondering what notable events had gone into the creation of my necklace, my thoughts were focused on how it would help me look even more like my mother, and that the stone was a duller shade of green than I had initially expected.

Often, we are unaware of how our possessions get produced. On the NOVICA website, where the necklace is listed, the artist Nyoman Rena states that he learned to make jewelry after his father "introduced him to a famous silversmith in his village" and that "having children gave me more motivation to boost my project" because there "was somehow always extra income to be found" (Rena). Nyoman's life trajectory and ability to provide for his family are directly linked to the necklace. In this way, his livelihood is attached to the piece in a way mine never could be. Nonetheless, like the many museum artifacts that are stolen and reframed to tell a story that best suits their new environment, I dismissed the necklace's past, instead replacing it with personal associations that served my own purpose of feeling connected to my family.

I behaved like Christopher Columbus, as described in the essay "In History," where the fact that the New World "had a substantial existence, physical and spiritual, before he became aware of it, does not occur to him" (Kincaid 620). The author Jamaica Kincaid argues that Columbus' belief in possession caused him to impose his own narrative onto her native Antigua and overwrite the history of the people who lived there. Kincaid warns that "the person who really can name the thing

gives it a life, a reality, that it did not have before" (Kincaid 621). The person who names the land gives it credibility, as if it had no existence or significance prior to their discovery. Similarly, whoever has the authority to label an object as "mine" according to socially accepted rules about ownership, gets to decide what story is told about that object moving forward. When we ignore how an object was manufactured and by whom, we act like colonizers, erasing its culture and history.

This dismissal ultimately harms the communities whose culture is tied to the item. As noted by Garni Trading, a company specializing in Balinese jewelry, silver-making has a rich history in Bali dating back to the 14th century, when it was introduced by the Javanese people fleeing the spread of Islam (Garni Trading). Silver jewelry is worn during ceremonies "to honor the relationship between people, God and the environment" and to create "a connection to the peoples of the past" (Garni Trading). When I only focus on how the necklace is relevant to my own life, I risk the loss of these histories and traditions by not allowing them to continue on through the story of the object that gets shared with other people. When interviewed about the necklace, my parents made no mention of its origins, only thinking of it in relation to our family. The turtle was no longer a symbol of protection and wisdom like in Balinese culture, but something that "represents our family, our love of the sea, long life and adventurous journeys" (Neff).

Disregarding cultural significance poses the danger of commodification, where individual appeal is prioritized over authentic representation. We can observe this with my turtle necklace, which is sold by a company whose brand is all about connecting consumers with exotic, handcrafted items. The picture of Nyomen's smiling face plastered on the packaging, and quotes about how turtles represent patience and wisdom in Balinese culture, are not intended to preserve the object's story, but serve as a tool for marketing. In a way, Nyoman's family and their way of life is sensationalized in order to sell their product, raising questions about who gets to profit from this exploitation.

Clearly, ignoring the details of how an object came to be can lead to historical erasure and cultural commodification. Yet, for many this behavior is habitual, if not instinctive. In an age where one can acquire pretty much anything from anywhere, most of us do not know the various lives our possessions experience before they arrive at our doorstep. We only begin to care about these objects and see them as important once they have some connection to us. So why is it that we are so quick to dismiss, and in some cases not even consider, an object's past or relevance to another person? Why do we take the extra step to then project our personal associations onto that object?

Forced Entertainment's *Tabletop Shakespeare* touches on the ways we view objects and develop attachments to them. During their performances, ordinary household items like ketchup bottles are used to represent Shakespeare's characters. Even though I already had certain emotions and circumstances that I associated with the objects in *All's Well That Ends Well,* these were quickly replaced with the character's qualities and my feelings about them. Over the course of the play, I found myself caring for these seemingly insignificant articles because of the story that had been thrust upon them, to the point where I had a visceral reaction to watching shampoo bottle Parolles get knocked down by the lords kidnapping him. When we attach personal stories to objects, we do so in a similar attempt to invest the world in our trivial lives. Like *TableTop Shakespeare*, which gets us to care for an old bottle by erasing preconceived notions and replacing them with stories relevant to the audience, we too forgo the history of objects in favor of our personal relationships to them, using this bond to keep us tethered to a physical world that might otherwise view us as irrelevant.

By taking a piece of the big world and making it ours, we validate our existence within it, much like the souvenirs in Susan Stewart's book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Stewart argues that the meaning of souvenirs comes not from their place of origin but the story their owners tell, noting how postcards "mark the privatization of a public symbol," and "the juxtaposition of history with a personalized present" (Stewart 138). Through this

object, a beloved attraction for many becomes privatized and connected to the individual. On a planet full of wondrous things, we make ourselves special by taking home an object that lets some of that wonder belong to us. By visiting a site with a noteworthy past and record of other people coming to see it, one becomes part of that greater history. When grappling with our innate impermanence, the postcard provides permanent evidence of our connection to the rest of humanity. When sent to a recipient, it "validates the experience of the site, which we now can name as the site of the subject" (138). Not only does the object confirm the sender's presence at the location, but turns them into the focal point, where conveying their experience at the place matters more than the place itself. Projecting personal associations onto the object makes us feel just as important as the historic monument captured in the photo.

To help me feel important and connected to others, I deliberately invented my necklace's narrative as a representation of my family. The pendant wasn't an heirloom and had no prior familial associations attached to it, but I projected these ideas onto the piece so that it would be meaningful enough to get passed down to future generations, allowing me to live on through my connection to it. Since their invention, fashion and jewelry have been regarded as outward expressions of identity and aesthetic preference. By attaching personal meaning and anecdotes to accessories like a necklace, we create a part of our identity that exists outside of ourselves and will remain long after we are gone. It doesn't matter where or by whom the object was made, because we want the focus to be on how the object connects us to the broader world. Unlike Nyoman, the necklace's history within my family won't be forgotten because it connects each wearer to a narrative that is both deeply personal and enduring.

To fulfill this purpose of making ourselves feel special, we are drawn to objects that already have distinct qualities and significance to society. In her *History Makers* interview, entrepreneur and jeweler Veronica Airey says that customers seek out her pieces "because they are going to be so unique and so very different" (Airey). People want to possess and foster a relationship with objects that they view as distinctive. I related my turtle necklace to a meaningful story about family because of its uncommon shape and the fact that my mother owned a similar version. It is unlikely that I would have done the same with a standard piece of clothing or other item that wasn't already remarkable in some way. Veronica recalls how the businesswoman working in Hartford were eager to buy her African style jewelry because it resembled the pieces worn in their home city of New York. In this instance, the historical and cultural context of the items remained because it was a personal connection that helped express their identity as New Yorkers, and also differentiated the woman in a way that made them feel special.

The human impulse to overlook an object's past is not an intended act of erasure, but an attempt to find meaning through possession. Filling objects with personal associations reasserts our own importance by connecting us to something greater than ourselves, while also imbuing these items with meaning. By recognizing this tendency, we can begin to understand that an object's history and production are special in their own right, and add value to our lives without needing to be linked to an individual story. Every identity deserves to be preserved in objects–the guaranteed witnesses of our lives.

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Writing the Urban

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

To write the city is to know the city.

How do you begin to write the city? You begin to write the city by feeling it.

How do you begin to feel the city? You begin to feel the city by letting it impress itself on you with its many different lights, smells, sounds, tastes, sensations–in synchrony and in cacophony. Once the feeling starts burning you inside–with curiosity, with fascination, with confusion–you are ready to write. Pen to paper, fingers to keyboard–you do it once or twice and then you get regular with it: once a week, twice a week, once a day… and here's your nifty habit of writing the urban!

Does writing the urban mean writing about anything city-related? Food, strangers on the bus, everyday activities, famous sites, memories, stories, someone you met in the Deli, summer concerts in the park, the way the rain hits the windows of your tiny apartment, the noises you hear from the neighbors, couples holding hands in the street, the view from the tallest building in the city, the prices of things, the smell of a particular block, ice skating in the park, traffic regulations, unspoken subway etiquette, street markets, parked strollers on a Brooklyn block? Yes, it does.

Does every time you write take you closer to knowing the city? It certainly does.

Once you have gotten comfortable with the habit of writing the urban, there are many things you can do with the product of that habit–your urban writing–casually talk about it with others or officially talk about it on the news, at conferences, on social media, in classrooms; you can find homes for it beyond the comfort of your notebook or hard-drive–journals, books, reports, grants, exhibitions, workshops, blogs, policies, documentaries, movies, songs, plays, games, debates, protests, project proposals. Your urban writing can inspire, challenge, document, comfort, imagine, celebrate, bring about change. Conceived in private, your urban writing can have quite the rich life in public.

You can also choose to teach the habit of writing the urban to others.

How do you teach your habit to someone else? You show it to them, you do it together, you encourage their progress, and you let them make it their own. You can teach one person or you can teach many at the same time: in homes, parks, museums, community centers, schools, symposia, on youtube; you can teach in person or online; you can teach once or you can teach over time.

I teach the habit of writing the urban to college students. I design a series of prompts–a progression, as my former director Pat C. Hoy II taught me–that helps students build an essay step by step, in many stages and drafts. A progression takes at least a month to unfold and so I also have to teach my students the habit of writing with patience and sustained curiosity. One of the essays that I teach is on everyday urban performances. Students choose to observe closely an everyday urban performance in the public domain of New York City–say, listening to music while walking–and examine it in contexts: theoretical (historical, visual, cultural, sociological, theatrical, psychoanalytical and a historical image and/or their drawing/photograph of it), textual (a selection of relevant published essays and a brief interview with someone engaging in it), and urban (other similar everyday and scheduled activities, and an event, production or an artist's visit that we attended as a group). They also describe its main characters, plot, setting, signature gesture, freeze frame, main conflict, and metaphor (used briefly, as a tool). Ultimately by writing this everyday urban performance, they develop an original idea about city life and their own, unique way of writing about it. Their exploration is based on their interpretation of the everyday performance that they selected. Their familiarity with it enables them to write it and thus both discover and document it.

X

X-ing the Street

Yuyoung Chung

"The City is Yours"*: From the Zebra in a Metropolis*

24-hr Parking, DIG, Union Square Wine & Spirits, Hyatt Hotel. I am greeted by these signs every morning and throughout the day. I am at the 4th Avenue and 13th Street intersection on my daily commute to the Washington Square campus from Palladium Hall. The pedestrian traffic light across 4th Avenue next to DIG just solidified into a red palm. The curb is crowded with people who have just crossed the street: parents pushing strollers, a runner in shorts, backpackers adorned with NYU lanyards from Welcome Week, NYU security on a lunch break, a smoker wrapped in a beautiful scarf, and a loud family in matching flannel. They leave me behind on the curb, continuing down the 4th Avenue and 13th Street sidewalks. I gaze into the oncoming traffic: FedEx trucks, Grab delivery cyclists, shiny cars, white vans, and the occasional scooter with mittens attached to the handlebar. To my left, sunlight breathes gold into the foliage flanking either side of 4th Avenue. Yet just a little further down at the intersection with 14th Street, I feel trapped in an imaginary prison of brown-brick buildings and a "Doomsday" countdown looking over Union Square. This is my New York. The restless city whose atmosphere shifts block by block. The only history I know of this place is that Palladium Hall used to be a nightclub where Kevin Aviance would perform. I am reminded of this by the Korean American nail salon owner on 4th Avenue and by Muñoz's writing.

The signal blinks white, illuminating the universal stick-figured symbol for pedestrians. This is my time to shine. It is my right of passage, yet I linger on the curb. Crossing the street is regulated by specific traffic laws and social expectations. Stripes and signals are uniform on every street corner and intersection. Drivers must yield to pedestrians. Pedestrians can cross on a red light if there are no cars, but drivers cannot. So in a way, pedestrians rule the streets. But crossing the street still feels vulnerable at times. I am exposing myself to the piercing gaze of others. On the crosswalk, I am on display. Especially during rush hours, the street becomes my unsolicited catwalk.

There is also a physical fear. Are there any cyclists zooming this way? My mother's voice in the back of my head nags me to look in both directions. After all, "collisions involving a pedestrian and a motor vehicle are a common occurrence in today's society" (Happer et al. 1288). But the carpet of white stripes ahead indicates to the world that the street is mine. Drivers are on standby, waiting idly in their vehicles. I trust that they are patient enough for a green light. I used to only hop onto the white stripes like the black asphalt was lava. I may have grown up. My steps land inconsistently on and in between the white slabs of paint on the black asphalt, sometimes in puddles, cracks, sewage drains, and cycling lanes too.

But in Pompeii, steps falling in between the crosswalks meant that you were getting submerged knee-deep into "dirt, bones, and broken dishes and pots" (Current World Archaeology). These first crosswalks date back to "more than 2000 years ago," writes Carole Martinez, and were made of thick stone slabs instead of white paint as sewage would flow on the streets. Martinez

details the development of the modern crosswalk: in December 1868, the "first traffic lights at Parliament Square in London" were installed, in its "busy part." But after a month of operation, the manual traffic light exploded causing two policemen casualties, and that stumped "the development of crosswalks and traffic lights" until 1951, when the "zebra crossing" was adopted across the world: the black and white design proved to be "efficient" for both drivers and pedestrians (Martinez). This is the prototype that is still widely used today.

Just as I am about to step onto the curb, something whizzes by. "A blur. A blindspot. An apparition" (Momchedjikova 1), as Blagovesta Momchedjikova describes the rollerblader in her essay "Rollerblading." The rollerblader is equipped with "two toy cars," "two flying carpets," "two huge needles," "two pens" that edit city space (Momchedjikova 1). Momchedjikova reclaims agency and a sense of purpose by rollerblading instead of getting lost in the flurry of nonstop New York City movement. How do I feel when I cross the street? I feel like I spend more time looking forward to reaching a sidewalk instead of appreciating the few moments it takes to leave my footprints on a zebra crossing. I find it nearly impossible to exist in the moment nowadays; In my mind, I am always a few blocks ahead. As a result, time slips by very quickly, and I often feel left behind.

For Momchedjikova, the "blades" embody her "desire to feel" the city (Momchedjikova 2). I suppose I could "feel" the city more if I am deliberately slow, like a protester in a planned, peaceful protest. For this performance, protestors do not have to be wary of their surroundings, like street crossers have to be. There is no longer a physical threat. Streets are sectioned off, traffic is rerouted, to fill the streets with footsteps instead of tire tracks. The rules of the street are suspended. People are dressed in matching colors, holding up signs and chanting a unified message. Some people's faces are smeared with war paint, but that usually signifies a moral commitment to the movement rather than a physical one. Police accompany the mass, patrolling from the outskirts of the streets. A massive sound cloud hangs above a crowd of peaceful protesters: pieces of their souls that are yearning for a better world. But facing a thick stream of protestors flowing down 4th Avenue told me otherwise. After weaving through the crowd myself, I realized I cannot appreciate the present when also moving with resistance.

Aaron Attoma-Mathews offers insights on how to challenge resistance in his essay "When the Horizontal Goes Vertical or How Skateboarding Redefines the Urban Environment." Skateboarders are unwelcome in the city. "Off limits" signs in parks, "metal spikes and metal studs" to "prevent grind," and discriminatory labels like "punk" and "hooligan" are telling of how "space becomes power through exclusion" (Attoma-Mathews 60). Yet skateboarding "challenges the horizontal existence through various vertical moves," "riding not the waves of the ocean but the concrete of the streets" (Attoma-Mathews 59). Skateboarding resists by utilizing the very infrastructure that was created against it. Attoma-Mathews points out that pedestrians, on the other hand, "are welcome almost anywhere" (Attoma-Mathews 60). But feeling "safe" as a pedestrian is not always contingent on being "welcome." In an interview, my friend reflected that "a space that is designed for one often ostracizes the other" (Liang). Then who is New York City designed for?

Jaywalkers never ask that. They just go. Jaywalking is the way of life. I do not think jaywalking makes you travel faster. Rather, it gives you the illusion of efficiency as you are taking matters into your own hands. Maybe that is what matters. When jaywalkers see an opening in traffic, they jump into the double-dutch. People cut across streets regardless of the flow of traffic; everyone is running on their own clock. Some people stare down drivers who insist on playing the dangerous game of dominance, inching forward even with pedestrians swarming the street. Some people ignore the cars, locking their gaze forward in a way that forces the car to let the people pass. Other, more skilled jaywalkers, cross the street seamlessly without interrupting traffic. These people, through immense effort and practice, are thoroughly self-aware of their walking speed and ability to predict the speed of oncoming vehicles. The point of jaywalking is to get from point to point quickly, often

because using a crosswalk seems inconvenient or slow. So, unlike crossing the street at a walking signal, jaywalking is rebellious, fast, and simply more convenient.

R. L. Moore's study on "Pedestrian Choice and Judgment" from 1953 agrees that "pedestrians economize in time or effort whenever possible" (Moore 9). But sometimes by economizing on time, we spend more on effort. I noticed that I have been climbing the stairs more often lately - the New Yorker in me has become too impatient to wait for a crowded elevator. My gaze is fixed on the steps above me or fragments of clothing and facial features of descending climbers headed in the opposite direction. You notice more intimate details about strangers when using the stairs because each climber is on a different level. I follow the single-file flow of movement that sticks to the right side of the stairwell. I hold my bag closer to me, either by hugging it to my chest or pressing it against my back to create space in this narrow stairwell. I think sticking to the right side is also more enforced in a staircase because, unlike a crosswalk, there is not enough space to swerve. Also, people using the stairs are way more pressed for time than people who wait for the traffic signal to cross the street. Blocking a climber in the staircase is like trying to refrain a jaywalker from cutting through traffic. A single file flow ensures that this need for quick travel is ensured. Don't be that person climbing on the left side. Stairs are often the only options in New York to access subways, low-story apartments, and basements. It is not convenient when I am hauling luggage or groceries, and it makes me hesitant to invite my grandparents to visit me. New York is not sympathetic to those struggling, and I have acclimatized by climbing two steps at a time. My first few steps feel sluggish, more from the frustration of being denied a modern luxury that is usually taken for granted. My steps gain momentum like my strides on the crosswalk, and I feel a reassuring weight bear on my legs. Maybe this is the way I should travel to "feel" New York City. My body needs to feel the toll, I need to feel the weight of my existence in my limbs.

Crossing the street is about reclaiming power and space in an urban place that is growing beyond you. The white stripes are a sacred space to start practicing order and allowing yourself to feel vulnerable in a chaotic city. The zebra in the metropolis tells you that the city is yours.

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Y

Yard Sale Shopping

Jo Novelli-Blasko

Oakland, 1987-1993

Yard Sale Shopping used to be an urban habit of mine–back when yard sales were a category in the want ads of the newspaper, back when Sunday Papers were a thing: extra heavy with good stuff to do in the city. I remember getting the paper on Saturday night so I could map out a path. I would prioritize far flung sales. My first question at yard sales in those days was always "Do you have any salt and pepper shakers?" Living in a converted warehouse space meant I could collect much larger things, and hold deep collections of small things.

Over the years, my many collections have dwindled in number and dimension. My log slice collection shrunk from well over 250 pieces, to roughly 30. A house is not a home, until the log slices are hung (Fig. 1)! Same goes for my extensive holdings of salt and pepper shakers. Today, I have exactly 5 pairs, which have remarkably survived several moves and households (Fig. 2).





Fig. 1. Surviving log slice collection; Fig. 2. Surviving salt-and-pepper collection. Phoenix, AZ, USA, October 2025. Photos: Jo Novelli-Blasko.

Yelling in Public

Neven Armanios

Subway conductors yell at passengers, mothers yell at children, couples yell at each other, drivers yell at traffic, protesters yell slogans, preachers yell sermons, the homeless yell for respect... In the city, people yell because they want to be heard. Yelling is common: you fight for attention by amplification. Then there's silent yelling–when you wish to yell from deep inside, to release frustration, to let off steam–but you don't–your manners won't let you. But if no one was around…



Fig. 1. *Yelling*. Digital Collage, Mixed Media, New York City, USA, 2025. Artwork: Neven Armanios.

Z

Zeroing in on Nature

Jo Novelli-Blasko

If there is a plant in my purview, I will greet it. I reach out and shake its hand. I put my finger under its leaf, on its stem, or carefully between its needles. "Hello plant, thank you for the oxygen." I zero in on the tenderness of the plant and feel appreciation for how infinitely interesting plants are, in their diversity.

Zeroing in on Nature grounds me. I take a moment to be present with the life that survives or thrives around me in seemingly impossible places. Zeroing in on Nature means reducing all the urban input to zero. I can zero in at my house and other private places, I zero in while in public places, too.

Sometimes zeroing in means looking at far away things. I have been known to pull my car to the side of the road or into a parking lot, for a better view of a hawk soaring above crosstown traffic. I zero in on their underbellies, the shape of their tail, and tilt of their head. "Hello hawk, please don't eat any domesticated animals today."

Zeroing in on Nature happens with my whole body. When it rains, a rare thing in Phoenix, I walk outside without an umbrella: coolness, wet, petrichor, steam off the pavement. "Blessed water, hello."

My habit is not always so friendly. You don't want to be the sewer roach in my shower.

Zooming

Blagovesta Momchedjikova

To Zoom or Not to Zoom?

Since the pandemic, our vocabulary became rich with another verb, activity, habit: to zoom. Previously, zooming referred to focusing the photo or video camera or hurrying past someone. Now it means meeting others online and conducting or attending various events, big or small, virtually: meetings, conferences, classes, lectures, workshops, job talks, interviews, doctor's appointments, therapy sessions, etc. Initially, we complained that zooming forced us to make things presentable to the camera, visually and auditorily: our backgrounds, ourselves from the waist up, our surroundings, even our desktop screens, in case we have to share them during a zoom call; we became hyper aware of bad lighting and noises. But we quickly adjusted: zooming is no longer a survival tactic but a convenience habit: it saves travel time and cost; allows for more flexibility in attending events across geographical and time zones, from any wi-fi equipped location; frees up time otherwise spent on travel for other activities; and provides the safety of planned social interactions. In fact, being able to work from home via zoom is now a perk that employers use to lure prospective employees.



Fig. 1. *To Zoom or to Zumba–That is the Question.* During the pandemic, I also religiously stuck to the habit of dancing zumba online with my instructor Lilka Mimbella. Here I am debating if I should zoom or zumba, presenting the two activities that dominated my life when we sheltered in place: teaching on zoom or dancing zumba. Brooklyn, New York City, USA, Spring 2020. Photo: Moussa Toni Cisse.

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Gavin Stubbings attends the Experimental Theatre Wing at the Tisch School of the Arts, NYU. He spent the Spring semester of 2025 in Prof. Momchedjikova's writing class, learning more of the intricacies behind writing and how to craft the perfect essay. Outside of school, Gavin enjoys acting in movies and short films, thrifting, collecting vinyls, watching anime, taking photos, and playing video games. gbs4195@nyu.edu / @endergavin

THOMPSON, Olivia
Olivia Thompson studies Drama at the Playwrights Horizons Theatre School studio at NYU Tisch School of the Arts. She previously obtained an associates degree in the performing arts at Cape Cod Community College through dual enrollment. This year she has been exploring writing through playwriting in her studio, and both "The World Through Art Writing the Essay" and "Writing the Essay: Art and the World" instructed by Blagovesta Momchedjikova, PhD. In her future, along with Drama, she intends to minor in both journalism and sociology during her time at NYU. ort2008@nyu.edu / @oliviathompson0087

TOP, Khalifa Babacar
Khalifa Babacar Top is a dancer, choreographer, dance teacher, and activist from Senegal living in New York City. He has travelled the world performing in various companies, doing workshops, and teaching dance. He specializes in Contemporary, West African, and Experimental Sabar dances. In New York, he has taught at Cumbe, in Brooklyn, and at the Joffrey Ballet, in Manhattan. He has also held many artistic residencies, most recently, the New Directions Choreography Lab at Alvin Ailey. In the summer, you can find him teaching Experimental Sabar in Morningside Park, in Harlem. topdancecompany@gmail.com / @top.babacar90

TRUMAN, Bella
Bella Truman is a lifelong resident of New York City as well as a student of Drama at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. She has always been engrossed in the arts, whether as a professional hip hop dancer, a vocalist, or a creative writer. Her work has been heavily influenced by her love and pride of being a native New Yorker. She is devoted to provoking emotional and mental consideration with all that she does thus inevitably using her creativity to inspire the creative endeavors of others. bmt8481@nyu.edu / @Bellaatruman

URSO, Jen
Jen Urso is a multidisciplinary artist utilizing public interventions, performance, drawing, mapping and technology to honor a sensitive approach to our environment and community that respects the unseen and unspoken. Her work typically takes place in the public via occupation, immersion and discovery. Jen has exhibited and performed across the United States, Canada, Mexico and Brazil, receiving numerous grants and awards. She is a runner, gardener and thinker who also creates hand-drawn maps for her business Steady Hand Maps. Jen received her BFA in Art from Carnegie Mellon University. jenniferursoart.com, steadyhandmaps.com / @shmapsmaps, @jenurso

VAN DE BOVENKAMP, Kate
Kate Van de Bovenkamp is an NYU student pursuing a degree in Dramatic Writing. With an avid love for film and television, she finds herself on many sets whether it's directing, sound mixing, gripping, and so on. On the weekends she loves to pick up boxing classes or walk around the city (with music of course). She has a background as an equestrian, where she used to compete internationally as a show jumper and work at a few different barns. Now her eyes are set on Hollywood and writing films. klv2012@nyu.edu / @kate.vdb

VASSILEVA, Kalinka
Kalinka Vassileva holds an MA in Political Science from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and a BA in Applied Linguistics from New Bulgarian University. Her Roma origin has motivated her involvement with national NGOs that advocate for equal rights and opportunities for the Roma community in Bulgaria. She currently serves as Head of the Projects Department at the Bulgarian National Radio. kalinkanv@gmail.com

YASKUN, Elena
Elena Yaskun was born in St. Petersburg, Russia. She came to New York in her late twenties. She is a professional designer and works for the fashion industry. She also loves to dance. She started dancing salsa and other Latin dances in New York over 10 years ago and since she started, she has been taking salsa classes and performing around the city. She performs regularly with Dance on 2 Salsa Studio, Salsa Salsa Dance Team, and Nieves Dance Studio. Recently, she performed in the New York Salsa Congress. eyaskun@yahoo.com

ZLATKOVA, Violeta
Violeta Zlatkova grew up in a loving family in Haskovo, in the 1980's, when kids played freely in the streets. She had a wonderful childhood. Movement is, for her, the source of life: she loves sports and hiking. She lives in a small, sunny apartment in Sofia. Named after the violet flower, she loves flowers and takes care of the flowers on her balcony every day. Flowers, for her, are living beings, needing love and attention. Her day begins with a walk in the park with her beloved companion: her brown labrador Tessa. vilizlatkova@gmail.com

Appendix A

Call for Papers: *Streetnotes* 31 – *Urban Habits*

Listening to music while jogging, getting coffee from the same coffee shop in the morning, always crossing the street at one particular intersection, dining with friends every Friday, going to one barber or hairdresser only, leaving the subway station from the same exit… time and time again… these are some of many Urban Habits–individual or group, public or private–that we form in the cities where we live. We perform them regularly, with or without much thought. They have their own rhythm and choreography as they pulse through the cities where we perform them.

How do we develop Urban Habits, how long do we practice them, and how do they change over time? What role does city infrastructure play in the life and longevity of Urban Habits? How do Urban Habits define not just the cities where they take place but also the people who enact, observe, or remember them?

In addition to inviting submissions of essays, poems, 2D artwork, and (auto) ethnographies for the issue *Streetnotes 31: Urban Habits,* we are partnering with The Habitorium–a platform for documenting habits of all kinds–founded by Jo Novelli-Blasko in 2013–to launch *The Survey of Urban Habits*. The Habitorium will report on the survey findings in the journal.

Journal submissions and survey responses are due by June 30th, 2023. You can complete either or both.

Inquires? Contact the co-editors:

Jorge de La Barre, jorgelabarre@id.uff.br (journal submissions)
Blagovesta Momchedjkova, bmm202@nyu.edu (journal submissions)
Jo Novelli-Blasko, jonovelli@gmail.com (survey),

The Habitorium: https://www.jonovelliblasko.com/the-habitorium/
The Urban Habits Survey:
https://www.jonovelliblasko.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Survey-of-URBAN-Habits-Final-1.pdf

Appendix B

Survey of Urban Habits

The Habitorium invites you to complete The Survey of Urban Habits, which aims to collect information about individual habits expressed in different urban environments. The Survey of Urban Habits was developed in collaboration with Blagovesta Momchedjikova and Jorge de La Barre, for a special issue of *Streetnotes*. A final report on the results of The Survey of Urban Habits will be included in the publication, an ethnographic journal at U.C. Davis.

1. Urban Habit NAME: Choose one of your Urban Habits and give it a specific name.
For example…"Buying Food From a Street Vendor" vs. "Food Habit"

2. Urban Habit CITY: In which city did/do you practice this habit?

3. Urban Habit DESCRIPTION: Describe your urban habit with as much detail as possible. Your description might be a sequential list of actions, a series of drawings, a narrative paragraph, a poem, or a word cloud.

4. What makes your habit URBAN? How is your habit particular to the urban environment where it exists? Consider how your habit would change, if you expressed it in a rural, country, village, or town setting.

5. Do you still practice this habit? YES. NO

6. How long have you practiced this particular Urban Habit?
_____ It's Brand New (less than 21 repetitions).
_____ For a While (up to 6 months)
_____ Long Enough (6-24 months)
_____ Longer Than Not (2-6 years)
_____ Feels Like Forever (6-12 years)
_____ Forever (more than 12 years)

7. Draw one detail of your habit in the left margin of this page.

8. How rigid is your Urban Habit? Plot your commitment to strict adherence to your habit on the scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represents "every time I express my habit, it is different" and 5 represents "every single detail of my habit is the same every time I express it." For example: if you stop at a deli

for a beverage every week, do you order the same coffee, pay with cash, tip the same amount? A habit with fewer variations is a more rigid habit.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

9. Would you consider your Urban Habit Public, Private or Both?

10. If you could change one aspect of your Urban Habit what would be different about it?

11. Do you ever stack this Urban Habit with other ones? Which habits are adjacent to it?

12. What is one Urban Habit you would like to develop and why? Give it a name.

13. What is one Urban Habit you have observed? Give it a name and identify the city where it happens/ed.

14. Identify three other Urban Habits you might have examined for this survey. Give them names and indicate where the habits happen/ed

Thank you for contributing to The Habitorium's research.
Send your completed survey via U.S. Postal Service to:

The Habitorium
P.O. Box 10041
Phoenix AZ 85064

Please share your name and address to receive a note from The Habitorium:

_____

_____

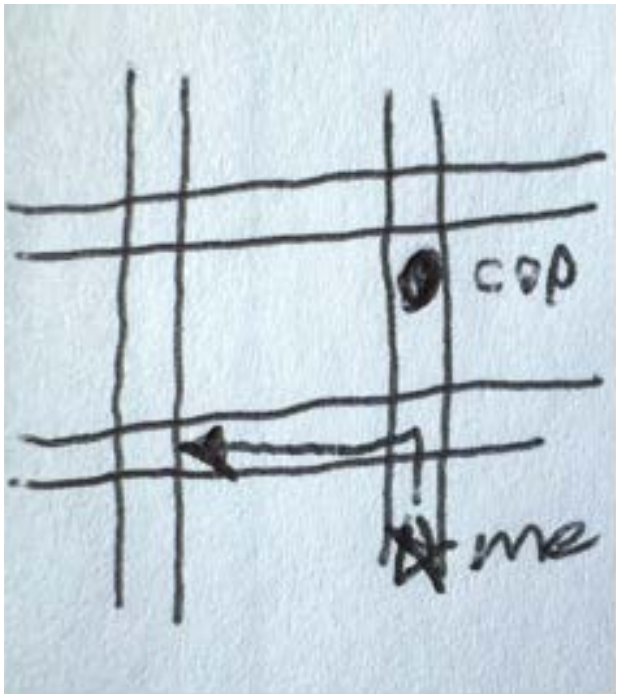
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Appendix C

Report on the Survey of Urban Habits

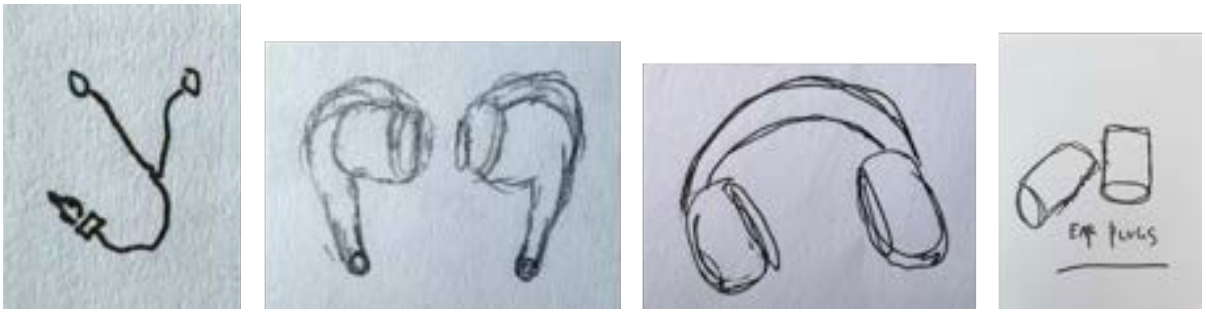
Prepared by The Habitorium on September 13, 2024



Urban Habit Illustration: Avoiding Police

Introduction

The Survey of Urban Habits was developed in collaboration with Blagovesta Momchedjikova and Jorge de La Barre, for Volume 31 of Streetnotes. It is the longest survey ever devised by the Habitorium, with 14 questions and two opportunities to create habit-specific drawings. There were 4 questions on the survey that asked respondents to identify habits. Each survey had the potential to generate 7 different habits; 365 unique habits are indexed at the end of the report. The survey was published in July 2023 and closed on September 1, 2024. Nine responses were reported on-line and 60 on paper. All but 5 respondents are currently practicing the habit they describe in the survey.



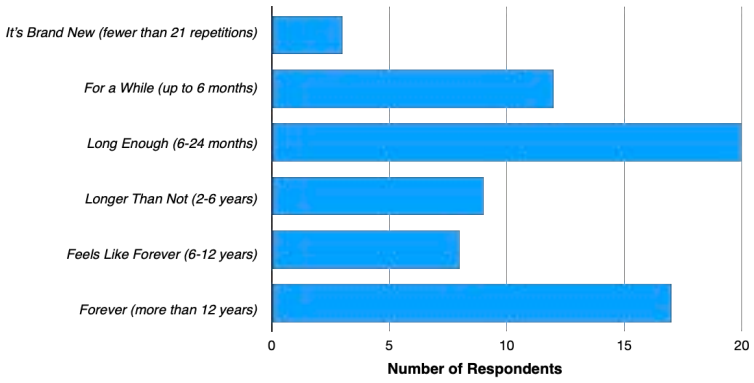
Several Urban Habits related to listening to music or other media using headphones. One noted using earplugs every Saturday night.

Summary of Findings

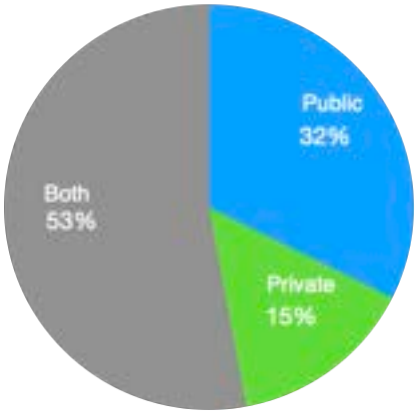
Respondents identified habits they fostered in cities far and wide including: Phoenix, Tucson, and Glendale Arizona, La Mesa, Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco California, New Orleans Louisiana, Cambridge Massachusetts, Jersey City, and Newark New Jersey, Syracuse and New York City New York, Greensboro North Carolina, Pittsburgh and West Reading Pennsylvania, Austin Texas, Buenos Aires Argentina, Rio de Janeiro Brazil, Sophia Bulgaria, Paris France, Budapest Hungary, and Amsterdam the Netherlands. Nearly 20% of the respondents reported practicing their habits in multiple cities.

Several themes emerged from the findings, they describe habits of food procurement, taking public transportation, listening to music on headphones, and walking. One respondent wrote about talking loudly on the phone while walking through the city. Buying and eating bagels was a habit common to 9 responders, but only one entailed the kind of bagel: it's everything. Six responses described habits that break the law (Jay Walking and Turnstile Jumping) and one dodging the law (Avoiding Police). Nature plays a recurring role in the Survey of Urban Habits. Spending time in parks, following the full moon, walking on the shady side of the street, and feeding the birds all make an appearance. One respondent from La Mesa California devised a complex of bird feeders to attract wildlife to her yard. She wrote: "What I especially love about the bird feeding station is the diversity - I never know who's going to show up!"

Question 6: How long have you practiced this particular Urban Habit?



Question 9: Do you consider your Urban Habit Public, Private or Both?



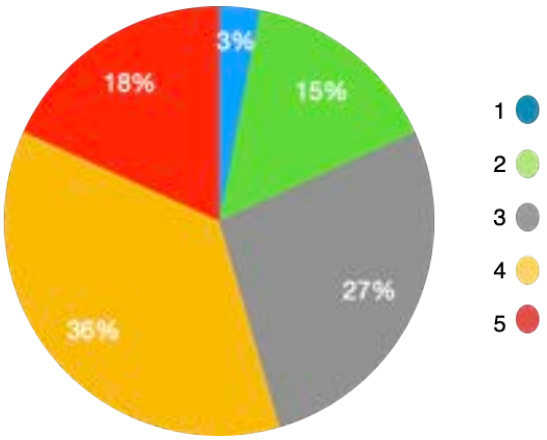
More than 75% of survey respondents have been practicing their habit for at least 6 months. Only 3 reported on a new habit.

When asked about the public or private nature of their Urban Habit, more than half of the respondents identified both private and public aspects of their behavior.

When asked to illustrate their Urban Habit, 76% of the respondents offered a drawing.

Question 8: How rigid in your Urban Habit?

Plot your commitment to strict adherence to your habit on the scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represents "every time I express my habit, it is different" and 5 represents "every single detail of my habit is the same every time I express it."



Notable Responses, Surprises and Outliers

Respondents describing habits originating in NYC were inclined to offer geographic details about the city including the names of parks, streets, and specific train lines. Those describing habits outside NYC never specify such details. There is, apparently, a lot of dancing happening in city streets - at least four respondents explored this habit. Of the three people who wrote about jumping the subway turnstile in NYC, one considered the habit a secret. A full 17% of respondents would not change a single thing about their Urban Habit.

As with all The Habitorium's surveys, some of the responses were down right poetic. One respondent wrote about the habit of "Looking at myself in building windows," describing this Urban Habit as "the one time I really get to see myself living my life in action." Another who offered the habit of Urban Hiking wrote: "I can be like a squirrel trying to cross the road, but I don't wear earbuds, ever, so my senses are always on alert." A third, who listens to music while seated in the park, wrote: "it's urban because I am a feature of the city in that moment."





Hello City is a poignant habit of addressing the city on approach by car. Another respondent who habitually skips through New York wants to develop the new habit of Group Jazz Skipping.

An Index of Urban Habits Derived from the Survey and Included in An Anthology of Urban Habits
(updated May 2026)

Accordion Playing
Acting Every Day
African Dancing in the Park or at Festivals
Air-drying the Laundry
Applying Makeup on the Train
Archiving Art Project
Art Walks
Asking for Money Entering the Highway
Attend Protests While Walking through the Park
Avoiding Eye Contact
Avoiding Police
Babysitting
Begging
Being a Good Neighbor
Being at a Train Station
Being Nosey
Being Stuck on Highway in Traffic
Bike Habit - Going to the City Center by Bike
Biking
Biking and Yelling at Walkers
Bodega Food in Late Nights
Busking
Buy Food from Halal Cart
Buying a Bacon/Egg/Cheese in a Deli
Buying a Bagel in a NYC Deli
Buying a Bottle of Water along the Way
Buying an Everything Bagel
Buying Coffee Every Morning from a Cart
Buying Coffee Every Morning to Get Myself Up



Buying Coffee from Coffee Shop
Buying Coffee from MUD Daily
Buying Food from Food Carts on the Street
Buying from Coin-Operated Vending Machines
Buying Lunch Everyday
Calm
Carrying a Purse
Carrying First-Aid Supplies
Catching Wafts of Beauty
Church Chat
Citibiking as a Form of Commuting
Citibiking in Central Park
Cleaning Leaves Before the Rain
Cleaning the Park
Collaborating on a Jazz Album
Collect Trash in Separate Bags (Plastic, Paper, Metal)
Collecting Cans
Commuting to WFMU Once a Week
Commuting to Work
Composting
Conspicuous Leavings
Cook with Friends
Cooking Food Rather than Going Out to Eat
Crocheting
Crossing Guards Safely Crossing the Street with Children
Crossing the Street Before the Light Says 'Walk'
Crossing the Streets at Pedestrian Traffic Lights
Daily Meditation
Daily Walk
Dance Rehearsing: Dancers and Tree
Dancing Outdoors
Dancing While Walking
Data Tracking Walks
Delivering Food

Determining What Language are They Speaking at the Restaurant Table Next to Me

Develop a Sense of Meaning When It Comes to Simply Waking through the Park

Dining Alone

Discussing in Class

Disposing of Trash

Dog Walking

Doing Laundry

Doing Laundry After I'm in The Sub-Cellar

Doing Laundry and Ironing

Doing Work Outside

Double Parking to Go to The Post Office

Drawing Panoramas

Drinking Coffee Every Morning Right After Waking Up

Drinking Espresso

Drive Through Coffee Purchasing

Driving an Ambulance

Driving While Playing Music Loudly

Driving with Windows Down

Drug Use

Eating a Bagel While Listening to a Jazzy Pianist in Washington Square Park

Eating Food from Trailers

Eating from Street Food Vendors

Eating on the Go

Eating Out More Often

Eating While Walking

Enjoying Nature

Enjoying the Moment

Entering the New Year

Estate Sale Shopping

Evading the Subway Fare

Experiencing Delays

Falling Asleep in Trains

Farmer's Markets

Feeding the Birds

Filling My Metro Card Before I Need to

Fixing Things

Flirting

Flushing the Shower Drain

Flying Kites in New York City

Flying Kites in Rio de Janeiro

Folk Dancing

Following the Full Moon

Food Craving

Food Hoarding

Foodstagramming

Foraging

Forgetting One's Umbrella

Forgetting to Eat

Gentrifying East Flatbush

Getting a Haircut

Getting an Empanada from The Local Deli

Getting Coffee

Getting Groceries

Getting Ice at Hotel Resort

Getting Some Fresh Air

Getting Your Caricature Drawn

Giving Change to a Homeless Person

Giving Panorama Tours

Go to the Deli Every Day

Going to the Theater

Going Biking Every Morning

Going for a Run

Going on More Extensive Bikes in More Nature-Filled Areas

Going on Walks

Going Out to Eat Regularly

Going Out with Friends

Going Shirtless

Going Surfing in the Morning During Summer

Going Through the Farmers Market

Going to the Supermarket After School to Get Food

Going to Stella Adler Studio

Going to the Band Rehearsal Room - Music Habit

Going to the Bookstore Every Weekend

Going to the City Center by Bike

Going to the Theater and Performances in Stage Theaters

Going on Runs

Good Dog

Grocery Shopping

Grocery Shopping at Farmers Markets

Group Jazz Skipping

Hailing a Cab

Happy Dog

Having 'Me' Time

Hello, City

Holding a Baby

Hooping

Hopping the Subway Turnstile

Hosing the Sidewalk

Ice Cream Habit - Buying Ice Cream from the Same Place

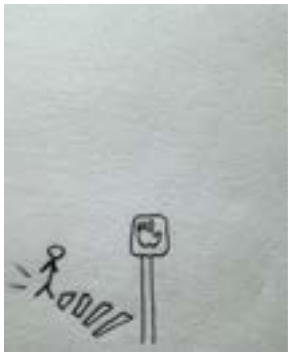
Iceskating

Ignoring Other People

Intentionally Seeking Nature

Internet Vlogger Street Interviews

Jaywalking



Jigsaw Puzzling

Jogging

Jogging in the Morning

Jumping the Turnstile

Keeping Spare Money in a Pocket for When People Ask for Money

Kissing in Public

Learn Folk Arts

Learning a New Dance

Leaving Things for Others to Find

Leaving Your Main Phone Behind

Letting Dogs Go to the Bathroom on the Street

Linking Arms

Lining Up for Food Truck

Listening to Jazz in the Park

Listening to Music Through Headphones While Walking on the Street

Listening to Music

Listening to Music in the Park

Listening to Music When I Travel

Listening to Music While Walking in the City

Listening to News Podcasts on the Headphones on My Phone, Including German Language Radio Stations to Practice My German

Living Among Tourists

Long Walks and Bike Rides in Parks

Look at My Phone

Looking for a Parking Spot

Look Up to Experience the Beauty of New York

Looking at Myself in Building Windows

Looking for Birds in the City

Looking for Rats on the Subway Track

Looking in Every Retail Window

Making Conversation with Servers

Making Lists

Mapping Habits

Mapping Vietnamese Restaurants

Meditating with Drawing

Meeting Friends for Coffee Every Saturday at the Same Place and Time

Mind-Mapping

Moving through the City

My Way on the Highway

Nata Street Eating

Nocturnal Habit

Not Paying Attention to the Road When They Drive - Instead Looking at Their Phones

Observe My Surroundings

Observing the City

Online Grocery Delivery

Out-Of-The-Urban Tribe, Like a Hiking Club That Is Close to the City

Park Habits

Passing One and the Same Way After Leaving Home and Going Through the Roundabout

People Watching

Personal Training

Photographing as Seeing

Photographing New Yorkers in Public Spaces

Photographing NYC Urban Habits

Photographing Park Goers

Picking Up Dog Poop on the Sidewalk of NYC



Picking Up Mobile Orders at Starbucks Daily

Picking Up the Kids from School

Picnic/Sitting in Parks

Pizza Every Friday

Pizza Habit - Buying Pizza from the Same Place

Playing Imaginary Games

Playing the Streets

Playing with Fashion

Playing with Toy Soldiers

Practicing in a Bulgarian Folk Dance Club

Protesting

Putting Up Anti-Consumerist Posters

Queuing

Quieting the Fear

Reading

Reading a Book in Washington Square Park

Reading Everyday at Lunchtime

Reading in Public

Reading Park Signs

Recording Architectural History

Rehearsing

Religion Hopping

Remaining Flexible to Develop Whatever Habits I Need to in Order to Get My Tasks Done in the Most Efficient Way

Resisting Sleep

Resting on a Park Bench

Riding a Bike to Work

Riding a Citibike

Riding Bike at Night

Riding Bikes

Riding Scooter on Lanes

Riding the Elevator

River Walks and Kayaking

Rollerblading

Running

Rushing

Say Hello to People on the Street

Saying Hi to People

Screaming

Selling Weed in Washington Square Park

Sharing an Umbrella

Shop in a Favorite Bakery on My Way Home

Shopping for Different Food Items from Different/Specific Shops/Market Places

Shopping for Discounted Groceries

Singing Happy Birthday in Restaurants

Singing in Public

Singing in the Back of the Bus

Sit N See

Sittin' at the Coffee Shop with a Laptop for Hours

Sitting at the Pick Up Panera and People Watching

Sitting for Coffee in a Nice Square

Sitting on Public Stairs

Skateboarding Around the City

Skaters Performing Great Figures in The Park

Sketching

Skyline Viewing

Sleeping on the Subway

Slowing Down and Noticing Urban Nature

Smoking

Smoking on a Stoop

Spinning Classes on Tuesday and Thursday

Spitting

St. Peters Prep Boys Going to School and Taking Up the Whole Sidewalk

Stepping Over Trash

Stickering

Stretching Every Morning

Summer Lap Swimming

Summer Salsa Dancing

Surfing the Subway

Surveying

Taking 4 or 1 or C Train

Taking Grand Central to Work

Taking Nightly Strolls

Taking Pictures

Taking Selfies

Taking Selfies All the Time in Front of Specific Places or Monuments

Taking the City Bikes to Class

Taking the Express Bus Each Morning to Get to Class

Taking the Long Way Home Driving with Windows Down

Taking the Subway

Taking the Train to School

Taking the Train, After the Bus Ride

Taking the Trash Out

Talking on the Phone While Walking on the Street

Telling Time

The Indoor Wave

The Pittsburgh Twist

The Stroller Push: Mom, Grandma, or Nanny?

Thinking about One's Skin Color

Thinking about Skin Color While Deliberating Jumping the Turnstile

Throwing Away Garbage

Touring the City by Tram

Tracking Studies with Spreadsheets

Training

Travel Vlogging

Trying Hole in The Wall Restaurants

Unkindness/Aggressiveness

Unwinding

Urban Hiking

Urinating in Public

Using ChatGPT

Using Public Payphones

Using Your Phone on the Subway

Vaping

Vibing with Images

Visiting Museums

Visit Special Needs Child Care Facility

Waiting at the Crosswalk

Waiting for Bus to Come

Waiting for Delivery

Waiting for the Subway

Waking Up Early

Walking a Dog

Walking and Taking in the Park Signs

Walking Around Union Square at Night

Walking Around My Neighborhood More to Breathe in Some Fresh Air

Walking Around the City with Headphones

Walking Casually

Walking Dogs in The Morning

Walking Everywhere



Walking Home

Walking in The Park

Walking My Dog

Walking on Cobblestones

Walking Quickly and with Haste

Walking the Dog/Ignoring the Dog While Talking on Cellphone

Walking Through Washington Square Park

Walking to All My Classes

Walking to Class and Blowing Bubbles with Gum

Walking to the Bus Stop

Walking to the Park on One Side of the Street Only

Walking Tours

Walking to Work on the Shady Side

Walking with Friends

Walking without Being on My Phone

Walk My Dog to the Grocery Store and Buy Something

Walks Around Union Square at Night

Wandering the Back Streets Looking for a Coffee Shop I Haven't Tried Yet

Watching Videos

Watering the Plants on the Balcony

Watering Trees

Wearing a Facemask

Wearing Earplugs Every Saturday Night

Wearing Jewelry

Wide Angle Habit

Window Shopping

Working Outside

Write in a Park

Writing the Urban

X-ing the Street

Yard Sale Shopping

Yelling in Public

Zeroing in on Nature

Zoning Out on Devices While Walking, Biking, Driving

Zooming

FIN