

This chapter considers the Festival de Marseille-danse et arts multiple 2017 as a successful apparatus of transition from positions of non-place to place in one of Europe's most diverse cities. Through its temporary installation, the festival crossed spatial, aesthetic, and thematic divisions of the center and periphery, constructing bridges of movement between these invisible borders. In doing so, this chapter troubles the traditional affirmation that the value of performance is most prominently interpreted during its enactment. Instead, it leverages the spatial turn of French theory to emphasize that the festival's significance extends to the process of coming-to-stage, and highlights participant interactions with the city as facilitated by the festival's infrastructure. In re-framing the boundaries of the festival's intended performance scene from the aestheticized proscenium to the larger social context of Marseille, a voyeuristic and objectifying gaze is removed from the staged bodies and redirected to a new embodied praxis of inclusion and exclusion, rehearsed for, and by, the performer whose ephemeral offering is too often pushed to the periphery or essentialized at the center but never allowed full placement. To move away from accentuating the fixed nouns and verbs of place in a recapitulation of the actors and how they danced, this chapter instead looks toward the mechanisms that scaffolded the relationship between the two—the grammar of the event—which both exceeded and preceded its actual content. What emerges is an attention toward prepositional events, the mechanics of societies that facilitate and articulate such relations.

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OF THE SPACES BETWEEN: PREPOSITIONAL EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE FESTIVAL DE MARSEILLE

Anna Jayne Kimmel

Introduction

Following the spatial turn of French theory, anthropologist Marc Augé defined the non-place in counterpoint to place.¹ Common examples include airports, malls, hotels, and other intersections of fleeting encounter with a capitalistic drive (Augé, 2006). Generalized, non-places remove sociality from interaction—due to economic efficiency, but also fear and bias. With its absence of identity, history, and relationality of the individuals who occupy it, the non-place cloaks those who pass through in anonymity as it erases traces of the past and future. In this milieu of place and non-place, then, where do we situate sites of performance—defined as it is by a sense of ephemeral present-ness—as participants come and go at the theater? My experience of the Festival de Marseille was that it belonged to neither category, but was rather an essential bridge between the two, a critical mechanism of transition toward belonging and emplacement. What follows is a winding narration of this transformation from transience to belonging, replete with prepositional clauses that allow for constant slippage between the two (place and non-place). Implicit to Augé’s writing is a hyperawareness of globalization and the sense of mobility, of which the festival presented both. Relationality is not always utopianly reciprocal; often it is dangerous, perishable, and precariously rehearsed: between bodies, yes, but also between sites, cities, and institutions. Together, let us tumble through the peripheral spaces of the festival in order to cypher its meaning, lest we forget “the stumbling block to the coexistence of places and non-places will always be political” (Augé, 2006, p. 115).

¹ French anthropologist Marc Augé defines the non-place: “If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined accordingly will be non-place. [They] do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of ‘places of memory,’ and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position” (Augé, 2006, p. 77). There is a similarity to Michel de Certeau’s construction of space as different than place, in which place—for both Augé and de Certeau—is the more saturated site of meaning and memory. Throughout this chapter, I maintain the distinction between space and place, but intentionally collapse non-place and space as an empty site of exchange and non-relationality. Admittedly, Henri Lefebvre’s social space, however, complicates this binary between place and non-place/space put forward by Augé and De Certeau.



Fig. 1
Street art in
Marseille, France
(photo: Anna
Jayne Kimmel,
June 2017).



Arriving at the Festival de Marseille

This graffitied wall, visible from a public bus when entering Marseille from the north, stands as an unofficial welcome-sign with bold letters: “Je ris / Je pleure / Je vis.” These verbs—“laugh,” “cry,” and “live”—point to the complexities of embodied experience in the city as well as its larger political economy. Together, the verses summarize the city’s conflict between its vibrant cultures and the continued racial, ethnic, and economic inequalities found throughout France. This language also quips at the canonical sixteenth-century poem by Louise Labé, paying homage to the poet’s oxymoronic feelings toward loving, living, and dying, appropriated here by the anonymous artist in public space.² Four golden letters come together to script *juis*, the joy and pleasure implicit to

² Je vis, je meurs ; je me brûle et me noie ;
J’ai chaud extrême en endurant froidure :
La vie m’est et trop molle et trop dure.
J’ai grands ennuis entremêlés de joie.

Tout à un coup je ris et je larmoie,
Et en plaisir maint grief tourment j’endure ;
Mon bien s’en va, et à jamais il dure ;
Tout en un coup je sèche et je verdoie.

life accented by three exclamation points in satire, or exuberance, or both. Shifting the improvisational tone to the sanctioned, the graphic words appear next to an emblem that denotes Marseille as the 2013 European Capital of Culture. The logo points to an organ of governmentality generated to claim space and capitalize upon Marseille's cultural status, the poetic language an alternative vitality to this state-sanctioned designation.

Notably, the kind of street art that welcomed me into the northern side of Marseille was not found in Cours Julien, a trendy neighborhood nearer the center of Marseille where extant murals have been authorized, but in an industrial edge, already pointing to art's aesthetic traversal through spaces of French culture. These dichotomies between errant and institution were striking, yet their coexistence within the city — if superimposed to subvert a supranational program — suggested a potential for fluid exchange between the national and the local, the state and the individual, the center and the periphery, place and non-place. Rather than exclusion, the layered ephemera of both sanctioned and unsanctioned art painted the multiple valences of the city's cultural geography, tensions included. The salient contrast between government-regulated events and individual-artistic voices sharing space repeated throughout the capital, a harbinger for what was later staged at the 22nd edition of the annual Festival de Marseille — *danse et arts multiples* 2017.

For three weeks, the festival's performers danced, acted, and embodied their relationality — to France, Marseille, and each other — as a reminder that (the identity of social) space is constantly re-produced and re-inscribed with new meaning. Stemming from a larger ethnographic study that investigated the political potential of the festival as an intervention into fraught immigration policies of integration particular to France, here I reimagine the Festival de Marseille — with its dual sub-themes of “Focus Afrique” and “Focus Marseille” that emphasized transnational histories — as a successful apparatus of transition for moving from positions of non-place to place in Europe's most diverse city.³ I aim to draw attention to the ways in which this edition of the festival contextualized place, body, and event in a space of negotiation and activation, rather than staging moments of representation as solution. If, as anthropologist Mark Ingram argues, the relationship between art making and social life is “an

Ainsi Amour inconstamment me mène ;
Et, quand je pense avoir plus de douleur,
Sans y penser je me trouve hors de peine.

Puis, quand je crois ma joie être certaine,
Et être au haut de mon désiré heur,
Il me remet en mon premier malheur.
— Louise Labé (1524–1566)

³ This project received funding from Princeton University's Department of French and Italian and the Lewis Center for the Arts.

important arena in which French people have self-consciously grappled with issues of cultural heritage and social change,” then the festival seems a prime example to reflect upon the relationships it produced—economic or interpersonal, professional or political (2011, p. xxx).

Located at the periphery of Europe, the Mediterranean, and North Africa, Marseille lives as a city on the edge, a geographic node that decenters the boundary of French national identity south from Paris. Yet through its temporary installation in the city, the festival crossed spatial, aesthetic, and thematic divisions, constructing bridges of movement between center and periphery that blurred not only these invisible borders but, if only for a moment in time, brought them together as one. With Marseille as subject and the festival as resident, I play with Jill Dolan’s claim that “suddenly, the theater *was* the city,” instead suggesting the city as a theater in which a crossing of the center and periphery was staged (2010, p. 12).

Throughout, I understand the Festival de Marseille to invite engagement with the larger question of what is read as the stage, how that boundary effects a contextualization of the power of performance and location of the periphery, and how we—as scholars, artists, and patrons of the arts—can harness that power for the production of a social space of community, of place. Rather than attending solely to the rich and varied performances which together comprise the festival, I trouble the traditional affirmation that the value of performance is most prominently interpreted during its enactment. Instead, I emphasize that its significance extends to the process of coming-to-stage, not limited to what happens on (center) stage, and highlight participant interactions with the city as facilitated by the festival’s infrastructure. In re-framing the boundaries of the festival’s intended performance scene from the aestheticized proscenium to the larger social context of the festival, a voyeuristic and objectifying gaze is removed from the staged bodies and re-directed to a new embodied praxis of inclusion and exclusion—a praxis that is rehearsed by, and for, the performer (whose ephemeral offering is too often pushed to the periphery or essentialized at the center but never allowed full placement).

A prepositional event

Cynicism of the cultural capital displayed at festivals, biennales, and world fairs is both plentiful and justified, well-articulated by contemporary scholars to include the false promises of global multiculturalism, essentialist mindsets, commodity-driven profits, and residues of colonial grabs. Jan Goossens, the director of the festival, has himself

recognized these concerns.⁴ Without disavowing such literature, I strive to move beyond an easy critique of the international festival as mere form to instead acknowledge the possibilities and potentialities which arise from its instantiation. I do not mean to suggest that this festival was not also limited in its display. However, I make a deliberate choice to read its embodiment generously, optimistically, euphorically, in hopes of making legible its mechanisms of relationships which work against current critique. By dually remaining in the register of both the city's urban logics and national politics, the festival enables potential mobility between cultures previously marked at either the periphery or center to remain at play.

This stance follows an evolution of festival thought, ranging from the role of the festival in social cohesion, which associated it with ritual, the sacred, and the ceremonial as a reflection of customs (Durkheim, 1976 [1912]); to its substantiation of sites of deviance, disruption, and potential decentering (Turner, 1969; Caillois, 2001 [1959]); to more nascent writing on festivals, including their association with policy-making (Frost, 2016). Following João Leal, rather than viewing the festival as either inherently subversive or reflective, I view it as a scaffold for either potentiality (Leal, 2016). The non-place is global, after all, and bridges may lead to nowhere.

Motivated by the graffitied wall that ushered me into the city, I search here for fleeting moments in which the center and periphery seemed to exist simultaneously. This does not mean a harmonious coexistence, *per se*, but the beginning of constructive forms of overlap in unexpected spaces. At the festival, the subject (as a political address), the individual (as an interpersonal marker), and the body (as a corporeal concern) were all set in motion. For this reason, structures of space, location, access, occupation, movement, and migration become central to my reading of the politics of representation as practiced at, and by, the festival, including the lines of mobility mapped between its sites. Here, the periphery exists not as supplement to, or even separate from, the center, but as a fractured, fragmented part of a national whole. The festival, as I experienced it, operated as a mechanism through which the peripheral and central became blurred, and through which the local and the institutional, as in the street art, combined.

Guiding my writing is an understanding that to “embodying the periphery” is to perform a moment when personhood, positionality, and identity become bound in politics through

⁴ “Festivals in French-speaking countries are often described by non-participating locals as ‘ovnis’ (UFOs), akin to the endless list of art biennales taking place across the world. Of course this word, with its “alien” undertones, is tinged with populism: you can’t reach out to everyone.... But it’s really little more than fancy international shopping. In a world where a lot of theatres in major European capitals put international works on their programmes all year round, we might wonder whether festivals should be looking for a specific new identity that would allow them to return to their initial role as forces of emancipation” (Goossens, 2018).

action, tethered together materially and corporeally. But by what relationality? What connects and reveals orientation—of exclusion or belonging, of recognition or disavowal—to a nation, a community, a cast, an audience? After all, the periphery is not a place, but *a relationship* to the center.⁵ Thus I move away from accentuating the fixed nouns and verbs of the place—a recapitulation of the actors and how they danced—and instead look toward the mechanics that scaffold the relationship between the two. In short, I look to the grammar of the event, which both exceeds and precedes its actual content, turning specifically toward prepositions, the grammatical mechanisms of societies that facilitate and articulate relation. To be *before*, *during*, *under*, and *after*, *betwixt* and *between*. The preposition *throughout* best summarizes my experience of Marseille as an American tourist guided by the festival. “Throughout,” in the OED, means to be “through the whole of (a place, thing, or group); in or to all of many parts of; everywhere.” The festival—its dispersed crowd of audiences and performers, venues, funds, and publicity—spilled throughout the city. The space of the festival—not as labor or commodity but as prepositional event—refused the center-periphery divide: geographically, culturally, economically, aesthetically.⁶ The center-periphery is not exclusively about location. It is not simply about juxtaposing two nouns, two peoples, two cultures, two identities in concentric circles of dominance. It is about porous boundaries between the two, the moment of encounter and exchange in which prepositional events unfold to facilitate the transition into social and anthropological space, even place. One may argue that metaphors are the weakest form of argument, and perhaps the preposition here is mere allegory. And yet perhaps it’s not. Perhaps the embodied tissue—the permeable membrane of a city that facilitates active and passive transport—was material, structural, and very much alive in the choreo-kinetics of the Festival de Marseille.

Before the Festival de Marseille: setting the scene

If a layer of the street art was created in 2013 to recognize Marseille as a European Capital of Culture, its maintenance until 2017 suggests an unlikely permanence for an art form defined by its constant erasure. I write within this 2013–2017 retrospective, my observations framed by the durability of an urban space that both creates and preserves. The Festival de Marseille 2017 was staged during the resurgence of Le Front National—a

⁵ I avoid language of relational aesthetics, for I want to include the artist within the framework of the festival, rather than view the artist as a facilitator of social experience.

⁶ Arguably, labor underpins this festival, from the exertion of the dancing bodies, the staff and crew who man the theaters, to the artistic teams and festival organizers. However, it is not labor for the sake of material production, but for shared experience. Thus, there is a fluidity to the social divisions of labor prescribed by Lefebvre (2009, p. 225).

right-wing, populist party characterized by its anti-immigration and neo-nationalist ideologies, sentiments which continue to sweep Europe and the United States.⁷ France was forced to acknowledge this particular growth in power by the immense popular vote for Marine Le Pen in 2012 and again in 2017.⁸ Le Pen and her party strongly opposed immigration—legal or otherwise—and campaigned that French citizenship should be “inherited or merited” (Marine Le Pen, quoted in Nowak & Branford, 2017).⁹ A year later, the word “race” was written out of the French constitution. This xenophobic stance revealed the potential for events such as the festival to embody a tolerant alternative for those who have been labeled as peripheral and forced into a national non-place where value has been reduced to economic output in a newly color-blind state.¹⁰

To write of place-making, it is necessary to situate the festival as historically located within the context of French immigration politics, with Marseille at the center of that trajectory. Migration as a historical identity of Marseille extends to Greek presence in 600 BC, as the city’s port location established it as a gateway to economic trade. In modern times, migrant flows increased as colonial trade routes solidified its economic foundation, including Italian, Russian, and Corsican individuals in the early 1900s. Individuals from the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa, and Comoros comprised the principal currents of migration into Marseille in the mid-twentieth century, shifting the population to a more predominantly North African identity in the wake of decolonization. By 2017, migrant identities from eastern Mediterranean nations, such as Syria, increased. I will not replicate a review of immigration debate in France, which includes rhetoric of *intégration*, *assimilation*, *multiculturalisme*, *diversité*, *mixité* and *communautarisme*, as this discourse has been well-charted by political scholars, historians, and cultural theorists (Amiriaux & Simon, 2006). But I include it briefly to suggest the historicity of the city as non-place as the backdrop of the festival and setting in which I arrived.

The festival’s themes themselves touched upon migration, origins, borders, and exclusion, as well as an explicit celebration of Africa. The artists who presented at the festival can be

⁷ This political party has identified as Le Rassemblement National (National Rally) since 2018.

⁸ In 2012, Le Pen received the third-place popular vote for France’s president, behind François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy. In 2017, she lost the presidential seat to Emmanuel Macron, having received a little over 30% of the vote.

⁹ For analysis of the multiple valences of the discourse that structured the election, see: Alduy C. 2017, *Ce Qu’ils Disent Vraiment: Les Politiques Pris Aux Mots*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.

¹⁰ This chapter employs the term “tolerance” to refer to the lack of physicalized violence used to express differing opinions. It implies a passive acceptance, if not active valorization, of alternative perspectives and modes of living. This is rooted in UNESCO’s *Declaration on Principles of Tolerance*. Although Marseille is regarded as a tolerant city, I do not want to paint a false utopia. Anti-tolerant violence has been performed on both ends of the political spectrum. Indeed, the primary venue of the festival was located near Saint Charles station. In October 2017, the train station was the site of a stabbing, officially recorded as an act of terrorism, escalating tensions in the continued wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris.

largely summarized as Euro-Mediterranean, including the Maghreb, but extended to practitioners from Lebanon, Syria, southern Europe, Senegal, and Burkina Faso, among elsewhere. While these identities are by no means homogenous, they share historically subaltern positioning in binaries such as North-South, colonial-postcolonial, and center-periphery, weaving them together with a common thread beyond the connecting shores of the Mediterranean. Through its programming, the festival forged a space for flow across and between such artificial and isolating categories. These pertinent themes, in Marseille and elsewhere in Europe, contextualized the relationships that the event facilitated—rescripting the festival’s values from aesthetic-peer-collaboration toward practices that contested national culture and narratives of citizenship. This was especially important given the simultaneous rise of nationalistic rhetoric.

Goossens situated the festival within the violence of this ideological turmoil by recognizing the political affairs around him. He did not attempt a euphoric staging of cohesion, but rather recognized the discord, and labored “to include programming at the heart of the brutal problems of mobility of immigration, and multiply the collaborations ‘South-North’” (Beauvallet, 2017).¹¹ This commitment to local, political complexities allowed the festival to (attempt to) overcome current shortcomings of international arts platforms, and through collaboration and engagement begin to bridge center-periphery divisions on a cross-continental scale.¹² The festival’s invitational dramaturgy perhaps diluted this democratic potential, embedding exclusion before it began. But it also literally extended an invitation to those who might not have previously felt welcomed, and thus became a scaffold of opportunity as many of the invited artists of the festival (including and beyond the 2017 iteration) have continued on to international acclaim.

Throughout the Festival de Marseille: internal flows and relationality

To understand the festival as an event that allowed for movement between non-place and place, one must first understand the physical mobility induced by its format. The festival opening’s placement in the 3rd arrondissement encouraged an internal migration within Marseille. The audience—a *mélange* of identities—included a significant proportion

¹¹ Festival translations are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

¹² The festival’s longevity is important, and while its political vision, thematic orientations, and urban trajectory have not remained constant in its two-decade life, its leadership has consistently engaged in politics of inclusion—politically, aesthetically, accessibly, featuring themes such as “*Sous le signe du plongeur de Paestum*” in 1996. Themes of the last decade include: “*Quinzième round*” (2010), “*Out of Africa*” (2011), “*Accents circonflexes*” (2012), “*Année capitale*” (2013), “*La résistance des lucioles*” (2014), and “*Nous nous sommes tant aimés*” (2015). The 2017 iteration, while unique, is thus emblematic of the larger festival institution, and I anticipate that had I attended a year prior, or a year after, my experience would have been similar in terms of how I related to the city and current events through my engagement with the festival.

of the seemingly white-intellectual and artistic population of the upper-middle class, a statistic that did not typically occupy that district.¹³ The festival stirred this demographic to transit across the city, and reconfigured the district—if just for the duration of the performance—as a place more widely inhabited. Because of the temporality, local residents were not permanently displaced (a problematic consequence with gentrified forms of urban planning), but rather remained interspersed. In future iterations it may be more radical for the festival to invert this structure by inviting marginalized audiences into bourgeois spaces. To prompt non-elites to enter elite spaces would reverse the power-differential in spectatorship currently prescribed at the theater, and mitigate against the potential pitfalls of slum tourism or gentrification in which the center-periphery traffic flows unidirectionally. Nonetheless, the benefits of the festival were not limited to its particular place but extended to the creation of a porous border, uniting individuals that otherwise might not interact.

After the opening weekend, the festival geographically surrounded nearly all of Marseille, with eighteen participating theaters extending into the majority of the city's arrondissements. This physical embrace of the city—or perhaps by the city—carved not a niche place for the performers but rather an expansive space without habituated boundary or confinement. In doing so, it blurred the line as to where the festival and its strategy (should have) existed. It challenged the liminal borders within Marseille, encouraging a mobile public to reorder lines of economic, social, and cultural difference otherwise enforced indirectly through state initiatives such as income-based housing projects. The performers and audience alike were allowed to inhabit new spaces, to become familiars in new territory (physically and otherwise). As a tourist myself, the festival's map forced me to explore corners of the city I otherwise would not have visited. It generated an intentionally transitory audience, setting the city in motion with an internal flow.

The festival's fluid encounters extended to content and thematic concerns as much as the spatial politics. In total, after three weeks of performance—including dance, theater, concerts, cinema, installations, lectures, roundtables, and public parties—over twenty-four thousand spectators had attended the festival. There were twenty-two artistic installations and forty-eight performances; thirty-two of these seventy events were free. The festival was composed of thirty-two international artists and intellectuals representing twenty countries.¹⁴ Eight of these artists were listed as current residents of Marseille, and four works were created

¹³ The surrounding area was largely comprised of a population considered economically disadvantaged and of immigrant origins, primarily of the Maghreb and Comoros (Peraldi, 2015, pp. 20–21).

¹⁴ These countries include: Algeria, Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Chili, Democratic Republic of the Congo, France, Germany, Israel, Lebanon, Mali, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Rwanda, Senegal, and South Africa.

in collaboration with the city: José Vidal's *Rito de Primavera*, featuring twenty dancers Marseillais alongside twenty Chilean dancers; Brett Bailey's *Sanctuary*, featuring two performers Marseillais with six other actors; Nacera Belaza's *The Procession and Solos*, featuring the city itself as backdrop to the processual event; and lastly, Rimini Protokoll's *100% Marseille*, in which a hundred citizens Marseillais take the stage. Such figures demonstrate the breadth of the programming of the festival and the significance of an annual presence that rehearses its right to the city. Not all of the actors selected for these works were professional performers. Instead, they were chosen to be representative of the city's demographics. The relationality of the festival thus exceeded the audience-performer dynamic to extend to the rehearsal process as well, as foreign artists and local residents became codependent collaborators.

Although the festival staged the evolving demographics of Marseille, most explicitly in Rimini Protokoll's piece *100% Marseille*, more broadly it confronted the national identity of France, questioning who is authorized in claiming Frenchness and who is ostracized as francophone. For while the event attempted to augment the visibility of Marseille's diversity while occupying an unequivocally French stage, conflation of identity was intentionally allowed.¹⁵ The 2017 Festival de Marseille had two themes: "Focus Afrique" and "Focus Marseille." In total, twelve events were labeled as "Focus Marseille," and ten as "Focus Afrique." Although on the surface this binary promoted a continued divide between French and foreign identity, this was not an exclusive labeling system; five events were considered both. For example, Brett Bailey's *Sanctuary* was listed for each. This cross-pollination continued: artists who created works for "Focus Afrique" were not exclusively residents of Africa, and artists who created works of a "Focus Marseille" were sometimes other than French, and frequently other than Marseillais. José Vidal, of Chile, presented *Rito de Primavera* under the genre "Focus Marseille;" Eva Doumbia, born in Le Havre, France, presented *Communauté* under "Focus Afrique." This crossover worked against spatial divides and undermined nationalistic rhetoric of viewing birthplace as a primary factor in figuring national identity.

Even though the festival listed pieces as particularly Marseillais, they were not always themselves of Marseille. *Sanctuary* premiered in Athens and then toured Germany prior to its inclusion in the festival. Similarly, *100% Marseille* is a prime example of what Keren Zaiontz has called a "transposable dramaturgy"—a global dramaturgical model that nonetheless seeks to produce "local" voices everywhere it goes (2014). Past iterations

¹⁵ Diversity, in this writing, follows rhetoric on immigration that traces ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural diversity. It does not speak to diversity of gender or differently-abled bodies, for example, as this language was less visible in my experience of the festival. My application of the term is not meant to disavow the value of such diversity.

include, for example, *100% Vancouver*, *100% London*, and *100% Tokyo*. But it is precisely this kind of transmutability, rather than pure inheritance, that motivated me to see the festival as a prepositional event: the performances became structures for facilitating relationality, for transfiguring a non-place of commodity-driven encounters into a more settled place with relational meaning. The fact that producing the “local” was enmeshed within an explicitly global set of products of the international festival circuit became a productive tension of the festival, a blurring of local-global, center-periphery dynamics that I first perceived in the graffitied wall. If this rendered the Festival de Marseille itself a global product, rather than one belonging exclusively to the French public and cultural policy discourse, it also destabilized the fixed idea of place precisely because these pieces first came to stage elsewhere.

Thus, through the off-stage movement facilitated between sites, by audience members in attendance and through artistic collaborations in performance and rehearsal alike, the festival confronted the city’s migratory aesthetics and resulting history of non-placement. Through its intentional redistribution of the city, identity was contested through mobility, emphasizing a new spatial configuration in which new relationships were allowed to form, and suggesting an inclusive alternative to the restrictive binary of foreigner or French—an alternative where identity was not reduced to an *either-or* but a *both-and*. It did not demand that to present something as Marseillais would require local residence, and by extension did not presume that something French would require national citizenship.

In the years that followed, the festival remained “an event that really belongs to the city’s people and involves them in its development, while never losing its ability to surprise them, move them—and even unsettle them” (“Festivi’alliés,” n.d.) To better facilitate a relationship to the city, the idea of a “partner audience” emerged in 2016, with residents of the city being featured online, sharing their biographies alongside the artists. 2017 was the first year of Le MarsLab, a “forum for interaction, discussion and networking for young local artists working in different disciplines. It allows them to enrich their creative approach via in-depth discussions with the artists involved in the Festival” (“Le Marslab,” n.d.). 2017 was also the inaugural year of the “Festival of Ideas,” a series of workshops, lectures, and roundtables that accompanied the performances, involving local teachers and researchers in more academically focused work. The festival has also maintained an official partnership with the city’s student programming, including the Marseille frère de ses étudiants program and the Carte Culture of Aix-Marseille University (“Educational,” n.d.). Such efforts underscore a value of live art as an experience both social and intellectual, and evidence the structures that allow for internal flows to eddy toward a larger current of exchange, resisting the commodity-critique levied against international festivals.

During the Festival de Marseille: offering public space

In reading and recounting what social anthropologist Cris Shore writes on the culture of policy, politics of institutions, and European ethnography—that “to put it in more theoretical terms, the invention and expansion of EU-wide policies toward ‘culture’ is in itself a measure of the development of a new type of relationality of government; ... ‘EU governmentality’”—I recognize that debates such as these require tangible sites of negotiation, not just space for theoretical discussion (Shore, 2006, p. 9). In 2017, the Festival de Marseille opened at La Friche la Belle de Mai, “a new territory of art” as opposed to a state theater, such as La Criée (Ingram, 2011, p. 64). First renovated in 1992, the complex is in constant flux, yet hosts over 600 events and nearly half a million guests each year, in addition to 70 on-site organizations. La Friche “affirms the close relationship it has with the surrounding area in formal and informal ways—through cultural initiatives with local schools and community centers in the Belle de Mai, by opening a playground and sports area, and by re-opening the Gyptis Cinema in the heart of the community,” though these intentions are not always realized (La Friche, n.d.). La Friche’s position since 2007 as a semi-private Société Coopérative d’Intérêt Collectif (a cooperative society of collective interest), both draws on centralized policy principles and negotiates its inclusion in the EU’s urban redevelopment program, *Euroméditerranée*.¹⁶ More than a decade after Ingram’s compelling ethnography of the arts in this particular ecodistrict, within the context of the festival, the venue utopically attempted to be the site of a prepositional event, connecting neighbors, municipalities, and nationalities in a sprawling, urban venue.¹⁷

To enter the sprawling performance venue, I crossed under an overpass plastered with weathered advertisements; the layered ephemera echoed the palimpsest of histories of the mural that first framed my experience of the city. A chain link fence surrounded the property, opening into a concrete courtyard to the right of an exposed warehouse-now-converted-theater complex. A basketball court was situated next to a few skateboard ramps and a ping-pong table, all in use. To the right of this scene, teenagers lounged against the cement wall as though they belonged in this urban playground. It would have been desolate, but the wall was skillfully colored with graffiti, indicating life and voice—or laughter, cries, and life, to return to Labé’s transformed verse. In the afternoon, children filled

¹⁶ Ingram explores this decentralized form of governance and its limits, as based on 2006 ethnographic research, in relation to French cultural policy.

¹⁷ For more on La Friche’s renovation and evolution, see: Della Casa F. 2013, *La friche la belle de mai: Projet culturel-projet urbain / Marseille*, Actes Sud; or Rosenquist M. 2019, *La friche la Belle de Mai à Marseille: Espaces industriels, politiques culturelles et art contemporain*, Presses universitaires de Provence, Aix-en-Provence.

the space with shrieks of giddy laughter and playful footsteps. By evening patrons trickled in, their pristine attire replacing the athletic clothes, a demure murmur replacing spontaneous cries. The local youth faded into the shadows, displaced as the newcomers gathered outside the theater, a growing crowd that pushed others into the edges of the space.

I offer a thick description of this “indeterminate space” because of the importance of the location of La Friche la Belle de Mai for the opening weekend. The numerous subsequent performances there refuted preconceptions of state opulence associated with the performance spaces in French culture (Rosenquist, 2015). Later, as the festival progressed, audiences transitioned into more aesthetically-formalized spaces for theater, evidence of the fortune historically engendered to French haute-culture: La Criée, Théâtre des Bernardines, and the National Ballet de Marseille, for example. Yet the festival chose to begin in a repurposed place of industrialization that was rich in its embrace of its own shifting histories. This warehouse was once a tobacco manufacturer (tobacco having been a prominent colonial export), and thus its twenty-first-century occupation by a festival with a “Focus Afrique” became a less than subtle gesture at the possibility of rectifying colonialist histories—of addressing a wound of the city at its site. This effort toward stability was complicated by the omnipresent notion of migration, as the venue was situated next to an active railroad and the Saint Charles station, a reflection of the city’s port identity even when away from the water. The tracks served as a constant reminder of the migrating patterns of human life, and the perils of immigration policy that too often follow. On stage, however, participants were allowed a space to be *de Marseille*—to gesture away from a colonial history and toward a new relationship with France, if only temporarily.

The continued renovation of the historical warehouse indicated that France, too, was still developing, and distorted the binary distinction between cultures in a developing-developed world. Like the mural, the site was not a commercial space until the artist arrived to reconfigure perceptions of institutional structure. To be brought there was to recognize beauty in a new ideal of virtuosity not rooted in courtly origins, to commit to a future of the arts that began away from the center.¹⁸ Or so it claimed. While the (financial) accessibility of the festival worked against the fear of this site becoming a place of slum tourism for the bourgeoisie, the life of La Friche outside of the festival posited a more difficult history. La Friche was designed to be a space that could accommodate the community in which it was situated, but it was also clearly directed toward an upper-middle-class and “bobo” sensibility. Gentrification—if yet

¹⁸ For a broader review of the space of cultural politics in post-war France, see: Urfalino P. *L'invention de la politique culturelle*, Fayard, col. Pluriel, 2011, 1ère édition en 1996 (trad. en portugais, *A invenção da política cultural*, Edição SESC, São Paulo, 2016).

to touch upon this area as it has elsewhere, such as nearer to the Vieux Port, but still nearby—weighed on the site, a held breath of anticipated displacement.

Due to La Friche la Belle de Mai's embrace of its non-classical and industrial aesthetic, the moment of exit from the performances was less abrupt. The resemblance of the interior of the theater to the concrete exterior of the street eased the return to reality. Audience members were not jarred awake from a dream-state with a grandiose curtain fall and overhead chandeliers brightening, as typical with the affluent state theaters. No fantastical strike of the clock at midnight shattered the reality temporarily constructed on stage. As the theater-goers left on foot, the pedestrian act and methodical pace of walking encouraged reflection, conversation, and comingling among the audience. I walked out with a solo attendee who offered me directions; a few days later, I serendipitously met him again on the sidewalk, a familiar face in a sea of strangers that exemplified the festival's potential.

Linguistic traces supplement the visual in my experience of the venue. *La friche* in La Friche la Belle de Mai translates to “the wilderness/wasteland,” evoking the dated sentiment of viewing the place of minorities as an undesired destination, the underbelly of a nation, without meaningful exchange and the chance for full placement. Understanding these linguistic clues provides insight into the strategy of the location—a space now filled with art and culture and attended by the public—as the grand opening of a state-sponsored festival.¹⁹ As such, it mimicked the juxtaposition of the graffitied words “Je ris / Je pleure / Je vis” and validated the potential of integration of previously separate spheres of influence: specifically, the potential of financial precarity and foreignness as a visible part of contemporary French identity. The divide between center and periphery was thus submerged into a borderland of existence, where a non-place could become a place. Gloria Anzaldúa's poetic words remain unfortunately relevant.

Municipal support from both local and regional bureaus indicated political recognition of the value of the festival and its efforts. Jean-Claude Gaudin, the mayor of Marseille from 1995 to 2020 and affiliated with the liberal-conservative party Les Républicains,²⁰ reiterated the local government's investment in the arts and the festival.²¹

¹⁹ The festival was subsidized by: la ville de Marseille, la Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, le Ministère de la culture et de la communication, la direction régionale des affaires culturelles, le Conseil départemental des Bouches-du-Rhône, and les Actions Culturelles d'Arte. It received additional support from media sources such as *La Provence* and *La Marseillaise*, and benefits from partnerships with the Marseille Office de Tourisme et des Congrès and Aix-Marseille-Provence.

²⁰ Gaudin was succeeded by Michèle Rubirola in July 2020.

²¹ To contextualize the political uses of culture in Marseille more generally, and the former Marseille mayor Jean-Claude Gaudin's endorsement of the Festival de Marseille specifically, see: Maisetti N. 2017, *Marseille, ville du monde. L'internationalisation d'une métropole morcelée*, pref. André Donzel, Questions Transnationales, Karthala, Paris, p. 304.

This endorsement from a public official heightened the festival's visibility as a public structure for Marseille's *vivre-ensemble* attitude, rather than a site of private ideas exclusive of the national. It also established a relationship between the festival and state, supplementing the performer-to-city dynamic suggested above. But I'm reminded of Ingram's hesitant description: "Rather than a melting pot, Marseille is a place where communities do co-exist, but often warily and at a distance" (Ingram, 2011, p. 66). Crowded together in one venue, an informal community was formed, this time not at a distance, but perhaps only momentarily.

At best, festivals provide participants with a place for performing citizenship; they structure space for transforming the experience of distance into an activity of proximity. Felicia McCarren references this construction of embodied citizenship when she describes a place where "people can insist upon difference without losing their stake for equality and avoid a racism defined through ethnicity or redirected against immigration or religion: the very cultural diversity that is celebrated in the arts" (McCarren, 2013, p. 26). Thus, the value of the Festival de Marseille moved beyond merely locating public space for the underrepresented of Marseille to locating a place to speak as a part of French culture. Equally important, it offered an audience for such utterances and the opportunity of interaction.

Under the Festival de Marseille: against a utopic imagination of space

If, as I have argued, the overarching dramaturgy of the festival operated as a prepositional event that offered structures of interaction to convert political non-place to place, some performance pieces inverted this dynamic as a form of critique. To the former, *100% Marseille* invited 100 residents on stage to act as data points. Through careful spatial arrangements on the stage, the bodies visualized the city's statistics. *Rito de Primavera*, in a dynamic adaptation of the neoclassical ballet *The Rite of Spring*, eventually invited the audience on stage as the performance collapsed into a collective rave. Non-place became place as interaction and exchange occurred. In contrast to these utopian moments—moments featuring choreography that imagined a more equal future of placement—*Sanctuary* inverted this dynamic, isolating both its performers and audience members and creating strict barriers to belonging that underscored the rigidity of identity formation when space is disavowed. *Sanctuary* was directed by South African Brett Bailey and performed by a team of eight artists coming to the stage with unique stories of migration between places such as Syria, Greece, and Germany. Many of the performers were themselves refugees. The festival listed the performance as both "Focus Marseille" and "Focus Afrique"; only one actor was exclusively French Marseillaise. Given this international configuration, the piece transitioned the understanding of the festival

from a mere meditation of French citizenship to an expression of citizenship in and as globalization, crossing boundaries across the shores of the Mediterranean, between the center and periphery. This cue to view the politics of the festival beyond the national borders of France was made poignant by the renewed support for Le Front National's anti-globalization politics in the elections preceding the festival, as well as the contemporary shift from colonialism to immigration and trade in France's global profile.

Bailey emphasized the precarity of statelessness by forcing the audience to migrate through spaces of confinement. The piece began with audience members entering the performance space one-by-one, a labyrinth constructed out of a tall chain-linked fence made opaque by a blue tarp and ominously lined with barbed wire above. Once inside, it was impossible to see out. The first designated space was a waiting room; benches lined the sterile walls. Rotating projections of European cities appeared on one wall, all idyllic photographs that might be published in an expensive travel catalogue: Grecian beaches with whitewashed houses and striking azure doors, a royal view of Neuschwanstein, the Champs-Élysées. Only signs sponsored by the EU indicating no phones, no headscarves, no cameras, no talking, and no guns ominously warned of the tragedy ahead—an acerbic refrain of the 2013 Capital of Culture logo that foregrounded my experience.

Cued by the repetition of the cycle of photographs, the audience then navigated alone through the labyrinth to proceed through eight rooms, each containing solo installations. I continued with the agency to view at my own pace, to sit in the discomfort provoked by the images or flee to the next. A plaque next to each room—or rather cell—labeled the scene and provided a brief description for those patient enough to read. The construction was reminiscent of a zoo, the sentiment of voyeurism strong: the body on display in each cell was reduced to visual consumption, the balance of power and freedom between the performer and audience member clearly unequal. Jacques Rancière writes that “[t]he place of political subject is an interval of a fissure: a being-together as being-in-between: between names, identities, cultures” (Rancière, 2012). The performers complicated this understanding: they were in-between but not together, not recognized as being in the fissure. Rather, they were in a wasteland, the bottom of *la friche*, performing from the periphery, between spaces not yet located.

Sanctuary was a French premiere, having previously been staged in Athens and Hamburg, two cities also enduring controversy over refugees. During the festival, it ran thirty times across six days. Like much of the festival, it too took place at La Friche la Belle de Mai. However, this piece did not occupy a formal theater of the complex, but rather situated itself partially underground in a parking garage of the former warehouse. This

liminal space primed the audience to believe that these bodies were outcasts of society, not truly meant to be seen or heard, just shadows exiled to the periphery of the community. The parking lot setting also underscored the transitory state of existence belonging to refugees, highlighting the absence of a place for them to park, so to speak, outside of the construction of the festival.

The first scene, entitled “Red Carpet,” presented a man arriving on shore with an infant in his arms, his torso and face square to the audience. This peaceful landscape was broken by the barrier of police shields between him and the audience, and by artifacts of shoes and clothing strewn about to indicate bodies left behind. He stared at me, but did not move or speak, as though his agency had been stripped away. He only had the faculty to plea, condemn, and arrest with his eyes—and to hope that his gaze would be returned. Spectatorship would remain central throughout the performance, as the performers were seen but never heard, a critique of representation that bled into the political. By having the actor return my gaze without breaking contact, I began to feel vulnerable. I had arrogantly come to view, not to be viewed. After this first scene, the audience then walked past “Black Friday,” a scene in which the sale of women’s lingerie, shoes, and handbags is foregrounded by a woman in a hijab sitting in a wheelchair and backlit by a haunting red glow. She too was labeled “for sale.” Then, the audience proceeded past an ex-revolutionist from Syria in “Quarantine.” He sat in solitary confinement, alone with a ticking metronome, eyes blank. Each figure was frozen in their dystopia, only able to confront the voyeurs through eye contact. But beyond the titles and identifiers, who were these exiled corps?

The biographical information of each character was provided to the audience as they exited the labyrinth. Notably, the biographies presented were not those of their fictional personas, but their personal stories of migration, and drew attention to the subtle difference between reality and representation in critical engagement of documentary theater. *Sanctuary* presented a scene in drama, the act of staging implying a fabricated reality, yet the truth of the actors’ lives consumed the performance. A few days later, an audience member remembered this tension: “The difficulty, or the ambiguity, is that we saw you as fiction, but in our hearts we know it is real” (“Rencontre,” 2017). The representation of refugee-ness was given a place of belonging; in the parking lot of La Friche la Belle de Mai, and again through documentation by festival programs, press reviews, and local media. This stability of belonging afforded by documentation, however, could not be guaranteed in reality.

The iteration of eight different scenes accumulated toward a larger narrative in which the relationality of the disparate performances was exposed. The artists foreshadowed the indifference that comprised this common thread, several times exhibiting signs that read: “I see you

not seeing me.” This accusation emphasized that the “millions of people suspended in the books, in the margins of the Civilized World, in search of a new place to feel at home” are without aid or active efforts from many around the world (Bailey, “Programme”). It underscored the idea that those in exile are forced to the non-place of societies, to occupy a transient space less privileged and less seen. At the conclusion, spectators were not provided the opportunity to applaud, to express their gratitude for the performers’ endurance and vulnerability. They did not reunite as an audience. They simply arrived at the end of the labyrinth as individuals, somberly set free to choose to ponder or forget the experience and continue with their daily lives.

This performance piece forced an affective experience of non-place for the audience as relationships, comradery, and the utopic *communitas* of theater were disavowed (Dolan, 2010). The solo journey of the audience, coupled with the compartmentalized solo performances of the actors, inhibited interaction and any relational dynamic, forcing an individualism emblematic of Augé’s non-place. Instead, the audience became singular voyeurs, privy to the tragedy of a space sardonically titled *Sanctuary*. I traveled alone, not influenced by—or even aware of—my fellow audience members’ reactions. The relationship was exclusively between myself and each performer.

After the Festival de Marseille: reinterpreting the festive

Although the festival resisted neither difference nor dissonance, it leveraged performance to address the division of the city—expressed through the divided political polls, shaped by the physical gap of Mediterranean Sea, reinforced through targeted political policies, and traced back to colonialism—in order to rehearse a new relationality of and to place. The national hesitation to move away from a homogenous space was interrupted, while an inclusive French identity was performed. The 2017 iteration of the festival promoted a layered, as opposed to discrete, concept of identity, scaffolded by institutional histories, sites of symbioses, points of meeting, and places of encounter, such as seen in the graffitied mural and suggested by the palimpsest of positionality curated at the event. As a result of the festival’s geographic presence, the cityscape was reconstructed with altered demographics, and bodies of the periphery were allowed to take center stage. Encounters between spectator and performer, local and foreign, state and festival, were negotiated in-the-live through the shared event of the festival, and reflected through the site-specific performance *Sanctuary*.

Throughout this chapter, my aim has been to emphasize the ways in which the festival facilitated a movement from non-place to place, transience to emplacement, with

careful attention to the geopolitical specificity of the site: Marseille 2017. Festivals that do so have the opportunity to move beyond the multicultural failures of globalization that underscore their contemporary critique. When the festival is featured as a prepositional event—rather than a commercial enterprise, aesthetic competition, or superfluous fête—something meaningful remains in the crevices, seams, joints, gaps and fissures, between places of relationality. Throughout its duration in the city, the festival bridged non-place to place and facilitated meaningful relationships in transitory spaces of encounter, between individuals who might not otherwise have met. It moved not necessarily toward the EU’s broader principle of “unity in diversity,” but toward visible and valuable relationality of difference. If utopic, the festival affirmed if and how festivals can once again become “genuine avant-garde drivers of artistic creativity and civic emancipation” (Goossens, 2018). In 2020, this mission of reinventing the festival continues in Marseille. By returning to the 2017 iteration, I believe that a new value to the structure of the festival is understood: a motility that allows for an embodied response to the center-periphery divide that continues to haunt identity politics in the present. This particular iteration became a means of confronting the city’s (colonial) past, of filling the resulting void—the non-place of constant motion—that immigrants, refugees, and foreigners have been forced to occupy. It constructed, seen and unseen, a common space of exchange for the performers and audience. From the periphery, it created a space for identity, for witnessing, and for recognition, if not also for understanding. Although the utopian community of the festival was at times staged and not real, it was finally embodied, thus crossing previous boundaries of the center and peripheries of belonging. In the future, there remains the ambition for festivals to “radically foster contextual creations, interactions between artists and cities, and the mobilization of new audiences drawn from ranks that are not controlled by the political establishment” (Goossens, 2018). But in 2017, a step toward this reinvented festival was made.

Years later, the image of gold letters taken in transit still burns in my mind. I saw it first in passing in 2015—two years later, I returned on the same route from Aix-en-Provence, my camera ready. As I write now, it might have been washed away, or re-layered one more time. I cannot say. But for me, the center of Marseille was this building on the periphery, only marginally within the parameters of city limits. It stayed with me not because of where it was located, but because of what it depicted—the intersection of a Venn diagram, the axis of two aesthetic platters tipped until they poured into one. A visual of encounter. Places and non-places, with a bridge from one to the next.

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