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Pluralistic ambiance and urban socialisation

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For Isaac Joseph

- 1 Along with Belleville and Faubourg Saint-Denis, Goutte d'Or is one of the very few areas of central Paris to “resist” the gentrification dynamics at work in the capital since the 1960s. The high visibility of the immigrant populations who live there, their specialist stores¹ and the manner in which they use the public space, all hamper the generalised social transformation of the capital (Clerval, 2010). Those who have moved into Goutte d'Or with dreams of a colourful, multi-ethnic neighbourhood say they have problems fitting in. Groups have mobilised different media and political resources to denounce the proliferation and resulting nuisance of “exotic” stores and informal trading as well as uses of public space deemed to be illegitimate (Bacqué & Fijalkow, 2006). In spite of the gentrification policies deployed in the area, thirty years of “urban renovation” have yielded only very limited social transformation. Goutte d'Or is one of Paris' oldest and most cosmopolitan districts. It has absorbed successive waves of immigrants who have harnessed mobility resources and networks to develop economic activities that gave them a foothold in the territory and enabled them to put down roots. The neighbourhood is both a hub and a nodal point in mobility networks, a focal point for sociabilities and cultural replenishment (Raulin, 1990) and an economic and cosmopolitan centre. It nurtures an area-specific local culture that continues to thrive in spite of urban policy.

Illustration 1: Map of the Goutte d'or district



Shop window of the Echo-Musée Goutte d'Or, 21 rue Cavé, Paris, 18e

Credit: N.Simonnot

- 2 Anyone who goes to Goutte d'Or for the first time has the distinct impression that they are entering a very singular type of territory. It is not somewhere that you just stroll through, flitting nonchalantly over the surface. It is a neighbourhood that captivates the passer-by, plunging them into a sensorial world that resonates with emotions and reactions. Both the inhabitants and those who know it well refer to a highly-specific “ambiance” – that it is difficult to put your finger on - to account for the conflicting feelings of attraction or repulsion and familiarity or strangeness that the neighbourhood evokes. It is difficult to analyse ambiance in terms other than impressions and sensations. It seems to slip through the mesh of rationality and consequently may be treated as a non-object. However, if we take up where Jean-François Augoyard (2007, p. 98) and his team left off, workaday ambiances, far from being epiphenomena, are actually “(...) the forge and the repository of ordinary culture and inter-culturality.” To paraphrase Thibaud (2002, p. 195), “Ambiance may be regarded as the medium that configures the everyday sensorial world or the sphere out of which phenomena emerge and separate.” In the following pages, we will attempt to analyse the characteristics of the ambiance of this small part of a city to determine what gives it its peculiar strength. The sensorial world of the streets of Goutte d'Or clashes with the normative ideal of a safe and secure public space with no rough edges. It is a rough and ready, electric place where many worlds and social problems that have been masked elsewhere by urban functional segregation are visible for all to see. Passers-by may be transported to other worlds or come across stalls, products, noises and smells reminiscent of the cities of the Maghreb or Sub-Saharan Africa. They encounter signs and messages evoking faraway places and horizons and the

urban furniture (phone booths, bins, hoardings, etc.) is plastered with posters and stickers² advertising “Afro-Senegalese” gigs, “a march of the Indigenous People of the Republic³” against the “profit-mongering of M. Béké”, or “disposable immigration”, etc. Graffiti on the walls and footpaths calls upon “anyone witnessing the rounding-up of illegals to call an emergency helpline on 06...”, etc. A walk in the neighbourhood suffices to get an idea of the historical breadth of immigration in France, the political and cultural pulse of all these different worlds and the maze of difficulties with housing, working papers and economic survival besetting the most recently arrived immigrants. This local colour is a key component of the neighbourhood ambiance however we will be focusing mainly on its social dimensions in this article. To understand the emotionally charged and contrasting reactions of both the inhabitants and passers-by in the area, we need to get to grips with one of the key features of this ambiance: its capacity to draw people in and to capture attention. As Maurice Goldring (2006)⁴ put it, this neighbourhood cannot leave one “passive or indifferent” and it is both “exciting and exhausting” because it triggers strong and contrasting reactions from passers-by and local residents alike that force the urbanite out of his or her reserve...

The street as a space for activities

- 3 Once you cross over the boundaries of this area – around Barbès and Château Rouge metro stations and the surrounding Boulevards – you are immediately submerged by the thronging crowd. Walking here is no relaxing stroll but an experience underpinned by friction, arrhythmia and constant happenings. “Malbororo! Malbororo!”. Waiting just outside the exit of Barbès metro station are cigarette vendors, men handing out flyers for mediums and faith healers (“Mamadou. Accurate and detailed fortunes told. Excellent reputation”) or maize and hot chestnut sellers, depending on the time of year. These activities generate specific types of visual attention. Whereas elsewhere, looks are exchanged in a crowd in anticipation of bodily movement and getting out of the way, here the crowd is full of searching looks in anticipation of potential exchanges. Walking on and avoiding eye contact are often enough to convey that you are just a passer-by, but hesitant bodily movements or looks systematically trigger offers/enquiries. This informal economic activity gravitates around the main crossroads and densifies circulation at these points. At the exit of Château Rouge metro station you have to beat a path between the groups that congregate around the wares of woman selling clothes or African vegetables. The passer-by is invited to buy something, singled out for a special offer or hailed good-humouredly or aggressively.

Illustration 2: "Black Market in Barbès" L. Lolmède



Courtesy of L. Lolmède

<http://www.lolmede.mobi/blognotes/index.php?2006/09/07/54-barbes>

- 4 The constant, static presence of groups of men who transform the street into an arena of sociability or informal economic activity is a striking phenomenon for people visiting the area for the first time. As one young local resident told me⁵ *“there are always groups of men or youths all along the street or the Boulevard, or in the area... This gives the impression that there’s always something going on.”* Drug dealers congregate in certain streets inside the neighbourhood. They are constantly on the lookout for potential customers or police raids and anyone crossing these spaces comes in for careful scrutiny. Patent misunderstanding of the coded signs produces a sensation of strangeness and illegality and may give rise to a feeling of insecurity. City dwellers have to negotiate their right of way and alter both their gait and expression when passing through a space that has clearly been territorialised by such activities.
- 5 But most gatherings that may be observed are scenes of public sociability. As in other immigrant neighbourhoods, the pavement is the preserve of “men standing around” because “... these spaces function both as places and interchanges, not merely as working class neighbourhoods and components of major cities, but as mobility and information crossroads and economic and cultural circulation vectors” (Battegay, 2003, p. 9). Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, Egyptians, Malians, Cameroonians, Senegalese, people from the Central African Republic, etc. travel in from all over the Greater Paris region to buy food “with a local flavour”, catch up on news or share in political or sporting events from the old country that receive little coverage in the national media. They all claim that this neighbourhood contains something of the specific ambiance of their country of origin (Bouly-de-Lesdain, 1999). As an Algerian youth recounted, “they said when you get there, go to Barbès and you’ll find someone to help you. I came and I did find someone”⁶. For both newcomers who sometimes arrive with no more than the name of the area to go by, and old timers seeking out the familiarity of a sociability that straddles the old world

and the new, the neighbourhood constitutes a significant well of social, cultural and economic resources.

- 6 Goutte d'Or is the stage for an enlarged public sociability on which recognition of signs of "ethnicity" facilitates relational accessibility. Gatherings take place in front of certain cafés or stores that, while they are frequented primarily by certain groups or nationalities, are still relatively receptive to their environment. Glances and greetings travel across the public space and produce "resonance effects." Most people of North or West African origin that we interviewed considered that they were in a space in which they felt at home: "you can tell by the way people look at you that this is your place." Conversely, French people may feel like outsiders. Majority-minority dynamics tend to be stood on their head in this neighbourhood to the extent that passers-by experience shifting identities as they walk through the neighbourhood and new classifications emerge in the wake of these encounters between different worlds. New inhabitants frequently use the term "*petit blanc*"⁷ to refer to themselves, considering this an appropriate description of their situation within the area. For some people, this "street-driven" awareness can give rise to feelings of encirclement and rejection, culminating in a decision to leave the neighbourhood⁸. Alternatively it can drive media and political campaigns to counter the "Islamic invasion" and "communitarianism" in the name of Republican values. Or these same values may underpin activism via local associations to combat poverty and improve the lot of newly-arrived immigrant populations. The older residents have learned how to adjust through a combination of keeping their distance and getting involved. As a novelist who has been living in the neighbourhood for over twenty years confided to me in 2010 after reading a report on the neighbourhood that we had worked on together:

One Friday I was walking along *rue des Poissonniers* and thinking how I liked living in a place (a "country", i.e., Goutte d'or - a space or a territory) where men pray, even though I'm an atheist. I really liked being able to walk by them as they kneel, without causing offense, living alongside them without having to observe the same laws. I don't mind them blocking the footpath in the same way as they accept that I do not cover up my hair (...). Thus, I had the impression that I was not alone in bearing the weight of the world... Everything that I cannot control or understand helps to set me free.

Illustration 3: “Immobile trip”



Credit V. Milliot

- 7 As Toubon and Messamah concluded in 1990 (p. 46), “what is striking about Goutte d’Or is the capacity of each and everyone to carve out their own neighbourhood, micro-territory or protective space within a wider cultural area.” And while they see “indifference to others” as the reason for the non-conflictual coexistence of such diversity and the “rule of least resistance” as the “behavioural code specific to beleaguered ethnic spaces”, we would contend that the public life that underpins the ambiance of this neighbourhood plays a key role in integrating and achieving a fit between these differences. As a Senegalese student interviewed by Maria Anita Palumbo in 2008⁹ clearly explains, these different worlds are limited by communication which exercises a centrifugal force due to its public nature:

When I used to visit the area before living here, the ambiance reminded me of neighbourhood life in Senegal. There is a thing here that you don’t get elsewhere: in the evening, people go out, sit down in front of each others’ houses, chat and brew up tea. It’s not like that in other areas – here, if you meet somebody you speak to them, ask for news, greet them, have a laugh and go on your way. And these people are not just Senegalese. They’re just over here, that’s all - but it’s not only Senegalese people. And sometimes you even chat with French people or non-Africans. So I wonder if the people who come into the neighbourhood from other areas do likewise. They change how they usually are in order to get into the neighbourhood ambiance while they’re here, before changing ambiance once they leave the area. Yes, I think that’s what happens and it’s probably only natural because when you’re at the university, you don’t behave in the same way with your Senegalese pals as you do with your French friends who are a lot less laid back. So, the question really is... I mean, you’re much less inhibited and laid back in terms of the restrictions you put on yourself in other situations... (Milliot (ed). 2009, p. 94)

- 8 For this young Senegalese man, the neighbourhood ambiance is the enlarged public sociability that reminds him of life in Senegal in which urbanites of all origins participate. And as Stefan Le Courant has shown, humour is a key component of this public sociability. It is “the art of adjusting to diversity”¹⁰ insofar as it both plays on and helps to avoid pigeon-holing (Milliot (ed.), 2009, p 68). It helps express differences in pacific terms thus regulating the conflicts produced by conflicting norms and blurred orders of legitimacy. Humour brings everyone face-to-face with their “otherness”, however such stereotyping is bound up less with making boundaries tangible than with structuring these differences in a shared interstitial space. As one French woman living in Goutte d’Or for over twenty years put it, “my country is not France, it’s Goutte d’Or where you’re not simply an open book and where everyone exists along with their differences.” (Interview 2009). This public life forces both passer-by and inhabitant alike to redefine and reposition themselves in a pluralistic world. Dealing with the public space helps the urbanite to develop that ability described by Ulrich Beck (2006) as a pre-requisite for all cosmopolitan skills, namely “the ability to locate and get some perspective on one’s lifestyle on the radar of all other possibilities (...) and to see oneself through the eyes of people from another culture” (p 175-176).
- 9 Goutte d’Or circumscribes a small chunk of a city that is unlike Parisian working class areas out in the suburbs insofar as plurality is experienced in a non-conflictual mode in a central and accessible public space. Nevertheless, this public space does not work like Elijah Anderson’s (2004) “cosmopolitan canopy.” The public space as a fraught domain in which roles are not defined by any regulated activity and where relations cannot be anticipated does not function either as a zone of respite or in principle as a zone of tolerance. It is less a mosaic composed of different worlds than an enclave composed of interlinked zones in a constant state of flux. The aforementioned street occupations generate “resonance effects” that go way beyond the centre of the neighbourhood. The dynamics of this public communication make these worlds porous ones and draw them right up alongside one another, cheek by jowl.

The converging force of street entertainment

- 10 In this neighbourhood, urbanites experience interactions that are unregulated by the “civil inattention” of anonymous public spaces. The ideal-type public space – as an arena of non-convergent interactions regulated by avoidance, reserve and tact – is eroded by other relational mindsets. This does not mean that anonymousness gives way to any mythical urban village – the sheer density of these spaces means that everyone is submerged in a throng of unfamiliar faces and bodies – however, the space is characterised by considerable relational accessibility. We had begun to look at how “role discriminators” in this area constitute vectors for public communication-type activities. This public sociability is specific to all “immigrant centrality” insofar as it constitutes the relational aspect of these “surrogate homes” although in this case it is characterised by its openness and porousness. There are endless pretexts for verbal exchanges: a short rest on a bench, people constantly going the same way, stopping in the same store, joint interest in the same event, etc. In all working class neighbourhoods “this blend of conviviality and anonymousness turns the street into an intermediary space between the familiar and the unknown for the local residents” (Charmes, 2005, p. 125). What is unusual here is that this sociability is open to individuals that are neither inhabitants nor

traders because the neighbourhood provides a forum for daily exchanges between urbanites who have come from elsewhere. Visual recognition of a certain category or ethnic identity provides the grammar of relational accessibility. But aside from this, the endless stream of micro-events taking place within the area have a centripetal force.

- 11 Goutte d'Or is unusual in that it features street entertainment on a constant basis. The least little occurrence and people stop to exchange remarks. Young undocumented migrants hawking cigarettes have an expression for describing the local ambiance. "It's like Disney village away from home, there's always something going on." Day-to-day street entertainment produces "cooperative attention" (Joseph (ed.), 1991, p. 32) between passers-by. It brings individuals into closer contact and exchanged glances redefine the bases of co-presence, opening potential spaces for communication between strangers... Even before they have properly "checked each other out", local residents can find themselves discussing workaday scenes with perfect strangers. How does this exchange dynamic actually work during these moments of accessibility when there is no predetermined role in principle? What words are exchanged and what temporary ties are forged on the basis of such exchanges between strangers?
- 12 The types of events that may generate exchanges are legion but we may distinguish three broad categories of iterative situations: conflicts between users of the neighbourhood arguing about a right of way (e.g., a woman with a baby buggy whose passage is impeded by young street hawkers who are blocking the footpath, a man who refuses to go out of his way to avoid the streets where Muslim Friday prayers are being held, etc.); intervention by the police (to speed up traffic, question illicit street vendors, etc.); or scenes of degeneracy involving drug addicts.
- 13 The first type of scene generally gives rise to fraught exchanges where each party will refer to the other as an outsider, regardless of their nationality, in order to legitimise their own presence and right of way. African women who have taken up position at the exit of Château Rouge metro station laughingly chide a Parisian in a hurry trying to barge his way through: "Go back home if you don't like it because this is how it is here!" In reply to an old man of similar origin who asked him to be quiet and to respect Muslim prayers on Rue des Poissonniers, a young North African man exclaims: "I couldn't give a damn! We're in France here." If they go on long enough, these fraught interactions that combine aggression and humour can attract a small gathering. Everyone will have something to say on the subject of the identity of the place in question, on respecting differences and on the place of all and sundry. These micro-events help break out the identities of those who become involved into so many situational stances. Depending on the circumstances, the same person may easily find themselves defending Muslims against Islamophobes, elderly people against the young, Algerians against French people, or local people against disrespectful neighbourhood users, etc. Such situations involve a constant renegotiation of identities and normative behaviour.
- 14 Police intervention systematically gives rise to public discussions as to what is fair/unfair, legitimate/illegitimate, and legal/illegal. It is as if such exchanges were designed to tease some sort of a political moral out of all of these little workaday events. The street becomes a forum for discussions between ephemeral groups who pit themselves as a community of equals *vis-à-vis* the forces of law and order. These events also generate a form of reactive solidarity that seeks to re-establish a notion of public order based on a "presupposition of equality"¹¹ in the face of excessive demonstrations of force against individuals perceived as vulnerable¹². Onlookers systematically take the side of the

weaker, oppressed party and on a number of occasions we have observed and experienced this spontaneous solidarity that spreads like wildfire, taking the form of shouts of protest and a general outcry when the police use strong-arm tactics to arrest illicit street vendors¹³. The indignation arising from a shared sense of injustice helps forge a public that is characterised by “a simultaneity of convictions” (Tarde, 1901, p. 9). Such repression sparks feelings of resentment that may act as a vector for activism in defence of undocumented migrants, poor people and immigrants, etc.

- 15 “*Le spectacle de la déréliction*” (Bordreuil, 1995) involving drug addicts where dealers or their customers use the public space as if they are not under the gaze of others is also a regular source of public rows. Transgression of the rules of basic civic behaviour or personal hygiene by drug addicts systematically set off reactions from passers-by. At the sight of a dealer zigzagging through the traffic in pursuit of a young addict, the incoherent babble of someone high on a mind-altering substance, or the dirty half-naked body of a youth slumped on the sidewalk, passers-by seek to exchange a look of bafflement or a few words with a stranger concerning the sheer weirdness of the situation. Local residents use these exchanges to undertake a sort of reparation work that seeks to mend the “public offense” through a convergent focus on the situation. The aim is to re-establish common sense and attention to one and all as a means of reasserting public reciprocity. The offense to public order caused by this drug culture gives rise to reparatory exchanges between strangers.
- 16 Conversations between people that have never met before, jokes cracked between strangers in a *café*, witnessing a street event by pure chance, commenting along with others on the ongoing street entertainment, or having to adopt a position or justify oneself when faced with actions that lie way outside our own normative framework... These are all par for the course in Goutte d’Or and they have major repercussions in terms of socialisation and social dynamics.

A pluralistic civic space

- 17 So Goutte d’Or appears as a highly-specific space for public communication defined by its relational accessibility and characterised as much by the recognition of type and ethnic “role discriminators” as by the converging force of street entertainment. Micro-events spread the spoken word out in three different directions: either it spreads to the private sphere where it becomes a private confidence, or it increases in generality to focus on general principles, or it is disseminated laterally to circumscribe situational boundaries between “us and them” or to reassert a sense of public reciprocity based on a minimum of common sense. When the norms for assessing a situation are too divergent, conflict may be handled by feigned indifference, by carrying on as if nothing was amiss, by continuing on one’s way or by diffusing the situation through laughter. The moments of accessibility to diversity facilitated by these animated pauses in the midst of incessant urban flows are also accompanied by a process of adjustment and negotiation.
- 18 Although the crux of these meetings between strangers concerns the issue of the public good – and the related debates over the principles of visibility, accessibility, equality and reciprocity – we should also stress the whole question of judgement. Stroller-types who act as uncommitted spectators do not tend to predominate in the surrounding streets. Instead we encounter other types¹⁴: the “onlooker” who “gets caught up in the spectacle”; the “eyeballer” who scrutinizes the crowd of strangers or the “importuner” who calls out

to and slows down the passers-by. While all of these categories highlight the public nature of this space insofar as they correspond more to “territorial regimes” of visual attention (Bordreuil, 2005), what really puts them on a similar footing is their difference to the stroller as a “spectator who constantly neglects his or her faculty of judgement” (Joseph (ed.), 1995, p. 25). Goutte d’Or is particular in this respect and as a space for confrontation, debate and negotiation; it may be depicted as an ideal forum for building a pluralistic civic space.

The very fact that a public space is "disputable" (in terms of its uses and guiding norms) makes it the original theatre of the civilian realm as a domain in which procedures exist for easing tensions, and of the civic realm as a domain of debate over the public good (Joseph, 1998, p. 16).

- 19 The vibrancy of this sociability is directly related to the experience of excess (of degeneracy, plurality or social dissymmetry, or of power relations and legitimacy). They are all part of the same urban dynamic. In this area, the street concentrates both differences and inequalities in the same space in an almost archetypal manner.

Public spaces bring heterogeneous elements together. They bind the plurality of individuals and communities and confer "visibility" upon the experiences of different universes with social and political impacts (Gourdon, 2001, p. 173).

- 20 The street is an interface and a medium where differences are produced and articulated. It is the crucible for a process involving associations and differentiations that crystallise new frontiers to the extent that experiencing the neighbourhood, getting around it or even living there always involves experiencing a renegotiation of identity in one way or another. The sheer visibility of poverty, inequality, degeneracy and differences within an accessible central area tends to make the neighbourhood a civic and moral laboratory. Anyone who goes walking there is struck by an atmosphere that forces them to situate and position themselves.

Goutte d’Or is exhausting and exciting because it raises all of the key issues of our era (...). Housing, jobs, social vulnerability, insecurity, how to handle migrant populations, communitarianism and integration often need to be resolved on a human scale (Goldring, 2006, p. 184).

- 21 Down there on the street, in the midst of the constant entertainment and the mesh of loose links, the urbanite experiencing this space is confronted with a number of social issues that cannot be side-stepped or ignored. As Isaac Joseph (2007, p. 14) pointed out, “paradoxically, this visibility is a conquest of democracy, a moral stimulus, the workaday workshop of compassion or kindness, and solidarity as a civic dynamic and not one based merely on a decree issued by the State and its ideological apparatus.” The public life peculiar to Goutte d’Or produces a dynamic that combines communication with “concern”, making it a forum for the endlessly renegotiated construction of a pluralistic civic space. Thus it helps forge today’s urbanite. This ambiance helps point up the dynamics of “bottom up” globalisation and metropolisation that is reshaping urban public spaces. The political ideal of a “pacifying” public space and the difficulties of local representatives in recognising the legitimacy of non-resident neighbourhood users lead them to perceive this public life as dysfunctional. Plans to move stores selling exotic produce elsewhere and support provided for other businesses in the area, the construction of a Mosque in an effort to reduce the overspill from Friday prayers and urban renewal projects are all attempts to win back the street. And yet this all-pervading ambiance plays such a key role in forging the contemporary metropolis day in day out that it continues to resist and endure. As Eric Charmes (2005) has shown, “the return to

the street” is a strong ideological argument for gentrifying working class Parisian districts and the public life of this neighbourhood is one of the main stumbling blocks to this process because it cannot be contemplated from a distance as a “human landscape” or a reassuring backdrop. This ambiance is a pluralistic forge that focuses attention, decentralises opinions and redefines thresholds, as well as bringing together a wide range of publics mutually concerned by what they can and cannot share. This pluralistic ambiance helps forge a cosmopolitan urbanite identity whose mere dynamic holds up the processes of general social transformation at work in the capital.

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NOTES

1. 37 % of inhabitants were born abroad (20 % in Paris). Every day these stores (70 % are classified by Paris City Council as "ethnic") bring as many people into the area as actually live there.
2. See for example the beautiful photos of Mi Zi (<http://www.assomag.com/dicietdailleurs/tags/affiche/>)
3. *Les Indigènes de la République*
4. A local resident who has written about his experience of living in Goutte d'Or.
5. A female student who has been living in the neighbourhood for some time (interview in 2006)
6. Discussion in 2007 with an undocumented migrant who sold cigarettes in the street.
7. A colonial-era term used to refer to white people of modest means living in France's African colonies.
8. As M.-H. Bacqué and Y. Fijalkow (2006) have demonstrated, there is a very high turnover among property owners in the neighbourhood.
9. Maria Anita Palumbo : "Trouver sa place : parcours d'habitants dans la pluralité de l'espace du quartier" in (Milliot (ed.), 2009).
10. Stephan Le Courant "Sociabilité informelle dans un espace public pluraliste", in (Milliot (ed.), 2009).
11. "The presumption of equality is a presupposition in public spaces and in the sphere of sociable exchanges. The issue is not whether equality has been achieved. A presupposition is a regulatory device and a principle underpinning the order of interactions" (Joseph, 2003, p. 341)
12. See (Milliot & Tonnelat, forthcoming 2013)

13. The neighbourhood has witnessed a number of police blunders over the last few years (including the heavy-handed arrest of a pregnant fruit vendor on 17 July 2007) which have been investigated by the *CNDS* (National Security Ethics Committee).

14. To draw on the typology developed by Samuel Bordreuil (2005) to describe the 19th century urban experience.

ABSTRACTS

In this article we propose to describe the ambiance in one of the oldest cosmopolitan neighbourhoods of Paris, La Goutte d'Or. We will analyse the currents driving public life, which has clung to this space despite "urban renewal" policies spanning 30 years. The neighbourhood operates as a centrality, a hub of networks for immigrant communities, and the street here has been turned into an arena for social interaction and informal business activities. It is both a source of cultural inspiration and rejuvenation, and a popular "cosmo-political" scene, a multi-faceted world subjected to constant tension. We study the spontaneous gatherings prompted day after day by the spectacle of the street, the dynamics of communication and concern stirred up by public life. We see that this ambiance is a many-sided forge, the focus of much attention, dispersing opinions, redefining thresholds, a forge crystallizing a variety of publics mutually concerned by what they can or cannot share.

Dans cet article nous proposons de décrire l'ambiance d'un des plus vieux quartiers cosmopolites de Paris : la Goutte d'Or. Nous analyserons les ressorts de la vie publique qui s'est fixée dans cet espace malgré trente ans de politique de « rénovation urbaine ». Ce quartier fonctionne comme une centralité, un nœud de réseaux pour les mondes de l'immigration et la rue y est transformée en espace de sociabilité et d'activités économiques informelles. C'est à la fois un espace de ressourcement culturel et une scène « cosmo-politique » populaire, un univers pluraliste en tension. Nous étudierons les rassemblements spontanés qu'occasionne quotidiennement le spectacle de la rue, la dynamique de communication et de « concernement » générée par cette vie publique. Nous verrons que cette ambiance est une forge pluraliste où se focalisent des attentions, se décentrent des opinions, se redéfinissent des seuils, une forge où se cristallise une diversité de publics mutuellement concernés par ce qu'ils peuvent ou non partager.

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Mots-clés: ambiance, informalité, immigration, rue, foule, publics

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