The Ave has a defiant distaste for standing still. It'll shiver in the winter, and shake in the sun, but the Ave stays put for no one. I've noticed that roiling, that disquiet: the ground can sometimes feel like its shifting on its feet – part of a greater dance, that perhaps alone, we are too small to see. And so it moves, us along with it. But travel relies on both space and time. The Ave is a contested space. The Ave is on borrowed time. A young man told me, "They say triggers are people, places, and things," when I asked him if he felt safe on the Ave, "but shelter is a human right." The Ave is subject to the weather. No matter where a body sleeps, it wants to get out of the rain. The Ave moves bodies, as a current, as a breath, as a hum – I tried to hold onto its skysound. But I too was swept away, and I too would return timely to wade from one bank to the other, finding breath between the currents. A greyhair assured me I'd get a few dings along the way, maybe one of each kind. If I can understand the Ave as a map then so too must I be a cartographer. I've come to think of Ethnography as the mapping of a soul's reach. I noticed that to do this, we all must strain - I've been trying to touch us. The Ave is unfair – a hierarchy of access that sits high on capitol accruence. Despite money's existance as physical representations of theoretical values, when in material possession, it can be exchanged for some dilution of progress. I found access to a view 22 stories in the sky because of my tuition: a young man on the street told me he can't get a library card without an official piece of mail with his name and an address – Gates locked with paper keys. I learned about the places you could count on to bum a smoke if you needed one. When I traveled the Ave alone, I felt I was alone. Each passerby were a ship in the night: the Ave as a beacon, the Ave as a whirlpool. The Ave as deception, some things are not as they seem, but I was on my toes, I think everyone sort of is. I clocked blocks, I witnessed isolated incidents enough to see that some dice were loaded. Would I be picked next, and for what for? The evertemporary feeling of what's going to happen to me next? We're not alone, I see you too.
THE CITY

City is the site of OG trauma: Conquest – Victory by manipulation. Cities are built on backs, on birth, on blood. City got me thinking: if a god makes humans, so do the human make god? As a city is constructed into realization, then what too does the city make real? Does the city make people – am I a city-person? Are there city-crows? Is there city-life? If not everyone gets a choice in playing for keeps, then what sort of games are played on the fields here? I noticed distractions run abundant in the city, it's a fertile breeding ground it shares with the postmodern symbiosis with electricity, that dazzling current. Diversions, native to the idea of the City; there is no limit to the potential to not see what is really there. For all our physical bodies sharing threads of time and space - our heads are all away in The Cloud. We are very far. I feel it, but there so much that we share. Cities: freedom as embodied – I am because I am allowed. I've been wondering how the body relates to the dream. Do cities span without out space and time and does that then mean that cities have a soul? I've sat on the floor and wondered if I felt connected to a city, the same way I felt connected to a non-city: nature. As the otherside, not even raw nature (even if it exists) has my experience led me to draw points of reference connecting the two. The city seems to care (or at least acknowledge) about my light-skinned male body, in a way that nature never has. This attention, I've noticed, guides my actions away from true primal survival instincts and into those that have been refined for me. I do not fear that this has left its mark upon me, but I fear for the marks it has left on other bodies. The weight and wait of the city marks it has left on other bodies. The poor are neglected perpetuated. The city is where we bare witness to the unattainability of normalcy. The city is trauma.

The city is a river. The city as a river, the city as a frontier, the city as commons, the city as trauma, the city as contradiction; it is a lot to consider when approaching the Ave as an ethnographic opportunity. And yet, little by little these ideas started to make sense. They began to play out right before my eyes. Taking the time to simply observe provided me with the tools I needed to find the meanings behind these claims. The city is a river. It is ever changing. It will not be the same from one day to the next and it certainly does not give you the chance to wade in slowly; its banks are abrupt. The city is turbulent at times and calm at others. It is not because of you and it is not because of "them". It is both, simultaneously. The city is a frontier. More than just a physical or geographical separation, the city as frontier presents itself as a place where "actors from different worlds meet". There are no rules of engagement. There is no guidebook indicating how far or how close to stand next to someone, whether or not to give the homeless man money, or how to respond to being called. The buildings speak, the people interact, the cars bob and weave and the institutions loom. The city is where people, places, things, are created, shaped and molded. The city is a commons. The city is trauma. The city is where we bare witness to the effects of colonialism and capitalism and the consequences of an established set of rules under which "normalcy" is created and perpetuated. The city is where we see that the poor are neglected and abused, both directly and indirectly. If we look with intent, we can see the breaking of bodies and the ways in which a constant need for growth and development supersedes the need for stability and equality. The city is contradictory. At once the city is both a place where dreams are meant to be attainable and where dreams are broken down. Where creative expression shows both beauty and pain. Where wanting to live free of enclosures is not an option and using drugs to escape from suffering is a crime. The city is a place where neighborhoods share a zip code but do not share a life style. The city is a complex organism that is difficult grasp, draw conclusions from or experience the same way twice. It is a place where life histories come together to create diverging narratives.
I am simply one observer. I am fueled by curiosity but held back by fear and discomfort. I am all too aware of my vulnerability and weak demeanor. But did I make this up?

I am like the girl on the bus, made uneasy by the unfamiliar. But I don't want to be, I know better than to be. I have the ability to observe but the inability to see it all; I cannot simply watch the Ave from a looming tower and hope to understand it better.

Perspective does not grant me perspective. No matter which way I position myself, I am the college student whose fortune means that others must find refuge on the doorsteps of closed down businesses. I can't help but feel like I was dealt the better hand in this serious game, and that while I wouldn't trade it for anything, I can't help but feel guilty. My intentions are good; they are to learn, to listen and to improve. But is that enough?

I am simply one observer, but I hope that my motivations make the difference. The Ave can change me, shape me, teach me. The Ave shows me that an ethnographer must be aware of the complexities of the city that extend beyond and buries itself into the deepest crevices of the human experience. That an ethnographer must understand the importance of collaborative work, shared experiences, and life histories. It is only then that the ethnographer can begin.