

THE

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 accruece. Despite money's existence 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.



AVE

The Ave is a city within a city. It is both a space and a place where the interactions between actors are tangible and inevitable.

My experience on the Ave has evolved, become more complex and more at odds with the way I once thought. Thinking of the city as a river helps us to also understand the Ave as a confluence; a merging of people, ideas, thoughts, and background; a commons.

Each block is different, every alley tells a particular story and every building is marked by the changes brought upon by man and time: "progress". The highly concentrated nature of this area provides a diverse landscape for observation. A wealth of information that seems at once stimulating and overwhelming. The busses in which we travel, provide an amplified form of concentrated interactions; this place, which moves along in time and space, allows me to begin to explore the ways in which our everyday exchanges reflect a bigger picture --

The ways in which people nervously search for a seat, hoping to find an empty one, preferring to stand than to sit near someone unfamiliar

Wearing hoods and headphones, sometimes both, to further the sense of enclosure

We make a public space, private, by imposing our standards of normalcy and comfort

The ways in which people slowly move away when a man talking to himself becomes louder

I strike up a conversation with a girl sitting near me and she tells me that it makes her uncomfortable that "just anyone" can ride the bus.

Who is "anyone"?

She adds that she always sits near the bus driver for safety. The ways in which the time of day dictates behaviors.

Duneier asks us to consider the difference between invisible and ignored.

Is there even a difference? Does it matter?

The distinction is imperative to understanding the Ave, the city, the commons, the truama...the river.

THE

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 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 are together heavy in pregnancy – both in joint efforts material and ethereal. With humanity's (humanities?) proto-quality of life-will, I fear I can be sure to share a moment of another's suffering. I know that our bodies are separate in a city, I'm nervous that I have tendencies of making the first move. A city is a resilient experience, located somewhere between relentless and resistant – I've learned that a city cannot be properly described with words, it must be heard in its own tongue. Devoid of language, the listener is left to translate or transcribe what is heard in the obstructed air. A young man told me, crying into my shoulder we shared in an embrace "These streets are crazy." I should have asked him if he thought we were too. He seemed to be listening.



CITY

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 cat-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.

THE

It was my intent to position myself, not merely as a body amongst many, a feeler among many, a seer among many, but as a contributor among many. If while walking with the wind with my metaphorical microphone cum butterfly net - I caught a few but hunted none. Blessed by the lilting poignancies and perfectly random sequences of events which due to the confines of space and time, were temporarily mine to observe - I decided dissection immoral. But just as a booming voice or a sighing bus would stimulate my senses, I thought it my reciprocal obligation to stimulate theirs. As if I could, as an actor-seer, walker-talker, be more than just the pen-paper. I wondered, what truly is the best way that I (as a unique grain of dust in the Universe, the Machine) can reproduce an expression of my experience as a compounding return for others to share. I thought if I were to attempt to make real my ethnography of experience, it'd have to be itself, experienced - not written and read, not published and purchased. It'd have to have more layers to the creation. It'd have to be an experience that would stretch the boundaries past public and private, but notice where these are were drawn in the sand. It'd have to be very deeply rooted in the time and space, consider travel and place, but acknowledge coincidentally that perhaps the true reality of experience laughs in the face of such concepts. Maybe this ethnography is laughing in my face, as life often does too: but I can be sure of one thing about my experience - it provided me information that I cannot know. I can't know what others will see as (though I often dress myself as a shadow) I walk through their experiences, I can hardly guess how they will act. I will never know what their lived experiences entail, but I am curious, and so I can ask. I can't know the City, the Ave, the Life other than the phenomenons that I am present to observe, and must admit that there must be anomalies that sing past just under my nose. I'd hope that this is the case for every One, an attempt to acknowledge the potential of near-lived experiences. With a bellow I can only declare as an ethnographomancer - the time has come, but nothing can ever be finished.



END

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**.