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Drancy–La Muette: Concentrationary Urbanism and Psychogeographical Memory in Alexandre Lacroix's *La Muette* (2017)

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Abstract: That the Drancy transit and internment camp—the main camp from which Jews were deported from France—is currently inhabited, having reverted to its pre-war name 'La Muette' and initial function as a housing estate at the end of the 1940s, remains little-known. As a result of this multi-layered history, the site is deeply ambivalent, being both haunted *and* inhabited. Through a theoretical framework informed by psychogeography, this article brings to light the concentrationary presence that is layered onto the space of everyday life at the site of Drancy–La Muette and investigates the possibility of resisting the resulting spatial politics of dehumanisation. Through a close reading of Alexandre Lacroix's novel *La Muette* (2017) and its spatial poetics, this article argues that it is by elaborating new ways of seeing, whereby the interpenetration of past and present, the visible and the invisible, comes to the fore, that the traumatic space of Drancy–La Muette may open up. This, in turn, allows for the circulation of affective resonances between the built environment and the individual, which resist the concentrationary logic.

Keywords: Drancy camp; La Muette; psychogeography; concentrationary; trauma; memory; affect; space; Holocaust memory; urbanism

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1. Introduction

As part of a survey conducted in 2020 aiming to gauge knowledge about the Holocaust among French adults, participants were asked to name the concentration camps, death camps, or ghettos they were familiar with. Only 2% mentioned the Drancy camp (Schoen Consulting 2020). That the vast majority of respondents had seemingly not heard of Drancy—the major transit camp in France, from which approximately 63,000 Jews were deported eastwards to the death camps from 1941 to 1944 (out of the 75,000 Jews deported from France)—is deeply unsettling. Even lesser known still is the fact that the Drancy camp, located only 12 km away from Paris, is now inhabited again, having thus reverted to its pre-war name ('La Muette') and function (a housing estate), making it the only former camp site in France to be inhabited. La Muette is now an ambiguous site, with approximately 500 residents carrying on with their daily lives, and would not stand out if not for the presence of a memorial sculpture and a railcar on the grounds of the estate. In addition to the hardship associated with living in a site that carries a traumatic history, the estate's current residents, most of whom are from the immigrant community or former patients of the nearby Ville-Evrard psychiatric hospital, endure difficult living conditions as the estate is in poor condition. Importantly, La Muette is also located in the Seine-Saint-Denis department, the poorest department in metropolitan France with 27.9% of people living under the poverty line in 2019, and part of the demonised banlieues (INSEE 2022). The site of La Muette, because of its role in a traumatic history, its architectural significance, and its location in an ostracised geographical area, thus poses a set of challenges for representation. In this article, I suggest that literary representations are uniquely placed to respond to these

challenges and use Lacroix's (2017) recently published novel *La Muette* as a case study, arguing that it elaborates an original approach that proves able to grasp the ambivalence of the site as both a haunted and inhabited space wherein multiple histories intersect.

Lacroix's novel *La Muette* is a polyphonic text. It alternates between the narratives of Elsa, who was interned in Drancy as a young French Jewish woman, and Nour, a young man who currently lives in the estate. Both narratives are told through their perspectives using the first person. Elsa, now an elderly woman, shares her story with a historian; Nour, in police custody after the death of his childhood friend Jamie, tells his story to police officers. Both narratives take the intimate form of a confession, and because their respective addressees (the historian and the police officers) seldom intervene, the primary recipient of their stories arguably becomes the reader, who is then left to weave the two narratives together.

I start this article by discussing the theoretical contributions of post-war theorists Henri Lefebvre and Guy Debord, who both conceptualise the everyday as a privileged site through which the dehumanising nature of a certain kind of urbanism can be laid bare. Such an approach illuminates the unique set of challenges that a site such as La Muette, sitting at the intersection of different histories, stories, and memories, must address. Through this framework, I uncover the alienating logic of the urbanist ideology that guided La Muette's architects, and which culminated in the seamless transformation of the housing estate into the Drancy camp. I then turn my attention to Lacroix's novel, exploring its potential for counteracting the concentrationary logic of the site, arguing that its spatial poetics gesture towards a different kind of perception, attuned to the affective resonances between the built environment and the individual.

2. Relearning to Look at a World Contaminated by the Concentrationary

While the history and current status of Drancy–La Muette are little-known, writers, artists, and filmmakers have played an important role in bringing to light this past and, importantly, the interconnectedness between the different aspects of Drancy–La Muette. French writer François Maspero in *Les Passagers du Roissy-Express* (Maspero [1990] 2004), for instance, concisely summarises the complex history of La Muette as follows:

> La cité de la Muette, 1935, l'une des plus grandioses tentatives de logement social de l'entre-deux guerres.
>
> La cité de la Muette, 1941–1944, camp de transit vers la mort.
>
> La cité de la Muette, 1989, HLM décrépite.
>
> La cité de la Muette, pièce en trois actes. Cité radieuse, cité de la mort. Cité banale.
>
> Banale, banalisée. Et bientôt: réhabilitée. (Maspero [1990] 2004, p. 175)
>
> [The cité de la Muette housing estate, 1935, one of the grandest social housing projects of the interwar period.
>
> The cité de la Muette housing estate, 1941–1944, transit camp to death.
>
> The cité de la Muette housing estate, 1989, decrepit low-income housing.
>
> The cité de la Muette housing estate, play in three acts. Radiant city, city of death. Banal city.
>
> Banal, banalised. And soon: rehabilitated.]

This short overview aptly captures the ambivalence of such a site, which once represented a hopeful time of social progress and that has now become the epitome of the dark years of the collaboration of the French State in the Holocaust. By describing the history of La Muette as a 'play in three acts', Maspero implicitly puts forward the idea that the different phases of La Muette are to be understood as part of the same, wider (hi)story rather than as three independent, separate stories. Yet, unlike traditional theatre plays that

end with a 'dénouement' (literally, unknotting) bringing about a resolution of tensions, it is, herein, impossible to unravel the different histories that intersect at La Muette. However, being now 'banale, banalised', its normalisation within the everyday landscape means that, although La Muette is the result of a complex intertwining of past and present, the multi-layered nature of the site has become invisible.

Most historiographical accounts have tended to focus on the site's function as an internment camp, rather than on its ambivalent, multi-layered nature. A notable exception is Hansen's (2014) historiographical account of Drancy–La Muette, which, drawing on Rothberg's (2009) concept of multidirectional memory, proves attentive to its entangled status. Investigating the site's threefold identity as 'a lieu d'histoire, a lieu de mémoire, and a lieu de vie' [a site of history, a site of memory, and a site of life] (Hansen 2014, p. 121), Hansen underlines its multidirectional potential (p. 146) but leaves unanswered the question of 'whether a site so charged with a story of tremendous atrocity can productively accommodate multiple narratives and foster multidirectional dialogue about other difficult histories that carry critical social and political implications for the present and the future' (p. 123). In response to the question raised by Hansen, this article proposes the notion of the concentrationary as the missing link required to understand the relationship between the different histories of La Muette. The phrase 'l'univers concentrationnaire' [concentrationary universe] was first coined by Rousset (1946), a returning political deportee from the Buchenwald camp, who argues that the dehumanising logic of the Nazi concentration camps did not end with the liberation of the camps; rather, it has now taken other forms and has spread insidiously.[1] It is, therefore, urgent to find ways of identifying and resisting the concentrationary presence that shadows life in our contemporary societies. If Pollock and Silverman (2011, 2014, 2015, 2019) have already explored and conceptualised important aesthetic and political modes of resistance to the concentrationary in their series of edited volumes, the present article is especially concerned with the interaction between the concentrationary and space, and with the kind of spatial poetics that would be able to dismantle the normalised perception that renders the site of La Muette invisible.

I contend that an approach informed by the principles of psychogeography may be able to illuminate and counteract the dehumanising logic at play in La Muette. Defined by French Situationnist Debord (1955, p. 288) as 'l'étude des lois exactes et des effets précis du milieu géographique, consciemment aménagé ou non, agissant directement sur le comportement affectif des individus' [a study of the exact laws and precise effects of the geographical environment, wittingly developed or otherwise, acting directly on the affective behaviour of individuals], psychogeography emphasises the affective nature of the relationship that ties one individual to their surrounding environment. Furthermore, by proposing a different kind of phenomenology, one that centres around the environment rather than human subjectivity, it disorients pre-established perceptions and introduces the idea of a sense of agency that is profoundly spatial. In doing so, it becomes possible to envisage such questions as the kind of memory that is carried by sites and spaces, but also the kind of memory it actively produces. Developing an approach attuned to the affective dimension of such spaces enables us, as I shall demonstrate later in this article, to reconceptualise the site of La Muette as a repository of complex affects. If phenomenology is dedicated to 'rapprendre à voir le monde' (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. xvi) [relearning to look at the world], as Maurice Merleau-Ponty puts it, psychogeography can be understood as a new kind of phenomenology, one that is more specifically dedicated to uncovering the invisible (affective) forces at play within one's environment (and, in particular, one's urban environment). Its aim is to illuminate what lies behind the façade of what Debord termed 'la société du spectacle' [society of the spectacle]. The spectacle corresponds to the moment at which 'la marchandise est parvenue à l'occupation totale de la vie sociale' [the commodity completes its total occupation of social life] (Debord [1967] 1992, p. 26) and thus only furthers humankind's sense of alienation. For Debord, a key manifestation of the spectacle can be found in modern urbanism. I suggest that psychogeography offers—because of its commitment to rethinking the relationship between the visible and the invisible, between

absence and presence—a productive way for thinking about sites such as La Muette, which fall into the category of what Tumarkin (2019, p. 6) has termed 'traumascape', those 'haunted and haunting places, where visible and invisible, past and present, physical and metaphysical come to coexist and share a common space'.

A traumascape such as La Muette, which is currently inhabited but remains haunted by the violence of History, is located at the intersection of History and the everyday. This peculiar configuration brings forth specific challenges, for, as Sheringham (2006, p. 360) points out, '[w]hile the everyday is not the place of the event (always exceptional) and is therefore in tension with history, it has a historicity that is embodied, shared and everchanging'. The label 'monument historique' [historical monument] was bestowed upon the site in 2001 in recognition of its status as 'une réalisation architecturale et urbanistique majeure du XXème siècle' [a major architectural and urbanistic achievement of the twentieth century] *and* because of its use during the Second World War 'comme camp d'internement, puis comme camp de regroupement avant la déportation, qui en fait aujourd'hui un haut lieu de la mémoire nationale' [as an internment camp at first, and then as a regroupment camp before deportation, which makes it today a key place of national memory] (Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication 2001).

This status has created further problems with direct consequences for the everyday lives of the housing estate inhabitants. The historical monument classification means that maintenance, repair, and restoration work are tightly regulated so that no significant alteration can be made to the building. As a consequence, much-needed work to improve the thermal insulation of the building had to be put on hold for a decade due to the fact that the window frames, originally by Jean Prouvé, had to be replaced with identical copies, which proved to be costly and challenging. Such an example illustrates the very tension between history and the everyday that structures the experiences of the current inhabitants. While this special issue takes as its focus the recent 'spatial turn' undergone in Holocaust Studies, this article goes back to theorists, such as Guy Debord and Henri Lefebvre, who have become associated with the spatial turn that took place in French critical theory in the wake of the Second World War, and especially in the 1970s, and for whom, crucially, the question of space is inextricably linked to that of the everyday. With these thinkers, the idea of the concentrationary becomes a bridge between history and everyday life, with Lefebvre (1958, p. 261) positing the task of 'comprendre les villes et la vie « moderne » à la lumière cruelle des camps de concentration' [understand the city and 'modern' life in the cruel light of the concentration camps] as key to the understanding of the post-Holocaust world. As Silverman explains, the everyday thus becomes for those thinkers 'the central site on which the struggle between oppression and freedom is played out and requires a critique (an art) of demystification and defamiliarization to render this visible' (Pollock and Silverman 2019, p. 125).

3. Concentrationary Urbanism

The cité de la Muette, conceived by the French architects Marcel Lods and Eugène Beaudouin, was commissioned in 1929 by the Office Public d'Habitations du Département de la Seine [Public Housing Office of the Seine Department]. It departed significantly from the other housing planning projects of the time that had so far drawn inspiration mainly from the British model of the garden cities.[2] In sharp contrast to the garden city with its cottages and pastoral imaginary, La Muette, which was made up of low-rise housing blocks, a horseshoe-shaped apartment building, and five fifteen-storey towers—the first in the Paris region—was characterised by a decidedly modernist, functionalist style.[3] La Muette thus represented a significant move away from the garden city tradition and towards the model of the *grands ensembles* (mass housing developments) that would prevail in the post-war period in the 1950s and 1960s in France.[4] While construction began in 1931, severe budget resulting from the financial crash in 1929 meant that the housing estate was left unfinished, and the planned communal facilities never built. The estate struggled to attract tenants due to the high rent and the economic context[5], and it was eventually decided in

1938 that the estate would be used to house members of the Mobile Guard (an auxiliary force to the army) and their families in the tower blocks.

As Weddle (2001) has shown, Lods and Beaudouin thought of housing as a manufactured product and subscribed to the view that 'architecture could be integrated into the broader movement for the modernization of France according to principles of efficiency and productivity' (p. 169). In many ways, La Muette appeared at the forefront of the technological innovation of the time, with the use of prefabricated elements (such as concrete panels) to be assembled using a steel structure. The building process, regulated by principles of standardisation and efficiency, mirrored the way the housing estate was meant to function: each specific space (whether individual or communal) was designed to fulfil a specific function. Arguably, then, Lods and Beaudouin's urbanist vision was underpinned by a rationalisation and systematisation of human needs, which inevitably performed a sort of compartmentalisation of life.

In an interview about his general approach to architecture and urbanism, Lods notably asserts the functionalist nature of housing: 'Le logement est un appareil destiné à remplir une certaine mission, et qui doit être attribué à un célibataire, un vieillard, un travailleur, etc.' (Chombard de Lauwe 1959, p. 164) [Housing is a tool designed to fulfil a specific mission, and which must be allocated to a bachelor, an old man, a worker, etc.]. In that same interview, Lods further explains that 'Le rôle de l'architecte est de leur [les gens] apprendre à habiter, ils ne savent pas et il manque une littérature sur la question. Le Corbusier qui écrit très bien a fait là-dessus quelque chose de remarquable' (Chombard de Lauwe 1959, p. 158) [The architect's role is to teach them [people] to inhabit, they do not know how to and a literature on the question is missing. Le Corbusier, who writes very well, has done something remarkable on this topic]. Contemporaries of Le Corbusier, Lods and Beaudouin can be seen with La Muette to embrace Le Corbusier's functionalist urbanism. Maspero's description of La Muette as a 'cité radieuse' [radiant city] in the aforementioned passage of *Les Passagers du Roissy-Express* underlines this intellectual genealogy, the concept of the 'cité radieuse' being emblematic of Le Corbusier's urbanist philosophy. With the adjective 'radiant', Le Corbusier sought to inscribe his architectural model in a continuation of the ideals of the Enlightenment, and, above all that, of (technological) progress and rationality.[6] Yet, as the sociologist Bauman ([1989] 2013) has argued (in a similar way to Frankfurt School thinkers such as Theodor Adorno), it was those very features that made the Holocaust possible. Herein, the paradoxical nature of an architectural and urban project such as La Muette is laid bare: conceived as an emblem of modernity and progress that would advance a social housing agenda and provide a solution to the shortage of housing, it eventually came to embody its darkest aspect.

The idea of 'habiter' [inhabiting] that Lods refers to is radically different from that of French Marxist thinker Henri Lefebvre. In *Le droit à la ville*, Lefebvre (1972) introduces an important distinction between 'l'habiter' [inhabiting] and 'l'habitat' [habitat]'. While 'l'habiter' denotes the potential of creative transformation, with actors being able to exercise their agency upon their surroundings in unexpected ways, 'l'habitat' is devoid of such potential. As Lefebvre further demonstrates, the *grands ensembles*, such as La Muette, are 'marqués d'un caractère fonctionnel et abstrait: le concept de l'habitat porté jusqu'à sa forme pure par la bureaucratie d'État' (p. 28) [characterised by an abstract and functional character: the concept of habitat brought to its purest form by a State bureaucracy]. Although expressed in slightly different terms, Elsa, one of the two main characters in Lacroix's novel, reaches a similar conclusion. To the historian who has come to listen to her testimony, she explains that, ever since her internment in Drancy, she has developed a sense of distrust towards contemporary society,

> où les relations sont toujours plus fonctionnelles, où l'on cesse même d'être poli parce qu'on n'en voit plus l'utilité. Moi, j'ai un problème avec la froideur parce qu'il me semble qu'elle peut inspirer la main qui guérit comme celle qui tue, qu'elle peut conduire au meilleur comme au pire, justement parce qu'elle est aveugle. (Lacroix 2017, p. 154)

> [where relationships are always more functional, where we even stop to be polite because we can't see the use in that anymore. I personally have a problem with coldness because it seems to me that it can lead the hand that heals in just the same way as that which kills, that it can lead to the best and the worst alike, precisely because it is blind.]

What Elsa expresses in terms of 'coldness' is the abstract rationality criticised by Bauman and Adorno, whom I discussed earlier. Her reflections concur in particular with Adorno, who urges the need to reflect on coldness as a condition of possibility of the Holocaust. According to the latter,

> If coldness were not a fundamental trait of anthropology, that is, the constitution of people as they in fact exist in our society, if people were not profoundly indifferent toward whatever happens to everyone else except for a few to whom they are closely bound and, if possible, by tangible interests, then Auschwitz would not have been possible, people would not have accepted it. (Adorno 2005, p. 201)

In her discussion of coldness, Elsa insists on its dual nature, which, as mentioned previously, plays out in the paradoxical history of La Muette: principles of rationality and efficiency, which drove the construction of the housing estate in the pursuit of the betterment of people's lives, were also the ones, that 'made the Holocaust thinkable' (Bauman [1989] 2013, p. 17). Importantly, Elsa further describes this coldness as being 'blind'. As I will discuss in the following section of this article, counteracting this blindness requires a different mode of perception, which relies on the affective power of space to bring to light the intertwining of different stories and histories that would otherwise remain obscured by the coldness of the estate. Like Elsa, Nour, the other protagonist, also uses the idea of coldness when describing the urban environment that surrounds him, likening the housing estate to an assemblage of Tetris blocks (Lacroix 2017, p. 41). This is a telling comparison, for Tetris, whose goal is to fill in an empty rectangular box by stacking variously shaped geometrical blocks, is a video game devoid of any trace of human life. Such a comparison thus reinforces the idea that La Muette is inhospitable to human life.

The fragile boundary between human and inhuman space is a dominant theme throughout the novel. In the very first chapter of the book, Elsa briefly recalls her life in Lyon before her internment: she was in love with a gentile man named Albert, who was the one, she suspects, who turned her in, leading to her internment in Drancy. She recounts,

> Dans ses lettres, il me parlait de la maison qu'il comptait faire bâtir. Il voulait que nous ayons un poste TSF, une baignoire en fonte, une cuisine aménagée, que sais-je. Parfois il allait même jusqu'à me décrire des motifs de papier peint ou de rideaux. (Lacroix 2017, p. 10)

> [In his letters, he talked to me about the house he intended to have built. He wanted us to have a radio, a bathtub, a fitted kitchen, or whatever else. Sometimes he would even describe wallpaper or curtains patterns.]

Her lover's promise of a future together is conveyed through material symbols of modernity pertaining to the domestic sphere, underlining the extent to which faith in modernity and progress became intricately linked with the possibility of a safe, comfortable, domestic living space. Such an equation between modernity and the possibility of a better future was embodied by La Muette at its inception. Indeed, the sort of modern living described by Albert was exactly what La Muette, as an icon of modernity, stood for just a decade earlier. Each flat benefited from its own bathtub, independent W.C., and modern kitchen, including an 'évier-vidoir' (a sink with a kitchen waste disposer)[7], representing state-of-the-art development. Ultimately, however, Albert's betrayal of his promise uncannily mirrors the history of La Muette and its unfulfilled promises. Once more here, it is the two facets of La Muette that are highlighted, for just as the housing estate carried a hopeful promise of better lives for all, like modernity, it also held a dehumanising potential, which was

activated during the Second World War when it was turned into the Drancy internment camp. Elsa picks up on the fundamental ambivalence of the site upon her arrival at the housing estate now turned internment camp, noting 'ce mélange de sophistication et de gravats bruts' (p. 20) [this mixture of sophistication and raw rubbles].

The dehumanising potential of space is further underlined when Elsa explains that rather than by their names, inmates were identified by two numbers: a matriculation number assigned to them at their arrival and another number representing their assigned location within the camp.

> Dernière formalité, l'enregistreuse m'a prié de retenir par cœur trois numéros: j'avais le matricule quatre cent trente et un, j'étais assignée à l'escalier quatorze, chambre trois. Elle a répété en articulant bien chacun des numéros, il ne fallait surtout pas les oublier, ils composaient ma nouvelle identité à Drancy. (p. 26)
>
> [As the last formality, the woman in charge of registration asked me to remember by heart three numbers: I had the matriculation number four hundred and thirty-one, I was assigned to the staircase number fourteen, room three. She repeated, articulating well each of the numbers, which I should absolutely not be forget as they made up my new identity in Drancy]

Herein, the spatial organisation of the camp is shown to participate fully in the dehumanisation of the inmates.

Moreover, in such an environment, material objects themselves turn hostile. Elsa painfully notes the discrepancy between the room she lived in prior to her arrest and the dormitory she is assigned to in Drancy:

> Sur le seuil de la chambrée, j'ai reculé. J'ai revu, avec un serrement de cœur, ma chambre de Lyon. Ce n'était pas un palace, ça non, imaginez une petite pièce mansardée avec un lavabo, mais rien n'y était agressif. J'avais posé des brise-bise aux fenêtres, j'avais cousu des coussins de brocard qui recouvraient le lit, j'avais un gros traversin qui me tenait chaud l'hiver. C'était un nid douillet, qui sentait toujours le propre. Dans cette chambrée de Drancy, au contraire, on aurait dit que tout à coup les choses et les objets étaient hostiles. (p. 35)
>
> [At the threshold of the dormitory, I took a step back. I saw once again, with a heartfelt pang, my room in Lyon. It wasn't a palace, far from it, imagine a little attic room with a sink, but nothing there was aggressive. I had hung some half-curtains at the windows, I had sewn brocade cushions that covered the bed, I had a big bolster that kept me warm in winter. It was a cosy nest, that always smelled clean. In this dormitory of Drancy, on the contrary, it seemed that suddenly things and objects were hostile.]

In Lyon, where she lived prior to her arrest, Elsa was able to exercise, to a certain extent, her ability to shape her own space through a creative process. In other words, she was able to 'inhabit' this space in the Lefebvrian sense of the term. Moreover, her enumeration of the few things that formed part of her practice of space, such as making cushions, suggests that space is the result of an imaginative process rather than a mere product.

4. Spatial Poetics of Affective Resonances

With each chapter of Lacroix's novel alternating between Elsa's and Nour's stories, their narratives remain structurally separate throughout the novel (apart from the epilogue, which I will discuss later), leaving it up to the reader to connect them. This structure prevents their respective experiences from being conflated while nonetheless allowing for parallels to emerge. Examples of such parallels include the persecution they both suffer, Elsa as a Jewish woman and Nour as a child of North African immigrants. We see authority figures (members of the Milice[8] and police officers, respectively) using ethnic slurs ('youdi' (p. 12) and 'melon' (p. 15), respectively) to refer to them, for instance. The novel shows the violence that permeates both Elsa's and Nour's lives. For example, in Chapter 9, Elsa

witnesses the suicide of an internee who could not bear to be separated from his wife and is struck by the deep colour of the blood on the ground. In Chapter 24, Nour has a similar reaction upon seeing the dead body of his childhood friend Jamie, who accidentally shot himself in his flat during a fight with Nour after finding out about the affair between his girlfriend Samantha and Nour. This creates a shared sense of humanity both between Elsa and Nour, but also between the dead Jewish man and Jamie. The suicide of the Jewish man also echoes that of Bernard, an inhabitant of the housing estate and former patient of the nearby psychiatric hospital Ville-Evrard in the following chapter. That the psychologically vulnerable Bernard was allocated housing in a site with such a traumatic history reflects the reality of the estate, whose inhabitants notably include former patients from Ville-Evrard in addition to immigrants.[9] According to the inhabitants of the estate, Bernard's suicide is the consequence of the death of his beloved dog Daisy, but Nour speculates that one further reason for Bernard's suicide is the latter's discovery of the sketch of a woman's face dated August 1943 on one of the basement walls of the housing estate.[10] Ever since, Nour describes Bernard as being haunted, his thoughts being occupied by the image of this unknown woman. Reading these examples through a psychogeographical lens that is attentive to the effects of the environment on the affective behaviour of individuals, the influence of the traumatic history of the site of La Muette is laid bare. With characters echoing each other across time, the space of La Muette becomes a resonance chamber, which serves to highlight the inherited character of violence at La Muette.

These observations lead to another question, namely, whether one necessarily remains trapped by the traumatic history of such a site. In other words, does the built environment condition the psychic life of individuals? That psychogeography may sometimes inadvertently turn into 'simplistic determinism or behaviourism' (Sheringham 2006, p. 163) is for Sheringham a potential limitation of psychogeography. While psychogeography certainly emphasises the way an individual's surroundings affect them, according to French philosopher Bergson ([1896] 1929, p. 50), affect implies a dual movement: it is not only what the body receives from the outside but also 'ce que nous mêlons de l'intérieur de notre corps à l'image des corps extérieurs' [that part or aspect of the inside of our body which we mix with the image of external bodies]. In what follows, I consider the key role of affect in not only bringing about resonances between different stories but also in counteracting the concentrationary logic that plays out in La Muette, through a close reading of one of the key moments in the novel. In this passage occurring right after the tragic death of Jamie, Nour describes a peculiar affective experience:

> En sixième, le prof d'histoire nous a raconté la disparition des dinosaures. Je m'en souviens encore, comme j'avais mal pour eux. Y a une météorite qu'a percuté la Terre et du jour au lendemain plein de cendre flottaient dans l'air. Le soleil passait plus au travers. Les plantes se sont mises à crever à cause du manque de lumière. Bientôt les dinos ont plus rien trouvé à grailler et ça s'est mal terminé, la story. Après le drame, dans l'appart, j'avais comme l'hallu de les voir moi aussi, les cendres qui volaient partout. Je me sentais dans le noir, comme si la nuit venait de tomber en plein jour. A peine si j'arrivais encore à respirer. (p. 17)
>
> [In Year 7, the history teacher told us about the disappearance of the dinosaurs. I still remember it, how deeply I felt for them. A meteorite crashed into the earth and overnight tons of ashes floated in the air. The sun couldn't shine through it. Plants started dying because of the lack of light. Soon the dinos couldn't find anything to munch on and it ended badly, the story. After the tragedy, in the flat, I too was like tripping I was seeing them, ashes were flying everywhere. I felt I was in darkness, as if night had fallen in broad daylight. I could barely breathe anymore.]

In this passage, I argue that a peculiar manifestation of affect, not unlike the 'particular kind of affective aura' that Sendyka (2016, p. 688) associates with non-sites of memory, comes to the fore. As Sendyka explains, non-sites of memory, which are characterised by a

lack of information, commemoration, and reparation, are imbued with an unsettling aura that becomes their 'trademark' (p. 688). While the very presence of a memorial sculpture as well as a freight wagon and railway tracks at the site (together with the Shoah memorial across the road) invalidates La Muette as a non-site of memory, the site itself is nonetheless arguably subjected to a politics of invisibilisation, resulting, in part, from the ambivalent layering of the traumatic presence onto the space of everyday life. For instance, despite living in the housing estate, some residents, including Nour's mother, are unaware of what happened; others, like Nour, repress this knowledge in order to carry on with their daily lives. In the aftermath of Jamie's death, Nour's unsettling and disorientating experience seems to turn the space of the flat into a different one altogether. If Nour relates his hallucinatory episode to the dinosaurs' extinction, the imagery mobilised here evidently relates to the Holocaust as well. Although Nour does not immediately connects the ashes to the traumatic history of the site, this image of ashes is a powerful visualisation of the haunting of the Holocaust. Nour's hallucination can be read through Sendyka's notion of 'affective resonance', defined as the '"effect of the affect" through the body's spasms when it feels exposed to an encounter that will alter its "functioning capacity"' (p. 699).[11] However, the resonance of Nour's body with its immediate surroundings also gestures towards an unconscious, or pre-conscious, knowledge that is relational in nature, connecting his individual story to the broader history of La Muette.

That it is the sense of sight that is primarily affected is significant: it is as if the hallucination gave access to a different mode of seeing, whereby connections between different stories and histories start to come into view. What is at stake here is the interpenetration of perception, affect, and memory. As Bergson ([1896] 1929, p. 20) explains, just as 'il n'y a pas de perception qui ne soit imprégnée de souvenirs' [there is no perception which is not full of memories], 'il n'y a pas de perception sans affection' (p. 50) [there is no perception without affection]. For Bergson, a stimulus does not elicit an automatic response from human beings. Instead, between a received stimulus and an action, there is a temporal interval, opened up by affect, during which memory-images are interwoven with perception. For Al-Saji (2004, p. 221), this means that 'the way in which affect delays and prefigures action defines my body's hold on time—its access to memory and the openness of its future. To feel is to no longer play out the past automatically, but to imagine and remember it'. The way Lacroix's novel points to the possibility of the opening up of the traumatic space of La Muette through the affective power of relations between the built environment and the individual mirrors the key role of affect in enabling perception and memory in Bergson's model.

Foregrounding the role of affect in this way is especially important for both the alienating urban ideology embodied by the housing estate and the dehumanising nature of the internment camp that sought to deny the transformative potential of affect. Earlier on, I noted how both Elsa and Nour evoke the coldness of La Muette, which Elsa also links to a kind of blindness. Through this blindness, what is made invisible is the Other, understood in the Levinasian sense[12], that is to say, whose alterity is irreducible. In La Muette, the Other is made to lose their human likeness and becomes a matter of indifference, in turn negating the possibility of an affective relationship. To follow psychogeography, in re-assessing the geographical environment through a network of affective relationships, is predicated upon a mode of perception that interlaces affect and memory. This, in turn, allows for the opening up to other memories and for the possibility of affect to arise 'in midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and to be acted upon' as per Gregg and Seigworth's (2010, p. 1, original italics) definition.

The epilogue further explores the role of the affective relationship between an individual and the built environment in transforming La Muette into a relational site of memory. Unlike the rest of the novel, it is written in the third person in the conditional tense. It imagines a meeting between Nour and Elsa, which would take place at the housing estate sometime after Jamie's death. Nour has gone back to living at La Muette while Elsa has come to the housing estate to commemorate the dead. Their encounter is described

primarily in affective terms—Nour is, for instance, described as restless, 'comme si quelque chose s'était déréglé dans son métabolisme' (p. 191) [as if something in his metabolism got disrupted]. Just as Elsa witnesses Nour write Jamie's name on the memorial wagon located in the estate's courtyard—in so doing, inscribing his death into the longer history of La Muette—Nour reciprocates her gaze: 'C'est alors qu'il la verrait' [It is then that he would see her] (p. 191). Here, they not merely acknowledge the presence of the Other, but also that of their respective ghosts. When Nour explains that the name he wrote is that of his friend who died, Elsa simply replies 'Nous avons tous perdu beaucoup d'amis ici' (p. 192) [We have all lost many friends here]. This mutual acknowledgment of what is invisible, of 'certain *others* who are not present, not presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us' (Derrida 1994, p. xix, original italics), extends to the housing estate itself. The concluding sentence of the novel, which immediately follows this very short dialogue between the two characters reads: 'Et un grand courant d'air s'engouffrerait dans la cour, un courant d'air accru par la puissance d'aspiration du vaste espace vacant qui entraînerait toute parole supplémentaire vers l'inutilité' (p. 192) [And a big gust of air would burst into the courtyard, a draught strengthened by the aspiration power of the vast empty space that would carry any additional words off towards uselessness]. The phrase 'puissance d'aspiration' can be interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, it might refer to the sucking of the individual into the traumatic history of the site, but it may also be read as forming part of a breathing mechanism whereby the courtyard acts as lungs. Because the breathing mechanism is, above all, one of exchange between the environment and the body, it implicitly points to an interconnected web of relations. To end the narrative on this tension reinforces the idea of the complexity of the site, that it seems and could only ever be grasped obliquely.

5. Conclusions

As this article has shown, grasping the ambivalence of the site of La Muette, includes not only acknowledging its multi-layered nature as an architectural landmark, former internment camp, and housing estate, but also the concentrationary presence that is layered onto the space of everyday life. Because the haunting of the concentrationary at La Muette, operating through a spatial politics of dehumanisation, is insidious, it brings forth a set of challenges that relate in particular to the relationship between the visible and the invisible. To address those questions, this article explored the potential of the approach developed by Lacroix in his novel *La Muette*, in which affect plays a key role in allowing for a different mode of seeing, in turn transforming the site of La Muette into a relational space. In doing so, it enacts on a spatial level trauma theorist Caruth's (1996, p. 8) argument that one's trauma is always bound up with the trauma of another and that it may thus lead 'to the encounter with another'. While the relational dimension of trauma occurs for Caruth (1996, p. 8) 'through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's words', herein, the opening up of one's trauma to that of Others operates primarily through spatial dynamics. Through this approach, which can be productively described as psychogeographical, the text dismantles the concentrationary logic that renders both Drancy's ghosts and La Muette's inhabitants invisible.

Although this article has focused its analysis solely on Lacroix's novel, its findings can be applied to a wider corpus of cultural texts that probe the question of inhuman space in the context of the growing temporal distance from the events of the Holocaust. These include not only Maspero's *Les Passagers du Roissy-Express* mentioned early on in this article but also Angelini and Haenel's (2013) *Drancy La Muette*, a book which combines photography, text, and archival documents to form an 'errance photographique' (p. 13) [photographic wandering], or des Pallières's (1997) essay film *Drancy Avenir*. In his review of the latter, Liebman (2009, p. 72) regrets the fact that 'Few who look at the handsome images of the large complex and its surroundings that des Pallières and his cameraman Julien Hirsch have crafted will recognize the building both for what it is, and more importantly, for what it once was'. Yet, this is precisely the point, for the blending of the Drancy–La Muette within

the urban landscape illustrates the violence of the normalisation of the concentrationary.[13] The strategy developed by des Pallières to remediate this invisibilisation involves the juxtaposition of testimonial texts read in voice-over and images of the contemporary urban landscape of Paris and Drancy, which produces a defamiliarisation of the landscape of the everyday and creates interstices between sound and image wherein affective resonances between past and present circulate. The spatial poetics devised by those writers, artists, and filmmakers point to the critical role of artistic practices in bringing about a re-assessment of violence, whose mode of expression is spatial in nature.

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Notes

1 Rousset's political reading of the concentration camp system is shared by Robert Antelme and Jean Cayrol, who were also political prisoners in the Nazi camps. These ideas were also later further developed by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt 1951).

2 English town planner Ebenezer Howard developed the model of the garden city at the turn of the twentieth century. Howard's garden city model promoted the establishment of communities in the countryside for working-class people. In England, Letchworth Garden City and Welwyn Garden City were built according to Howard's vision in 1903 and 1920, respectively. In their analysis of Howard's model, Clevenger and Andrews (2017) underline the 'unapologetically eugenic and biopolitical objectives articulated within, and through, Howard's schematic' (p. 142). In this respect, the cité de la Muette, though formally departing from the garden city, may be understood as part of a broader tradition.

3 The current housing estate looks decidedly different: the towers were demolished in 1976, and only the horseshoe-shaped building remains.

4 Dufaux and Fourcaut (2004, p. 51) notably identify La Muette as 'le premier grand ensemble de la région parisienne' [the first large-scale housing estate of the Paris region].

5 The Wall Street Crash of October 1929 had somewhat delayed effects in France, with a severe economic decline starting in 1931, but which persisted for the remainder of the decade. For an overview of the political and economic context of the 1930s in France, see Schor (2016).

6 In *La Ville radieuse* for instance, Le Corbusier (1935) elaborates on his vision of the ideal city—the 'radiant city'—that he had started to develop from 1922 onwards. Such a city would be hierarchical, vertical, and functionalist. In this book, he shares his ambition to remodel Paris according to this model, which would allow for the 'ville-lumière' to live on (although such a transformation entailed the demolition of most of the city, to be replaced with skyscrapers). His description of the resulting Paris in the following terms echoes the hygienist discourse of fascism:

> 'Paris rassemblé en Ville Radieuse dispose de lieux efficaces pour la réalisation féconde de la journée de l'homme d'une époque machiniste. Une norme éternelle s'y retrouve dans le calme bienfaisant de l'organisation qui sauve le corps et dans la stimulation des énergies concentrées, animées de civisme: nous avons reconquis l'esprit!'. (Le Corbusier 1935, p. 142)
>
> [Once concentrated within the Radiant City, Paris will have all the means at its disposal to provide the machine-age man with a full and fruitful daily life. In the beneficent calm provided by an organization that will spare the body sterile fatigue, and with the stimulus of energies concentrated and animated by civic enthusiasm, an eternal norm will have been rediscovered: we shall have reconquered the realms of the spirit].

Although there exists vast evidence of Le Corbusier's fascism and antisemitism (including his active involvement in fascist groups, publications in fascist journals, and personal correspondence), they have been rarely discussed in France. Nonetheless, in recent years, several books tackling the dark aspects of Le Corbusier have been published, though this has caused some controversy in France, see, notably, Perelman (2015). For an insightful overview of this debate, see Brott (2017).

7 The 'évier-vidoir' was, for instance, presented as something novel in the advertising materials included in the special issue of the journal *Chantiers* (1933, p. 45) dedicated to La Muette.

8 The Milice was the fascist paramilitary police force created by the Vichy regime in 1943.

9 For a low-income housing estate such as La Muette, HLM (Habitation à loyer modéré) agencies are in charge of selecting applicants and managing the allocation of housing.

10 Over seventy graffiti by Jewish internees in the stairwells of the housing estate were discovered during renovation work in 2009.

11 In her discussion of affect, Sendyka draws on Brian Massumi's theorisation of affect (itself derived from Gilles Deleuze, who was himself influenced by Bergson (together with Spinoza)).

[12] Central to the philosophy of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas is an ethics of alterity according to which the Other is transcendent and irreducible to comprehension. For an overview of Levinas's thought, see, for instance, Critchley and Bernasconi's (2002) *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*.

[13] The invisibilisation of sites of violence through their normalisation also applies to sites of colonial violence. Such sites include, for instance, the 'Jardin d'agronomie tropicale' [Garden of Tropical Agronomy]) located on the outskirts of the Bois de Vincennes in Paris. The site, which was transformed into a 'colonial village' as part of the 1907 colonial exhibition wherein indigenous people from the French colonies were put on display in 'human zoos', has played an important role in France's colonial past. Yet, despite being 'one of the most evocative colonial *lieux de mémoire* in France' (Aldrich 2020, p. 161, original italics), the Jardin d'agronomie tropicale (reopened to the public in 2006) remains highly ambivalent as traces of the colonial past are left for the visitors to uncover.

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