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# URBAN ENCOUNTERS ART AND THE PUBLIC

Edited by Martha Radice and  
Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier

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## ARTWORKS AS STRANGERS? ENCOUNTERS WITH TWO MONUMENTAL ARTWORKS IN MONTREAL

It is just another Sunday afternoon in Montreal; the summer weather has finally returned after months of snow, slush, and freezing temperatures. Around George William Hill's 1919 *Monument to Sir George-Étienne Cartier*, in Parc du Mont-Royal, and Alexander Calder's 1967 sculpture *Man, Three Disks*, on Île Sainte-Hélène, two popular gatherings are taking place. With music at their centre, these social events offer a unique perspective on the present-day impact of artworks that have been installed in public spaces for decades. On the east side of Parc du Mont-Royal, in the great open space at the foot of the mountain (Mount Royal) along Avenue du Parc, up to four thousand people come together every week throughout the warmer months. This event is called the tam-tam, which means drums in French: at its core is a drum circle, made up of thirty to fifty percussionists, which forms near the monument to Cartier (figure 1.1). Off the pathways circumscribing the artwork's site are fifty craft vendors – another key component of the gathering. This is to say that the monument is an intrinsic part of the event and its identity, even though its intended meaning has nothing to do with the tam-tam itself. The thirty-metre-high composition, featuring eighteen bronze figures, is a tribute to a French-speaking Father of Confederation (the founding of the Canadian state in 1867). Facing east and west around the base of the monument are allegorical figures representing the first nine provinces to join Confederation; on the north and south sides are two groups representing “education” and



1.1 The *Monument to Sir George-Étienne Cartier* during the tam-tam.  
Photo: Thibaut Larquey, 2014.

“law,” two domains to which Cartier contributed. On a higher level of the monument, linked to the representation of the provinces, are statues of the man himself and of a patriotic soldier holding a standard. The pyramidal column is crowned by what is commonly assumed to be an angel but which is actually a winged figure of “Renown” holding a laurel branch. This complex assemblage is installed on architectural components designed by brothers Edward and William Maxwell, which include a terrace and stairs that are part of the monument. Four lions at the corners of the terrace, added later, complete the composition; these symbols of the British Empire are the work of Belgian sculptor Louis François Étien. (This description of the monument is based on Gubbay 1979.)

In another public park – this one on an island in the middle of the St Lawrence River – a different gathering takes place on summer Sunday afternoons. Created in 2003 to make electronic music accessible to a bigger audience by taking it out of its habitual context of the rave and the after-hours club, the Piknic Électronik is a weekly festival presenting local and international DJs, taking place between 2:00 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. from mid-May to the end of September (figure 1.2). There are two stages at the Piknic, but the main dance floor is located under Alexander Calder’s “stabile” (a term coined by Jean Arp to designate Calder’s airy monumental artworks that touch the ground at a few points, as opposed to his mobiles) entitled *Man, Three Disks*. The work was commissioned by the International Nickel Company of Canada for the 1967 Montreal World Fair, known as Expo 67, and it was later given to the Ville de Montréal. Its title is a reference to the Expo 67 theme, “Man and His World,” and so the abstract sculpture can be seen as a symbol of unity and equality in difference. At twenty-two metres, it is the second-tallest work by Calder in the world (after one in Mexico City) and the tallest that is unpainted. It consists of five overlapping arches sitting on six legs, topped with three discs and two points. The work was moved from its original location in 1991 to the belvedere created specifically for it; this site offers a spectacular view of the downtown core and the mountain in the middle of the city (Ville de Montréal, Public Art Bureau 2015). *Man, Three Disks* is without question part of the Piknic: the image of the work has been used in advertisements for the festival as well as on various products such as glasses and t-shirts.

In this essay, I take advantage of the similarities between the two events mentioned above to propose an urban sociological perspective



1.2. *Man, Three Disks* during the Piknic Électronik.

Photo: Thibaut Larquey, 2014.

on the notion of publics for artworks in public spaces. As a point of departure, the tam-tam and the Piknic Électronik offer starkly contrasting cases of publics' encounters with monumental artworks. My study of these gatherings is based on filmed and participant observations conducted both during the Sunday afternoon gatherings and during the rest of the week. I use Lyn H. Lofland's (1998) principles of stranger interaction as an analytical guide to better understand the relationships of publics with art objects. First, I look at the Sunday events as contexts for intense public sociability: even though they are different in nature – one more organic, the other more programmed – one of the reasons that people take part in them is the pleasure of being in a public space with strangers. Then, I develop the idea that the relationship that these strangers have with one another in these public parks is replicated in the relationship that people have with the monumental public artworks found there. I cite key ideas from scholars working with pragmatic sociology, including Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, for the pertinence of these authors' approaches to associating people with objects (notwithstanding Latour's reservations about the concept of sociability). Finally, the social experience of these artworks feeds into a reflection on the cultures of public spaces in Montreal and on the contribution of artworks to the social life of large public parks.

#### BETWEEN STRANGERS

As this book shows, there has been growing academic interest in the outcomes and effects of various forms of public art. This is especially true in disciplines such as geography and anthropology, which offer the theoretical and empirical tools that enable practitioners to conduct fieldwork in the city. By concentrating on users' interactions with and perceptions of the art objects, recent contributions have produced a shift in the discourse on art in public spaces, displacing the focus from the artwork itself to the individuals that interact with it. In their introduction to *The Uses of Art in Public Space*, Julia Lossau and Quentin Stevens observe, "'Use' moves the locus of attention and power to the public, who find their own purposes in the aesthetic objects and experiences presented to them" (2015, 5). An example of this shift would be cultural geographer Martin Zebracki's (2012, 2013) work on the perceptions and representations of artworks by

users and residents. For my part, I have described publics for artworks in public spaces by looking at how individuals use them (Vernet 2015) and by establishing the different degrees of relationship that publics have with the art object (Vernet 2014). My intention is to create a break with the usual art-historical discourse, which, following Rosalyn Deutsche's (1996) definition of public art based on Jürgen Habermas's (1974) public sphere, has typically considered the site of the public artwork to be one of debate and political discourse, leading to confusion between discursive and physical sites. Instead, I argue that artworks should be looked at within the specific context in which they are experienced: public spaces, which include parks, plazas, squares, and streets (see, for instance, the typology by Carr et al. 1992). In these sites, strangers coexist with one another in a mingling process that is called public sociability, defined as weak and ephemeral social interactions (Grafmeyer and Authier 2008).<sup>2</sup>

Here, I pursue this exploration of the question of the publics for artworks in public spaces by transposing well-established vocabulary and research methods specific to the study of the city, both as a form and as a social space.<sup>3</sup> I propose that the vocabulary of public sociability – more precisely, Lofland's five principles of stranger interaction – can help to elucidate the concept of publics (see also Matthias, this volume). As we will see, we need to adjust certain theoretical considerations and vocabulary before applying human-to-human patterns of interaction to human-to-object relations. For the moment, I shall introduce the general patterns that, as Lofland reminds us, work in combination with each other. These patterns were established through systematic observations, based on fundamental work by theorists of social relations including Erving Goffman, Jane Jacobs, and William H. Whyte. The first pattern is cooperative motility, which is described as the somehow cooperative, uneventful movements of individuals through public space, in which objects may also intervene. The second is civil inattention, meaning respect for the other's presence in the same space without interfering in his or her actions or personal space, although one might cast a glance at him or her. Considering this as a form of social relationship, Lofland notes, "Civil inattention suggests that when humans in the public realm appear to ignore one another, they do so *not* out of psychological distress but out of a ritual regard, and their response is *not* the asocial one of 'shut down' but the fully social one of politeness" (1998, 30; italics in the original). Third is audience role prominence, which takes

place when our attention is directed toward someone else's actions such that watching them is our predominant role. Fourth is restrained helpfulness, which can be exemplified by asking for a simple bit of information (such as the time), without it leading to a more substantial relation. Fifth is civility toward diversity, expressed by tolerance for each other's differences, which usually only becomes visible when it is not respected, when incivility arises.

As my fieldwork has shown, all five of these patterns come into play at events such as the tam-tam and the Piknic Électronik, where strangers have to deal with the presence of hundreds of others. The analysis of each event in terms of experiences of public sociability, presented in the following section, helps deepen our understanding of publics' interactions with artworks in public spaces. Such a systematic approach is not so much the result of this specific research as it is integral to the method of a broader experiment: it feeds into my inductive process and builds on my intention to transpose the vocabulary of these types of festive experiences onto the interactions that occur between publics and artworks – this time in an everyday situation.

#### FRIENDS, CAMERAS, AND A BLANKET: LEARNING FROM THE FIELD

I conducted my observations at both the tam-tam and the Piknic Électronik in the manner that the events should be experienced: in a participatory way, my fieldwork took place with the help of friends, a picnic, and a blanket spread out so we could sit on the ground. A still camera was used to record specific actions or elements, and a video camera was used in an impressionistic manner, as a *flâneur* or a tourist would do, to capture ambiances, rhythms, and general dynamics. One of the limitations of this research method lies in the fact that it allowed me to classify users only according to easily recognizable social categories (age, phenotype, clothing style, and other traits).

Four extended observation sessions were conducted at the tam-tam on Sunday afternoons in 2013 and 2014. A first look at the crowd allows for general statements about its composition. The event attracts mainly young adults aged eighteen to thirty-five. There are no barriers around the tam-tam and there is no charge for attending it, so it attracts a wide variety of individuals. For instance, we recognized several homeless people

whom we had encountered in our everyday activities who were there to enjoy their day like any other participant, illustrating the degree of civility toward diversity. The most popular activity at the tam-tam is sitting back and relaxing in order to eat, chat, drink, and, to some extent, enjoy the drumming, depending on where you choose to hang out. This instantly puts hundreds of strangers in various situations of interaction. This mass of individuals does not form a coherent whole: it is composed of small groups of people who have chosen where to sit according to how far they want to be from other people and which of the different atmospheres in the subsections of the site appeals to them. In terms of cooperative motility, even though the grounds are crowded with participants, their trajectories never interfere with the activities of others; people make sure that they walk around the groups. Interactions among the different groups are governed by civil inattention: they do not have contact with one another, even though they are in great proximity, but they may glance at each other, as people watching is a popular activity.

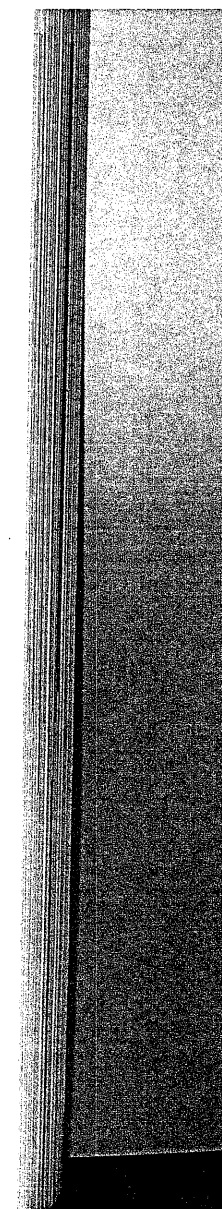
Even though no one is responsible for organizing the tam-tam and very little control is exercised on the site, there is no apparent tension. Indeed, the tam-tam is a spontaneous event that started in the 1980s. Because of its organic origins, it is impossible to say exactly who started it and when, although there are urban legends on the subject (Germain 2003; Handfield 2008). Even today, there is no official organization in charge. This self-regulation is the result of a social compromise that happened in 1994, after a conflict that lasted almost a year. The event had become very popular the previous summer, which had led to negative consequences such as a great quantity of litter left by the participants, including broken bottles (Bonhomme 1993; Dion 1993), and graffiti on the monument (Baillargeon 1993). Once the municipal authorities became involved in the situation, they started to find other infringements of bylaws: the sale of alcohol, drugs, and food prepared in unknown conditions and without a permit (Paquin 1993). At first, the police were sent onsite to manage the situation, which, unsurprisingly, was not appreciated by the participants (Poussart 1993). Instead, a forum was set up by the city to discuss the situation, involving all parties (including musicians, vendors, and the authorities). A consensus was reached: food and alcohol would not be sold onsite, but participants would be allowed to bring their own, and the city would issue fifty permits a week to people who wanted to sell arts and crafts – the main form

of official control and programming of the event (Hachey 1994; Pelchat 1994). Today, given the festive character of the gathering, the municipal authorities responsible for the park tolerate alcoholic beverages on site, when they are brought to accompany a picnic (as per general city policy). To show the extent of this *modus operandi*, here are two more examples of civility toward diversity. First, we saw a man and two women openly selling pot brownies out of wicker baskets. Their action did not shock anyone on site – to the contrary, it seemed to be appreciated by some. Second, a few individuals patrolled the site to collect refundable cans and bottles; they not only checked garbage cans but also directly asked people who had just finished their beverages if they could take them. For what I could observe, far from being bothered, people seemed to be happy to not have to carry these containers back home. This case also highlights restrained helpfulness, since the refundable cans were worth five or ten cents.

Although the tam-tam is a mainly organic event, the same activities occur in the same subsections every week, without any form of obligation or official mobilization. The site is divided into three main areas: the area around the monument at the centre; a large, open, sunny space south of the artwork, along the street; and a space to the north, stretching toward the forest that covers the mountain. Although activities are more homogeneous in the open space (representative of what I described above), a wider range of possibilities opens up in the wooded area. A surprisingly broad mix of activities can be performed in the context of a spontaneous musical gathering: the tam-tam's evolving nature allows for the emergence of new sorts of happenings. In and around a glade, some people play volleyball and hacky sack, and others perform yoga and circus-inspired acts (slacklining, juggling, devil sticks, hula hoop, and aerial silks). The trees obviously come in handy for activities such as silks and slacklining. Musical groups perform, and spiritual activities take place (for instance, Hare Krishna members sing mantras). Some participants clearly appreciate having an audience, as exemplified by a very popular role-playing game that has been played at the tam-tam for fifteen years: medieval battles. In a dusty glade that marks the northern border of the tam-tam, contemporary knights fight their opponents, showing their skills and demonstrating their tricks. Passers-by stop and gather around them, and some curious spectators even ask to borrow equipment to try it out (Cauchon 2007; King 2011; *La Presse* 2001). The tension between looking

and being seen is an incentive to come to the tam-tam for all participants. In recent years, a new musical gathering has even been established on the same site, at the same time. At the south end of the site, a resourceful DJ now brings his own equipment every Sunday afternoon to offer his own free version of the *Piknic Électronik*: the music in this space is “harder” and generally attracts a slightly different crowd than the tam-tam, but it does not interfere with it.

At the centre of the tam-tam event and its site is the *Monument to Sir George-Étienne Cartier*, which has four interrelated functions in this context. Its first function is to be the core of the tam-tam, in a historical, social, and economic sense: it hosts the greatest concentration of activities (music and commerce) and the greatest density of participants (musicians, dancers, spectators, sellers, and buyers), elements that define the essence of the gathering. Today, the percussionists are on the slope just behind the monument. Up to 2005, when the artistic and architectural components of the artwork underwent restoration, they used the terrace and the steps around it as their stage: during the renovations, they had to temporarily move a few metres west, to a site that became their permanent one, even though one might have expected them to return to their original site. (Although I found no explanation for this relocation, one could hypothesize that the new site provides better acoustic conditions because it is more distant from the street and that the monument may act as a sound barrier.) The musicians, who usually number about fifty, attract a large audience composed of curious spectators and a few hard-core dancers: civility toward diversity may also enter the picture here, as exemplified by an intoxicated dancer who was intensely active but easily called to order by one of the musicians during one observation session. The fifty vendors continue to use the same location: they set up their wares by the three paths around the monument. Near the site, at the edge of the forest, illegal drugs can be purchased, which reinforces the idea that the tam-tam's most historical components can be found in this subsection, as the availability of drugs at the event is something of a tradition. Second, the monument functions as the element around which the space of the whole gathering is organized. If the tam-tam were a city, the monument would be its downtown core and neighbourhoods with specific identities and functions would be laid out around it. This function is different from the first in that the first function is centripetal, attracting activities to the centre, while the



second is centrifugal, generating dynamics that move outwards. Its third function is to act as a landmark not only from within the space of the park but also within the cityscape. Although this role is not specific to the tam-tam, it takes on a particular significance on Sunday afternoons. Facing the west end of Rue Rachel, Avenue du Parc, and Parc Jeanne-Mance (which is right across the avenue), the *Monument to Sir George-Étienne Cartier* occupies a strategic site – which is why it was installed at this location in the first place. With its exceptional height and size, it is visible from a distance, indicating a destination and gathering point (people can also hear the drumming from adjacent neighbourhoods). The fourth function of the monument is also not event-specific: it is a gateway to this section of Parc du Mont-Royal. When the gathering takes place, many people enter the site – whether to go to the tam-tam or not – via the monument's terrace. It is therefore common to see individuals who came by bike or on foot waiting for their friends to join them on the perimeter of the monument, alone or in groups, sitting or standing, watching the crowd and checking their cell phones.

On an island in the middle of the St Lawrence River, *Man, Three Disks* fulfils very similar functions during the *Piknic Électronik*. Two observation periods were conducted at the event in 2014 – data saturation occurred more quickly than at the tam-tam because the range of activities at this programmed event was less broad. As the general director of the festival confirmed in an interview, when the *Piknic* started, participants were mainly between twenty-five and thirty-five years old, with significant numbers of families with children, gay men, and lesbians; these groups are proportionally less important today, and eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds now form the core audience. The *Piknic* also became popular rapidly; in its first year, about 300 people attended each week; now, up to 5,000 are expected. Interestingly, the festival's mission, as stated on its website, includes programming of both electronic music and public sociability: "With electronic music at the core of its mission, *Piknic* aims to open up the genre by offering an immersive social experience" (*Piknic Électronik* 2014). Whereas music seems to be less important than public sociability at the tam-tam, at the *Piknic*, the two are of at least equal importance. The *Piknic*'s mission is conveyed by the way the site is physically organized: practical functions frame the social experience. Participants reach the site after a five-minute walk from Jean-Drapeau metro station or the parking

lot and must go to the main and only entrance for two reasons. First, they have to pay their admission fee: admission costs \$10 before 3:00 p.m. and \$15 after that time. Attendees are given electronic bracelets that employees at each entrance scan to control access to the site. Second, their bags have to be checked: they are allowed to bring picnics, even though there are many food options on site, but alcoholic beverages must be purchased at the bars set up for the event. After passing through this area, they arrive at the main dance floor under Calder's stable. The sculpture has four functions. The first is to be the core of the *Piknic*, in the sense that many of the key elements that define the event are gathered there: a DJ, the dance floor with the abstract sculpture as a roof and a spectacular view of the city as a background, large drinks bars, designated sitting areas formed by artificial turf carpeting in front of a low wall, a spot for sponsors, and bleachers. This furniture, as its original function implies, is an indicator of audience role prominence and of the general programming of public sociability. Although the artwork is not really a gateway into the *Piknic*, its second function is to be a signal within the space of the park, marking the gathering point: you hear the beat as you leave the metro, and the Calder sculpture emerges from the treetops as you walk toward the site. Its third function is an acoustic one: the sculpture absorbs and retains sounds, creating reverberation (Lamarche 2003). Its fourth function is to act as a spatial organizer, because all of the other subsections of the site are connected to it, as we will now see.

There are two pathways branching off from the main site. The one on the east side leads to a quieter seating area (chairs are installed for participants) that ends with an exit into the rest of the Parc Jean-Drapeau. The one on the west side leads to the second stage, which features different programming, to broaden the musical range offered on site. This pathway works as a commercial street: there are food trucks, a snack bar, a wine bar, sanitary installations, and promotional booths for the event's sponsors. The middle of the "street" has a high volume of pedestrian traffic – people going from one stage to the other – and the shops and services are on the sides; it is a form of cooperative motility that generates efficient movement through the site rather than opportunities for people to meet. At the second stage, the ambience is usually more relaxed, and there is ample seating available in the form of bleachers and chairs. This is where my co-observers and I undertook what I call the blanket test. In the



early years of the Piknic, we used to bring blankets to sit or lie on; once a common practice, this now seems obsolete. Given the movable furniture installed in this area, unfolding the blanket required some thinking and manoeuvring around other individuals already in the space. Using the blanket revealed a certain lack of flexibility, which can be attributed to what Karen Franck and Quentin Stevens (2007) call “tightness” of the space. In their conceptualization, space becomes loose through people’s gestures of appropriation, opportunities for which vary depending on the type of space. It can be argued that the space at the Piknic is, to borrow the authors’ vocabulary, only *apparently* loose – a concept they define by referring to the shopping mall experience: “Many loose occasions and places can be seen as merely licensed ‘safety valves,’ harmless ways to release tension which are carefully regulated in time, space and intensity. But controlled and pre-programmed ‘looseness’ is not loose; people can only appropriate space for their own uses if they have full access and freedom of choice” (2007, 24–5).

Indeed, the event’s “immersive social experience” presents its own version of public sociability. In relation to civility toward diversity, the cost of admission clearly affects the composition of the crowd; compared to the tam-tam, the participants are more socioeconomically homogeneous, with no homeless people or individuals collecting refundable cans and bottles to be found. In other words, the Piknic brings together, and consequently puts into contact, people from particular social strata who appear to appreciate this context. All aspects of the social experience are organized to some extent. For instance, alcoholic beverages not bought on site stopped being allowed in 2012, following some unfortunate incidents of excessive drinking; the restriction reduces the likelihood that such incidents happen again, thereby helping to guarantee a friendly, hedonistic atmosphere (Agence QMI 2012; Doyon 2012; Renaud 2010). In terms of “original” (non-dance-related) activities, we observed hula-hoop and hacky-sack only in the early hours of the Piknic, when there were not many people on site. In fact, the organizers orchestrate happenings to create new social contexts, such as special offers for men with long beards and a special international students’ day. In general, a large proportion of participants seem to be conscious of their appearance, playing directly with civil inattention: well-coiffed hair, fashion accessories including the almost-mandatory sunglasses, little clothing (fit women in bikini tops, shirtless

men with good physiques). Flirting is also part of this: we witnessed people exchanging phone numbers. With an apparently loose space and what tends to be a relatively programmed form of public sociability, the Piknic Électronik attracts a clientele, and therefore publics, with a clear taste for this type of overall creative environment. Perhaps a study of other factors, based on interviews with participants, would show less homogeneity in nonobservable factors such as occupation, place of residence, and values.

Setting aside considerations of public sociability for a moment, in order to expand the way we think about these cultural practices we could interpret them as scenes. Alan Blum (2003) has analyzed this complex notion not as community or social circle but as an imaginary structure that is part of the social life inherent to a city. He shows that scenes put collective life into play and lays out what he calls their grammar, which includes, for instance, the notion of theatricality. Described as seeing and being seen and characterized by the reciprocity implied in the voyeur/exhibitionist logic, it applies to both the tam-tam and the Piknic Électronik. Intimacy is also crucial in scenes: “The scene makes sharing enjoyable as if it is a private experience, and it makes the very private orientation to quality and discrimination something to be shared” (Blum 2003, 179). The notion of “being private in public” is embodied in both events by the fact that groups of friends socialize in a sea of strangers with whom they entertain interactions of a weaker order. Finally, as scenes are informed by cities just as much as they inform them, Blum adds to his conception that it “connects the space to time through the idea of making it an occasion. This occasioning of the space is part of what we mean by its emplacement, its making space into a place” (Blum 2003, 187). In this context, the *Monument to Cartier* and *Man, Three Disks* link their scenes to the city: they define the place where these occasions occur. That said, to go further into our study of the interactions that participants in both events have with the artworks, we have to take a closer look at notions of public sociability.

#### ARTWORKS AS STRANGERS: PRAGMATIC AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To what extent can participants in the tam-tam and the Piknic Électronik be considered publics of the monumental artworks around which the events take place? Although the functions described for the artworks are



valid at the scale of the crowd, they cannot explain how individuals might appreciate them. Generally, although the events cannot be dissociated from the artworks, it seems safe to say that the objects will not be conceptualized in the same way and to the same degree by everyone there. It is actually possible to not look at, and even more possible to not give any thought to, the *Monument to Sir George-Étienne Cartier* or *Man, Three Disks* during the tam-tam or the *Piknic Électronik*; as casual conversations with various individuals revealed, some people do not even notice that they are there. Moreover, there is a disparity between the relatively generic functions that I have identified, which could be valid for many monumental artworks in various contexts, and the singular experience of public sociability specific to the tam-tam and the *Piknic Électronik*. To counter this discrepancy, I propose to explore a similarity: if people take part in these events because they enjoy each other's presence without generally engaging with them, can the same then be said of their relationship with the artworks? If civil inattention is the main relationship observed during these Sunday gatherings, is it possible to use the same principle to describe participants' main relationship with both artworks?

The inclusion of objects in social interactions can be justified by referring to pragmatic sociology: indeed, this approach, which includes Bruno Latour's (2005) actor-network theory (known as ANT), has reintroduced objects into the study of social relations. Rather than taking social relations for granted and presuming society to be a complete and definite whole, ANT is based on reconstructing associations among actors by following them through their various situations. More importantly, ANT considers objects to be actors when they influence those associations, and even when they do not they are still conceived as "actants" with the potential to influence associations. Thus, objects are seen not as passive but as active parts of relationships. Antoine Hennion's (1993) sociology of mediation, and specifically his work on music lovers, is a translation of this approach into the study of arts publics. In Hennion's pragmatic definition, publics are understood in interrelation with the art object: they can be discerned by looking at what people do with art objects, as well as what artworks make people do (Hennion 2005). That said, Latour is critical of face-to-face interactions and sociability because in his view they are ends in themselves; they do not redeploy the action. Because his sociological project consists of identifying how collectives are assembled and transformed, he is not interested

in weak and ephemeral interactions such as public sociability, which do not allow for the study of redistribution of the social. In spite of this, the Latour-inspired idea of publics interacting with artworks in public spaces is pertinent to my argument because it spatializes these interactions into specific situations, demonstrating that all content actually matters. In this context, using the vocabulary of public sociability shows that artworks are part of our experience of public spaces, just as strangers are.

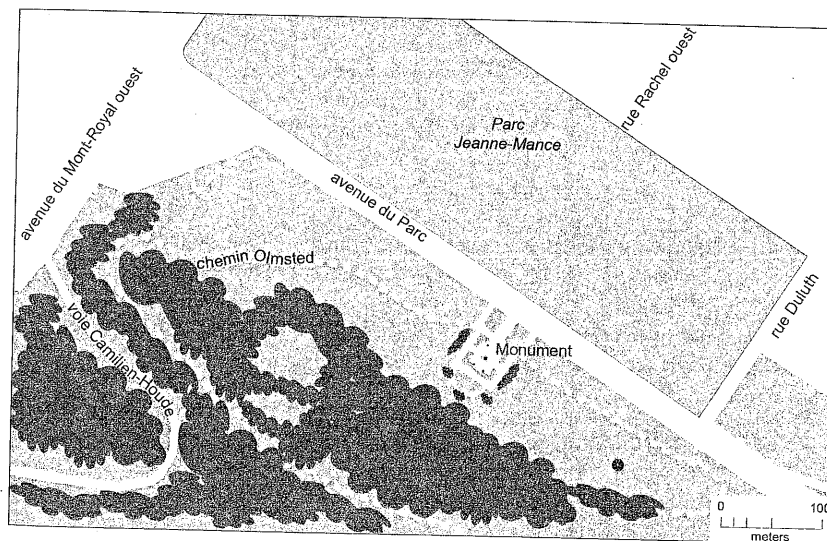
In this light, Lofland's principles have to be slightly adjusted, or at least further explained, in order to be applied to artworks as strangers. First, cooperative motility is seen as how our trajectories can be influenced by art objects or can put us in contact with them. Second, civil inattention is identified when people passing by an artwork cast an impartial glance at it, giving it enough attention to show that they recognize its presence. Third, audience role prominence is when individuals in public spaces look at others who are engaged with an artwork; this can have the effect of enlarging the audience through a domino effect, when individuals consciously or subconsciously reproduce someone else's actions. Fourth is restrained helpfulness, which cannot be applied literally, since artworks do not talk: instead, we could reconceive this principle as art objects acting as a prop or support for actions or gestures for which they were not necessarily intended. Taking pictures would be a variety of this principle (when in relation with the fifth principle), because artworks indicate the space that the photographer was in or serve as a stage on which the person photographed acted. Using the artwork as a meeting point, in the sense that it helps people locate each other, would also fit this definition. The fifth principle, civility toward diversity, can here be renamed recognition of the artwork's singularity. Artworks are conceived and installed to be looked at: this is a contradiction of the original principle, which is based on the notion of *not* acting on or reacting to someone else's difference. Below, I will use this heuristic set of principles to better understand the concept of publics.

Filmed observations of the artworks that we conducted during the week provided material for testing the hypothesis that artworks are strangers, and for close analysis of how Lofland's five principles relate to monumental artworks. Inspired by sociologist and urban planner William H. Whyte's 1988 documentary film *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, for the past few years I have been using filming in my research to document how people act and interact with artworks in public spaces. This has proven

to be an effective data-collection method because careful consideration of the seemingly trivial actions performed by the public requires detailed descriptions, which in turn rely on accurate recordings. Because I can pan and zoom in on the video footage after it is shot, and because they show the general dynamics of the site, the footage obtained is well suited to the present line of inquiry. Six and five forty-five-minute observation periods were conducted, respectively, at the Cartier monument and the Calder stabile at different times of day and week, between 2011 and 2014. Field notes taken by the on-site observer-camerawoman had several uses: they were a point of comparison to validate my own observations, they could point out an action in the background that I had not noticed in the first place, and they could supply additional information about an action that started beyond the camera's field. The number of observation periods was determined according to a principle of saturation: filming at a site stopped when analysis of the footage yielded no new information. For each artwork, we found spots for the camera distant enough from the artwork that it would not interfere directly with everyday activities. The camera angle also needed to be wide enough to see how actions evolved within each site, and both camera and observer were visible on site. The observations of everyday life (as distinct from special events) that were recorded during this phase of fieldwork can also be interpreted according to interaction patterns, as I explain in the following two sections.

**A FLEXIBLE, POPULAR PLAZA:  
THE MONUMENT TO SIR GEORGE-ÉTIENNE CARTIER**

It is useful to set our observations of the *Monument to Sir George-Étienne Cartier* in context by looking at how it is connected to the city (figure 1.3). It faces Avenue du Parc, a busy north-south thoroughfare that defines the park's eastern border and can, therefore, be seen by people in vehicles and on public transit. Although the artwork is highly visible in this context, because it is in the middle of a cleared space (the only trees around the monument are there to show it off), these individuals have a relationship of civil inattention with it. Our observations focused on dynamics of a different scale and were centred on the monument and its direct perimeter, for which the interface with the street is still very important: most users



1.3 Map showing the context of the *Monument to Sir George-Étienne Cartier*.  
Credit: Nathalie Vachon, Institut national de la recherche scientifique, 2015.

enter the park from Avenue du Parc; Rue Rachel, on an east-west axis, also provides access to the monument via Parc Jeanne-Mance from the local area. Therefore, this section of the park is well connected to the adjacent residential neighbourhoods and is a very popular location for everyday leisure and physical activities – biking, jogging, dog walking, and strolling (with or without companions or baby strollers) – bring users to the park via these streets and put them into contact with the monument.

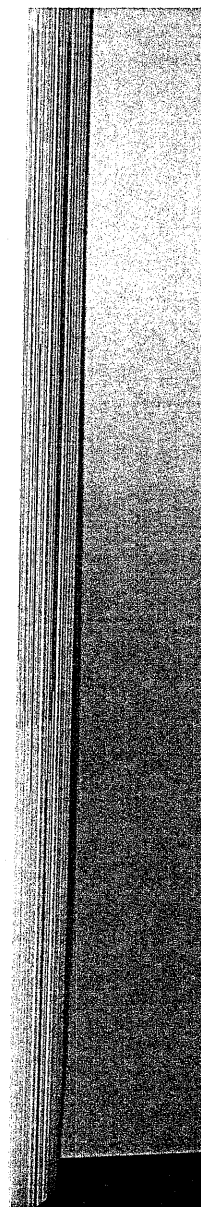
Cyclists' and joggers' trajectories around or on the monument's terrace highlight a conscious choice based on cooperative motility. The great majority of these people choose to go around the terrace to avoid climbing the steps or disturbing the crowds that gather there; by doing so, they themselves frame and thus emphasize it. In contrast, a few joggers choose to challenge themselves by running up the steps, and occasionally bikers riding down the hill also make use of them. As we will see, actions such as the latter, which were not intended when the monument was created, "loosen" it as a space, to borrow Franck and Stevens's (2007) term. Many pedestrians entering and leaving the park choose to walk along the terrace of the monument, showing by their east-west trajectories that the artwork does actually act as a gateway to the green space. In addition to cooperative motility, in the sense that the artwork supports their actions and that they move around its components, civil inattention is the main relationship that they develop with its various sculptures: they will, at most, take a quick look at them. That said, some people walking near the monument may slow down or walk around the pedestal to look at its components: this illustrates recognition of the artwork's singularity, which occurs less frequently. Looking at the artwork only from a distance is another option and a form of civil inattention made possible by the scale of the artwork, as exemplified by pedestrians walking on Avenue du Parc.

Some users stay in the space around the monument, such as joggers who stop there to stretch. The bases of the lions and the steps descending toward Avenue du Parc are handy because they allow for a variety of uses. An individual can put one foot on the base of the monument to stretch a leg, and someone who wants a deeper stretch can use the steps. The steps occasionally replace the apparatus found in gyms: one man was seen doing push-ups with his feet and hands on different levels. Cyclists offer a similar example. We observed a couple who stopped at the monument to wait for a friend (who arrived eight minutes later). While the woman

sat on a bench, the man practised bike tricks on the steps and the terrace, hopping from one step to another and then moving to another section of the monument in the middle of his practice session. Although his use of the steps produced a loosening through both restrained helpfulness (the monument is the prop for this exercise) and recognition of the work's singularity (no other element in the area could support this activity), the fact that it was a meeting point also refers to both principles. The monument plays its role as a landmark, defined as a distinctive object in this large park (recognition of its singularity); it is also the obvious answer to the question "Where should we meet?" which enables friends to find each other in the park (restrained helpfulness).

In fact, the monument proved to be a highly popular meeting point. Its various components allow different possibilities for performing activities while waiting for the other person – it seems to be the rule that one of the parties is always early or late. One may linger on the terrace or sit on a step: in fact, the steps facing the street, and especially those around the base of the sculpture, are useful because they are elevated and offer a better view of who is coming. More generally, the steps are a very popular place to sit and take a break while in the park.

Another very common activity is taking photographs of the monument. This activity is often a prelude to a longer stay in the vicinity of the artwork: for instance, it may lead to a more careful examination (by walking around its base to look at more than one of its sides) or to sitting down. Taking photographs brings into play both restrained helpfulness (the artwork is the "where") and appreciation of the monument's singularity. More than one individual may take pictures at a time because of the monument's grand scale and multiple components. Indeed, people may take photographs from a distance, in order to get the entire composition into frame (or because the photographer simply does not perceive the monument to be singular enough for a closer look). Taking a picture of someone on the steps shows that the person shared a moment with the monument as a whole; the human figure helps show the large size of the artwork. On a smaller scale, the lions are great props for humorous snapshots: for instance, some adults sat on a lion and raised an arm in the gesture of riding a bucking bull. Thus, the singularity of the artwork is brought into play by these individuals' creativity. In fact, all kinds of publics appreciate the lions, from children who like to climb on them (under

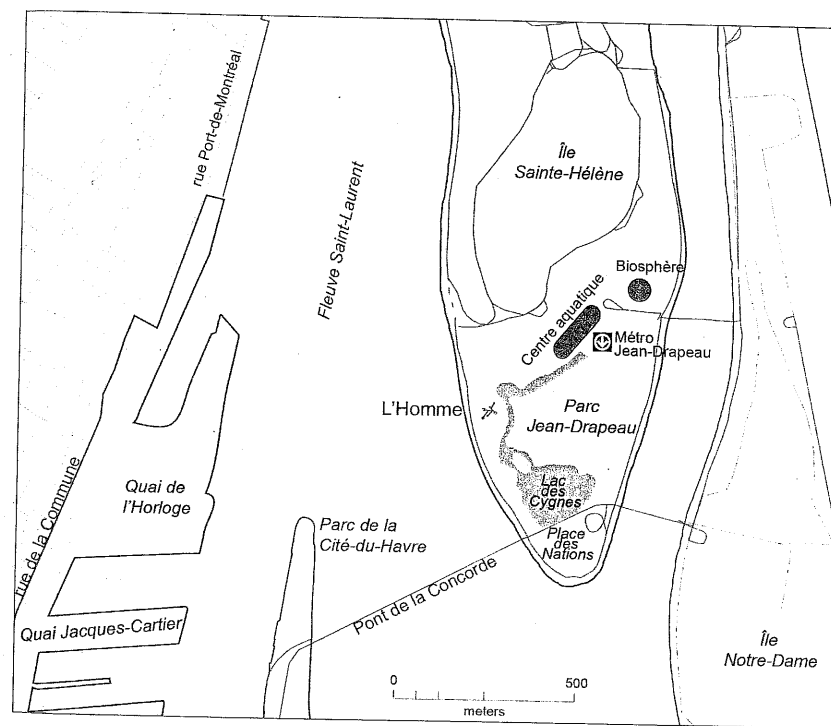


the eye of a more or less enthusiastic parent) to pedestrians who touch them in passing. They also encourage original gestures of appropriation: one man was observed lying on the back of a lion to sunbathe for 20 minutes while waiting for a companion (illustrating both restrained helpfulness and recognition of singularity).

Finally, although individuals usually keep their distance from one another on the terrace, the monument has also proven, on rare occasions, to facilitate public sociability. A couple walking around the monument to look at it carefully was imitated by another one, illustrating audience role prominence engendering a domino effect. The two couples (who did not know each other before) then exchanged cameras to photograph each other with the monument, showing restrained helpfulness between themselves, as well as with the artwork. Overall, the interactions with the monument show that it acts as a popular, flexible plaza within the space of this large urban park, which also benefits from its connections to nearby neighbourhoods. By contrast, the publics we observed for the Calder sculpture in Parc Jean-Drapeau are dependent on the nature of the park and the specificity of its management.

#### COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE: MAN, THREE DISKS

Île Sainte-Hélène and Île Notre-Dame form Parc Jean-Drapeau, a public space managed by a paramunicipal organization, the Société du parc Jean-Drapeau. The organization's mission statement says, "Parc Jean-Drapeau stages many recreation-tourist attractions that make it a unique site in Canada ... This outstanding park, which was created at the time of the world's fair, Expo 67, attracts sports enthusiasts, young families, culture aficionados, nature lovers and visitors who attend its international events. Its areas of attraction are enlivened by concerts, sports events and major festivals that contribute to its diversity" (Société du parc Jean-Drapeau 2015). Arguably underused for decades, Parc Jean-Drapeau has been the focus of rehabilitation efforts since about 2000. For instance, in 2005, the Ville de Montréal decided to relocate the ethnocultural festivals that used to happen in urban neighbourhoods to the Parc (Germain et al. 2008). Probably because they and their infrastructure are temporary, the various special events (concerts, festivals) seem to have no discernible impact on everyday



1.4 Map showing the context of *Man, Three Disks*.

Credit: Nathalie Vachon, Institut national de la recherche scientifique, 2015.

use of the park, except in that they restrict access to certain areas, including the site of the Calder stabile, for the duration of the event. They may, however, have helped promote the park as a destination to Montrealers and visitors.

On an everyday basis, park users who might eventually entertain a relationship with Calder's stabile come to the islands to enjoy what they have to offer: recreation (at the casino, amusement park, or sports infrastructures, including a beach and a swimming pool), cultural activities (there are two museums and various heritage sites), and special events (car races, concerts, and festivals). This explains the relative homogeneity of users (compared to users observed at Parc du Mont-Royal) and their patterns of attendance: there are fewer users in the belvedere containing the Calder sculpture in the mornings because the park's other institutions and facilities are not yet open. Individuals come to the Calder stabile while they are jogging, walking, or biking through this remote park (another transportation mode that we observed once was the Segway, used during organized tours of the park) (figure 1.4). Users generally come to the belvedere where the stabile is located because it is a major point of interest. They tend to stay for at least two minutes, appreciating the magnificent panorama to the north of the river and the downtown core with the mountain as a backdrop. Some people picnic in this spot and take pictures of the cityscape, others just sit on the north-facing benches for a while. In fact, when people enter this space, they tend to look at the breathtaking view first, before turning around and looking at the monumental sculpture. In summer, users cannot look up at the sculpture as they enter the space at midday because the sun is usually blinding: it is the view of the city, at eye level, that attracts them first. So although users generally express civil inattention to the artwork when they enter the site, some discover the singularity of the object when they turn to look at another section of the park: they may express their appreciation by taking pictures of the artwork or having someone take a picture of them with it – adding restrained helpfulness.

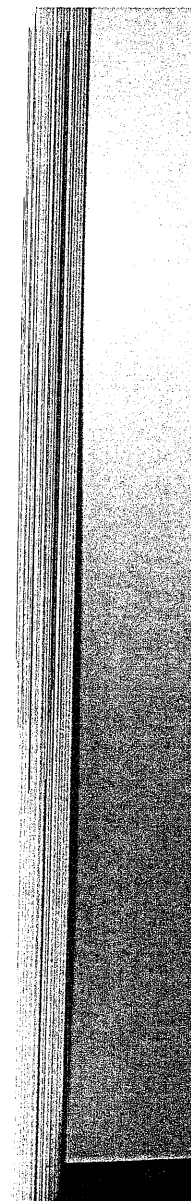
Like the *Monument to Sir George-Étienne Cartier*, *Man, Three Disks* has a direct impact on individuals' trajectories. Touching the ground at six points, so people can go under it, the artwork organizes the entire space of its plaza as well as the circulation around or through it: everybody who enters this space has a mandatory cooperative motility relationship with it.

The plaza is an enclosure surrounded by a low wall and dense vegetation, and people have to enter it via pathways that act as funnels; thus, users practically become captive audiences of the sculpture. On the one hand, some people, especially cyclists, choose to go around it without looking at it, which serves to highlight its presence and illustrates civil inattention. On the other hand, many choose to walk in a straight line and pass under it: their presence is thus framed by the artwork. Even if they do not look at it, or barely give it a glance, people seem to appreciate the sculpture's presence because many walk or bike very close to it, reinforcing the impression that they give it civil inattention while experiencing cooperative motility. Park employees driving pick-up trucks to collect garbage or mechanical brooms to clean the surface of the plaza also have to deal with the fact that the artwork organizes the space: as we observed, they have to drive their vehicles very carefully and cooperatively around the sculpture.

People often engage with the stabile from a distance: because of its large scale and great height, this is the only way to take in the whole sculpture (there is no detail to examine at ground level). This explains why some people stop to look at the sculpture or take a picture of it (recognizing its singularity) but do not enter the site. In contrast, a commemorative plaque installed on the ground, right in the centre of the space, attracts many individuals' attention. In fact, this plaque, the only element at human scale within the plaza around the artwork, sometimes creates a domino effect: audience role prominence is involved when people, seeing others reading the inscription, approach it themselves and follow suit. In general, even though it is common not to establish direct contact with *Man, Three Disks*, its scale and its placement in the space make it impossible not to interact with the sculpture and thus not to become a public for it.

#### ENJOYING THE PRESENCE OF STRANGERS: NOTES ON MONTREAL'S CULTURES OF PUBLIC SPACES

The analysis of encounters with these two monumental artworks, both during events that draw large crowds to them and during regular day-to-day use leads us to two kinds of conclusions. First, it is productive to think about banal, everyday gestures with and around art objects in terms of interactions with them, combining the vocabulary of public sociability



with the idea of artworks as strangers. The most common interaction that users have with the art objects are somehow at the same level as the associations that they have with strangers in public spaces. In this context, the five principles that I have used show that users are publics for the artworks to greater or lesser degrees: the works influence their behaviour in different ways, which generates different interactions with them. Indeed, as we have seen, an artwork's materiality (including its components and its relationship with its site) clearly impacts how publics interact with it and is an active component of its public space. We can conceive of these interactions as being along a spectrum. At the low end is the common action of passing near an artwork without looking at it. In this weak kind of relationship with the artwork, considered as civil inattention, very little association is created between the artwork and the user. As we move up the spectrum, the principles tend to be combined; at the top end are original but relatively rare gestures of appropriation, such as the singular case of the man who used one of the lions in the Cartier monument as a chair for sunbathing. Although observations cannot replace interviews in determining how users perceive and think about the artworks that they encounter, observation and analysis of the social life of artworks in my research indicate that users can indeed be considered publics when their behaviours justify it. This is precisely why pragmatic sociology, which seems not to have been applied before to the question of publics for artworks in public spaces, can be of help: publics should be considered as such according to their interactions with art objects and not only with regard to their knowledge or perception of them. While the concept of public sociability may not be strictly speaking compatible with aspects of ANT, it does not mean that this type of interaction should be dismissed. On the contrary, as I have illustrated throughout my descriptions, these interactions are meaningful, as they define the publics' specific experiences of public spaces and also redefine the meaning of the artworks involved.

Second, reflecting on Montreal's cultures of public spaces, it should be noted that the observations of social dynamics both during the events and the rest of the week correspond to the functions and management of the respective parks. On the one hand, the Parc du Mont-Royal has proven to be very flexible and open, both spatially and socially – a truly “loose” space. Just as the tam-tam eloquently demonstrates a persistent

activity that arose organically from a gathering, the range of publics for the *Monument to Sir George-Étienne Cartier* is characterized by diversity and original activities. On the other hand, Parc Jean-Drapeau is managed as a destination and a venue for popular events. The Piknic Électronik, as a programmed “immersive social experience” that is loose only at first glance, reflects this type of management, as do the users who frequent the park in general: they are relatively homogeneous both socially and in their interactions with *Man, Three Disks*.

The events themselves also speak to two very different definitions of collective cultural practices as they are experienced in public spaces. The tam-tam is a free celebration of being-togetherness in public spaces; the Piknic Électronik is an example of the increasing commercialization of public spaces and public sociability – in essence, their privatization – which, in turn, reduces the experience of diversity. If both tendencies coexist, it is because each has an appreciative public: in fact, quite a few people enjoy both events, so there is some overlap in their different “crowds.” The tam-tam and the Piknic Électronik have contributed to shaping Montreal's reputation as a culturally exciting city, and they offer two of the many opportunities that Montrealers and their guests have to celebrate the city's eagerly awaited, too-short summer: they are local scenes, as they are moments or events in the social life of Montreal that take place in specific places defined by singular artworks. In this context, it seems important to consider the diversity of publics that these coexisting events create. Similarly, we should appreciate finding a diversity of artworks, representing the history and plurality of artistic expression, in public spaces.

#### Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Nicolas Cournoyer, general director of the Piknic Électronik, who granted me an interview for this research project. I am grateful to my research assistant, Cecilia de la Mora, for undertaking the fieldwork for this study, and to photographers Denise Caron and Thibaut Larquey, who accompanied me during follow-up observation sessions during the week and at the events, respectively. Käthe Roth's precise and intelligent eye on my written English is, as always, extremely valued. Special thoughts to my friends who, at some time in

the last decade, have shared my passion for music and people watching at the tam-tam and the Piknic Électronik – they know who they are.

- 2 Many urban scholars throughout the twentieth century have discussed notions of anonymity and strangers' interactions as fundamental conditions for the civilizing functions of the city; see, for instance, Simmel ([1903]1950), Jacobs (1961), and Sennett (1974).
- 3 The form of the city is described using vocabulary reminiscent of Kevin Lynch's (1960) functionalist vocabulary of urban planning, which, even though it is static, serves the purpose of anchoring social interactions in an urban setting.

Susanne Shawyer

2

## URBAN PRANKS AS ACTIVIST PERFORMANCE

One sunny summer day in 2008, about 400 people converged on a grassy hill at Toronto's Riverdale Park East. They wore brightly coloured T-shirts and earphones or headphones attached to MP3 players. At some unseen signal, the crowd separated in two, with red and yellow shirts on one side of the lawn and blue and green shirts on the other. Each person inflated a balloon. Most of the balloons were the simple latex kind popular with children, although tubular rubber balloons, some twisted into the shapes of swords by dextrous participants, dotted the crowd. The two sides charged, flailing and striking with their makeshift weapons of sword and sphere. This good-natured mock battle raged for a few minutes, and then the participants began to mime dramatic deaths. Limbs jerked and shuddered. Faces contorted. One by one, people fell to the ground. Soon there was only a sprawling mass of frozen bodies scattered across the field: silent, except for the occasional giggle.

This event was one of many annual *MP3 Experiments*, participatory mass performances in public parks organized by Improv Everywhere, a New York-based comedy group who call themselves a prank collective and who organize surprise performances in urban environments for audiences of passersby. Improv Everywhere exploits the public spaces of parks, streets, subway cars, and train stations as well as the open spaces of retail food courts and shopping malls to create unexpected comedic

