

**Convivial Repertoires: Everyday Coexistence and the Management of Space in  
Notre-Dame-De-Grâce**

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A Thesis

In the Department of  
Sociology and Anthropology

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy Social and Cultural Analysis at  
Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2026

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## **Convivial repertoires: Everyday coexistence and the management of space in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce**

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Concordia University, 2026

Everyday urban life is held together by countless small moments of shared presence. People move through streets, parks, shops, and transit spaces alongside others they barely know, adjusting their conduct just enough for encounters to remain workable. Much of this coordination passes unnoticed. This dissertation begins from that ordinary achievement. It asks how people living in, or regularly moving through, the Montréal district of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) coexist amid difference, and what practical repertoires help sustain everyday co-presence under uneven conditions.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in NDG, the dissertation follows routine situations in which residents encounter one another on sidewalks and at bus stops, in cafés and dépanneurs, in parks, gardens, and running groups, and at local events. It attends to the micro-settings in which people come into view of one another and to the small adjustments by which ordinary shared life is managed. Rather than treating diversity as a stable background condition, the analysis examines how difference becomes salient in particular situations, how it is handled through ordinary interaction, and how it can also recede as other practical concerns take precedence. These encounters are shaped by uneven conditions of participation, including time pressure, fatigue, mobility, and material insecurity.

The dissertation argues that coexistence is best understood not as a settled ethos or normative ideal alone, but as the ongoing practical maintenance of ordinary co-presence. People can live side by side without strong attachment, shared identity, or explicit agreement, but this requires work, usually in the form of small acts of acknowledgment, restraint, accommodation, avoidance, cooperation, and repair. I describe these patterned but flexible competencies as convivial repertoires. They emerge through repetition, shift across settings, and are exercised within the limits of particular circumstances. They are also materially situated, since the built environment and the organization of local settings shape what forms of attention, coordination, withholding, and involvement become possible.

By foregrounding ordinary encounters as a primary site of the practical work through which shared life is sustained, the dissertation contributes to debates on urban sociality, civility, and coexistence by working at the scale of practice rather than policy or explicit discourse about diversity. More broadly, it shows that shared urban life is sustained not only through interaction in particular encounters, but through repeated and uneven forms of participation that help make local life workable over time.

## Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Vered Amit for seeing the shape of this project even when I could not yet fully name it. Her guidance shaped this dissertation in ways that are difficult to separate from the argument itself. She encouraged me to stay with the complexity of ordinary life, especially in those places where it resisted clear categories or settled conclusions. Her questions brought me back to the small and unfinished ways people live alongside one another.

Through our conversations, I came to understand more fully that people's lives are always in motion. Attachments change. Routes shift. What a place means to someone can alter over time, sometimes slowly and sometimes through the pressures of work or family, and sometimes through loss, uncertainty, or the need to begin again somewhere else. Vered helped me see that this did not weaken the argument. It was part of what made the fragile work of sharing space central to the project. Again and again, she pushed me to notice that living together is not only found in strong bonds or in clear declarations of attachment. It also happens in quieter ways, through the small adjustments people make as they pass through a place or return to it. There is something deeply human in this: we keep finding ways to share space while our lives continue to change.

This has been one of the deeper lessons of the research for me. Coexistence does not depend on permanence, and home is not always a fixed destination. It can be something more temporary than that. It can also be something people hold onto while they are moving through a difficult or uncertain part of their lives. Vered helped me recognize the significance of this insight and gave me the patience to think with it, rather than rush past it.

I also want to thank Eric Alexander, my partner in this world, who has stood beside me through this long process with patience, generosity, and care. He helped me immeasurably, not only by editing pages and helping me work through difficult passages, but by giving me a creative place to think out loud. So many of the ideas in this dissertation were formed in conversation with him, in the middle of ordinary life, while walking, noticing, remembering, or trying to find words for something I had seen but did not yet understand.

Eric helped me look again at the local spaces around us. The streets we walk every day can become almost invisible. The more familiar a path becomes, the easier it is to stop noticing what it carries. He brought me back to the ordinary scenes I had learned to pass over without quite realizing it. In that sense, he brought me closer to something central to ethnographic attention: that there is a small magic in ordinary scenes when we are willing to stay with them.

A street block is never only a street block. Alexandra Horowitz writes in *On Looking: A Walker's Guide to the Art of Observation* that "the block is full of things we miss seeing, smelling, or hearing," and that it holds stories even in what we do notice. On life's pathways, the happenstance and routine can carry us toward realizations we did not expect. That is part of what this project has tried to hold onto: the little-questioned dimensions of local life, and the way ordinary social life leaves room for the unpredictable aspects of encounter.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### *Pathways, Conviviality, and Everyday Life in Notre-Dame-De-Grâce (NDG)*

Everyday urban life is held together by countless small moments of shared presence. People move through streets, parks, shops, and transit spaces alongside others they barely know or do not know at all, adjusting their conduct just enough for these encounters to remain workable. Most of the time, this coordination passes unnoticed. Yet it is precisely this ordinary achievement that allows diverse urban environments to function. When I began this project, I wanted to understand how people living in a particular locality come to inhabit their urban environments in this way. I became interested in how people learn to find their way through places they encounter again and again, how familiarity accumulates through repeated movement and recognition, and how shared spaces come to matter through everyday practice rather than through formal planning or intention. Against this backdrop, this dissertation asks: **How do people living in or regularly spending time in the Montreal district of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) coexist amid diversity, and through what kinds of practical and moral repertoires is this everyday co-presence sustained?**

I address these questions through ethnographic fieldwork in NDG, attending to the everyday situations in which residents encounter one another across streets, bus stops, cafés, dépanneurs, parks, and other routine settings. Rather than treating diversity as something that simply exists in the background (Berg 2020; Berg and Sigona 2013), I examine how it is made relevant in practice. As Bethan Harries, Bridget Byrne, James Rhodes, and Stephanie Wallace (2019) suggest, places do not yield a single settled account of diversity. They come into view through different and sometimes conflicting stories, which can make some forms of difference more visible than others while leaving other aspects of social life less remarked upon. This is



useful for my study because NDG is not approached here as a locality whose diversity can be fully described in advance. It is approached instead as a place that takes shape through different biographies, pathways, and situated relations. The account that follows therefore traces how the relevance of difference shifts across everyday settings, and how these shifts are managed in practice through the forms of sociability, neighbouring, traffic relationships, and commercial interactions through which coexistence is experienced and held together by small forms of coordination.

This introductory chapter sets out the scope, orientation, and analytic commitments of the study. It also situates the research in relation to the conditions under which the initial fieldwork was conducted, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter clarifies how NDG functions as a field for examining everyday coexistence. It outlines the central research questions and explains how the chapters that follow are organized. In Montréal, and in NDG specifically, everyday coexistence unfolds within a highly heterogeneous social landscape. This heterogeneity reflects overlapping histories, patterns of mobility, uneven forms of settlement, and different ways of living alongside others. Yet diversity in this urban environment does not usually appear as a set of fixed or easily bounded categories. Instead, residents navigate intersecting differences of language, class, migration history, legal status, age, and bodily capacity as they move through shared spaces in the course of daily life. These differences are encountered in particular moments and settings, usually without being named. In turn, what shared spaces come to mean and how much they matter varies with the situations in which people move through and make use of these settings.

Steven Vertovec's concept of 'superdiversity' (2007, 2021) offers a useful point of reference for describing this complexity, insofar as it draws attention to the multiple and shifting

variables that shape contemporary urban populations. The value of the concept lies in how it directs attention to the ways in which a wide range of possible differences are lived, encountered, and made more or less meaningful. My concern is not to describe diversity in NDG primarily as a demographic profile, that is, to specify who lives here or how they are distributed across categories. I focus instead on how this complexity is managed on the ground, through small interactions and also through the patterned non-interactions that organize everyday coexistence.

NDG provides the setting for this research not as a district to be explained in its entirety, but as a field of social relations through which broader questions about living together in the city can be examined. I introduce features of its geography, infrastructure, and demographic composition only insofar as they bear on the situations in which everyday encounters take place. Although the questions I take up here are not unique to NDG, the locality offers a useful urban setting in which to observe how people come to navigate proximity, difference, and constraint. Notre-Dame-de-Grâce forms part of the Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce borough within Montréal’s administrative structure (Ville de Montréal, n.d.). Because official sources do not always use identical spatial boundaries for “NDG,” the demographic and territorial sketch that follows draws on a combination of neighbourhood-, district-, and borough-level materials derived largely from the 2021 Canadian Census (Statistics Canada, 2022; Montréal en statistiques, 2025; Ville de Montréal, 2021). I offer this contextual material in order to situate the field rather than to explain it exhaustively.

NDG is a socially and materially varied district in western Montréal. Local community organizations describe the area as lying west of downtown and Mount Royal and identify the major physical features and arteries that structure movement through the district, including Sherbrooke Street, Monkland Avenue, Côte-Saint-Luc Road, Cavendish Boulevard, the Décarie

corridor, the Saint-Jacques escarpment, and the Loyola campus (NDG Community Council, n.d.). These features affect how people move through the area and how different parts of it become more or less connected in daily life. The district is also strongly residential in character. City planning documents describe the broader borough as 65 percent residential by built form, while the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce–Loyola planning sub-sector as a whole is more than 86 percent residential (Ville de Montréal, 2024). In that sub-sector, the built environment is not dominated by a single housing type. It includes a mix of single-unit homes, two- to four-unit buildings, and medium-density residential stock, with detached and semi-detached houses alongside duplexes, triplexes, rowhouses, and small apartment buildings (Ville de Montréal, 2024). Major physical barriers also affect movement through the district. The Décarie trench and the Saint-Jacques escarpment, in particular, shape how people cross the district, making some routes more direct than others and some crossings more limited (Ville de Montréal, 2024).

NDG is also closely tied to the rest of Montréal through transit and routine circulation. Its bus network and metro access connect it readily to the downtown core, while Concordia's Loyola campus, located in the city's west-end NDG campus zone, contributes to the area's student presence and to the mix of uses that organize movement. Together, these conditions draw residential and institutional life into close relation with commercial corridors and the steady passage of people through the area. These forms of connection also make NDG a useful setting for this research, because they draw together people with different routines and purposes, including residents, students, workers, parents, and seniors using schools, parks, libraries, shops, and other everyday facilities. Community profiles describe NDG as home to more than 70,000 people, while official 2021 census figures place the broader Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce borough at 170,583 residents. At the same time, available housing and household figures

come from a different spatial unit, namely the Montréal en statistiques profile for the electoral district of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. That profile reports 31,755 residents, 14,755 households, 39.8 percent one-person households, an average household size of 2.1, an average age of 41, and a tenure split of 58.2 percent rented and 41.6 percent owned (Montréal en statistiques, 2025). I use these figures cautiously because they are helpful less as a definitive portrait than as a way of situating housing conditions, household arrangements, and the everyday circumstances within which coexistence unfolds.

Linguistic and migratory heterogeneity also mark the district's present-day profile. Census-based data for the electoral district of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce indicate that 73.1 percent of residents could conduct a conversation in both French and English. The same profile reports that 27.8 percent of residents were immigrants and 7.3 percent were non-permanent residents, with both longer-settled and more recent arrivals represented in the district (Montréal en statistiques, 2025). In this sense, NDG includes long-established anglophone and francophone populations alongside more recent immigrant and refugee populations. But diversity here is not only a matter of aggregate categories. It is lived through different histories of settlement, through language practices, and through the routines and household arrangements of everyday life. It is also important not to flatten NDG into a single social profile. A recent neighbourhood portrait prepared by Centraide shows that socioeconomic and linguistic conditions vary within the district itself. It reports a neighbourhood low-income rate of 13 percent, slightly above the Montréal average, with poverty more concentrated in sectors such as Saint-Raymond–West Haven and Walkley. The same portrait notes that recent arrivals and visible minority populations are also more concentrated in those sectors, and that knowledge of French varies internally across the district (Centraide of Greater Montreal, 2025). These differences matter because they

remind us that NDG is not socially uniform. Different pockets of the district are marked by distinct histories of migration and housing, by uneven access, and by different linguistic conditions, even while they remain tied together within the same broader locality.



**Figure 1. Map of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG). Source: NDG Community Council (2025)**

I offer this contextual sketch not to make the district itself the object of explanation, but to give a fuller sense of the material and social conditions within which the pathways, encounters, and relationships examined in this dissertation took shape. The chapters that follow therefore do not treat NDG as a self-contained social whole. They examine how people move through NDG, how they use it and return to it, and how they encounter one another across its ordinary settings. These broader conditions matter because they affect the situations in which

encounters occur and the practical demands under which they unfold. Within this context, interactions are shaped by ordinary contingencies, including time, work, fatigue, and temperament. People inhabit locality through shifting modes of presence, and those shifts matter for how everyday coexistence is carried out. Someone may be highly present in the morning school run, briefly present at a bus stop, and only thinly present on an evening commute. Over time, those patterns can settle into more stable forms as people move through their new routines, take on care roles, or become more embedded in particular routes and familiar places. These variations are not simply differences in personality or “sociability.” By sociability, I mean a person’s ordinary readiness to engage with others: the degree to which they are disposed to greet, make small talk, linger, or invite contact, as opposed to keeping to themselves. This helps show that even happenstance encounters can open onto incipient forms of sociability, especially at crossroads where people with different backgrounds and routines come into contact for different purposes. Even that readiness does not travel unchanged across the day, because it is structured by the situation people are in and by what they are trying to accomplish. The import here, then, is how attention is managed under ordinary conditions. People move through the day with limited time and energy, adjusting what they notice and how available they make themselves in relation to what a moment practically requires.

In some situations, it makes sense to remain open to interaction, especially when the pace is slow, the setting supports lingering, and recognition is unlikely to entail further claims. In other situations, people pull their attention inward, narrowing what they register not because they are indifferent, but because their attention is directed elsewhere. They may be concentrating on a task, trying to preserve a sense of privacy, avoiding unwanted demands, or simply trying to move through the situation efficiently. Seen this way, withdrawal is not the absence of social life. It is

often a situated practice: a way of managing exposure in public, of keeping some limit around oneself, and of moving through the day when other obligations are pressing. It can also help keep shared space workable, since not every moment can bear the weight of interaction. People sometimes maintain only a thin form of presence so they can pass alongside others without escalating into unwanted intimacy or friction. Locality, then, is not simply a bounded space that people occupy. It is a field of practical participation, unevenly determined by the kinds of attention and availability people can sustain at different times and in different everyday settings.

At times this involves attentiveness and convivial engagement; at other moments it takes the form of maintaining distance or simply moving alongside others without expectation of interaction. My fieldwork shows that even small and fleeting exchanges can be consequential. Their importance lies partly in how easily they pass unnoticed, even as they help keep everyday interaction workable in practical and moral terms without requiring explicit acknowledgment. Coexistence, as it appears in this research, emerges through modest acts of adjustment that allow everyday life to proceed. They do not require intimacy or a shared understanding so much as a practical sense of how to remain alongside others without making claims.

A key point follows from this. Coexistence does not require belonging. Emplacement does not require permanence. *Home*, as I use it here, is not always a settled identity. It can also be a lived orientation or a condition of passage. This distinction matters because NDG did not function for everyone as a strong site of attachment. For some residents, it was more a place to sleep than a site of attachment. For others, it was a temporary dwelling or a practical foothold within wider routes of work, study, care, migration, and family life. But this did not place them outside the social field of the district. A place where one sleeps is still a place one enters and leaves. It has to be reached, crossed, and negotiated at particular times of day. Even limited

residence requires people to use shared spaces, anticipate others, manage noise and proximity, and learn enough of the local setting to make ordinary routines possible.

Following Vered Amit (2012), I approach interactions and relationships in this district not as a search for a coherent or bounded “community,” but in terms of how people live together, however unevenly, under conditions that are shared in practice rather than formally chosen or agreed upon. This matters because “community” is often imagined as a source of safety and moral certainty in an insecure world (Bauman 2001). Amit (2012) cautions against assuming stable social units and instead urges us to keep “the range of associational forms open” (13). This orientation allows me to focus on how people coordinate with one another and become caught up in shared situations, including the affective tone of these encounters without assuming that they rest on agreement or a shared identity. It encourages an understanding of coexistence not as harmony, but as the real labour of managing expectations. It is the effort involved in remaining alongside others while managing difference and moral uncertainty. These encounters are often situational and fragile. Even when they do not develop into relationships, they still matter because they help sustain a workable sense of co-presence over time. They contribute to how people come to feel at home—or at least not entirely out of place—within an urban locality. From this perspective, NDG emerges as a site of social connectivity constituted through repetition rather than cohesion. In other words, its connectedness lies less in a shared identity than in the accumulated effects of return, as people come to know certain routes, recognize others, and learn over time how to move through the same spaces. Within this landscape of multiplicity, structured by subtle hierarchies, identities are not fixed but continually negotiated. Living together in an urban environment requires ongoing adjustment. Conviviality, as Sarah Neal, Katherine Bennett, Allan Cochrane, and Giles Mohan remind us, refers to “processes of



constant negotiation about the ways in which connective social interactions take place and emerge across and through the thrown together difference that is urban multiculture” (2018: 5). This framing positions conviviality not as a static moral ideal, but as a contingent process that unfolds through everyday practices of living alongside difference.

### ***‘Districting’: Everyday Interaction and Adaptation***

It was in thinking through these patterned forms of adjustment that I turned to AbdouMalik Simone’s (2019) reflections on urban districting. Simone’s conceptualization offered a way to articulate what I was observing in NDG: that cities are not only composed of buildings and infrastructure, but of the relations through which space is continually made and remade. What Simone calls “districting” refers to the practical alignments of bodies, routines, and temporal rhythms through which residents organize their movements and, in so doing, generate provisional forms of order. Districts, in this sense, are not bounded territories but relational fields that take shape wherever people’s activities overlap in time and place. Simone’s emphasis on making space provided a vocabulary for what I was witnessing in NDG, where repetition and modulation, rather than planning or deliberation, gave coherence to everyday life. Particularly compelling was his attention to the moral labour embedded in these practices, namely the continuous work through which people manage proximity and keep shared life moving. Districting, for Simone (2019), conceptualizes space not as a fixed neighbourhood but as an ongoing process of holding and release. As he writes, “improvised lives require a somewhere,” and districts are those “places capable of holding an intensive heterogeneity of lives and ways of doing things, but which also do not hold residents down to specific regimens of discipline or anticipation” (4). Instead, they “hold residents to each other just enough to enable an atmosphere of mutual witnessing, to hold residents to an ethic of letting others go their own way without that

way being seen as having dire implications for anyone else” (2019: 4). Districting, in this sense, is not the naming of a place but “the creation of a platform for operating in the world,” a terrain that exceeds administrative boundaries and enables residents to “spiral in and out, propel themselves into the larger urban surrounds and then bear back down again into the familiar places now rendered unfamiliar” (2019: 5). While Simone writes primarily from the urban peripheries of the Global South where districting describes infrastructural and economic improvisation amid precarity, I adapt the concept in a more modest and metaphorical way. In NDG, districting is less about material improvisation than about the continual recalibration of coexistence through moral and affective practice. The improvisation I trace is relational, unfolding through ordinary encounters as people move through shared space and adjust to one another *in situ*. What holds social life together in these settings are the ongoing, often unnoticed adjustments through which people manage being together in everyday situations.

Seen in this way, NDG is not a static locale, but a living environment continually contoured by interaction and adaptation. Following Simone (2019), I came to think of NDG as a kind of district: a space that “holds residents to each other just enough to enable an atmosphere of mutual witnessing” (4). Residents rarely experience NDG as a single, self-contained world. Instead, they move through pockets and paths, frequenting ‘micro-settings’ such as street blocks (Kusenbach 2003, 2008), cafés, restaurants, and familiar circuits that anchor daily routines. Some people pass through these routes regularly, while others’ movement in and out of the district is more episodic, tracing pathways that are organized by job obligations, social networks, or other commitments. These trajectories are overlapping and divergent and together they compose the social fabric of the district. Simone’s framework also helped me articulate a distinction I was observing between traffic relationships and commercial nodes. Traffic

relationships refer to fleeting yet recurrent encounters that occur on sidewalks, at bus stops, or along running paths or dog-walking routes, what Hannerz (1980) describes as the minimal social infrastructure that allows people to “get by” one another. These relations are narrowly routed and instrumental, unfolding through brief negotiations of space and pace as people move past one another in the course of daily life. Commercial nodes, by contrast, gather everyday encounters in steady, well-used places such as cafés, bakeries, restaurants, and *dépanneurs* where repetition can foster recognition and a degree of social familiarity. Because people may return to these places regularly, encounters can accumulate, allowing forms of recognition and ease to develop through repetition rather than deliberate social effort. In neighbouring relations, this labour of adjustment becomes more exposed, as people encounter one another through forms of proximity that are less voluntary and harder to avoid. As my fieldwork revealed however, the boundary between these domains is porous. A man who pauses to greet a familiar dog each morning, or two commuters who exchange a brief comment after a bus detour, participate in the same process of districting that animates Simone’s account.

The capacity to participate in these circuits, however, is unevenly distributed. In NDG, difference is not only cultural or linguistic, it is also decisively economic. Socioeconomic disparity cuts across other forms of diversity, shaping how residents inhabit and move through the area. Those who are affluent or simply comfortable can more easily fit into a range of local situations. They can linger in cafés, join urban community gardens, or choose among different housing options. For others, the same geography is shaped less by choice than by the constraints their circumstances place upon them. Mobility may depend on public transit, and daily movement is often organized around what can be reached and managed within the limits of time and money, rather than what would otherwise be preferred. Housing conditions matter here as

well. Where domestic space is more limited, parks can become an extension of daily life rather than simply a place of leisure. Everyday consumption often follows the same practical logic. The *dépanneur* may serve as a familiar point of access not because it is preferred, but because it is close and workable under the conditions people are living with.

NDG's geography makes these contrasts visible at a fine scale. As I walked the length of the area from the university precinct around Loyola, across the commercial corridors and open parks, over the Décarie expressway toward Grey and Claremont Avenues on the eastern edge bordering Westmount, I became aware of how the landscape shifted around me. Each stretch highlighted a distinct texture of life, with modest apartment blocks giving way to semi-detached houses, then to tree-lined streets and carefully tended gardens. These contrasts registered gradually in the built form of the area. They appeared, for example, in the kinds of housing found there and in the condition of different streets and buildings, but also in the pace of movement through them. Some spaces offered reasons to remain: a bench, a pocket park, a familiar shopfront, a place to sit with children, or simply a setting that made lingering possible. These features gave certain parts of the district a different practical character. They made it more likely that people would pause, come back, or spend time there, while other spaces functioned more as corridors of passage. Older rental corridors sit beside newly built condominiums and stretches of single-family homes. To the south, beyond the railway tracks near St. Jacques, smaller apartment blocks and social-housing complexes anchor residents with more modest resources. To the north, around Monkland, gentrification has taken hold more rapidly with cafés, restaurants and boutiques signalling a different demographic pattern than along portions of Sherbrooke Street where many long-standing shops have closed. At the same time, Sherbrooke has not been untouched by processes of change. Even amid closures, new forms of commercial investment

have appeared, including boutique-style retail and higher-end restaurants oriented toward more affluent consumers, such as specialty cafés, organic or vegan eateries, and upscale dining establishments. These businesses reflect changing forms of consumption and point to a form of gentrification that unfolds unevenly across the locality.

Despite these differences, what continues to shape everyday life in NDG is proximity. Households sit side by side, but not with the same degree of security or latitude. Some have more secure housing, more disposable income, and more flexibility in how they move through the day. Others are more exposed to disruption and live with fewer buffers against the ordinary pressures and inconveniences of daily life. A certain ease tends to appear in the ordinary flow of daily routines, as neighbours move around one another without difficulty or sustained attention. Strain, by contrast, becomes more visible when everyday constraints or mismatched expectations make interaction feel more tentative and guarded. These juxtapositions do not add up to a broadly shared sense of belonging, because social life in NDG is worked out in practice under uneven everyday conditions. Encounters take shape according to access to time, mobility, and housing, since these shape how people move through the district and what kinds of interaction feel possible, even as dispositions such as openness or curiosity also play a part.

### ***Fieldwork During the Covid-19 Pandemic***

My research began during the COVID-19 pandemic, when restricted movement and ongoing uncertainty had become part of ordinary life. At the same time, Montréal was navigating repeated waves of infection and shifting public health measures. Rather than simply interrupting everyday life in NDG, these conditions made the ordinary work of sharing urban space more visible and, at times, more fraught. The everyday errands we had to carry out bore the marks of the moment. Taped floor markers reorganized lines at grocery checkouts, and plexiglass screens

separated cashiers and customers, reshaping the small choreography of waiting, passing, and speaking. Being near others was no longer taken for granted. Even familiar gestures of recognition could briefly feel uncertain, and people often seemed to adjust in real time.

These shifts did not affect everyone in the same way. Pandemic conditions were lived unevenly across NDG. For some residents, especially essential workers, movement outside the home remained required. For others, daily life narrowed abruptly. How restrictions were experienced depended on access to private space, digital connectivity, and the ability to move around. These differences mattered in ordinary, practical ways, shaping both what felt safe and what kinds of conduct came to seem reasonable in shared settings. While I set the objectives and bounds of this research before COVID-19, the pandemic became part of the conditions under which the field was encountered. This study does not treat the pandemic as its central focus, but it remains part of the context through which everyday encounters unfolded and through which I came to the field. The dynamics I examine were already present, but the changed circumstances brought them into clearer view. As conditions changed, people adjusted how they related to others, and what felt reasonable in shared settings could shift as well.

### ***Pathways as an Analytic Lens***

When movement was disrupted, it became impossible to take it for granted. I began to think more concretely about movement itself, not only as something restricted but as both a methodological tool and an analytic thread for understanding how people live alongside one another. By theorizing this disruption, I came to see that social interaction is partly organized through ordinary rules of movement and engagement that usually recede into the background of daily life. During the pandemic, those rules no longer felt natural or automatic. They had to be

renegotiated, and that made the patterned relationship between movement and sociality easier to perceive. It was at this juncture that Ruth Finnegan's *The Hidden Musicians* (1989) offered an important point of orientation. While Finnegan's concept of pathways helps me attend to movement and circulation, I do not treat pathways as leading toward stable or bounded forms of sociality. Instead, I approach them in a way that keeps the range of possible associations open, in line with Amit's (2012) emphasis on variability, contingency and the unfinished character of social life.

For Finnegan, pathways illuminate how social worlds are composed through participation in multiple, overlapping circuits of activity. They can reveal forms of organization that might otherwise remain obscure when analysis begins from bounded communities or fixed places. Her account suggests that people do not simply live in a locality but move through it. In doing so, they participate in particular routes and rhythms that overlap with others and gradually give place its lived texture. This offers an important lens for my own research. It allows me to trace NDG not as a bounded place, but as a network of pathways made up of everyday journeys, pauses, and crossings. Through these, sociability is not simply given. It is sustained through effort. Thinking with Amit (2010), I approach NDG not as a coherent social unit, but as a field of relations that are uneven, partial, and always in motion. What becomes analytically central is not where pathways lead, but how they are lived. Repeated routes through streets, shops, parks, and transit spaces become sites where people adjust their attention and negotiate difference, while also deciding in practical ways whether to engage, hold back, or keep moving.

Finnegan approaches these questions ethnographically by tracing how participation in a wide range of amateur musical activities revealed the complex circuits of social life in an English town. Her research shows that locality is not a static container. It is made through circuits,

encounters, and situated practices that often remain invisible to those not directly involved in them. Walking alongside my interlocutors, I observed how they noticed and highlighted elements along familiar streets from particular vantage points. Their noticing made visible to me aspects of the local environment that I had long ceased to see: specific points that carried memory, history, and feeling, and that gave certain places and things a different weight.

Like Finnegan, I am concerned with the hidden systems of relationship that underlie ordinary urban life. My interlocutors' pathways between home and work, along bus routes, through collective gardens, running clubs, and neighbourhood festivals reveal how people create and maintain connections across difference. These pathways, or circuits, illuminate what I call the convivial repertoire in this research: the shifting strategies, dispositions, and competencies through which residents coexist in diversity. At one end are slight or fleeting encounters marked by civil inattention or watchful indifference. At the other are the more deliberate moral and practical efforts involved in neighbouring, volunteering, and participating in collective activities and events.

### ***Research Questions***

As noted earlier in this chapter, the arguments developed in the preceding sections converge on a central inquiry:

**How do residents of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) live together amid diversity, and through what practical and moral repertoires do they sustain everyday coexistence?**

I approach coexistence not as a fixed state or shared ethos, but as something continually made and remade through everyday movement—through the pathways people take, the pauses they share, and the small adjustments through which the moral and affective texture of local life



becomes visible. Guided by this orientation, the thesis addresses the following interrelated questions:

**1. How do residents of NDG navigate and sustain everyday relations across difference, within and beyond the locality?**

How do people's movements through cafés, parks, bus stops, commercial streets, and local events reveal the ways they manage proximity and distance? When do they engage, when do they step back, and how do they navigate moments of hesitation or quiet withdrawal in public life? How do particular spaces afford or constrain encounters that are often slight, fleeting, yet consequential?

**2. What repertoires of practice do residents draw upon to manage proximity, recognition, and difference?**

What strategies and dispositions shape everyday coexistence, including civil inattention, watchful indifference, minimal consensus, moral ambivalence, and the traffic relationships of everyday movement? How do these repertoires overlap, shift, and coexist across situations? In what ways are they responsive to changing energies, obligations, moods, and circumstances rather than applied as fixed orientations?

**3. How do conditions of constrained agency shape the possibilities and limits of convivial practice?**

How do logistical and affective constraints—such as housing insecurity, work schedules, caregiving responsibilities, linguistic or mobility barriers, and the lingering effects of the pandemic—structure who participates in local life, how, and to what degree? How do residents articulate and navigate the limits of their agency, including moments of withdrawal, hesitation, or selective disengagement?

#### **4. What do these situated practices reveal about the broader moral and affective conditions of living together in diverse urban settings?**

How do the rhythms and textures of everyday life in NDG invite us to rethink conventional notions of community and neighbourhood, not as bounded social units but as assemblages of movement, adjustment, and ethical labour?

Taken together, the preceding sections suggest that coexistence in NDG cannot be understood as a state of ease, nor as a matter of simple tolerance. This is because it is made in the small moments where people decide whether to greet, pause, step aside, or let things pass. Those decisions shape how others read them, including whether they come across as considerate or entitled, open to contact or inclined to avoid it, and they can open or close off future interaction. It appears instead as an ongoing labour because living alongside others requires continual work to acknowledge presence, deflect potential friction, and sustain proximity under conditions that are often constrained. Approaching NDG as a field of movement rather than as a bounded locality makes it possible to see how these practices take shape through ordinary routines and repeated encounters. Conviviality, in this sense, does not function as a stable moral ideal but as a situated accomplishment driven by how much time and capacity people have and by the circumstances they are moving through. Solidarity and care therefore do not necessarily appear as thick or intimate relations. They often take modest forms and these moments form the moral texture of the local, in which people learn how to remain present with difference without necessarily attempting to resolve it.

#### ***Contribution to Knowledge***

This thesis seeks to make a contribution to the anthropology of urban life through an ethnographic focus on everyday coexistence. I develop the concept of convivial repertoires to

describe the patterned yet flexible ways residents negotiate living alongside difference. Rather than treating conviviality as a stable ethos or shared disposition, I approach it as a dynamic set of practices through which people calibrate everyday relations in response to circumstance.

Focusing on repertoires foregrounds practice and adjustment. It draws attention to how people adjust themselves as situations change. This can mean altering the way they carry themselves, the tone they adopt, or how available they make themselves to others, rather than adhering to a single, consistent mode of relating to others. In this study, convivial repertoires capture how residents and users of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce manage being with others in ordinary urban settings. They include moments of engagement as well as restraint. They also name the subtle labour involved in managing how present one is, what one attends to, and when one pulls back.

Coexistence, as it is examined in this thesis, depends not only on moments of warmth or connection. It also relies on more subdued forms of conduct through which people keep co-presence from becoming burdensome. Across the settings I studied, much of the work of living alongside others took place through small calibrations. This meant judging when to look away, when to yield space, and when it was better not to pursue an interaction that would carry new expectations. These adjustments are easy to overlook, yet they are central to how shared spaces remain workable in heterogeneous environments. This is also why I resist building a normative hierarchy into my account of collective life. I do not assume that one way of inhabiting public space should be privileged over another, whether that involves sociable openness or a more reserved mode of moving through the day. Because difference lies at the heart of urban encounters, the question is rarely how to dissolve it into sameness. It is how to live with it without turning it into a problem that has to be resolved on the spot. What I call convivial

repertoires name the practical means by which people do this. They are not scripts that guarantee ease. They are ways of feeling out what a situation will bear.

Within these repertoires, tacit awareness plays a key role. It refers to a practical sensitivity to others that does not require explicit engagement, but nonetheless registers their presence and claims to space. In mundane encounters, this form of awareness can articulate a minimal threshold of acceptability. It rests on the sense that others are entitled to occupy shared settings, to wait there, and to move through them without being disregarded or singled out. This does not amount to intimacy or agreement. Instead, it marks a baseline expectation of ordinary respect that allows co-presence to persist in mixed and shifting social contexts. In this sense, conviviality names an ethos of engagement suited to heterogeneous settings, one in which the grounds of commonality are not fixed in advance, but remain open, partial, and sometimes ambiguous.

Approached in this way, conviviality is not a condition of ease but a form of moral work. It is part of what I later describe as the moral texture of the local. By this I mean the fine grain of everyday judgment, the small hesitations and adjustments through which life with others is carried out. By conceptualizing conviviality as something fragile and uneven, and as something that must be renewed in practice, the thesis shifts attention away from normative ideals of integration and toward the ordinary efforts through which people manage proximity under constraint. It also shows how the scope of convivial practice is driven by uneven capacities. What matters here is how much time and energy people have, how easily they can move through the district, and how secure their everyday circumstances are. Residents do not simply choose how to relate to others; their possibilities are patterned by the conditions under which everyday life unfolds.

Convivial repertoires therefore emerge in relation to what is possible as much as to what is desired. Thin forms of civility, such as acknowledgment without intimacy or watchfulness without intrusion, often function as pragmatic responses to constraint, while thicker forms of care or involvement remain situational and contingent. By grounding these arguments in ethnographic attention to ordinary encounters in NDG, this thesis demonstrates how forms of living alongside one another is sustained through small acts that accumulate over time. Sidesteps on narrow sidewalks, cautious greetings in cafés, or moments of deliberate restraint reveal the everyday work required to keep shared space usable. In approaching NDG not as a bounded community but as a field of relations, this study offers an analytic framework for describing how urban coexistence is lived and maintained in practice, under conditions that are neither fully chosen nor fully shared.

### ***Chapter Outline***

*Chapter Two* develops the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological foundations of this study. It situates the research within key literatures on urban coexistence, conviviality, mobility, and moral life, and outlines the methodological orientations that guided my ethnographic approach. The chapters that follow move through a sequence of ethnographic settings in order to examine how people make shared life workable in NDG. Read across the dissertation, these chapters reveal how residents navigate proximity and difference, and how forms of sociability take shape through a range of relations, movements, and micro-settings. *Chapter Three* traces *How I Came to NDG* and examines the pathways through which residents orient themselves to others and to place. Drawing on life histories, it shows how people arrived, settled, and made sense of their movements into and through the local milieu. In doing so, it highlights how emplacement emerges through repetition and routine navigation. *Chapter Four* turns to PorchRock, a street-

level festival, to consider how residential blocks are temporarily reconfigured into spaces of performance and encounter. It examines how the event's logistics create both conditions of ease and managed distance. In this way, residents are able to share space, exchange brief recognitions, and participate in their immediate surroundings without demanding sustained engagement.

*Chapter Five* focuses on the collective enterprise of Marigold Garden and explores how shared cultivation, seasonal routines, informal rules, and occasional disagreements over gardening practices shape social relations. The chapter reveals how cooperation and friction coexist within a shared space. It also shows how moral expectations and practical adjustments are negotiated over time.

*Chapter Six* follows the NDG Pacers to show how group walks and weekly runs, together with a volunteer baking network, cultivate recurring patterns of recognition and support. These practices unfold both in person and through online coordination. They also rely on light, non-intrusive forms of awareness that allow participation without obligation. *Chapter Seven* examines neighbouring relations through interactions on residential streets and at a local block party. It shows how proximate relationships, and the varying degrees of shared space they involve, become sites where residents negotiate closeness, obligation, and distance. *Chapter Eight* develops the idea of traffic relationships by focusing on encounters that unfold on buses, sidewalks, intersections, and along other transit routes. It explores how quiet, non-intrusive attentiveness helps people move together through these micro-settings, making ordinary shared space workable through brief and procedural forms of coordination. *Chapter Nine* investigates commercial interactions in cafés, dépanneurs, sidewalks, and small shops, tracing how sociability emerges in routine exchanges and how it is occasionally unsettled. The chapter examines how repetition, recognition, and uneven power relations can shape the moral and

affective dimensions of commercial exchange. The final chapter concludes by drawing these threads together to reflect on coexistence, mobility, and the shifting conditions that support ordinary sociability in a diverse urban locality. It returns to the thesis's central claim: that urban coexistence is not a settled state but an ongoing accomplishment, constituted through the situated adjustments by which people coordinate co-presence and negotiate norms and obligations in ordinary life. We now turn to the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological foundations of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMING AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### *Theorizing Urban Sociability as Practical Coexistence*

This chapter outlines the bodies of scholarship that inform and frame my research on how people live together in cities. I am particularly interested in the mundane settings where people spend time and carry out the routines of local life, and in how shared life is worked out there. I do not approach this as an abstract ideal of togetherness. Rather, I am interested in how everyday life is accomplished among people who are often unknown to one another, or who may be familiar only at a distance. In many of these situations, people share no more than co-presence in the same place at the same time. Even so, they must still find ways of moving alongside one another and managing nearness. They must also respond to the shifting demands of the moment. What interests me here is that these arrangements cannot be taken for granted. They are often provisional, and at times fragile, because they remain exposed to ambiguity, misalignment, or failure. I therefore approach urban sociability as a practical accomplishment rather than as evidence of cohesion because it unfolds through everyday encounters under conditions of proximity, difference, and constraint. To develop this argument, I draw on early ethnographic and sociological studies of urban life, interactionist accounts of public conduct, and more recent work on conviviality, superdiversity, and everyday ethics.

Much of this literature does not treat the city as a bounded social entity. It approaches urban life instead as something composed through movement across space and through encounters that vary in intensity and duration. The relations that emerge in these contexts are often partial and at times brief. They are shaped by less by enduring social ties than by the



immediate situation and by the practical demands it places on those involved. From this perspective, sociability is not reducible to deep attachment, nor does it arise automatically from spatial proximity. What comes into view instead are the routines and conventions through which people move alongside one another without constant strain or overt negotiation. A crowded situation places different demands on attention than a quiet one. A glance can mean one thing in one context and something else in another. The same is true of a pause or a brief acknowledgement. Judgments of this kind are rarely named as such and yet they shape what kinds of presence are possible in shared environments. They also help organize expectations about conduct since they influence what comes to feel appropriate in a given setting and what begins to register as disrespectful or out of place. For that reason, moments of friction or incivility can bring the terms of living alongside others into view and expose how uneven those terms can be. Approaching sociability in this way shifts the analytic focus away from categorical notions of belonging. It directs attention instead to the situated demands of everyday conduct. It also brings into view the unequal conditions under which shared life is managed since not everyone moves through urban settings with the same capacity to remain in place, to take part in what is unfolding, or to step back from an encounter without consequence.

The chapter begins with early formulations of urban sociability, which emphasize the tensions of city life and the strategies people develop to manage them. It then turns to more recent scholarship on how shared life is learned, practiced, and sometimes strained in ordinary settings. My aim is not to construct a unified theory of urban life. It is to assemble conceptual resources that help make sense of the modest yet consequential negotiations through which people live together in urban quarters like NDG. I return to these literatures because they ask questions I recognize from my own material, particularly about what it takes to remain near

others without turning proximity into obligation. Across these bodies of work, I am interested in how people find workable ways of living alongside one another, even when the conditions for doing so remain uneven and fragile. This includes the small adjustments people make in relation to others, but also the restraint they sometimes exercise in shared settings and the judgments through which they decide what a situation requires. Over time, these ways of responding can become part of the situated repertoires through which people learn to live alongside one another. This framing allows for an account of urban life that can register ease and familiarity while still making room for strain, disagreement, and those moments when living alongside others falters.

### *Early Views of Urban Co-Existence*

In “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” Georg Simmel (1950) reflects on the position of the individual in the modern city and on how the density, pace, and sensory intensity of urban life shape social relations. Living amid near-constant contact, he suggests, requires people to develop an urban consciousness that helps them preserve autonomy, because being continually responsive to others would quickly become overwhelming. What Simmel famously calls the blasé attitude is often read as indifference, or as a narrowing of emotional range in the face of too many stimuli. But it can also be understood as a pared-back composure that makes closeness bearable. In this sense, one’s reserve is not simply a withdrawal. It is a practical disposition that allows people to remain among others without being pulled into continuous engagement. As Simmel writes, “The deepest problems of modern life” concern the effort to preserve individuality “in the face of overwhelming social forces” (324). I read this as an early account of a central tension of urban life: people remain aware of one another, but they also maintain enough distance to keep proximity manageable. For my purposes, the key point is that Simmel frames reserve as a practical necessity rather than a moral shortcoming. Keeping some distance

is not an absence of social life; it is one of the conditions that allows social life in the city to continue.

Restraint and selective attention can therefore be understood as practical ways of coping with the demands of sharing space with strangers. Urban sociability, in this account, is not grounded in fellowship or shared values but in the ongoing calibration of engagement and withdrawal. People learn how to remain present in shared spaces without making themselves too available to others. By this I mean that city life requires ways of being attentive without inviting demands that cannot be sustained. To become overexposed would be to remain continually open to interaction, explanation, or emotional engagement in situations where that kind of openness would quickly become exhausting or intrusive, especially when people are simply trying to get on with their day. Learning when to hold back is therefore not a sign of disengagement. It is one way of protecting one's capacity to keep moving alongside others over time. In a similar way, living alongside others does not require the erasure of difference or the production of intimacy. People can share space and recognize one another while maintaining a basic sense of mutual orientation, without every encounter becoming a personal relationship.

This framing offers an early way of understanding how everyday urban life is sustained through modest, often unnoticed adjustments. It shifts attention away from overt social bonds or deep attachment and toward the practical adjustments through which co-presence is kept workable. The urban sociologists at the University of Chicago in the early twentieth century translated some of these concerns into empirical practice by treating the city as a site of patterned interaction rather than as a purely physical environment. Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and Roderick McKenzie (1925 [1967]) famously imagined the city as a "social laboratory." In their account, it is an ecology of zones and flows, shaped as well by recurring routines through which

people adapt to one another through movement and repeated contact. They also direct attention to how social order emerges through circulation and routine, and through the ways in which space itself is organized. Shared identity alone does not adequately capture this, because urban order also depends on how people move through space, encounter one another, and adapt to the arrangements that structure those encounters.

Working from this ecological tradition, Ulf Hannerz turns from fixed groups or bounded communities to what moves between people. This includes not only people themselves but also the stories, styles, and information that circulate among them. He is interested, too, in how these are interpreted in particular situations and in how they take on meaning as they travel. Hannerz (1980) develops the concept of traffic relationships to make sense of the relations people have with strangers and how these unfold in dense urban spaces. He describes these as “unfocused interactions” (105). He also argues that traffic relationships are functional and instrumental, and that they “necessitate a wider range of informal skills” (219). As he further explains, “To study traffic relationships is often to study how people deal with one another while they are doing something else. So as long as they seem to be in a normal state which can cover a great deal of variation one largely ignores them. Unknown individuals in the field largely turn into non-persons” (219). His term captures the minimal coordination of bodies in public space that allows everyday life to proceed without constant negotiation. What makes traffic relations analytically useful is not that they are dramatic, but that they are ordinary and widely repeated. They form a baseline through which strangers share space. They help people avoid collisions and keep the demands they make on one another within workable limits. These are not deep social bonds. They are procedural interactions that make it possible to pass, wait, adjust, and continue on without turning every encounter into a claim.

What matters in traffic relationships is often what people do *not* do. They refrain from pressing on one another. They avoid escalating minor irritations. They adjust their conduct so that shared space stays workable rather than confrontational. In this sense, traffic relationships name a practical competence for managing proximity and distance. They involve knowing how to acknowledge others. They also involve knowing when to yield, and when it is better to hold back. Hannerz is useful here because he shows that urban order is not sustained only through formal institutions or explicit agreement. It is also maintained through ordinary, patterned acts of interpretation and restraint that help people, as he puts it, “keep life going” in face-to-face settings. What comes into view, then, is an understanding of urban order as something practical and provisional. It is sustained in real time through adjustment rather than through stable consensus.

Erving Goffman’s work provides a more precise account of how people manage co-presence without intimacy in everyday public life. In *Behavior in Public Places* (1963), he introduces the concept of civil inattention to describe a patterned way of acknowledging others while simultaneously signalling that no further engagement is expected. He describes this as the quick look that grants “enough visual notice to demonstrate that one appreciates that the other is present,” followed by a polite withdrawal that signals no further claim (Goffman 1963: 84).

What matters here is not the gesture itself, but the shared understanding it relies on. Civil inattention is effective because it is recognized as a cooperative practice that lets people occupy space near others without intrusion. What is shared in such situations is often very little beyond co-presence itself. People are in the same place at the same time, but they are not necessarily joined by mutual knowledge or common purpose. Nor do they need to share any stable sense of collective orientation (Goffman 1963; Horgan 2024). This is one reason why conduct in public

settings is so often patterned and ritualized. Patterned forms of acknowledgement and restraint help make proximity manageable without requiring each encounter to deepen into fuller social engagement. For my purposes, I read Goffman not as offering an account of social harmony, but rather one in which civil inattention names a minimal ethics of co-presence through which everyday movement becomes possible. Civil inattention allows people to pass, to wait, or simply to sit or stand near one another without having to negotiate each encounter anew. At the same time, it can also hold others at arm's length, since the same cues that establish ease can be used to signal disinterest or maintain distance.

In *Relations in Public* (1971), Goffman extends this analysis through what he calls the interaction order, the set of informal rules and understandings that govern how people behave in one another's presence. This order is fragile and situational. It depends on people recognizing cues and adjusting their conduct. It also depends on their responding appropriately to small disruptions. What stands out for me is that the interaction order is not imposed from above, nor is it usually articulated by those who follow it. Instead, it is learned through repetition and reinforced in practice, as people pick up its expectations through repeated encounters. These expectations often remain tacit until something goes wrong. When someone misreads a cue or commits a breach, or when a small disruption arises and has to be repaired, the terms of shared presence become easier to perceive (Goffman 1971; Horgan 2024). In this sense, moments of friction do more than interrupt the flow of interaction. They can also render the normative expectations of shared space more legible. Goffman is especially useful here because he shows more precisely how such encounters are organized. He shows how ordinary encounters are structured through tacit expectations. He also shows how the maintenance of shared space depends on people's capacity to register and respond to subtle shifts in conduct.

## *Living with Strangers*

Lyn Lofland takes these insights further by situating them within a broader account of how strangers and near-strangers share urban space. Simmel's account of the stranger is helpful here because it treats distance not as the absence of relation but as one of the conditions through which relation becomes possible in modern life (Simmel 1971). It also sharpens a point that becomes especially important in public settings: people are often present to one another while remaining only partially known. In such situations, others are first encountered through limited and often visible cues, rather than through biographical familiarity. This gives public interaction its distinctively patterned character. Where mutual knowledge is thin, conduct depends more heavily on recognizable conventions that allow people to remain near one another without having to negotiate every encounter from scratch (Lofland 1973, 1998; Goffman 1963, 1971; Horgan 2024). In so doing, Simmel sharpens the problem that Lofland stays with: how people manage proximity without requiring intimacy. In *A World of Strangers* (1973) and later in *The Public Realm* (1998), she shows how urban life depends on forms of civility that allow people to occupy the same settings without having to move toward closeness. Like Goffman, she emphasizes restraint and the small practices through which interaction remains workable. Her additional contribution is to distinguish between different social realms. The private realm is grounded in close, enduring ties within the household. The public realm, by contrast, is organized around anonymity and brief encounters. Between these two, Lofland places the parochial realm. This is a middle register of social life made up of neighbours, regulars, and acquaintances whose familiarity develops through repeated presence rather than deep personal knowledge. I use parochial here in Lofland's analytic sense, not in its everyday sense of

narrowness. In these spaces, people can be recognizably known without becoming intimate, and strangers can become familiar through routine contact.

This distinction helps me think about ordinary life in a district like NDG, where many routine encounters happen in spaces that are open to anyone but still feel locally patterned. Streets, cafés, libraries, and small parks often operate in this parochial register. They remain accessible to strangers, yet they are shaped by recurring routines and recognitions that give them a particular social texture. Over time, people come to expect certain forms of conduct in these spaces. They learn when conversation is welcome and when silence is appropriate. They also learn what kinds of presence can read as locally situated even when belonging remains provisional. What emerges is not necessarily a strong collective identity. It is a workable familiarity that lets people feel located without becoming obligated. Lofland's formulation clarifies that civility does not depend on shared values or emotional closeness. It rests, instead, on the practical ability to manage difference through everyday conduct. These practices do not resolve tension or guarantee inclusion, but they do make coexistence possible under conditions of close proximity. These accounts clarify how people manage proximity when common ground is minimal. They do so under conditions in which social relations remain thin. At the same time, not all urban encounters remain at that level. Some spaces draw people into more sustained forms of adjustment because they involve repeated presence, shared activity, or practical interdependence. In such cases, the issue is no longer only how to remain near others without intrusion, but how to coordinate conduct when some degree of engagement becomes harder to avoid. This wider range matters for the chapters that follow, which move from passing coordination among strangers to forms of familiarity, shared activity, and temporary collective projects that place different demands on coexistence.



Ash Amin's (2002, 2008, 2013) work marks an important shift away from thinking about urban sociability primarily in terms of shared identity or belonging, and toward an account of how people learn to live together through repeated exposure and practical coordination. Amin is not primarily concerned with casual openness in public space on its own. He is more interested in sites of interdependence and habitual engagement, where people cannot simply pass by one another and where negotiation is built into the setting. In his discussion of 'micropublics', he draws attention to spaces in which contact is structured and repeated, and in which what he describes as "'prosaic negotiations' are compulsory" (Amin 2002: 969). He argues that looser urban public spaces often "fall short" because they are not organized as "spaces of interdependence and habitual engagement" (Amin 2002: 969). What matters, then, is not exposure in the abstract, but the kinds of spaces in which people are required to work out accommodation in practice. Amin is useful here because he shifts attention away from diversity as a demographic fact. He directs it instead toward the micropolitics of spaces in which people are brought into relation through repeated, practical engagement. His account of micropublics helps specify why some ordinary sites matter more than others: not because they guarantee understanding, but because they structure interdependence and make adjustment difficult to avoid.

Although Amin's own examples of micropublics tend to be more structured sites of association, his formulation is still useful for thinking about the ordinary spaces I examine in NDG. Cafés, sidewalks, parks, and shops are not organized in the same way. Even so, they bring people into repeated and patterned forms of co-presence in which adjustment cannot be taken for granted. These are spaces where interaction may be brief and instrumental, yet they still matter because they require people to manage proximity in ways that allow daily life to proceed.

Amin's contribution lies in his insistence that ordinary sociability does not depend on mutual identification, but on the practical terms under which people come to share space with others. These "meeting places," as he describes them, offer openings for "contact and dialogue with others as equals" (Amin 2002: 960), even if what emerges from such contact remains partial and contingent. This perspective resonates with my observations in NDG, where people rarely stop to reflect on how they are relating to others, yet their conduct reveals learned expectations about distance, pace, and restraint. The key point here is that shared life does not simply exist as a stable condition. It has to be sustained through ordinary repetition. Amin helps articulate how people develop competencies for living together without necessarily naming difference as such.

Vered Amit's (2020) writing builds on these insights by sharpening attention to the labour involved in everyday coexistence. Rather than treating indifference as a lack of sociality, Amit introduces the concept of 'watchful indifference' to describe a form of attentive co-presence. People remain aware of one another and make space for one another side by side, while also holding back from confrontation or direct engagement. In many urban situations, people cannot simply tune one another out. They register who is present and what is unfolding around them, while also holding back from intervention unless circumstances require it. Watchful indifference, in this sense, names a restrained way of sharing space. It does not close off interaction, but neither does it presume that interaction ought to follow. What remains are ambiguous openings and outcomes that cannot be known in advance. This kind of restrained attentiveness makes it possible to share space without letting small irritations grow or turning every encounter into a demand for moral evaluation.

As Amit (2020) suggests, this mode of sociability balances awareness and distance without relying on deep social bonds. It is grounded instead in the practical work of sharing

space and in the tacit, embodied forms of coordination through which everyday situations are kept running. In this sense, it resonates with Goffman's account of civil inattention as a patterned way of acknowledging others while limiting claims. The outcome is not connection so much as coordination. What matters is a way of moving with and around others that depends on responsiveness rather than explicit agreement. Farhan Samanani's (2023a) formulation is useful here because it makes the situated quality of these orientations more explicit. As he writes, "both capacities are expanded by the work done to weave together different relational possibilities—to stage openness in relation to care, to leave space for opacity within support, to enfold transformation within familiar identities, and so on—meaning that even general orientations incorporate a specific, situated dimension" (2123). In my fieldwork, this was visible in parks, cafés, and along streets where people adjusted themselves in response to others. Sometimes this meant changing pace. At other moments, it involved shifting their gaze or using space differently, often without making those adjustments visible.

### ***Moving Beyond Bounded Notions of Group and Community***

Rather than treating the neighbourhood as a coherent social unit, I situate my approach within scholarship that foregrounds coordination, partiality, and relational practice. Following Rogers Brubaker (2003, 2004), I treat terms such as "community," "ethnic group," or "culture" not as natural or self-evident formations, but as classificatory frames that can reify social difference. Brubaker's critique of "groupism" is particularly useful here. He describes groupism as the tendency to imagine social life as organized into bounded, internally coherent groups, an assumption that obscures the relational and situational character of everyday interaction. When diversity is understood through fixed group boundaries, the subtle and negotiated ways people inhabit and share space are easily lost from view. Social life is then read primarily through

categories of identity, rather than through the situational adjustments by which people make living alongside others workable. In urban settings, this often means that everyday forms of coordination are interpreted through the language of collective identity, rather than through the more provisional relations that actually sustain sociability.

Amit's (2002) work extends this critique by turning attention to the limits of concepts such as "community" and "neighbourhood" when they are treated as empirically bounded categories. As she notes, such terms often operate as statements in the order of "we have something in common as a result of our social interaction" or "we have something in common that can become the basis for future social interaction" (2002: 10–11). What is important in this formulation is not the claim of commonality itself, but the way it gestures toward potential relations rather than describing an already existing social form. For Amit, community is not a given structure but an ongoing social project, one that seeks to mobilize relations while never fully containing them. As Amit posits, "Existing collectivities cannot always be reproduced, and efforts to mobilize new ones can fail, but the imagination of community is always fundamentally oriented towards the mobilization of social relations. Yet while the category invoked and social relations mobilized in the name of community are always linked, they are never wholly commensurable and are frequently in tension with one another" (2002: 10-11). This tension is central. It shows that collectivity is imagined and worked toward. At the same time, the relations that sustain it remain partial, uneven, and difficult to stabilize. Community, in this sense, is oriented toward connection, but it is also marked by incompleteness, ongoing effort, and the possibility of stalemates or failures. These insights caution against reading neighbourhood life as evidence of a shared identity or a coherent social whole. They also sit alongside recent ethnographic work showing how claims about who belongs can become moralized and

exclusionary in residential settings, reinforcing the need to avoid treating such areas as coherent social units (Samanani 2023b). Taken together, these perspectives direct attention to the practical work through which people manage proximity without automatically presuming belonging. Bringing Brubaker and Amit into conversation, I approach NDG not as a stable or self-evident “community,” but as a field of ongoing relational work. What connects people is not a fixed sense of membership but the repeated effort to inhabit shared space under conditions of difference.

Suzanne Wessendorf (2013) extends these arguments further through her ethnographic work on *commonplace diversity*, offering a detailed account of how difference becomes ordinary without becoming insignificant. Her research focuses on semi-public spaces such as corner shops, markets, and streets where repeated encounters generate familiarity over time. Such settings can appear public to outsiders but more parochial to those whose interactions are patterned by routine and mutual recognition. In this sense, parochial does not name a closed or narrow social world so much as a shift in the character of interaction, as repeated contact makes relations more habitual and locally embedded. As Wessendorf suggests, the boundaries between public and parochial realms are fluid, and spaces such as corner shops or markets can take on parochial qualities when social relations become familiar through repetition. This fluidity, what Wessendorf (2014) calls being “open and sometimes closed,” captures the delicate balance between inclusion and withdrawal that shapes how difference is lived in everyday spaces (407). In practice, a space can feel public in principle but more parochial in use because regulars might come to recognize one another and develop shared expectations about how to behave, even though no one formally “belongs” to the setting. Familiar routines matter here as well since repeated presence can gradually make others legible as familiar strangers (Felder, 2021;

Milgram, 1972). What Wessendorf's work makes clear is that ease in diverse settings is learned. People learn how to behave in these settings so that everyday encounters stay manageable. This does not mean that difference disappears. Rather, difference recedes into the background as people focus on the practical task of getting through the day. Wessendorf shows that civility toward diversity can both enable and limit interaction. Being polite and restrained may allow people to share space comfortably, but it can also function as a way of maintaining boundaries.

For my research, Wessendorf's (2019) emphasis on the ordinary management of difference is particularly helpful. The cafés, sidewalks, *dépanneurs*, and parks I observed operated as spaces where familiarity accumulated slowly, without requiring closeness. People came to recognize one another, not necessarily by name, but through repeated presence and shared routines. These encounters did not produce deep relationships, yet they mattered because they contributed to a sense of orientation and ease in local life. Taken together, Amin, Amit, and Wessendorf provide a way of thinking about urban coexistence as an ongoing accomplishment. They direct attention away from fixed identities and toward the skills and judgments through which people navigate shared space, as well as the learned dispositions that take shape over time. By learned dispositions, I mean the habits of attention and response that develop over time as people move through the routine circulation of local spaces. Those movements open up repeated opportunities to notice others and work out how to respond.

Coexistence, in this view, does not come automatically with diversity, but neither does diversity necessarily erode it. In my research, what is significant is the everyday work that makes mixed settings feel livable. What is also at stake is how minor tensions are managed. This shapes whether moments of awkwardness or strain come to be read through difference itself, or are absorbed into the ordinary frictions of shared life. Here, difference does not refer only to

categorical distinctions, but also to the uneven expectations, capacities, and orientations through which people meet one another in practice. As Tillmann Heil argues, conviviality includes both “peaceful and conflictual dimensions” (2020: 10). It is also worked out through “interaction, negotiation, and translation” (Heil, 2020: 7). I take up these terms as analytic guides for my own research, because they help me name the processes through which coexistence is worked out on the ground in NDG. By interaction, I mean the small exchanges and forms of mutual adjustment through which people register one another in practice. By negotiation, I mean the practical work of managing a situation as it unfolds, especially when friction appears, hesitation enters in, or some kind of accommodation has to be worked out. By translation, I mean the effort to make conduct intelligible across difference, even when that effort remains partial, awkward, or unresolved. From this perspective, difference does not stand on its own as the explanation for tension. The issue is how a situation is being managed and how people respond to one another within it. What becomes analytically central, then, is the situation itself and the events unfolding around it. So do the material conditions in which it unfolds. Meaning remains partial because the frame itself is shifting and still in formation.

### ***Ordinary Competencies of Coexistence***

In this dissertation, I use conviviality to think about how coexistence is worked out in practice under conditions of difference. The question here is how people keep shared spaces workable over time. I am interested in how this happens even when relationships remain partial or uneven. I am also interested in what happens when tiredness, distraction, or other pressures reduce what a person can give to a situation and to the people in it. This use of conviviality aligns with the orientation developed in work on everyday multiculturalism and related accounts of everyday multiculture. Wise and Velayutham’s (2009) concept of ‘everyday multiculturalism’ offers a

useful complement to approaches that treat multiculturalism primarily as a top-down policy framework or an abstract model for managing diversity. Work on everyday multiculturalism moves the analysis away from abstract categories and toward everyday situations. Rather than asking how diversity ought to be organized in coherent ways, it asks how people live with difference in practice, in ordinary contexts and interactions (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014).

Bringing everyday multiculturalism into conversation with conviviality keeps the analysis close to the small negotiations through which people manage shared life in prosaic urban settings. Such negotiations unfold as people pass along streets, linger in cafés, enter neighbourhood institutions, and take part in local projects and events (Gilroy 2004, 2006; Neal et al. 2013, 2015, 2018; Neal and Vincent 2013; Valentine 2008; Wessendorf 2014; Wise and Noble 2016; Wise and Velayutham 2014). It also makes routines analytically central. Attending to social practices in everyday rhythms provides a way to examine the ‘habits of urban living’ (Noble 2013) among people who are often oriented to tasks rather than to explicit relationship-making. As Wise and Noble (2016) suggest, routine and sustained encounters can support a thin but workable familiarity including forms of trust that do not require intimacy. What these frameworks bring into view are the small moral and affective adjustments that sustain plural life. They direct attention to how people inhabit space together, not by erasing difference but by learning to move with it and improvise around it. Or, at times, quietly let it be.

A key point of reference for conviviality in social theory is Paul Gilroy’s *After Empire* (2004). In his formulation, conviviality names “the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere” (Gilroy 2004: xi). For Gilroy (2004), conviviality names a lived, ongoing negotiation of difference, a “creative, intuitive capacity among ordinary people who



manage those tensions” of everyday multicultural (xi). Noting the slippery nature of ‘convivial multicultural’, Gilroy (2004) emphasizes that these practices are local and specific, and that they emerge within an “unfolding of cultural formations that do not announce themselves, preferring to remain hidden and unpredictable” (161). His formulation shifts attention from official politics of diversity to the everyday ethics of coexistence that unfold in shared spaces. I draw from Gilroy the move toward ordinary cohabitation and interaction as the site where multicultural is lived. At the same time, my use of conviviality is narrower and more analytic than his. His project is concerned with a broader historical and political formation: the postcolonial formation of multicultural in which everyday cohabitation and interaction take shape in the shadow of empire, migration, and racism. My account stays closer to the situated competencies and limits that make shared life workable in specific settings. That is also why I keep the tension in view: for me, conviviality does not name a positive social whole but a fragile practical accomplishment that has to be worked out in particular situations.

At the same time, the conviviality literature has often carried a normative charge, even when it presents itself as descriptive. Les Back’s (2007) account offers a useful caution here. In *The Art of Listening*, Back foregrounds attentiveness and partial understanding but also the place of silence. In doing so, he draws attention to what remains unspoken in encounters across difference. This approach resists treating everyday sociality as if it were simply a matter of openness or dialogue. It suggests instead that shared life often works through partial attention. People notice enough to adjust, but not everything that is happening around them. People do not always fully understand one another because intentions, moods, and circumstances remain only partly known. Even so, they still have to decide how to respond. Just as important, they must judge when not to say more. They must also know when not to ask further questions or push a

situation beyond what it can bear. Back's approach therefore takes seriously the ordinary pressures people live under. Fatigue matters here, as do the limits of time and the pull of obligation, because these shape what people are actually able to sustain in practice. Les Back and Shamser Sinha (2016) extend this caution by arguing for "a way of seeing" that remains attentive to forms of division and racism alongside and sometimes within multicultural convivialities (521). As they note, "conviviality and conflict invariably intertwine" in urban life (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014: 351, quoted in Back & Sinha, 2016: 521). Everyday ease in shared spaces, then, should not be read as evidence that structural tensions have been resolved. Read in this way, Back's account supports my use of conviviality as an analytic term that does not presume engagement in advance or treat withdrawal as indifference or failure.

A second tension in the literature is that conviviality is often framed against an overly autonomous model of the person, with emphasis instead placed on interrelatedness and the relational conditions through which lives are lived (Amin 2012; Neal et al. 2013, 2018; Nowicka and Vertovec 2014). Yet several scholars have noted that conviviality can quietly imply an "optimal" form of social life, an imagined condition in which difference is managed harmoniously (Georgiou 2016; Valentine 2008; Valluvan 2016). Nowicka and Vertovec (2014), in particular, point out that discussion of conviviality often drifts toward a normative ideal. When that happens, the concept can begin to obscure what is most ordinary about coexistence: that it is often partial, effortful, and marked by moments of disengagement. I use conviviality in line with work that treats it as a way of analysing social life rather than as a term that presumes positive relations in advance. Building on Nowicka and Vertovec (2014), I approach conviviality as a fragile achievement, made and remade through practice rather than assumed as a stable condition. On this view, it is renewed through ordinary forms of adjustment, restraint, and

recognition. It is also influenced by the conditions under which those practices become easier or harder to sustain.

Within these situated practices, residents manage proximity and difference. They also negotiate fatigue and try to sustain care under varying forms of constraint. In other words, the question is not whether NDG is convivial, but how conviviality is enacted in practice. It also matters where its limits appear and what consequences follow for everyday life. Framed this way, conviviality is less a general atmosphere than a set of competencies that develop in routine situations, where people learn, often tacitly, what a setting will tolerate and what it will not. Rather than assuming a stable orientation toward others, this approach keeps attention on how such competencies take shape, how they are tried out in practice, and how they can also fall away as people move through everyday settings.

In what follows, I stay with this practical register by tracing how people sustain workable forms of co-presence over time. Building on accounts of proximity and adjustment, Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham (2009) and Suzanne Wessendorf (2013, 2014, 2019) direct attention to the ways people acquire practical capacities for living with difference through repetition and routine, rather than through explicit commitments or shared values. Wise's discussion of "quotidian cosmopolitanism" in her chapter in *Everyday Multiculturalism* is helpful here because it foregrounds the ordinary competencies that emerge through repeated encounters (Wise 2009). Over time, people learn how to read situations. They also learn how to modulate their conduct and how to respond to others who may be unfamiliar or different from themselves. These capacities are not best understood as abstract dispositions or ideological positions. They are practical ways of getting along that develop gradually through being in the same places, at similar times, under ordinary conditions. What matters for my analysis is that

these competencies are uneven and situational. They do not appear consistently across all settings, nor do they take the same form from one moment to the next. People do not become uniformly open or skilled at engaging difference. Instead, these capacities are often partial and reversible. They may be evident in one setting and fall away in another, depending on prior experience, on mood, or on the pressures of the moment. In this sense, sociability depends less on stable dispositions than on the ability to make small, context-sensitive judgments. Sometimes people engage. At other times they hold back, or simply pass by without interaction.

Wessendorf develops this point through her work on commonplace diversity, which shows how familiarity can normalize difference without erasing its significance. In her ethnography, diversity does not disappear through repeated co-presence, but neither does it necessarily lead to dialogue or intimacy. Instead, people learn to live with difference through routines that stabilize co-presence while maintaining a degree of distance. This often involves a conditional openness, one that captures the everyday work of remaining attentive to others while also protecting one's own autonomy. Wessendorf describes this as a mode of civility in which people remain available to engagement across difference while also keeping a certain distance. Openness, in this sense, does not imply sustained engagement. It refers instead to a readiness to share space without friction. These insights resonate strongly with my own observations in NDG. In cafés, corner shops, parks, and along sidewalks, people often encountered one another repeatedly without actively seeking interaction. Familiarity, for example, accumulated through shared rhythms of presence rather than through conversation. Recognition often took minimal forms. Sometimes it was a nod or a brief greeting. At other times it was simply a coordinated movement through space. Such moments were rarely dramatic. Yet they mattered because they

helped stabilize everyday life, allowing people to feel oriented and at ease in shared spaces without requiring social closeness.

Sophie Watson's (2006, 2009) work on city publics and marketplaces complements these perspectives by offering a way to think about public life without making interaction carry too much weight. Watson is useful here precisely because she refuses dramatic accounts of urban encounter. In her work, the public realm is not made only through conflict or through visible forms of political and intercultural exchange. It also takes form in quieter ways, through ordinary and sometimes hesitant modes of co-presence. As she relates, "the public is not just about 'talk', it concerns bodies and their micro-movements" (Watson 2006: 6–7). This emphasis is important for the argument I develop here because it keeps conviviality from being measured only by conversation, by whether people form ties, or by an explicit form of public togetherness. I use public togetherness here to mean those moments when people openly recognize that they share something. It might be a cause, a concern, a stance, or a reason to act together, even briefly. Watson's point is that public life does not always become visible in this way. People may not gather around a shared issue. They may not express support openly or make mutual recognition explicit. Even so, these quieter forms of public life still do something. They allow people to share space without having to turn that sharing into a relationship or a declared "we."

Watson (2009) extends this emphasis in her later discussion of markets, where she argues that a "minimal level of encounter" in shared public settings can matter because it shapes how strangers come to register one another in everyday life (1582). Her point is not that markets produce "community", but that ordinary co-presence can interrupt the ease with which "unknown others" are reduced to stereotype. My own market sites in NDG are smaller and more temporary, assembled in park corners and dismantled after a few hours, but they likewise

generate brief, repeated situations of co-presence in which residents often come into close contact, especially as they queue, pause to browse, and pay. Social interaction in these settings varied widely. It depended on the time of day, on how crowded the tents became, and on the small negotiations through which people worked out what counted as appropriate conduct in the moment.



**Figure 2. Market scene from fieldwork in NDG. Source: author's photograph.**

In these tight spaces under the tents, the diversity of residents is often immediately audible as well as visible. People move between languages in short exchanges with market volunteers and with one another. Interaction is frequently required but it is usually practical and situational, influenced by the confined setting and the ordinary routines of selecting produce and

moving along. These small negotiations mattered because they were practical and ethical at once. Following Michael Lambek's understanding of ethics as embedded in ordinary action (2010), and Mervyn Horgan's attention to urban moral orders (2012, 2019, 2020), politeness should not be treated as merely superficial. In the market, people had to work out whether an action felt considerate or intrusive in the moment. Standing too close, moving too quickly, taking too long, or failing to notice that others were waiting could all become meaningful. What counted as appropriate conduct was not fixed in advance. It depended on the situation and on how people read one another within it. Considered together, Wise, Wessendorf, and Watson help clarify how urban coexistence is sustained through modest and often unnoticed forms of labour. These are not grand gestures or moral achievements. They are the small efforts through which people make life alongside others workable. People adjust to one another. They keep an encounter within manageable limits. They remind us that sociability in diverse urban settings is rarely about building relationships, and more often about maintaining workable conditions for being together. In this way, everyday life in the city is held together not by deep ties or by collective identities, but by a repertoire of ordinary competencies that allow people to move through the world with others without constant negotiation or conflict.

### ***Situated Conviviality, Regulation, and the Unpredictability of Encounter***

Martha Radice's work helps bring these discussions into closer contact with the kinds of places and interactions I observed in NDG. Rather than treating conviviality as a general disposition or social atmosphere, Radice (2015, 2016) approaches it as something that becomes intelligible in particular locations, through repeated encounters anchored in everyday routines. Her work along Montréal's commercial streets shows how sociability conditioned by context, because the meanings of small gestures, linguistic negotiation, and public demeanours depend on where they

occur and who is present. What is especially useful in Radice's approach is her attention to micro-places and pedestrian-scale environments. She focuses on streets, shops, cafés, and neighbourhood corridors that people move through on foot, often daily. Encounters there tend to be brief and improvised and usually remain low-intensity. In these "flexible social spaces" (Radice 2019: 397), conviviality does not arise because people share identities or values, but because repeated proximity can generate familiarity with local rhythms and expectations. Over time, people come to recognize what kinds of behaviour are appropriate in a given place. They also learn how much interaction is expected, and when it is better to remain reserved. In this way, conviviality is situated, as it gives structure to the material layout of spaces, the timing of encounters, and the histories of interaction that accumulate there.

Radice's work also helps bridge structural forces and lived experience. She shows how broader social, linguistic, and economic conditions take shape in the small gestures and adjustments of sociability. Migration, language policy, and uneven urban development all enter in here. Radice's (2013) introduction to the Montréalology thematic section is useful for my project because it treats mobility as an ordinary condition of city life rather than a special case. She argues that the papers in the issue show why scholars need to attend to mobility "in order to capture city life and lives," because "city-dwellers are geographically and socially mobile creatures" (Radice 2013: 20). From this view, people's attachments to urban life are not anchored in a single place or scale. They move between home, neighbourhood, city, and transnational ties, and these shifts affect how everyday sociability is organized and interpreted. Radice (2013) posits that "being a city-dweller means being connected to places at many levels, and being enmeshed in all kinds of networks" (20). Radice (2016) further argues that conviviality is not only a quality of social relations but also of places, in that streets, cafés, and



markets can acquire their own affective atmospheres through patterns of practice and recognition. Importantly, she situates this analysis at the pedestrian scale, specifically in,

[...] publicly accessible places that can be thoroughly explored on foot within an hour or so, like streets, parks or plazas. This scale is important because, while neighbourhoods are usually experienced through ‘parochial’ social ties threaded through with notions of shared interest, urban public places are arguably where city-dwellers encounter their co-inhabitants in all their diversity, as strangers as well as familiars. (434)

Radice is also careful to stress that such conviviality is neither guaranteed nor uniformly experienced. The ease that may develop in one café or along one stretch of street does not automatically extend elsewhere, nor does it include everyone in the same way. This point becomes even clearer in her later work, where she argues that conviviality is selective and uneven because it depends on who is recognized, who is heard, and who is able to participate in everyday exchanges (Radice 2022). Convivial spaces can therefore have “in-groups and out-groups” (Radice 2022) even when they appear open or welcoming. This matters for my research because it allows me to examine not only moments when sociability flows easily, but also moments when it falters or becomes strained. In NDG, cafés and street-level events often function as sites of recognition and ease, while also revealing whose presence is treated as comfortable and whose requires explanation or careful management. Conviviality, on this view, is shaped through movement between settings and through the adjustments people make as they try to fit the demands of a situation.

While Radice emphasizes how conviviality is grounded in place and repetition, Junjia Ye (2017, 2019) pushes the discussion further. She shows that everyday sociability is also organized by regulation, by power, and by normative expectations. Drawing on ethnographic work in Singapore, Ye argues that encounters in public space are never neutral because they are filtered through norms of civility that determine who can linger, who is expected to move on, and what

kinds of behaviour are deemed acceptable. In this sense, conviviality is not simply a moral practice but also a regulatory one. In her analysis of everyday multicultural co-presence and the politics of place, Ye cautions against treating the sharing of space as a straightforward indicator of urban conviviality. She argues that public spaces often contain embedded boundaries and subtle enclosures among people who are personally unknown to each other. These public spaces regulate participation, sort difference, and shape how diversity is managed in practice (Ye 2017: 7). Her contribution therefore helps me avoid an overly benign reading of everyday ease. Rather than treating civility as something that simply makes encounters go smoothly, Ye shows that norms of “good” public conduct can function like a selective infrastructure. These norms do not just describe how people ought to behave. They actively organize what kinds of presence feel straightforward and unremarkable in shared space. In doing so, they make some forms of difference easier to accommodate while making other forms more likely to be read as out of place or in need of correction. This matters for my argument because it helps explain how everyday ease can be produced through ordinary practices of restraint and politeness while still carrying unequal effects. She therefore calls attention to “the work of difference-making that is done at both policy and everyday level [which] filters, sorts, and organizes diversity” (2017: 2). Drawing on Sara Ahmed, Ye further notes that the knowing of strangers and newcomers is itself a boundary-making practice, “a means by which the ‘we’ of the community is established, enforced and legitimated” (Ahmed 2000: 37, quoted in Ye 2017: 2). This framing is important for my analysis because it clarifies what ordinary ease consists of. It refers to the practical adjustments that allow public life to proceed without friction much of the time. At the same time, that ease is not neutral because it can set enforceable expectations about conduct and presence that not everyone can meet on equal terms.

I draw on Ye's account of how norms of public conduct sort and authorize presence when I discuss the Diwali gathering later on (2017, 2019). That vignette shows how quickly ordinary ease can become a question of who is entitled to take up space. Civility can make public interaction easier to navigate, but it can also contain difference or quietly exclude those who do not conform to dominant expectations of conduct. Inclusion and exclusion, in this view, are not opposites but can be produced through the same everyday norms. This perspective sharpens my attention to how conviviality in NDG is shaped by power even when it appears ordinary because local expectations about what counts as "considerate" conduct can make some forms of presence feel unremarkable while making others feel precarious.

In contrast, Helen Wilson (2017), along with Jonathan Darling (2016), foregrounds the unpredictability of encounter and the openness that remains within it. While much of the literature emphasizes patterned behaviour and learned competencies, Wilson insists that encounters are never fully determined by norms or routines. Even in highly regulated or familiar settings, interactions can unfold in unexpected ways because people bring different moods and histories into shared space, along with different capacities for response. Her notion of encounter emphasizes potential rather than outcome. She argues that proximity always carries the possibility of reordering expectations, even if most encounters remain slight or unremarkable. It is not simply a question of whether encounters produce connection or conflict. The point is that they call for ongoing adjustment, because other people's presence is never fully predictable and cannot be entirely managed in advance. This unpredictability unsettles any idea of coexistence as fixed, making it dependent on people's ability to respond in the moment rather than on stable rules. This emphasis resonates strongly with my fieldwork, where many interactions unfolded without clear resolution. A small hesitation at a crosswalk, or a moment of strain in a park, did

not usually turn into confrontation. But it also did not simply vanish. More often, it left a trace, and people had to respond to it in the moment. They might pause. They might shift their stance or change how they spoke, and then continue on with the interaction or the day. Wilson's work helps frame these moments not as failures of sociability, but as evidence of the fragile and open-ended nature of urban coexistence.

Wilson and Darling (2016) add a further dimension by insisting on the unsettled qualities of encounter. They argue that encounter is not a neutral meeting but a form of relation that can carry an element of friction, in which prior expectations may be unsettled rather than confirmed (2016: 10). They also emphasize that encounters unfold across different durations. In doing so, they shape later situations by leaving behind habits of attention and readiness for contact (2016: 10). Wilson (2017) develops this through her discussion of an ethics of attunement, which asks the researcher to stay with what does not resolve cleanly and to treat misfit and friction as analytically productive rather than as noise (465). Attunement, for Wilson, also requires attention to moments of non-attunement, including events where attunement and non-attunement are experienced at once (465). I use this idea because it helps me follow how people register one another in real time and recalibrate when an interaction does not proceed smoothly, without assuming that shared life is stable or predictable in advance.

These three lines of work help me approach conviviality in a fuller way. Radice shows how it is grounded in particular places and routines. Ye shows how conviviality is constrained by norms that sort and regulate participation. Wilson shows why it remains open to disruption, because encounters are never fully predictable. These perspectives allow me to approach NDG as a district where everyday sociability is not a stable achievement but an ongoing process, worked out through small acts of judgment under conditions that are always shifting. This framing

provides the groundwork for my ethnographic analysis, where I trace how people navigate these conditions across different sites and moments. Rather than asking whether life in NDG is convivial, I ask how people manage living alongside one another in practice. This means attending to the work involved, and to the ordinary settings where its possibilities and limits become visible.

### ***Moral Life, Ordinary Ethics, and the Work of Coexistence***

To think more carefully about how everyday sociability is sustained, I draw on anthropological work that treats morality not as a system of rules or values, but as something practiced and sensed within the flow of ordinary life. This body of scholarship shifts ethics away from explicit deliberation or from the moments when people pause to think consciously about what they ought to do. It directs attention instead to the ordinary situations in which people must respond to one another, often without naming those responses as moral at all. Ethics, in this view, is embedded in how people judge a situation. It is also present in how they hold themselves back, and in how they remain responsive to others in the course of everyday life. This orientation is useful for my study because much of what I observed in NDG involved people working through minor frictions, interruptions, and uncertainties as they moved through shared spaces. Michael Lambek (2010), James Laidlaw (2002, 2013), and Jarrett Zigon (2007) each approach ethics as something that unfolds through ordinary life. What connects their perspectives is a shift in where ethics is located. Rather than starting from explicit moral codes, they begin from practice, showing how judgment and responsibility are worked out in the course of everyday situations. In this literature, ethical life is rarely dramatic. It becomes visible when the flow of the ordinary is interrupted and people have to work out how to respond.

Lambek (Ed., 2010) argues that morality is intrinsic to everyday action because social life continually places people in situations where they must take others into account. Ethical life, on this view, does not stand apart from routine conduct but is woven into it. This is especially clear in the ordinary use of language, and in what is left unsaid. Silence matters here, as does tone. These interactional choices matter because they shape how people move around one another in ordinary situations. A pause can do this. So can a softened tone or a decision not to say more. Each can help acknowledge another person's presence and keep a situation from escalating. In this way, people help sustain shared forms of life without explicitly understanding their conduct as moral. People are not continuously reflecting on what is right or wrong. Even so, they remain oriented toward others in ways that carry moral weight. This perspective helps make sense of many of the small acts I observed in NDG. People paused to let someone pass. They softened their tone, or chose not to comment. Such gestures rarely present themselves as ethical decisions. Still, such gestures help maintain workable relations in shared spaces. Laidlaw's (2002, 2013) approach complements this view by emphasizing ethical capacity rather than moral code. For Laidlaw, ethical life involves the ability to evaluate one's own actions, even when that evaluation remains implicit. Ethics, in this sense, is less about following prescribed norms than about exercising judgment in relation to a particular situation. What felt appropriate in one setting did not necessarily carry over to another, especially as the setting shifted and as different others came into view. People seemed to acquire this sense gradually, through repeated encounters rather than explicit guidance.

Zigon's (2007) notion of 'moral breakdown' offers one way of making these ordinarily unremarked processes visible. He argues that people do not experience themselves as moral only when they face explicit ethical choices. Rather, morality forms part of the unspoken background

of everyday life. It is when that flow is disrupted that moral reasoning becomes explicit. These moments of breakdown are not necessarily crises. They can be small disturbances that require adjustment. A hesitation at a crosswalk, a strained greeting, or an unexpected moment of contact can be enough to shake people out of the ordinary rhythm of sociability and require them to work out how to respond. Thinking with Zigon, I understand such moments not as failures of conviviality but as points where moral life becomes perceptible. They show that people are constantly doing small, often unnoticed work to keep things going. Much of this work is carried through embodied awareness. People register timing, spacing, and tone. They adjust through these small cues rather than through overt communication. These quiet efforts usually pass without remark and slip back into routine once balance is restored, yet they are part of what allows everyday life to hold together.

Understanding conviviality through this lens helps clarify why it is both fragile and durable. It is fragile because it relies on ongoing effort and can be unsettled by small disruptions. At the same time, it is durable because people are generally skilled at repairing disruption through modest adjustments. These repairs do not eliminate difference or conflict, but they allow everyday life to continue without constant negotiation or explanation. In this way, conviviality can be approached as a form of moral and affective labour. That labour is distributed across time and space, and it is shaped by the particular conditions of each setting. This perspective also helps avoid treating conviviality either as an ideal state of harmony or merely as a thin form of public politeness. Instead, it draws attention to the practical competencies people use to live alongside others in environments that are often busy and uneven. This understanding of moral life as ordinary and situational also provides a bridge to the chapters that follow. It allows me to examine how people sustain shared space through learned repertoires of attention and

adjustment, rather than through explicit moral claims or fixed collective ideals. The next section names the concepts that guide this analysis by linking locality and encounter to the practical conditions of movement and emplacement.

### ***Pathways, Mobility, and Emplacement***

In what follows, I treat pathways as the everyday form mobility takes in practice. By pathways, I mean the repeated routes and routines through which people organize the practical demands of life. These include work and care, but also errands and sociability. I use emplacement to name the process by which this repeated movement becomes a way of knowing and inhabiting place. Over time, familiarity and ease can develop through that movement. This section brings together mobility, emplacement, and convivial repertoires as analytic tools. It also uses them as practical guides for how I carried out fieldwork under constraint.

Because my research unfolded over three years, much of it during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the conditions of observation were altered in ordinary but consequential ways. Encounters were more distanced, public spaces periodically emptied, and routines were repeatedly recalibrated in response to shifting rules and uncertainties. In this context, and following Amit's (2000) reflections on doing fieldwork at home, I approached NDG not as a distant field to be entered but as a locality in which I was already embedded. Ethnographic knowledge, on this view, emerges through familiarity and participation, because the researcher's own everyday life becomes part of the terrain of inquiry. I was therefore not arriving somewhere unfamiliar. I was learning to see a known place again through others' routes and schedules, through their obligations, and through their patterns of movement.

### ***Calibration and Everyday Moral Adjustment***



This position demanded what I describe as a process of calibration or continual adjustment. By this, I mean recognizing how my own pathways through NDG overlapped with, and at times obscured, those of my interlocutors. Living in the same district meant that I shared many of the same routes and reference points as the people I was studying. While this familiarity offered access and ease, it also risked flattening difference by assuming a shared understanding. Calibration, in this sense, involved learning when to rely on familiarity and when to hold it back, so that what appeared self-evident to me could be questioned and examined. In using the term calibration, I draw on anthropological work that treats moral and affective life as a matter of ongoing adjustment rather than fixed disposition. My use of calibration draws attention to the fine-grained, moment-by-moment labour of tuning social behaviour within everyday encounters. It captures the practical and moral effort involved in maintaining balance. This includes knowing how much to engage, when to withdraw, and how to remain attentive without becoming intrusive within shared urban spaces.

The theoretical and methodological framework outlined here therefore serves a dual purpose. It provides a language for analysing how conviviality, constraint, and moral adjustment intersect in everyday life, and it grounds the ethnographic choices that made such analysis possible. By attending to pathways as both method and metaphor, and by situating observation within the embodied conditions of emplacement, I aim to show that the study of urban conviviality must proceed at the same pace as the life it seeks to understand. This means remaining attuned to movement and contingency, and to the quiet labour of adjustment through which ordinary coexistence is sustained. In this sense, pathways function not only as an ethnographic theme but also as a methodological stance. To walk with participants and follow their routes to the park, the café, or the bus stop is to witness how sociability takes shape in

motion. It also brings memory and fatigue into view. For example, on a route, tiredness can become visible in small, ordinary ways. It can show up in a slower pace. It may appear in pauses, or in choices that keep the walk shorter and simpler. People may avoid extra stops. They may keep an interaction brief, or conserve attention for what they still need to do. In this sense, fatigue helps organize sociability in motion. At times it makes conversation easier because it favours familiar, low-effort exchange. At other times it makes conversation harder. Patience narrows, and so does one's openness to others. People are pulled back from contact. Fatigue also links to biography. It can reflect care work. It may also reflect work schedules, health, age, or simply the accumulation of a long day and these conditions shape what "being sociable" is possible in a given moment. As Sarah Pink (2021) suggests, sensory and embodied methods show how perception and meaning are made through movement, not only through detached observation. Vision, in this account, is not set against other senses. It is organized through bodily movement and through the practical demands of navigating shared space. Pink argues that attention is distributed across the senses as people move, pause, and orient themselves in relation to what is around them (Pink, 2021: 23). For ethnographic analysis, this is a reminder that attention is situational and embodied, rather than a purely visual or cognitive act.

In NDG, this became visible during go-along interviews—walks in which I accompanied residents along routes that mattered to them while we talked, letting the walk itself shape what came into view and what could be said. Conversation often fell silent when a moment required concentration, and then restarted once the immediate demands of movement had passed. A loud stretch of traffic, a narrowed sidewalk, or the need to move around others could interrupt a story mid-sentence and change its pace. These interruptions were not incidental. They showed how sociability is shaped not only by what people say but also by how they move with others.

Spacing matters here, as does the way awareness remains tuned to the immediate environment. The go-along technique fits this sensibility because it places the ethnographer inside ordinary movement where attention is partial and continually redirected.

Emplacement provides a complementary lens. While mobility foregrounds movement and flow, emplacement draws attention to how bodies take hold in particular environments over time, and to how sensibilities form within them. As Pink (2021) reminds us, sensory ethnography is always emplaced because knowledge emerges through bodily movement and through attunement to surroundings. To be emplaced, in this sense, is to learn a place gradually by living within its rhythms and by responding to its frictions. Emplacement is not a static condition. It is a process that develops through repeated engagement and ongoing adjustment. This process also has a moral dimension. Ye (2019) and Wilson (2017) suggest that moral dispositions in the city are not formed through isolated encounters alone. They gather over time. People learn how to live with others through repeated exposure to small discomforts and the accommodations that urban life requires. This resonated with the biographical narratives I heard in NDG. Interlocutors often explained their present orientations through longer histories of living near others. These histories mattered because they shaped what people expected from others. A neighbour dispute could make later contact feel risky. A remembered kindness could make a small request seem possible. A difficult adjustment to a new street or building could affect whether someone read a greeting, a silence, or a hesitation as ordinary or as meaningful. Coexistence, in these accounts, was not something decided in a single moment. It was learned slowly, as people carried earlier encounters into later ones and adjusted their expectations along the way.

In NDG, emplacement was never final. People's attachments remained partial and contingent, determined by what they could sustain in the midst of everyday demands. For some,

a sense of social connection was anchored in intergenerational proximity. For others, it gathered around a habitual stopping point in the day, like a favourite café or a familiar park bench. In other cases, it was tied to a stretch of sidewalk where one felt able to move at ease. These uneven attachments underscore that emplacement is not a settled state but an ongoing accomplishment which is formed through repeated encounters and sustained through the practical work of living with others.

### ***Mobility, Movement, and Meaning***

In the contemporary interdisciplinary field of mobility studies, movement is not treated as a neutral or purely technical act. Rather, it is understood as socially produced and meaning-laden. Following Tim Cresswell (2006, 2015), I approach mobility not simply as motion, but as a form of movement whose meanings take shape through the conditions in which people move.

Mobility, in this sense, is produced through the expectations and constraints that organize movement, and through the material arrangements that make some forms of movement easier than others. It is therefore not only a matter of getting from one place to another. It is also one of the ways social life is organized and lived. Movement is lived through the body. The ways in which we move shape how attention is coordinated through pace, posture, and orientation, as much as through sight. Movement is also enacted through everyday habits and shaped by social position. As Cresswell (2006) argues, mobility is not simply movement but a way of being in the world, whose significance varies according to who is able to move, under what conditions, and with what expectations. Mobility is unevenly distributed, and it does not carry the same meaning for everyone.

Cresswell extends this line of argument in later work, suggesting that to define place is to recognize how meaning becomes attached to space through the ways people “conduct their lives

as individuals” (2015: 14). Drawing on John Agnew’s (1987) formulation of place, Cresswell (2015) notes here that a meaningful place or locale has a material form, “the setting for social relations, the actual shape of place within which people conduct their lives as individuals” (13–14). This matters for my analysis because it keeps “place” from becoming only a matter of meaning or attachment by foregrounding how built form quietly sets the practical conditions under which everyday interactions unfold. Place, in this sense, is not simply where things happen; it is where social life takes shape through everyday activity. Cresswell further emphasizes that places must be understood in relation to human capacities for producing and interpreting meaning. As he writes, “As well as being located and having a material visual form, places must have some relationship to humans and the human capacity to produce and consume meaning” (2015: 14). This formulation highlights the felt and experiential dimensions of place and how people come to identify with and care about particular environments over time.

In NDG, such attachments seem to unfold unevenly. Places are remembered and reinterpreted through people’s trajectories. They are also narrated through people’s lived histories and the ways those histories have brought them here. Many interlocutors described moments when specific sites such as a park, a café, or a stretch of Sherbrooke Street became charged with feeling and memory. PorchRock brought some of this into especially clear view. Because the festival spread across the streets, alleyways, and corridors of the area, it invited residents to recall the places that had come to matter in their lives. Some remembered restaurants where friendships were formed. Others spoke of alleys where children played, or of streets they most loved to walk in autumn, when the colours were at their peak. These recollections showed how the physical landscape had become layered with personal and collective meaning. Sense of place, in this view, is not singular or fixed. It is continually produced through movement and

memory, and through the encounters that gather around them. NDG's locales are made and remade through the lived experiences of those who traverse them. What emerges is an affective geography given texture by everyday life.

If movement and memory make place meaningful, they also bring into view the fine-grained bodily coordination through which people share space in motion. The same pathways that hold personal significance are also the settings where strangers cross and recalibrate their presence in relation to one another. As Ulf Hannerz (1980) reminds us, urban life is organized through traffic interactions that are brief yet consequential. These include slight and fleeting exchanges, but also the incidental ones through which people learn to share space while remaining attentive to one another's limits. Doreen Massey (2005) extends this insight by insisting that space itself is not a fixed container but an ongoing achievement. In *For Space*, she describes space as "a simultaneity of stories so far... it is relational and always under construction — a constellation of trajectories" (Massey, 2005: 130). Places unfold through intersecting paths and histories. Those trajectories are continually reworked in everyday life. Place, in her account, is never fixed but continually made through interrelations and movement.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) similarly describes locality as "primarily relational and contextual rather than scalar or spatial," a structure of feeling produced through deliberate, embodied practice (179). Together, these perspectives shift attention away from static geographies and toward the ongoing production of place. Movement matters here, as do relation and practice. Peter Merriman (2011, 2014) suggests that mobility unfolds through registers that exceed analytic categories of space and time. It is apprehended through rhythm and affect, and through bodily sensation (2011: 21–22). In other words, he is pointing to the way movement is not only something that happens within space and time, as if those were neutral containers that

can simply be measured. Space and time are also lived and felt through motion itself. Pace matters here, as do interruption and fatigue. So does anticipation, along with the shifting attention that accompanies movement through an environment. Movement, on this view, is not just travel from one point to another. It is one of the processes through which place and duration become meaningful in experience.

These insights align closely with my ethnographic attention to the subtle attunements of conduct through which NDG residents navigate proximity and distance. Through them, I approach NDG as a field of relational and embodied movement. It is a locality continually made through the movements people repeat, the rhythms they fall into, and the moral adjustments that keep urban life workable. I approach movement and place as ontologically inseparable. From this perspective, NDG's spatial order is a relational and embodied accomplishment, produced through everyday practices that orient bodies and tie mobility to emplacement. To deepen this account of everyday sociability, it is necessary to consider how people acquire the capacities for adjustment that living alongside others requires. Encounters do not arise only from immediate circumstances. They also take shape through repetition and through the memories and expectations that gather with return and familiarity. Thinking with the concept of 'wayfaring' allows me to link movement to moral learning, showing how everyday coexistence is formed through lived trajectories rather than through isolated moments of interaction.

### ***Pathways and Traffic relationships***

To capture how these movements were organized in everyday life, I drew on Ruth Finnegan's (1989) concept of pathways. Finnegan uses pathways to describe the overlapping circuits through which people organize their lives and connect social worlds through repetition. Pathways are not just routes but lived patterns of movement that accumulate meaning over time.

In NDG, residents followed habitual pathways organized by school schedules and work routines, but also by errands, recreation, and informal gatherings. These movements linked parks, cafés, streets, and institutions into practical geographies of everyday life. Pathways did more than connect destinations. They cultivated attentiveness to others and taught people how to inhabit nearness without presuming access or familiarity. As residents moved along these repeated routes, they learned how to pace themselves in relation to others and how to respond to the demands of shared movement. Hannerz's (1980) elaboration of traffic relationships builds on this insight by emphasizing the informal skills required to manage such encounters. These skills include reading bodily cues and adjusting pace. They also involve responding to situational demands while doing something else. They are forms of practical competence that keep urban life moving without requiring explicit coordination or shared intention.

I understand these competencies as part of what I later describe as constrained agency. Agency here is not unrestricted choice, but action exercised within limits. Those limits are set by time and energy, by social position, and by material conditions. In NDG, people's ability to linger, participate, or withdraw was conditioned by work and domestic commitments, but also by the ordinary demands of daily life. Within these limits, residents improvised small tactics for making encounters manageable. These efforts were often unnoticed, yet they were essential to maintaining workable relations in everyday settings. They balanced personal needs with the presence of others. In this way, life alongside others could continue without escalation or withdrawal. Pathways, then, functioned as moral and affective corridors through which everyday life unfolded. They were sites where recognition and restraint were practiced in motion. People learned how to be present without overstepping, and how to share space without assuming familiarity. In this way, pathways linked mobility and emplacement. They showed how



movement through NDG was also a process of learning how to dwell within it, aligning bodily conduct with local rhythms and expectations. This understanding of pathways prepared the ground for my later discussion of convivial repertoires, where these small, patterned practices become visible as ethical and practical strategies for living together in difference.

Seen this way, movement through NDG was never only about circulation or access. The repeated pathways people followed also became sites where social judgments were made and revised in practice. A pause could do this. So could a sidestep, or the decision to linger. Each involved a small assessment of others' presence and of one's own capacity to engage. These responses took form within constraint. People moved through the neighbourhood with limited time, energy, and attention. Even so, their responses were patterned rather than random. What emerges from these everyday movements is not simply mobility, but a set of learned capacities for living alongside others. Encounters in NDG are shaped not only by movement but also by biography. Valentine and Sadgrove (2014) argue that everyday interactions are filtered through personal histories and social learning, rather than arising spontaneously. What can look, at first glance, like simple tolerance or ease may also reflect experience that has accumulated over time. Through repeated situations, people learn how to move through difference with steadiness. They also learn how to keep an encounter in proportion to the moment. Encounters, on this view, draw on layers of personal memory and shared history, and cannot be reduced to the immediate situation alone.

Anthropologists of place such as Tim Ingold (2000, 2007, 2011) and Feld and Basso (1996) likewise show that people come to know and make place through movement. Memory matters here too, as does imagination. In *Being Alive*, Ingold (2011) treats walking as wayfaring, a process through which landscapes become places that take form as "knots in a meshwork of

movement” (149). Wayfaring knowledge is not acquired from above, as if it were a set of categories to be learned. It emerges along paths, through ongoing engagement with the world. As Ingold (2011) puts it, knowledge “is integrated not up the levels of a classification but along paths of movement, as people grow into it by following trails through a meshwork” (142–143). This shifts the emphasis from inherited or abstract knowledge to the slow making of understanding through embodied movement and repetition. From this perspective, conviviality is better approached not as harmony or ease, but as a set of practices through which moral relations are maintained. It involves the ongoing negotiation of how to dwell with others under conditions of difference and limitation. Drawing on Ingold (2011), I use “dwelling” to name the ongoing process through which people live in and with the world. In this sense, people participate in making their surroundings, even as those surroundings organize what they can do. To dwell, in this sense, is not simply to occupy space. It is to make movement with others possible through ongoing moral recalibration. It also means staying attuned to others and to place within conditions of constraint.

Basso’s (1996) work resonates closely with this view. He describes place-making as a form of world-building, “a common response to the composite question, what happened here, who was involved, what was it like and why should it matter?” (Basso 1996: 5). Place, in this sense, is not simply a backdrop for action but a repository of remembered experience. Together, Ingold and Basso show how understanding and attachment to place arise through movement and memory, rather than through fixed identities or abstract attachments. In NDG, this interplay of movement and memory was evident in how residents recalled and reinhabited spaces across time through routines that layered old and new meanings onto familiar settings. Their trajectories, like Ingold’s wayfarers, were shaped through repetition and return, continually remade in relation to

others and to the places that held their stories. Pathways through cafés, parks, and street corners thus became both spatial and biographical. They carried prior experience, while also opening possibilities for new encounters and reflection.

Emplacement, in this framework, refers to the embodied and moral process through which people come to dwell within, and orient themselves toward, their surroundings. Concepts such as wayfaring and place-making do not simply describe movement or memory. They illuminate the textures of experience through which people learn how to live alongside others. Reading Ingold (2011) and Basso (1996) alongside my fieldnotes sharpened my attention to how interlocutors' stories moved across time and space, and how my own movements through NDG were part of this same meshwork of relation. Feld and Basso (1996) emphasize that emplacement is sensory and storied; it consists of an accumulation of lived experience that gives settings moral resonance. Movement gives rise to attachments, while attachments orient further movement. In NDG, emplacement involved how residents found their footing within local rhythms through small, repeated acts of recalibration. Much of this work was quiet. People often calibrated how available they appeared to others, and how much they asked of shared space. Sometimes this happened through a brief greeting. At other times, it meant holding back. These were not simply gestures of politeness. They were ways of aligning with local expectations about care. They also involved restraint and forms of participation that remained locally intelligible. Valentine and Sadgrove (2014) describe this as the cultivation of moral dispositions within the social normativities of place. People's values and judgments are not abstract principles but "products of solidified configurations" linking biography to locality (Valentine and Sadgrove 2014: 1983).

### *Re-sighting the City as a Lived Field*

Re-sighting the city, as I use the term here, means changing the way we “see” the urban. It involves shifting analytic attention away from localities treated as stable containers, and away from fixed social categories. The focus moves instead to how urban places are conceptualised and experienced in practice. As Setha Low (1999) notes in outlining an anthropological approach to the city, urban life becomes ethnographically legible when we attend to how places are made through everyday practices and the wider forces that shape them. Building on work that reorients urban analysis toward movement and circulation (Urry 2007), I also draw on Glick Schiller’s call to resight the city by situating everyday urban life within broader transnational and scalar relations. These approaches help situate neighbouring not as a locally bounded social form. They show it instead as something that takes form through mobility, uneven connectivity, and repeated encounters within particular urban settings. The introduction by Nina Glick Schiller, Ayşe Çağlar, and Thaddeus C. Guldbrandsen (2006) is useful for my project because it explicitly calls for “alternative forms of ‘sighting’—in the sense of both how we see and how we understand a particular place” (612). Their goal is to think again about urban sociabilities that have recently been approached through the perspectives of diversity, superdiversity, and inter-ethnic relations (612). This framing supports my approach to NDG because it gives me a way to treat locality as relational and in-the-making, rather than as a bounded unit that can be taken for granted in advance (Glick Schiller et al. 2006; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2009; Urry 2007).

As Glick Schiller and Garbi Schmidt (2016) argue, a city can serve as a meaningful entry point for inquiry only when it is understood “not as a bounded unit but as a named and empowered actor within various and diverse forms of place-making” (6). To speak of the city in this sense is to recognize that it is actively produced through residents’ everyday practices. This

includes the ways they build institutions and organize local social life. These practices do not unfold in isolation, even as they take form through ordinary, local activity. They are situated within wider political, economic, and cultural networks that continually reshape how the city is governed, represented, and lived. Glick Schiller and Schmidt emphasize this dual process, arguing that “a city is the product of both (1) the ways in which its residents actively construct its institutions, neighbourhoods, political economy and daily life; and (2) the city’s positioning in larger global networks, within which it is physically, economically and culturally restructured and marketed” (2016: 6).

These everyday practices are embedded in broader processes that shape how the city is governed and experienced. This framing refuses to reduce urban diversity to an index of ethnic or cultural difference alone. Instead, it draws attention to the multiple ways people make place through social interaction, circulation, and moral labour as they move through the city. My ethnographic orientation follows from this premise. Rather than treating NDG as a fixed backdrop against which social life unfolds, I approach it as a lived field of relations. It is constituted through ongoing practices, but also through sedimented memories and encounters. Re-sighting the urban in this way shifts the analytic focus from static boundaries to lived processes. It allows attention to how pathways and mobilities are enacted and felt in everyday life. It also makes room for forms of emplacement, rather than simply mapping these processes onto space.

Thinking about movement and emplacement in this way also brings into view the limits of coordination in everyday life. While pathways and embodied orientations help make coexistence workable, they do not unfold on neutral ground. The capacity to move comfortably matters here. So does the capacity to linger, to withdraw, or to adjust one’s presence. These

possibilities are shaped by the specific settings in which encounters take place, and by the social expectations that organize those settings. Cafés, parks, commercial streets, and public events do not simply host interaction. They structure what kinds of sociability are possible. They also shape who feels entitled to take up space, and whose presence becomes noticeable or strained. In this sense, mobility and emplacement are always situated within relations of power, regulation, and uneven recognition. Paying attention to how conviviality is anchored in particular places therefore requires asking not only how people coordinate movement and attention. It also requires asking how inclusion and exclusion are quietly produced, tested, and sometimes repaired in the course of ordinary interaction.

### *Convivial Repertoires, Constrained Agency, and the Moral Work of Coexistence*

Drawing together the preceding discussion, I use the concept of convivial repertoires to describe how shared urban life is sustained through ordinary practices of adjustment. This means attending to the ways people move through and pause within the ordinary bustle of the city, adjusting their conduct around others as they follow routines, keep appointments, wait in shared settings, pass one another, greet, withdraw, and continue on. By convivial repertoires, I refer to the patterned but flexible techniques through which people manage proximity and difference under conditions of constraint. These repertoires are flexible, but they are not free-floating. They are highly canalized through the material and social organization of everyday life. People learn them by moving through familiar settings and returning to the same places. Over time, ordinary routines bring them into contact with others and teach them what kinds of conduct are possible or expected. In practice, they can be as small as a greeting, a moment of tactful avoidance, a watchful presence, or a minimal act of cooperation. In their repetition, these small acts carry ethical weight because they shape how social life becomes workable in practice. This way of

thinking builds from Simmel's (1950) early reflections on urban interaction, where restraint and selective attention appear as practical responses to density rather than signs of social failure. Goffman's (1971) notion of civil inattention develops this insight by showing how people acknowledge one another just enough to signal awareness, then withdraw so as not to impose. Lofland (1973) extends this further by situating civility within the public realm, where tolerance and restraint operate as a shared but minimal social contract. Across these accounts, urban sociability is not grounded in intimacy or consensus but in the ability to calibrate engagement and withdrawal in ways that keep everyday life moving.

Amit's (2020) concept of watchful indifference and Mervyn Horgan's (2019) work on strangership sharpen this understanding by reframing indifference as a relational ethic rather than a lack of concern. Indifference here does not mean disengagement. It describes an active mode of awareness through which people remain attentive to others while holding back from deeper involvement. For Horgan, strangership is not a quality of persons but a social relation that arises through mutual recognition in shared space. Following Ahmed (2000), he notes that strangers must recognize one another as strangers for strangership to exist; this recognition is affective as well as spatial, mediated by bodily orientation and the perception of others in space. It depends on bodily orientation and timing, and on a shared sense of proximity. In this way, indifference becomes procedural care, allowing people to remain responsive to one another without requiring familiarity.

Fran Tonkiss's (2003) account of urban civility complements this perspective by framing indifference as a minimal ethical relation. She argues that urban freedom depends on the ability to acknowledge others without requiring recognition, intimacy, or agreement. Civility, in her account, protects the anonymity on which diverse populations depend in order to coexist. This

ethical relation is thin but consequential: it enables people to move among strangers while maintaining a sense of dignity and autonomy. In dense urban settings, such minimal forms of civility become a condition of possibility for everyday life. Tonkiss (2003) describes indifference as a ‘minimal ethical relation’, one that allows strangers to share space without demanding connection. Rather than resting on shared consensus, civility is sustained through an orientation that acknowledges others while preserving distance. This form of coexistence entails what she calls an imaginative identification with strangers, enabling people to relate to one another in a condition of “mutual strangeness” (2003: 304). In NDG, this resonates strongly. Residents continually calibrated their proximity and distance. Sometimes this meant offering a brief greeting. At other moments it meant withdrawing the gaze or altering pace and position through small bodily and conversational cues that helped shared life proceed despite its tensions. These small, often instinctive choices reveal the moral underpinnings of everyday urban life. They show that civility is not only a matter of disposition, but also a practiced and spatial capacity through which people negotiate life alongside others in conditions of diversity.

From this perspective, I understand shared life through the ongoing work of keeping relations workable, even when they change or loosen over time. Convivial repertoires describe how people learn over time to read situations and respond appropriately because life alongside others requires continual recalibration. These responses are both moral and practical. They are shaped not by abstract norms but by what feels possible or appropriate in a given moment. Energy matters here, as do one’s obligations and social position. This emphasis on practice rather than bond aligns with Nicholas Long and Henrietta Moore’s (2013) argument that sociality is not defined by stable ties but by the ongoing work through which relations are made or allowed to fade. They caution against treating connection or commitment as fixed attributes of social



relations because even enduring relations contain the possibility of termination and ambivalence. As they write, “If connection, commitment, and unity are, then, potentially emergent but potentially evanescent properties of all relations, rather than fixed attributes of those relations experienced as ‘bonds’ or ties, the most productive way forward is not to focus on those ‘ties’ in isolation, but rather to examine the dynamic matrix in which they are continually made, sustained, or dissolved” (Long and Moore 2013: 7). They also caution that “placing such emphasis on putative mental connections and ‘joint commitment’ overlooks the ways in which even these kinds of social relations, by definition, contain the potential for their own termination and might thus be fraught with ambivalence” (2013: 7). Convivial repertoires capture this provisional quality. They show how social life is often sustained through attention and interpretation rather than durable attachment.

Conviviality, however, is inherently fragile. It depends not only on moral disposition but also on the logistics of participation. Time and energy matter here, as do work schedules, caregiving responsibilities, and bodily fatigue. These shape who can engage, who must hurry, and who withdraws. This is what I refer to as constrained agency. Agency here is not absent, but it is exercised within limits that structure everyday possibilities for action. In NDG, these constraints shape who can linger in a café, who participates in neighbourhood events, and who moves quickly through public space. The ability to take up space, or to step back from it, reveals how social and material conditions shape everyday sociability. The informal skills informing everyday interactions form what might be described as a thin moral infrastructure, a set of procedural ethics that make proximity functional without presuming intimacy.

The earlier discussion of moral life and ordinary ethics helps clarify what is at stake in these moments. As I argued above, ethics is not best understood here as a system of rules, but as

a matter of ongoing discernment within ordinary situations. Zigon's (2007) notion of moral breakdown remains useful not because everyday encounters in NDG are dramatic but because small disruptions can make ethical life perceptible. These are not failures of conviviality. They are moments when moral life becomes felt and worked through in practice. The modest, quotidian efforts through which conviviality is managed are also morally legible to others. The way someone responds to the flow of ordinary life and to its interruptions can become a basis for judgments about trustworthiness, care, or entitlement in shared settings. Convivial repertoires are also uneven because not everyone has equal access to recognition or participation. As Radice's (2022) work on conviviality and dignity makes clear, conviviality is selective and contingent, and it is always shaped by power and social positioning. The dignity of being heard, or of being in a position to host and receive others (Radice 2022: 5), is not evenly distributed. It has to be negotiated in everyday interaction.

In NDG, convivial repertoires became visible in ordinary scenes that were easy to overlook. A pause before speaking could reveal them. So could a small redirection of movement, a decision not to press further, or a brief greeting that kept an interaction in proportion to the moment. What mattered was not simply that people were near one another, but how they managed the terms of that nearness in the course of everyday life. Convivial repertoires, in this sense, name the patterned practices through which urban life is made livable. They refer to the ways people ease an encounter. They may limit a claim, or leave room for others, without turning every moment of co-presence into an explicit negotiation. Because these acts are ordinary, they often recede into the background. Yet they are part of what allows life alongside others to continue under conditions that are never entirely of people's own choosing. This has methodological implications as well. If conviviality is enacted through small, repeated practices,

then it has to be followed in the situations where those practices unfold. The analysis that follows proceeds from this premise: ethnographic understanding emerged not from a neutral vantage point but from being positioned within the same circuits through which local life was organized. This included the rhythms people had come to know but also the tiredness that gathers in mundane days and the practical limits that shaped what they could do.

### ***Methodological Orientation***

#### ***Positionality and Situated Practice***

Living in NDG both before and during my research profoundly shaped how I came to understand the process of fieldwork itself. My relationship to the locality was never external or detached. Observation unfolded from within the ordinary situations I was trying to understand, as my own conduct had to be adjusted in ways that mirrored those of others around me. Because of this entanglement, the field could not be treated as a site that I entered and exited. It took shape instead through the routines of living, working and moving through the spaces around me. I knew the geography of NDG well. I was familiar with its small grocers, the cafés, parks, and commercial corridors around me and I could navigate much of it by feel. At first, this familiarity seemed like an advantage, almost a ready-made intimacy with place. As the research progressed, though, I became more aware that familiarity could just as easily obscure perception. Conducting fieldwork “at home” required a deliberate effort to make the ordinary strange again, to slow down habitual recognition and attend more carefully to what these spaces meant and did for others.

My own pathway into NDG unfolded gradually rather than through a single moment of arrival. I am originally from Saskatchewan, where I grew up with my family. Before settling in Montréal, I had been living for several years in Taiwan. When I returned to Canada and came to Québec, I

lived briefly in NDG before moving to Hochelaga-Maisonneuve in eastern Montréal. It was there, in a predominantly francophone environment, that I began learning French. After that year, I spent several years in Sherbrooke and the Eastern Townships where I studied and taught at Bishop's University. I later returned to Montréal and settled more permanently in NDG. At the time of this research, I had been living in NDG for almost fifteen years with my partner and our three children. My longer-term residence in the district began on Walkley Avenue, below Sherbrooke, in a part of NDG marked by greater socioeconomic disadvantage than some nearby sectors. I had not known this pocket of Walkley before arriving there and my introduction to it came through the everyday variation around me: different languages spoken on the street, different kinds of households, and different histories of arrival and settlement. Living there, close to Loyola campus, I became aware of the social contrasts present within a relatively small area. In some directions there were apartment buildings and more precarious housing conditions. In others, streets with more detached and semi-detached homes and a different demographic profile. Because my first child was still very young at the time, I came to know the area through the routines of early parenthood. My days were organized around the nearby parks, walking routes, the Loyola campus, and other public spaces close to home. Later, I moved just south of Monkland Avenue into a part of NDG that felt different again. The built environment changed with more duplexes and detached homes, more visible yards and a somewhat different rhythm of daily movement. Moving across these parts of NDG made clear to me that simplified socioeconomic or age-based readings of the district can miss how people actually inhabit it. What came into view instead were overlapping but uneven social worlds best understood by following the pathways through which people move into, through, and sometimes beyond the locality.

Finnegan's (1989) notion of pathways is helpful here because it asks us to look beyond static population categories. What comes into view instead are the lived routes along which social worlds take shape and hold together because people return to them over time, even as those ties may also loosen. In her study, pathways highlighted plural and partly overlapping worlds whose connections extended beyond any single bounded locality. That insight matters here as well. In NDG, people's social worlds take form in relation to others and remain contingent on the situations in which they unfold. They are shaped by the conditions people bring into local life: where they live, who they care for, the languages they use, and the work or migration histories that organize their days. Over time, these conditions meet the repeated routes people take through particular streets, institutions, and local settings. My own experience as both resident and ethnographer reinforced this point. It showed me that broad distinctions such as renter and homeowner, apartment dweller and householder, or younger and older resident do not by themselves explain how local life is actually lived. Those categories matter, but their significance becomes clearer only when one follows the routes through which people keep daily life going. Fieldwork was conducted in both English and French. In many initial encounters, I introduced myself in French and then continued in French, English, or a mix of both, depending on the participant's preference and the interactional context. In some interviews and go-alongs, interlocutors moved between French and English as particular expressions popped up, and sometimes because a memory or encounter came more easily in one language than the other. I retained those shifts as part of the ethnographic texture of the field. For analysis and presentation in the thesis, however, I transcribed and translated the material into English.

As Amit (2000) reminds us, one peculiarity of participant observation is that the researcher's personal relationships often serve as primary vehicles for eliciting findings and

insight. Ethnography depends on relationships as both method and medium because inquiry is carried out through the same ties that make familiarity possible. For that reason, the work often involves an uneasy intertwining of growing closer to others while trying to understand what that closeness makes visible. Some things come into view through proximity; others remain difficult to name. Amit (2000) notes that these relationships offer “significant analytical advantages as well as poignant dilemmas of ethics and social location” (3). Living in NDG meant that the relationships through which I came to know the locality also became part of the research itself. My interactions with neighbours, storeowners, parents at the park, and volunteers were not separate from fieldwork. They formed part of the social ground from which it unfolded. The people I encountered were not research subjects in an abstract sense. Some were friends. Others were acquaintances. Still others were people I met through my work as a participant and volunteer in the area. This realization was both grounding and unsettling. It brought me up against a basic tension in ethnographic intimacy. Because understanding is built through relationships, questions about my position in the field cannot be treated as separate from the analysis. Living this work from the dual position of resident and researcher meant having to adjust, again and again, how close I was, what I could ask, and how I could write. At times, I caught myself slipping into the ease of familiarity and taking for granted what I thought I already understood about a site or routine exchange. At other moments, I became acutely aware of my presence, conscious that I was both part of and studying the same social field.

The task, then, was not to remove my involvement but to recognize it as part of the ethnographic process itself. As Amit (2000) suggests, “participant observation is often uneasily perched on the precipice between the instrumental demands of this as of any research enterprise and the more complex and rounded social associations afforded by this particular method” (3). I

came to understand this uneasiness not as a flaw to be resolved, but as part of what the method made available. The more complex social associations that Amit describes were important precisely because they did not stay neatly within established categories. They opened a space between doing and knowing between taking part in local activities and trying to understand what participation made visible. In that space, relations could become more complicated than the roles through which they first appeared, such as when researcher and interlocutor, volunteer and organizer, or neighbour and stranger did not remain entirely separate. These categories still mattered, but they could also loosen in practice. This was where the ambivalence of fieldwork became methodologically productive. It allowed me to see how social life in NDG was often made through partial involvement, practical cooperation, and forms of recognition that did not settle into fixed relations. My daily movements, whether I was walking to the market, greeting familiar faces at bus stops, or exchanging a few words with shop owners became part of both lived experience and ethnographic observation. I learned to treat these moments as openings, as occasions in which the ordinary could be seen with slightly more clarity. Sometimes that meant slowing down to notice how people adjusted to one another in shared space. At other times, it meant stepping back and reflecting on how my own movements were caught up in some of the same habits and demands. In this sense, fieldwork at home became a practice of dwelling with difference. It involved learning to attend to the ordinary not as background but as the primary site where urban coexistence is continually negotiated.

### ***Participation and Seasonal Rhythms***

Participation deepened as I moved with the area's seasonal rhythms and expanded my involvement across different parts of NDG. Much of what I learned about NDG came through participation. I volunteered at the urban markets in the summer and helped with PorchRock

during more than one spring. The collective garden became another recurring site, one I returned to over multiple seasons. What began as casual involvement gradually took on methodological significance. Through repeated participation, these activities trained my attention to the practical and embodied work that sustains sociability. They became forms of inquiry because they drew me into shared tasks and ordinary routines, and because they depended on coordination over time. In each setting, encounters tended to follow a familiar sequence. People arrived, prepared, interacted, waited, and then dispersed. Those rhythms shaped how people came together and moved apart.

At the urban outdoor markets, for example, I observed how convivial life was maintained through repetition and small acts of care. Familiarity was built gradually through the work itself. I was doing such things as setting up stalls, arranging produce, and talking with regulars as they passed through. These were small routines, but they placed me inside the ways public recognition develops over time. Running weekly with the NDG Pacers and attending block parties and local art events showed me something similar that is, place-making often happens through embodied coordination not only through conversation. These activities depended on shared timing, a mutual awareness and a willingness to adjust one's pace to others. Through them, I began to see that ethnography was not only about observing interaction but also about inhabiting its conditions.

Being present meant sharing time in ways that set the terms of what I could notice and come to understand. These moments of participation were also moments of attentiveness. I was often fully immersed in tasks while also becoming aware of what I was doing in those moments. Loading boxes and setting up tables created their own kind of attentiveness. So did moving in sync with others. It was practical rather than reflective in the moment, but analytically productive



afterward. As Pink (2021) reminds us, knowledge emerges through shared sensory and affective experience. To know is also to move, to pause, and to feel one's way alongside others. Over time, I came to understand more clearly the overlap between participation and observation. When I helped coordinate performers and logistics for PorchRock or tended a shared garden bed, I was participating fully. I was carrying equipment, chatting with volunteers, and experiencing both the strain of the work and the satisfaction of shared accomplishment. Later, as I wrote fieldnotes, I reflected on how being inside these activities shaped what I noticed and how I interpreted it.

The act of contributing itself became part of the ethnographic process. Participation functioned as an embodied form of thinking and knowing that could not be separated from what I was studying. This dual orientation became central to how the research unfolded. I was participating and reflecting at once. I was helping with tasks while also writing toward analysis. Fieldwork was not a matter of returning to the field again and again, but largely of remaining within it, as both neighbour and ethnographer. My routines of shopping, walking, running, and volunteering became extensions of the field. Reflection emerged from within those same circuits of activity. Working in this way meant continually learning with and from the situations I was part of. Each engagement required a balance between the immediacy of participation and the distance needed for analysis, between contributing to collective life and attending to how that life was made possible. In this sense, the field was not a bounded site but a living relation that I moved through daily. Over time, this way of working taught me that fieldwork required learning how to notice and move alongside others while my own routines continued to unfold. The tasks of childrearing, householding, volunteering, and teaching were not separate from the research. They shaped the conditions under which attention was possible.

### *Reflexive Learning and Constrained Agency*

As I became more immersed in these forms of participation, I came to see that learning in the field did not simply accumulate. It also asked something of my own position. What I noticed, and how I noticed it, was caught up in the same circuits of movement and obligation that organized life in NDG. Time mattered. So did energy, care, repetition, and the limits people moved within. My routines were therefore not outside the analysis. They were part of it. At times, familiarity made things recede into the background. A café I frequented regularly, or a park I crossed almost daily, could become too easy to recognize. It could slip past attention because I already knew how to move through it. At other moments, I felt sharply aware of my presence. The work, then, was not to remove my involvement, as if that were possible, but to attend carefully to how it shaped what could be seen and known. Over time, I noticed that my own capacity to engage with interlocutors was limited by many of the same constraints that affected others. Time pressures, caregiving responsibilities, physical tiredness, and the cumulative effects of pandemic restrictions influenced when and how I could participate. These limits were not incidental. They affected the tempo of the research. They shaped the kinds of encounters that were possible, and the depth of attention I could sustain. To study constrained agency ethnographically was also to recognize these frictions as shared. In NDG, the constraints shaping agency appeared in ordinary differences of pace and availability. Some people could linger. Others had to hurry. Some could volunteer, while others could only pass through. Some had the energy to engage; others moved more cautiously at the edges of social life. My own research unfolded within those same conditions.

This shared condition sharpened my analytic attention. Waiting, tiredness, and the uncertainty of partial knowing became part of what the research could register. Put differently,

slow moments and uneven access to participation brought the moral and practical labour of shared life into view. Learning often came not through dramatic encounters but through persistence. It depended on returning to the same settings, noticing small variations, and staying with what changed slowly over time. Reflexivity, in this sense, was built into the work of being there. It developed as I followed situations as they unfolded, and as I came to see that constraint was not just context, but a defining condition of social life.

### ***Fieldwork Realities: Relationships, Recruitment and Interactions***

This thesis draws on approximately three years of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between January 2021 and December 2024 in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG), a socially and culturally diverse district within the larger administrative borough of Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce in Montréal. The research examines how everyday sociability, emplacement, and constrained agency unfold across public and semi-public urban settings. An ethnographic approach was chosen because it allows close attention to the ordinary practices and affective textures through which people live together in difference. It also makes it possible to trace these dynamics along everyday pathways, showing how ways of getting along come into being through movement and repeated presence. By interrupting familiar routines, the pandemic made visible the extent to which sociability depends on learned forms of attention, restraint, and coordination rather than on ease or spontaneity alone. These small adjustments made the usually unspoken work of sharing space easier to see. They showed how people revised their practices in response to new spatial constraints and shared expectations. In this sense, the pandemic foregrounded the kinds of moral and practical negotiations that my research seeks to understand. It clarified what became the central orientation of my fieldwork: that everyday coexistence is not

a stable achievement, but an ongoing and uneven process sustained through practical adjustment to others and to the changing conditions of shared space.

Because the research focused on the moral and practical dimensions of everyday sociability, participants were not recruited through formal advertising. Relationships developed instead through sustained involvement in local activities. These included volunteering at food banks and outdoor markets, participating in a collective garden, attending events in local parks and community centres, and engaging with informal networks that formed around these spaces. Recruiting in this way allowed encounters to emerge within the rhythms of everyday interaction rather than according to the separate timetable of formal recruitment. It also supported ethical engagement, since people could participate at a pace that felt comfortable to them. Participation was rarely a one-off exchange. More often, it grew through familiarity and repeated encounters, as people began to recognize me and I came to understand the rhythms of particular settings. In most cases, interviews and go-alongs were arranged only after I had already met the participant elsewhere and had come to know them through prior conversation or repeated contact. The research followed Tri-Council and university ethics protocols. Participants were informed of my role as a researcher, and consent was obtained verbally or in writing depending on the context and the participant's preference. Pseudonyms are used throughout for individuals and organizations, and identifying details have been omitted where disclosure could risk recognition. Because I was already a long-term NDG resident, interactions sometimes moved fluidly between neighbourly and research contexts. I managed this by being explicit about when I was acting as a researcher and by making clear that participants could decline or opt out of further involvement at any time.

Ethnography is particularly well suited to studying conviviality as a lived process rather than as an abstract ideal because it attends to what people do in real time: how they move, pause, avoid, acknowledge, and respond to limits. Because conviviality is situational and relational, I combined participant observation, go-alongs, and open-ended interviews to document both the visible and articulated dimensions of everyday life. The research unfolded iteratively rather than sequentially. Observation, conversation, and analysis developed together, each shaping the direction of the others. As my fieldwork progressed, I began to see that different sites carried different kinds of sociability. In some settings, people returned often enough for interactions to repeat and for familiarity to build slowly. This was often the case in restaurants and cafés, at NDG Pacers runs, in the urban markets, and in the collective garden. In other settings, such as bus stops, street corners, and sidewalks, encounters were usually brief and sometimes one-off. Even so, those moments still mattered, because they formed part of the social terrain through which people moved.

Across these settings, I observed how people negotiated proximity and difference through the practical demands and limits of everyday life. NDG is a socially and economically mixed urban district where linguistic, cultural, and class differences overlap in ordinary life, often at a very fine spatial scale. Residents' experiences of the local environment varied significantly from one street to the next. Housing type, tenure, life stage, mobility, and length of residence all played a part in these differences. Participants ranged in age from their mid-thirties to mid-seventies and included people with diverse migration histories, household arrangements, and income levels. I do not treat this heterogeneity as evidence of NDG's uniqueness. I treat it instead as a condition that made it possible to observe how ordinary social practices shift across settings. This variation shaped both the forms of sociability I encountered and the

methodological choices I made in following people as they moved between sites, through different times of day, and through changing routines.

### ***Participant Observation and Volunteering as Method***

In Finnegan's terms, social patterns became perceptible through repeated encounters along familiar pathways. Ordinary movement accumulated over time and became recognizable as a form of coordination. Parks, cafés, and libraries in particular, emerged as sites where public life was enacted through small gestures of civility and attentiveness. Volunteering provided a second, complementary mode of participant observation. It allowed me to engage directly with residents in settings structured by shared tasks and collective effort. I volunteered at a collective garden for three hours per week during the summer and fall seasons, at a local food bank and indoor marché for four months at four hours per week, and at outdoor produce markets held in three local parks for four months each summer. I also participated in local events such as the PorchRock festival, local running groups, and a block party. These participatory settings showed that conviviality is not necessarily spontaneous. It is also organized through routine forms of cooperation.

Volunteering brought people together around practical tasks. People packed produce, set up tables, helped clients, worked in the garden. Through this work, language, pace, and etiquette had to be continually negotiated. Working alongside others made visible the quiet competencies that sustain shared activity. I began to notice how much depended on sensing when help was needed and when it would be better to hold back. Assistance had to be offered without presumption. Pace mattered. So did tone, timing, and the ability to recognize hesitation or difficulty as it emerged in the moment. Much of the coordination happened through small adjustments rather than explicit discussion.

Because these spaces combined routine and improvisation, they showed how sociability is built through repeated adjustment rather than through explicit agreement. Regular volunteers and market staff, for example, came to recognize one another and anticipate one another's movements. They had to coordinate with minimal instruction. At the same time, newcomers were continually entering these spaces which meant that recalibration was ongoing. These dynamics highlighted how conviviality depends on procedural forms of inclusion that are learned and enacted even when they are not formally articulated. Participation also sharpened my attention to the embodied dimensions of sociability. Carrying boxes, arranging produce, running alongside others, or waiting together for an event to begin oriented bodies in shared time and space. These moments were not ancillary to the research. They were part of how knowledge was produced. To participate was not simply to gain access. It was also a way of learning, from within the activity, what it asked of people in practice. It showed how time was organized, how responsibilities were distributed, and where effort or strain tended to accumulate. Participation did not replace observation. The two were intertwined. Participation positioned me inside ongoing activities, and observation emerged from within interaction itself, revealing how social relations were negotiated in real time rather than from a detached vantage point. While engaged in tasks, I remained attentive to the subtle adjustments that made cooperation possible: pauses in conversation, shifts in tone, gestures of acknowledgment, and moments of disengagement. Writing fieldnotes afterward allowed me to reflect on how being inside the activity shaped what I had noticed and how I interpreted it. Over time, I came to treat participation itself as a form of analytic labour within my fieldwork.

The timing of these activities also mattered. My fieldwork took place at different times of day, across weekdays and weekends, and over multiple seasons. This allowed me to observe how

social relations shifted with changes in pace, visibility, and atmosphere. Daytime settings such as cafés, produce markets, and gardens were often structured by repeated routines, work schedules, and brief encounters. Events like PorchRock, block parties, and evening gatherings such as night runs introduced different forms of proximity and attention. By moving across these temporal registers, I came to see that shared life is organized not only through space, but also through shifts in pace and rhythm. People adjusted their conduct in relation to crowding, noise, traffic, familiarity, and changing degrees of constraint. This temporal extension often continued after PorchRock formally concluded. It was customary for organizers and participants to gather afterward at a long-standing bar on Sherbrooke Street, where people remained together into the evening, talking through the day's events and spending unstructured time in one another's company. These moments did not replace everyday sociability, but they highlighted how its tone and intensity shifted as daytime routines gave way to slower, less regulated evening encounters.

### ***Go-Alongs and Walking Interviews: Mobility, Emplacement, and Situated Attention***

To explore how residents experience NDG through movement, I conducted five go-along interviews and twenty open-ended interviews, each lasting between sixty and one hundred and twenty minutes. I had initially hoped to conduct more go-alongs, but in practice this depended on participants' time, willingness, and comfort with a longer and more mobile form of participation. Drawing on Margarethe Kusenbach (2003, 2006) and Jo Lee and Tim Ingold (2006), the go-along method combines walking and conversation to examine how people relate to their surroundings in situ. When this was possible, interlocutors were invited to choose a route that felt familiar or meaningful to them and to guide me along it. I used this approach because it keeps reflection within the spatial and sensory conditions of everyday life. It also allows meaning to take shape through movement rather than being recalled at a distance. Interlocutors



were invited to show me their daily rounds, and walking side by side made visible forms of knowledge that do not always surface in seated interviews. Pace, gesture, silence, and hesitation became part of what could be noticed and talked through. As we moved, participants pointed out buildings, intersections, shops, trees, and benches often offering memories or observations prompted by what came into view. These mobile conversations showed how emplacement is produced in motion, as people oriented themselves to place through recollection and bodily familiarity. Some interlocutors compared past and present versions of streets, returned to earlier routines or encounters, and adjusted their attention in ways that signalled ease or unease in particular settings. For long-term residents, go-alongs often prompted layered narratives of attachment. Streets and parks became anchors for memory, associated with earlier life stages, family histories, or changes in the local area.

In addition to go-alongs, I conducted twenty open-ended interviews with residents recruited through community networks and everyday encounters. These interviews explored participants' biographies, routines, and experiences of life in the district, including how they came to NDG, which spaces they frequented, and how they perceived local diversity and change. The interviews were conversational and loosely structured, allowing participants to guide discussion toward what mattered most to them. Many led to follow-up exchanges or informal conversations in other settings, extending the research beyond formal interview moments. Because much of sociability in NDG unfolds in public and semi-public spaces, ad hoc conversations were also an important part of the research process. Brief exchanges at food markets, bus stops, cafés, along streets, or in parks often gave me spontaneous insight into how residents interpreted everyday interactions. These encounters were recorded in fieldnotes and later considered alongside interviews and observational material. Together, these methods

allowed me to trace how emplacement, mobility, and sociability were experienced across different registers of time, attention, and involvement. Interviews and go-alongs were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. When recording was not appropriate for brief informal encounters, I wrote up detailed fieldnotes as soon as possible afterward.

### ***Digital Fieldwork and Local Life under Pandemic Conditions***

During the COVID-19 pandemic when face-to-face contact was limited or intermittently suspended, I extended my fieldwork into local online spaces. Local Facebook and Instagram groups functioned as informal extensions of local life. I followed a variety of discussions and mutual-aid initiatives to understand how residents maintained connections with each other when many ordinary forms of co-presence were unavailable. This meant paying attention to the posts and announcements that circulated daily, but also to the responses they drew. Some posts asked for practical help. Others shared updates about local businesses, schools, daycares, snow removal, lost pets, or changing public health rules. Together, they showed how local life was being tracked and sustained at a distance. These posts often led to brief exchanges that were practical on the surface but carried more than information. A request for help could draw an offer to drop something off. A complaint might be met with recognition from others who were dealing with the same restrictions. Sometimes the response was only a small joke or a brief comment, but even that mattered. It signalled that someone was present, reading, and willing to respond.

What was analytically significant was not the content of any single exchange, but the pattern through which these interactions accumulated over time. Repeated posts by familiar names, the circulation of recurring concerns, and the routine acknowledgement of others' situations created a sense of ongoing orientation to shared circumstances.

Even when people did not know one another personally, these exchanges sustained a low-level form of social presence. They showed how residents continued to engage with one another even when ordinary contact was limited. The sense of local life that emerged here was not built through sustained interaction. It depended instead on intermittent forms of mediated attention, as people posted updates, replied briefly, offered help, or simply signalled that they were still present. At moments, these platforms also became sites of tension. Online exchanges also made certain tensions more visible. People disagreed about public health rules. They disagreed about what counted as responsible behaviour, and about how much adjustment could reasonably be expected of others. These exchanges could become sharper because people were not in the same physical setting. Tone was harder to read. So were hesitation, humour, irritation, or restraint. A comment that might have softened in person could land more abruptly on a screen. Misunderstandings sometimes moved quickly for this reason. These exchanges drew out the moral expectations that usually remain implicit in everyday interaction. They showed that the terms of living alongside one another were not settled, but articulated and contested in practice. Sometimes, they also had to be repaired through language alone. This offered insight into how people negotiated proximity and obligation when shared space was no longer available as a stabilizing frame. Observing these online interactions sharpened my understanding of how local relations persisted through partial and mediated forms of connection. Digital exchanges did not replace in-person encounters, but they sometimes carried them forward, allowing residents to remain oriented to one another despite physical distance. Familiarity could accumulate through repeated names, the profile images and reference points tied to local places and events. In this sense, online groups functioned as lightly held public spaces. Presence was uneven and participation intermittent, yet the shared frame of locality still mattered. Digital fieldwork also

highlighted how constrained agency shaped participation. Not everyone engaged in the same way. Some residents posted regularly, while others mostly read without commenting, and many did not participate at all. Decisions about whether to respond, to continue following a thread, or to disengage often reflected similar forms of restraint and selective attention to those I observed in physical settings. Limits of time and energy mattered, as did emotional capacity and a person's tolerance for conflict. Online participation therefore echoed offline sociability in its unevenness, showing how engagement is structured by what people can sustain.

I did not treat digital observations as a fully separate field site with its own bounded population. Instead, I approached them as one of several channels through which local relations could become visible during this period. The degree of integration varied. For some people, online spaces were part of their everyday social world; for others, access was limited, participation was not appealing, or connection moved through other routes. Online discussions often referred to specific streets, businesses, events, or people, and at times they folded back into encounters and conversations that took place offline. During periods of heightened restriction, these platforms became more active and made visible the ways residents tracked uncertainty and offered help at a distance. As restrictions eased, activity shifted again, reflecting changing patterns of presence and attention. Including digital fieldwork allowed me to follow how everyday sociability continued under constraint, without assuming that conviviality disappeared when physical proximity was limited. It also showed how moral attentiveness and practical coordination could be re-routed through whatever channels were available. Reading this material alongside in-person observation helped me see how people sustained shared life through both embodied and mediated contact. Even when these contacts were intermittent, they depended on restraint and situational judgment.

### *Analysis, Writing, and the Iterative Making of Knowledge*

Analysis unfolded alongside fieldwork rather than after it. Ethnographic understanding emerged through repeated movement between observation, participation, writing, and reflection. I transcribed interviews and go-alongs soon after they were completed, working with these materials alongside fieldnotes and digital observations to identify patterns as they took shape. Writing was not a separate stage of the research process but an integral part of it, a way of thinking through what I was seeing, feeling, and learning in real time. This iterative approach allowed insights to develop gradually. Early observations did not stand on their own. Many only became analytically significant when they reappeared in later settings or were reflected on in interviews. A brief exchange at a café counter, for instance, might initially register as incidental, but gain importance when it was repeated, recalled, or situated within a longer relationship. My analysis therefore unfolded through accumulation. Patterns became visible through repeated encounters and sustained attention, rather than through isolated moments. Familiarity built gradually, allowing the practical work of everyday interaction to be traced over time.

Because the fieldwork was long-term and multi-sited, I was able to trace how similar forms of sociability unfolded differently across contexts. Cafés, parks, food markets, running groups, and online spaces each assembled people through distinct rhythms and expectations, yet they shared common moral and affective registers. Across these settings, I repeatedly saw people orienting themselves to one another in small, practical ways. This included moments of brief acknowledgment, decisions to hold back or give space, and occasional adjustments that made it easier to remain alongside others. At times, this also meant choosing to withdraw, whether by moving on, ending an interaction, or letting a moment pass. These were not identical in form, but they were recognizable in their orientation toward managing proximity under constraint. Writing

across sites made it possible to see these practices as part of a broader repertoire rather than as isolated behaviours.

Fieldnotes played a central role in this process. I wrote them both descriptively and analytically, recording concrete details of interaction while also attending to mood, tone, and atmosphere. I noted pauses in conversation, shifts in body language, moments of hesitation or ease, and the subtle ways people adjusted to one another's presence. Over time, these notes became a record not only of what happened but of how situations felt and how they unfolded. Revisiting them allowed me to track how my own perceptions changed as I became more attuned to the rhythms of life in this district. Analysis also involved recognizing what remained partial or unresolved. Not every encounter led to clarity or understanding. Many were brief, uncertain, or simply ended without resolution. At first, these moments could feel incomplete, as though something was missing or left undone. Over time, however, I came to see this open-endedness as part of how everyday urban sociability actually works. Living alongside others does not reliably produce agreement or closure. More often, it involves staying with uncertainty. It can mean misrecognizing someone, or deciding quietly to disengage and move on. Writing with this in mind helped me avoid reading too much into any single interaction. It kept my attention on the modest ways coexistence is usually managed in practice.

Writing became part of how I learned to make sense of what I was observing, rather than a stage that followed fieldwork. As I drafted chapters, I had to make ongoing decisions about what to emphasize and what to leave in the background. Those decisions echoed the kinds of everyday judgments people make as they move through shared spaces, deciding what to attend to and what to pass by. Writing also slowed the research down. It gave me the time to return to encounters, sometimes repeatedly, and to notice how moral and affective labour accumulated

across weeks and months rather than appearing all at once. This process also made my own position in the field more visible. The routes I followed, the places where I lingered, and the limits on my time and energy all shaped what I noticed and how I interpreted it. Over time, I came to think of analysis less as applying theory to material and more as a practice of careful synthesis. Concepts such as pathways, emplacement, convivial repertoires, and constrained agency did not emerge fully formed. They took shape gradually through sustained engagement with people, places, and texts, each informing the other. Writing helped these ideas settle, grounding them in the textures of everyday life rather than in abstract models.

In this sense, analysis was inseparable from living in NDG during this period. The same conditions that structured local life—pandemic restrictions, fatigue, care obligations, and uneven access to time and space—also shaped how the research unfolded. Attending ethnographically to constrained agency meant recognizing that the limits I observed were not external to the research process but part of it. Knowledge developed by working within these limits, learning to notice what was possible in a given moment, what was deferred, and what remained tentative. This approach reflects the broader orientation of the thesis. Shared urban life can only be understood by staying close to ordinary settings and tracing how meaning builds through repeated encounter. Writing, like fieldwork, became a way of staying close to everyday life and to the small adjustments that allow people to continue alongside one another, even when tensions persist.

The research did not stand apart from the world it describes but unfolded within it. The chapters that follow build on this orientation by examining specific sites and practices through which everyday sociability in NDG is organized. The chapters that follow build on this orientation by examining a series of settings through which everyday sociability in NDG is organized. They move from pathways of arrival and street-level gatherings to collective

gardening, group running, neighbouring relations, traffic encounters, and commercial settings.

Across these sites, I trace how practical ways of managing co-presence are learned in the course of everyday life, and how they are adjusted when they break down and become part of routine conduct over time. Across these cases, urban coexistence appears not as a background condition of local life, but as an ongoing process of moral and affective adjustment enacted through repeated, ordinary encounters.



### **CHAPTER THREE: PATHWAYS: HOW I CAME TO NDG**

This chapter examines how residents come to live in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) and how they relate to the locality through their daily movements and routines. This means that I treat settlement less as an endpoint and more as the practical work of learning to manage co-presence, because people are continually adjusting to others in shared spaces while also trying to keep daily life workable. I ask who arrives in NDG, under what circumstances, and what factors shape their decisions to stay or move on, because these trajectories reveal how individual life histories are entangled with the shifting conditions of the city. These can include rising rents, redevelopment pressures, and changing expectations about who can remain in the district. People often come to NDG not out of a clear choice but because of what is possible at a given moment: the availability of an apartment, proximity to transit or work, or the pull of family or other social anchors. For some, NDG offers relative stability. For others, it is a temporary stop, a place where daily life is managed under conditions of uncertainty. Through these stories, I trace how people make life workable amid the mobility and precarity of local life.

I take up Finnegan's (1989) concept of pathways as a way to describe how people move into, through, and beyond NDG. Finnegan uses the term to describe how participation in social and cultural life unfolds over time. People enter different social worlds, sustain involvement for a while, and sometimes leave. This framing helps hold together personal agency and structural constraint. I use this idea to think about arrival and settlement as processes shaped by constraint as much as by intention. It keeps the focus on what becomes possible in a given moment. A person may live where rent is manageable, where a bus route is reliable, or where an institution provides support. Settlement, in this sense, is not a straightforward expression of preference.

What does a pathway look like when it is still thin, when daily life is mostly about getting through the day? Malik, for instance, found housing in NDG because it was what he could

afford, not because it was where he hoped to be. Marc-Yves, after years in the area, found himself relying on the local food bank. These trajectories show that settlement is not always the realization of choice but the management of circumstance. Thinking with Finnegan helps frame these stories as pathways of adjustment, as lived routes through opportunity and precarity rather than stable destinations.

Mobility in NDG is not a background condition. People arrive, settle for a time, move on, and sometimes return. These movements reshape the social composition and everyday feel of the locality. Residents establish themselves at different stages of life and for different reasons. Some do so through family connections or schools. Others through work, migration, or circumstance. Bus routes, the metro line, and NDG's central arteries connecting it to downtown Montréal structure how residents navigate the city and make sense of their surroundings. These daily movements foster familiarity and orientation because people encounter the same places and faces in passing, at the café, in the park, or along their commute. Over time, such repetitions generate a sense of rhythm and recognition that can anchor people, however briefly, in the flow of urban life. What emerges is not a single shared experience but a pattern of varied attachments, in which residents are positioned differently within the same locality.

Finnegan's (1989) notion of pathways helps situate these movements as lived routes through which people sustain and reshape their involvement in local life. Pathways draw attention to how individuals move through social and material environments that are both structured and open-ended, because every trajectory reflects not only personal choice but also structural constraint. Building on this, I draw on Nicholas Long and Henrietta Moore's (2013) conception of sociality as a dynamic and relational process rather than a fixed set of social bonds. They write that "if connection, commitment and unity are, then, potentially emergent but

potentially evanescent properties of all relations, rather than fixed attributes of those relations experienced as ‘bonds’ or ‘ties,’ the most productive way forward is not to focus on those ‘ties’ in isolation, but rather to examine the dynamic matrix in which they are continually made, sustained or dissolved” (2013: 7). In NDG, this perspective allows me to trace how people’s lives intersect and diverge, and how connections form, fade, and are remade through the ordinary movements that link people to place. Sociality, in this sense, is not something that exists prior to action but something achieved through repeated encounters, gestures, and the moral effort of coexisting with others. Because these relations unfold in everyday circuits of the locality, on the bus, in cafés, and at local institutions, they accumulate meaning over time, creating familiarity and a workable sense of attachment even when ties remain loose or temporary. This approach also foregrounds how living in NDG involves both the making and unmaking of social worlds, as people navigate constraint, precarity, and the shifting conditions of urban life. Thinking with Long and Moore helps clarify that the social life of NDG is not held together by stable bonds but by the ongoing labour of relating. Because connections are continually made and remade through everyday movement, the locality itself is best understood as a living process rather than a fixed setting.

This perspective opens onto Nigel Thrift’s (2003; 2004a) argument that place is produced through the rhythms, improvisations, and affective charges of daily life. As people walk, shop, wait for the bus, or pause to talk on the street, they reproduce and subtly transform the spaces they inhabit. As de Certeau (1984) suggests, these ordinary movements do not simply take place within space but help make it, as people learn routes and improvise ways of moving through the city in the course of everyday life. Thrift extends this orientation by emphasizing that such movements also participate in the sensory and atmospheric composition of urban life. City

spaces are not neutral containers but living fields that “summon life” through intensities, sensations, and rhythms that precede conscious reasoning. Everyday movement—the shuffle at a bus stop, the pause before entering a café, the steadying breath in a crowd—participates in what Thrift calls a “practical practice of composition” (2004a: 88), through which being in the city takes material and sensory form. This matters because it suggests that coming to inhabit a place is not only a matter of repeated presence or spatial familiarity. It also depends on how moving through a place feels, and on the atmospheres and embodied adjustments that make a locality more or less inhabitable. These activities therefore matter because they give spatial and sensory form to relations that are otherwise fleeting or provisional. In this sense, everyday movements become small acts of emplacement because they anchor people, however temporarily, in shared time and space. Lefebvre (1991) deepens this understanding by showing how daily routines and spatial practices produce and sustain social life itself. He notes that “the spatial practice of a society ... produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it,” and that under neocapitalism it “embodies a close association ... between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, ‘private’ life and leisure)” (1991: 38). This is helpful because it underlines how the ordinary movements of local life are not incidental but foundational in producing a lived locality such as NDG. In NDG, cafés, parks, and transit routes are not simply backdrops for social life but active mediums through which people cultivate a sense of ease and recognition and come to inhabit the locality with greater familiarity. This is not belonging as full inclusion or deep attachment but as situated familiarity, an ability to find one’s bearings and to participate, however partially, in the rhythms of everyday life. A place becomes familiar not only through residence or duration but through repetition, the daily routes, routines, and micro-adjustments that make the locality feel livable. In

this sense, mobility and emplacement are not opposing conditions but mutually constitutive. That is to say, people come to inhabit NDG because they move through it, and their movements, in turn, sustain the social and moral texture of the locality. Because these processes of familiarity and orientation unfold in motion, the go-along offered a particularly useful way to follow how participants came to know and inhabit NDG.

With several participants, including Bianca, Malik, Xiao-Wei, Helena, and Antonio, I conducted go-alongs, walking interviews that brought into focus how their understandings of the locality emerged through movement. These walks showed how people came to know NDG in motion. What they noticed in the present often carried traces of earlier experience. Because I used open-ended questions, participants often moved between immediate observation and recollection, drawing biographical details into the conversation as we walked. Memory mattered here. For some, particular streets, shops, or corners carried earlier impressions that continued to shape how they understood the place. A setting might be remembered as welcoming, frustrating, or simply ordinary, and those remembered qualities registered in how participants oriented themselves and in what felt familiar, uncertain, or changed. The go-along allowed me to be part of the conversation as it unfolded within the spaces we moved through together, while also attending to how interlocutors responded to what they encountered along the way and to the tone of the places we entered. Walking and talking together made it possible for me to see these responses as they happened: where someone slowed down, what drew their attention, when they lingered, and how they spoke about a setting as we entered it or passed through it. In this way, the method brought into view how knowledge of place was formed through movement, interaction, and ongoing adjustment. In positioning this approach, I draw on Kusenbach (2003), who introduced the go-along as a way of accessing the taken-for-granted dimensions of everyday

life. Lee and Ingold (2006) similarly treat walking as an “anthropological mode of knowing,” one in which knowledge is formed through movement and engagement.

My use of the method departs slightly from Kusenbach’s (2003) emphasis on familiarity. With long-term residents like Helena, the walks often elicited thick accounts anchored in memory: her grocery store, the Caribbean restaurant, the Coop as a meeting space, or Prasinos café as a hub of conviviality. With newcomers like Xiao-Wei, by contrast, movement through NDG was more tentative. Their walks were marked by hesitation, partial recognition, and at times silence. Rather than yielding dense place-based accounts, these encounters brought into view absence and incompleteness: gaps in knowledge, tentative identifications, and moments of not-yet-belonging. I do not treat this as a limitation of the method. Instead, I take the difference itself as revealing. Walking with newly arrived participants showed that making a home in the city is an ongoing process rather than an accomplished fact. Recent anthropological work similarly approaches home not as a stable achievement or endpoint, but as an ethnographic problem, something encountered unevenly and sometimes imagined provisionally (Lenhard and Samanani 2021). It takes place under time pressures, and amid uncertainty about whether people will remain, move on, or stay only temporarily. It depends, too, on the small repeated efforts through which a place becomes knowable: finding routes, noticing landmarks, and returning often enough for familiarity to build. Pauses at bus stops, curiosity about local signage, or uncertainty while navigating streets showed how urban knowledge is produced in motion, through attention and small acts of orientation. By bringing both presence and absence into view, the go-along showed that familiarity with urban space is unevenly distributed and that emplacement is not a given condition but something continually made in practice. Walking alongside participants let me see how they found their way and worked out, in the moment, what

felt familiar and what remained uncertain. Because the walk unfolded in real time, it showed how familiarity was made in practice rather than assumed in advance.

Importantly, pathways do not presuppose permanence. For some interlocutors, NDG was not a long-term home in any strong sense. It was a temporary dwelling, a place encountered during a particular phase of life, or a practical base from which other routes extended outward. Yet even transitory pathways involved learning how to move through local settings, when to pause and how to adjust to the presence of others. It was shaped by repetition over limited time rather than by long-term settlement. *Home*, in this framework, is not always a destination or a settled identity. It can also be a condition of passage. People's routes change over the life course as work, care, school, migration, and family arrangements reorganize where they go and what a place can make possible. Some people move through NDG more than they settle in it. Others build routines there for a time and later move away. What matters is that these different durations still participate in the moral and spatial order of everyday life. Home, then, appears unevenly in these accounts. For some interlocutors, it is tangible and deeply felt. For others, it remains partial and provisional. Home can be difficult to hold onto. The chapter traces how NDG becomes inhabitable in different ways. For some interlocutors, this happens through long familiarity or return. For others, it happens through practical and mobile arrangements that allow daily life to work for a time.

The stories that follow are not presented as case studies or representative types but as situated accounts that illuminate how mobility, circumstance, and locality intersect in NDG. Each narrative traces an individual's pathway into the area, how they arrived, where they moved through, what sustained them, and what they hoped to find. Read together, these accounts offer a textured sense of how emplacement is achieved through routine and adaptation rather than

through stable belonging. Because these pathways are contingent and uneven, they reveal the varied ways people inhabit NDG. Living in NDG involves learning to navigate difference and uncertainty, often by attempting to assemble stability from partial resources at hand. Many of my interlocutors were doing the subtle labour of maintaining everyday life. Much of the time, this meant keeping things in balance within the uneven textures of urban living. By saying that pathways “thicken,” I mean that everyday routes gain density over time. Repeated movement does not simply create familiarity in a general sense. It builds practical competence about how to get through the locality, when to go, what to avoid, and what to expect. It also accumulates recognition, in the form of faces, names, greetings, and small obligations that can be taken up or declined. In this way, pathways become socially populated and increasingly legible to the person moving through them. Thickening also names an affective shift. With repetition, routes often become less effortful to navigate. People move with greater ease and surer orientation. They have a sense of where they are, and they have ways of speaking about what they pass. They can recall what used to be there, what has changed, and what has endured. What thickens is not the street or the corridor itself, but the lived relation to it. A route becomes a kind of moving archive. It holds memories, habits, and past encounters that surface in the present as people walk, pause, and narrate what they know.

This process is uneven. Some residents move through NDG with layered recall and confidence. Others inhabit thinner pathways that are still being formed. These thinner routes can be marked by partial knowledge and by the ongoing work of orientation. In the stories that follow, “thickening” is therefore not a claim about cohesion or shared values. It is an analytic way of describing how emplacement is gradually produced through repetition, and how that process can remain provisional. I also want to note why I have presented these interviews as



narrative accounts rather than as a set of extracted themes. A more conventional approach would be to pull passages from across interviews and organize them under headings such as language, housing, or attachment. I did read across the interviews in that way, and those analytic threads matter throughout the chapter. But I chose to keep each account intact because my argument about pathways depends on sequence and pacing. A pathway is not only what someone says they values. It is what they keep having to do, where they keep returning, and what becomes possible or difficult over time.

The narrative form keeps those conditions attached to particular circuits and moments. It shows how people learn what to do on a bus, in a café, at a school office, or in a park. It also shows how they come to calibrate distance, ease, and attention in those settings. Keeping the narratives whole lets the reader see how constraint and orientation accumulate in lived order. That order is part of what makes co-presence manageable or strained. In this sense, the narratives are not an alternative to analysis. They are where the analysis sits, because pathways are made in time and in motion, not in summary categories. I am not using these accounts to demonstrate community cohesion. I am using them to track how people become able to move and relate in ways that keep everyday co-presence workable.

### ***Pathways Established over Decades***

The first set of narratives traces pathways that have had time to become established. In Finnegan's sense, what accumulates is not only time in a place. It is also a pattern of participation that develops through entry, continued involvement, and repeated return. Over years, residents learn the locality through what they do regularly and where they keep going back. They come to know routes that feel ordinary to them, along with the institutions and settings they have moved through at different life stages. What becomes visible here is everyday

emplacement built through routine involvement and familiarity that is unevenly held. In these accounts, the past remains present in how people orient themselves. It is present in what they notice and in what they can recall while moving through the area.

### ***Helena***

I met Helena on a crisp fall afternoon at the south edge of Girouard Park, our agreed-upon meeting point. She arrived a few minutes late, apologizing that she had lost track of time and didn't have her phone with her. Helena had long grey hair, round dark red glasses, and an exuberant, joyful presence. Even as she settled into conversation, I was struck by her energy and warmth. She explained that she had come through the park to meet me. Curious about how she related to the space, I asked if she spent much time there. Helena was a habitual walker who had established routine pathways through NDG, as she explained,

You know, Girouard Park, it's functional for me, I walk through it constantly when I come home from the garden. I always take that road [Cote St Antoine] because it's more scenic than Sherbrooke. I take that road up there, Cote St Antoine and I come through the park and I like coming through the park, but it's like a passage out. Like one end to the other, it's a flat piece of land with some trees on it and it's just functional. I'm happy about any green space but it's not an entity that holds me, and that I have an emotional connection with. When I see it, it's a lovely space, [but] it's not to me, "my park". There's natural spaces and there's urban spaces and [there's] the natural spaces within the urban spaces. (Helena, Go-along fieldnotes, October, 2023)

Helena and I set off westward along Sherbrooke Street, the main commercial corridor in NDG. From the outset, what struck me was how easily she moved. The park, the street, the turn onto Côte St Antoine, the return through familiar blocks: these were not directions she had to think through out loud. They were already patterned into her week, and she narrated them with the calm assurance of someone who had repeated these routes for years. It wasn't just that she knew where she was going; it was that the route seemed to settle her, because familiarity showed up in her pace, her tone, and the way she could pay attention outward to what we were passing

rather than inward to the work of navigation. As a habitual walker, Helena confessed that she doesn't drive a car. Her routine pathways are on foot and walking allows her to interact with her surroundings in a different way. She appreciates the slower, more interactive mode of actually interacting with the surrounding environment as she moves through it, instead of simply watching it (or not) out the window. She notices more things, has opportunities to interact with people. She has routes she takes consciously for specific reasons along Cote St. Antoine because she feels it is more scenic.

Helena in her early 70s had lived in NDG for most of her adult life, around 45 years. An Ashkenazi Jew with roots in Ukraine, she grew up in Knowlton in the Eastern Townships, before spending extended periods in Nepal, travelling widely through Europe and the Middle East. Given her many decades of active engagement in NDG, her experiences enabled her, in her words, to take me on a walk through "the ghosts of Christmas past," a tour of everyday spaces layered with her memories of the places that have meaning for her. She looked at me with an engaging smile and I had the feeling that we were going to explore a lot of these memories. She said to me with enthusiasm in her voice, while in thought, "This is my neighbourhood, it has generation upon generation of people I know." (Helena, Go-along fieldnotes, October, 2023)

This was one of the first moments when 'pathways' registered for me as a lived, embodied competence because Helena's comfort was noticeable. It came through in how quickly she oriented us, and in how readily memory attached itself to what we were passing. Helena was a well-known resident who invested time and energy into her social relationships and readily interacted with others, whether she knew them or not. She was deeply embedded in NDG life and she was very active in the collective garden, involved in café book clubs and discussion groups, taking part in the Art Hop, and attending block parties each year. Her wide range of

activities had given her an equally wide network of connections. Helena was an active, engaged resident whose everyday life was closely tied to the social fabric of the routes and return paths she relied on. She walked nearly everywhere, having never learned to drive, and took pleasure in the slower pace of movement through her local environment. As she explained,

And also, I'm a walker, and when you walk, you have a completely different experience of a place. You know when you're a driver—I don't drive anyway, I don't even know how to drive—you just zoom past. When you're on the bus, you're a little interactive, when you walk you are interacting with your environment. When I go overseas, or when I go to a new country or something, I walk everywhere. I've walked through Amsterdam. I walk wherever I am. Because you interact on more levels. (Helena, Go-along fieldnotes, October, 2023)

For more than two hours we strolled along Sherbrooke Street. She greeted dogs and their owners, pointed out the closed cafés, and recalled stories about storefronts long gone. She told me that Sherbrooke is where much of her everyday life has unfolded. She remarked, “Sherbrooke Street has been more of my neighbourhood for most of my entire adult life. I remember the ambiance of [Giving Tree] Café, [it was] ...evocative and [had] layers and mood. It was much more than a café, it receives you, people, they could just come there as [though it were] home. It transports you. It's like travelling in your own little neighbourhood.” Of another café, [Prasinos], she remarked that she spoke to the owner at length when he opened and he told her, “I want this to be a hobby, I want this to be a meeting place for the neighbourhood.” So Helena explained, “It's about him, how he drew people together. It's about him and those free Greek cookies. The old man died who made those cookies recently” (Helena, Go-along fieldnotes, October, 2023). As already discussed, Lofland (1998) refers to cafés like this one as ‘parochial realms’ because they are semi-public settings where habitual encounters could foster a sense of familiarity and recognition. What felt important here was not only what she remembered, but how memory came forward through walking. The movement itself seemed to cue her recollections. A shuttered

storefront was not simply “closed.” It carried an earlier social world, and her unforced way of telling those stories helped make Sherbrooke feel dense with past uses and memories. Further along Sherbrooke, she noticed a business that she had not known had moved, as she related,

People have a very long and storied relationship with Monkland Cordonnerie. The old owners had a very long relationship with the community. [Imani’s] was a Caribbean place where you could get doubles. Doubles are a pocket of red with Channa. Worn-in and a little shabby. It is what receives you, it’s what exudes history and stories. Monkland Cordonnerie. It used to be on Monkland, yes — hence the name. There was a fire, and the community even gathered funds to bring them back. That shows how connected people felt to this place. Oh, so they moved here to Sherbrooke? I’m not sure if it was bought out... maybe it was. Are these the same people? Different owners? I don’t really know this location as well, though I’ve had shoes and even a bag repaired here before. So the old owners had a very long relationship with the community. Somebody else bought it now? That’s fantastic. We actually have some shoes that need to be done. My husband kept saying, “Ah, I miss them, they’re gone,” but here they are! Great. I’m so glad they kept the name. It has such a strong reputation in the neighbourhood. (Helena, Go-along fieldnotes, October, 2023).

Helena’s surprise at finding the Cordonnerie on Sherbrooke highlights how walking can generate unplanned rediscoveries in the urban landscape. What began as a simple movement along the street became a moment of recognition. A business she associated with Monkland Avenue suddenly appeared in front of her again, carrying memories of local support, a long-standing reputation, and her husband’s sense of loss when it had closed. Years of walking along Sherbrooke had given Helena a layered knowledge of the businesses that had come and gone, and of the owners and customers attached to them. In moments like this, “pathways” are not only lines of movement. They are places where past routines and small negotiations stay present and continue to matter. Her knowledge was practical and responsive. It surfaced in real time as the street presented her with something unexpected.

This encounter also shows how pathways through NDG can reconnect past and present. As Kusenbach (2003) notes, go-alongs often bring out incidental findings that might otherwise remain unnoticed, and here the walk itself created the condition for Helena’s rediscovery.

Similarly, Jon Anderson and Katie Jones (2009) argue that interviews conducted *in situ* can “follow the fluidity” of people’s movements and bring into view “the incidental, trivial, [and] mundane” dimensions of spatial practice (299). That is what happened here. Helena’s recognition did not stay at the level of memory. It unfolded into a short exchange with the owners and a decision about what to do next. By walking, she stumbled upon continuity in a new location, which then opened into dialogue and a plan to bring in her husband’s shoes for repair. In this sense, the pathway produced an incidental form of emplacement. The everyday act of passing a storefront made the past socially active again turning memory into a renewed point of contact (Cresswell, 2006, 2015; Howes, 2005; Ingold, 2011).

At one point, Helena reflected on how people make fine-grained distinctions within a locality and attach status to them. She used “upper” and “lower” Westmount as an example of how small spatial distinctions can carry social meaning, even when the differences are not obvious to her. In the same spirit, she questioned why Monkland should feel “less real” than Sherbrooke, given their proximity and overlapping crowds. She reflected this way,

What do I mean when I’m rating streets? And I’m saying this street is more real than Monkland? Why? But I do have history on Monkland, I’ve been on it a billion times but I never formed this connection on Monkland. Why is that? It’s the same people, only a few streets over. The problem is that, making such distinctions between people are so tribal. They start to exclude over the most irrelevant criteria...the most irrelevant minutia. First, they start with your nationality or your religious group and then they get down to the smallest things, they judge and condemn on the basis of the smallest things. I live in Westmount, oh I live in upper Westmount as opposed to lower Westmount and it’s different, you know. So why would Monkland be different? As a street, it just doesn’t...for me, there aren’t as many portals into connection. (Helena, Go-along fieldnotes, October, 2023)

Helena’s point was not that Sherbrooke and Monkland contain wholly different kinds of people. It was that people sometimes treat very small spatial differences as markers of status and belonging, and she was wary of how quickly those distinctions can slide into exclusion. Her

“upper” and “lower” Westmount example names that dynamic in miniature: a few streets can become a boundary that people use to position themselves, even inside the same adjacent locality. At the same time, Helena was trying to account for her own felt difference between Sherbrooke and Monkland. Even though she had worked and spent time on Monkland, it still felt “less real” to her because it did not offer the same openings for interaction. What mattered, in her telling, was whether a street created repeated occasions for recognition and conversation. I also heard this as a comment about how pathways thicken over time. It was not only that she had walked both streets many times. One of them had, over the years, offered more recurring moments of contact.

As we continued, Helena recounted her journeys on Bus 24, describing how riding it eastward revealed the city’s linguistic and demographic shifts. “Montreal is a city of neighbourhoods,” she said. “I have many, many anchors to different neighbourhoods in Montreal. And that is something you can have in small communities, and to have it in a big city like Montreal! [...] I’m all over the city and I love being all over the city” (Helena, Go-along fieldnotes, October, 2023). We continued our walk and stopped at the site of the old [Coop Solidaire], now replaced by a different café. She remembered it with affection,

At least they kept the yellow awning. The seedling sale, but they had everything. They had the farmer’s market on Thursdays, Green Party, Provincial and Federal gatherings, where you’d meet your candidate. They’d have open mic night, they’d have No-Buy Day every year where [Kent] made his incredible cake—my friend [Kent] who was one of the hearts of the [Coop Solidaire]. He’s one of the founders of the [Coop Solidaire], so the [Coop Solidaire] has many, many memories. We had the dialogue group and we would have film night at the [Coop Solidaire]. (Helena, Go-along fieldnotes, October, 2023)

For Helena, the [Coop Solidaire] was more than a shop; it had been a vital gathering point that prioritized people over profit. She described it as “a mixing pot where people from different parts of my life came together,” emphasizing how it functioned as an open, accessible

space for neighbourly relations and mutual support. As we walked, this significance materialized unexpectedly when she ran into Ken, one of the people she had known through the Coop. Their brief, friendly exchange illustrated how the social ties formed there continue to surface in everyday encounters (Helena, Go-along fieldnotes, October, 2023). Helena continued,

The [Coop Solidaire] is the number one hub, then the [Giving Tree] café and then [Prasinos] was an echo...I would say. And all these places are gone and what can take its place, if anything? And when we don't have that, what happens to the collective? Because it was a collective, it brought us together...when you have a neighbourhood and you build a kind of neighbourhood tribe, and you have a point of commonality...so whatever it may be. (Helena, Go-along fieldnotes, October, 2023)

To her, the [Coop Solidaire] was not just a store, it was rather “a portal to community.” This was another place where her comfort in NDG became visible. She did not have to “look for” the social world the way a newcomer might. It surfaced as we walked, in names, in recognition, and in the way certain sites continued to matter even after they had changed form. Her walk along Sherbrooke was layered with memory and story. She embodied NDG not only through rootedness but through movement, conversation, and a constant openness to encounter. For Helena, rootedness develops through walking as much as through fixed destinations. Her movements across the city are tied to memories, such as her time in Westmount Park during the pandemic, showing how place becomes significant through repeated use and personal association. Her pathways along Sherbrooke Street and through Girouard Park are less about reaching destinations than about the chance recognitions and small encounters that, over decades, have shaped her everyday sociability. In this way, her pathways in NDG are shaped less by how long she has lived there than by the repetition of walks, accumulated memories, and everyday encounters.

Helena's account shows how walking can make the district feel layered, because Sherbrooke Street becomes more than a route. For her, it is a place that holds memories of the



people and settings she has moved through, including what has changed and what is no longer there. The next story stays with long settlement but shifts from memory to the regular return to everyday institutions because these repeated points of contact are where belonging becomes practical. Where Helena's pathways are anchored in walking and café sociability, Jordan's are anchored in the local institutions that shaped him from childhood onward: rinks, parks, teams, and volunteer roles. Reading them together brings into focus how emplacement can be produced both through everyday wandering and through structured participation, and how NDG becomes "home" through repeated involvement in shared local settings.

### ***Jordan***

I had known Jordan for several years before I interviewed him for this research project. I first came to know him through my children's sports activities, when he coached my son's softball team over a number of seasons. Our connection was not intimate, but it was familiar in the way many neighbourhood ties are familiar. It was built through repeated presence at practices, games, sidelines, and in brief conversations organized around children's activities. This matters for how I came to know Jordan as an interlocutor. My own pathway into this part of NDG life was partly through parenting, and through the forms of association that children's sports make possible for adults. Children's sport produces a limited but recurring field of association. People return to the same practices and games, and over time they become recognizable to one another without necessarily becoming intimate.

This is one reason Noel Dyck's (2002) work on youth sport, volunteering and parental involvement is useful here. Dyck shows that parents often come into relation through the everyday work of supporting and managing children's activities. These are not necessarily deep friendships or all-encompassing communal bonds. They are more limited forms of affiliation,

built through shared tasks and the ordinary coordination required to keep children's activities going. In this sense, sports settings can help "construct the means of consociation" because they make strangers knowable through repeated practical involvement (Dyck, 2002: 107). I came to know Jordan through precisely this kind of local setting. That connection also shaped what I was able to see in his account: not only his biography, but the importance he gave to sports as a place where difference became part of ordinary local life. Unlike many of my other interlocutors, Jordan spent nearly his entire life in NDG. "I've lived in different places—Snowdon, Côte-Saint-Luc, even a little bit in Hampstead—but I would say that out of my forty years, at least thirty-three or thirty-four of them have been in NDG proper" (Jordan, Zoom interview, April 2021). I interviewed Jordan over Zoom early in my fieldwork, at a time when pandemic restrictions still limited how easily I could meet people in person. Because we were not walking together, the conversation unfolded differently. Jordan described NDG from memory. He moved through the locality in the telling, returning to streets, rinks, parks, and childhood routes as a way of explaining how the place had shaped him.

In his early forties, Jordan had a ginger beard streaked with grey. He was an Anglophone from a middle-class Jewish family, a father of three, and worked in corporate sales with his sister. He lived only a few blocks from where he grew up, and for him, NDG was unquestionably home. He explained,

Actually, it's funny I didn't grow up far from where I live now, I grew up mostly on Madison and Somerled, so like smack in the heart of NDG. I grew up playing in NDG hockey and baseball and wearing those three letters on my sleeve, so I could be very much a lifelong NDGer. If you can picture where Fielding ends, it ends on Castle Street and if you drove on, you'd run into the house at the end of it, that was my best friend's house growing up... I live in the urban core. In NDG you're stuck between the city and the suburbs. In my background it feels like Côte St. Luc shopping mall is the only strip mall we have. We can walk there. It's a walking community. (Jordan, Zoom interview, April 2021)

With Jordan, pathways were anchored early on in local institutions and routine participation. His sense of where he is comes through streets and blocks, but also through the rinks, parks, teams, and the repeated settings that shaped his childhood and continued into adulthood. From grade three to grade eight, he moved daily between his own house on Madison and his best friend's house on Castle Street. "That was the pathway of my childhood," he reflected. He recalled countless hours spent in those homes, including years playing in an attic with its slanted roof. "Her attic's amazing—it's slanted, you can go all around the whole space" (Jordan, Zoom interview, April 2021). Football games spilled into the street corner. Decades later, those ties had not disappeared. They had shifted into another life stage, in which his children entered some of the same local circuits and ended up in the same daycare as his friend's children. This is how Jordan's pathway becomes more than a memory of childhood. It remains active in the present, carrying earlier attachments into the ordinary routines of parenting.

What is striking here is not only that Jordan remembers these routes so vividly, it is that their effects remain active in his present life. His account moves between the routes he took as a child and the continuities that still shape his life now. The same blocks remain active as reference points. Relationships extend across generations even without needing to be framed as a single coherent "community." For Jordan, home is tangible in this sense. It is not only a feeling of attachment to NDG as a whole. It is carried in the routes he repeated as a child and in the houses where he spent so much time. Those places did not remain only in the past. They kept reappearing in his present through his children and through his ongoing involvement in NDG sports. Now living near the boundary of NDG and Montreal West, Jordan's everyday commitments continued to anchor him in local circuits. He was deeply involved in volunteer work and coaching, and he also took part in civic life. These activities did not simply reflect his

attachment to NDG. They were part of how that attachment was practiced and renewed. He coached softball in the summer and hockey in the winter. Through those roles, he kept returning to the kinds of settings that had shaped him as a child.

For Jordan, NDG has always meant diversity. “You’ve got ethnic diversity, cultural, linguistic—and it’s all smack dab together. You’ve got your middle earners and your upper-income earners, but then you walk a few blocks and there’s the social housing. And all our kids are playing together no matter what the demographic” (Jordan, Zoom interview, April 2021). He explained further,

Growing up playing sports, especially hockey and baseball...the best way I can describe it...you know sitting in a locker room at Doug Harvey arena when you’re ten years old. And there’s 12 kids in the room and half of them are white, and half the white kids speak English as their first language and the other half speak French, but there could be six different origins [among them]. So you can have, you know, anything you can imagine, from different cultural and racial backgrounds, linguistic backgrounds. And then within them you’ll have English and French and whatever their languages are they speak at home with their parents and you all sit together. There’s a common understanding among each other. Nobody cared. It was normal. Totally integrated. But here’s what’s really important—it wasn’t a melting pot, it was a mosaic. Nobody said, ‘Don’t talk about your culture, don’t talk about your family.’ We all brought that into the room. The goal was to play together, to score more goals than the other team, but our differences were still there, woven into the experience. (Jordan, Zoom interview, April 2021)

Jordan’s account helps clarify why returning to the same places matters. A rink is not just a backdrop when a child comes back to it week after week. It becomes a setting where people learn who else is there and how to take part. Parents wait nearby. Children dress for the same game. Difference becomes part of the room before anyone has to explain it. For Jordan, the locker room became one of these ordinary settings. It was a place returned to again and again, in which difference was encountered as part of the situation rather than as something exceptional. His account does not emphasize intimacy or unity. It emphasizes the practical achievement of playing together while remaining distinct. This is the point of his distinction between a melting

pot and a mosaic. The children were not asked to leave difference outside the room. They brought it with them, but the shared activity gave them a way to sit together and work toward something in common.

That childhood experience shaped how Jordan moved through the world beyond NDG. The everyday encounters of his youth taught him to live with difference as something ordinary. “When I got to Dawson as a seventeen-year-old Jewish kid from NDG, I walked in and there were 9,000 different cultures. And I was totally comfortable. It felt normal and natural and I loved every second of it.” Meanwhile, he noticed that peers from private schools or less diverse neighbourhoods struggled in their first semester. “For me, NDG had already prepared me. That’s how we grew up—we grew up with difference.” For Jordan, this was not about assimilation. It was about what he called “living a mosaic.” Difference was not erased. It was carried into the ordinary activities through which children came to know one another.

Greg Noble’s (2013) work helps clarify what Jordan was describing. Noble argues that living with cultural difference involves habitual practices and capacities that develop through daily conduct in diverse settings. These are not simply attitudes people hold in the abstract. They are learned ways of acting with others, formed through repetition and through the places where difference is encountered over time. Jordan’s account of the locker room speaks directly to this. He was not describing diversity only as something people say is good. He was describing how it is lived in ordinary practice, through the repeated situations of team life. The locker room, the rink, and the game created recurring situations in which children had to sit together, cooperate, and take each other’s differences as part of the shared activity. These competencies were not taught as formal lessons. They were learned by doing the activity with others. Jordan continued, “So what ends up happening is you all sit together in the locker room, integrated under the idea

of we're all playing together on a team." This "ethos of mixing" (Wessendorf, 2013) has marked his life in NDG. From the locker rooms of his youth to the civic roles he holds today, Jordan's story shows how diversity became part of ordinary local practice. It shaped his sense of himself, but it also shaped his sense of what the district makes possible. Jordan reflected on what this meant more broadly,

Look, wherever you go to school you'll learn how to count, read a map, speak English and French. That's basic. But what matters is who you learn it with, and who you associate with around the educational experience—that determines who we become as people. And what NDG does is it makes you cross between cultures, religions, languages, socio-economic backgrounds. Different abilities, different sports, but everyone meeting up in the same parks and rinks. There's nothing like NDG for that.  
(Jordan, Zoom interview, April 2021)

Jordan believes that NDG is even more diverse today. He spoke about the growing presence of first-language French speakers, immigrant families, and more varied socioeconomic positions across the district. He also sketched out shifting property values. He contrasted the east side of NDG, with rising prices and older houses, with parts of the west side where younger families are moving in. He noted, "As it gets younger, it's getting more diverse. Many older houses are being renovated and resold at higher values to buyers in socioeconomic brackets that can afford them" (Jordan, Zoom interview, April 2021).

Jordan's reflections resonated with what Noel Dyck (2002) calls the "means of consociation" that can form through limited but meaningful arenas of everyday participation (107). Dyck's point is useful because he does not treat community as something that has to be total or deeply intimate in order to have social force. In the settings he describes, affiliation forms through practical involvement. Parents show up. Children play. Coaches organize. People who might otherwise remain strangers become familiar through the repeated work of keeping an activity going. Jordan's early experiences in NDG parks and locker rooms reflected this kind of

situated communality. Dyck (2002) posits that relationships of community can be “narrowly circumscribed in time and space” and “yet highly salient as means of affiliation” (107). For Jordan, the social connection did not need to extend across all areas of life. It had force because it recurred. Over time, children who might otherwise have remained strangers came to understand one another as participants in the same activity. This is also why the rink and the locker room became, for Jordan, microcosms of NDG’s broader mosaic. Social connection was formed through shared practice rather than sameness. These were not necessarily enduring multiplex relationships, but they cultivated what Dyck describes as “restricted dimensions of community making” that are nevertheless “deeply textured and meaningful” (2002: 107).

Jordan’s reflections on NDG as a place that “makes you cross between cultures, religions, languages, socio-economic backgrounds” also align with Dyck’s argument that community need not be all-encompassing in order to be consequential. NDG’s rinks, parks, and civic networks functioned this way in Jordan’s account. They were arenas where people “work hard to construct means of consociation and to make strangers knowable” (Dyck, 2002: 107). This helps explain how Jordan’s pathways thickened through institutions. What repeated was not only movement through the district. It was the return to places where familiarity had time to form.

According to Jordan, NDG also has to be understood in relation to nearby localities. It shares a borough with Côte-des-Neiges. Côte-Saint-Luc and Montreal West border NDG as well, but each area has its own history and particular character. “Truth be told, NDG and Côte-des-Neiges shouldn’t even be one borough—they’re two different communities. Friends and neighbours, sure, but divided by the Décarie Expressway. Different economic realities. Different roots.” He explained how Côte-Saint-Luc feels more insular and “tribal,” especially within the Jewish community, compared to NDG’s more open diversity. “NDG goes like this,” he said,

drawing an imaginary rectangle. “It’s almost like a tapestry—Walkley, Loyola, Somerled Village, each with its own identity, but woven into the larger whole” (Jordan, Zoom interview, April 2021). He recalled how Walkley, once stigmatized, became more integrated through investment and local outreach to develop and provide education and resources to the area: “It maintained its identity but became part of the larger community. That’s very NDG...it’s that locker room effect again.”

These comparisons are part of Jordan’s lived orientation. His account is not only about what NDG is. It is also about how he understands NDG in relation to adjacent places. Boundaries appear through everyday knowledge of crossings and local reputations. They are geographic, but they are also social and economic. Jordan’s NDG is open and mixed in relation to what he understands as the more insular character of nearby areas. This is part of the optimism in his account. He sees NDG as a place where difference does not simply sit side by side. It becomes, in his words, part of a shared local fabric. What Jordan admired most was NDG’s orientation toward reciprocity and fairness. He contrasted this with nearby areas and recalled the start of the pandemic,

At the beginning of COVID, when you couldn’t find toilet paper anywhere, I went into Jean Coutu on Somerled. They had a shipment. Everyone took one package. We stood in line, nervous but talking to each other. One person had BMW keys in their hand, another had a bus pass. But it didn’t matter—we each took one and no one tried to cut ahead or hoard. That, to me, is NDG.

When asked what holds such diversity together, Jordan was clear,

For the Jewish community, the glue is thousands of years of history and survival—we stick together wherever we are. But in NDG, the glue is different. The glue is how the community embraces difference, encourages it, and still integrates. We see color, we see culture, and we want to know what makes you different, and why that difference makes us stronger.

He tied this back to a larger reflection,



I actually agree with Trudeau when he said there is no Canadian identity. People got upset, but I've been saying it since I was a teenager. What makes Canada strong is exactly what NDG shows us. We don't say, 'Come melt into us.' We say, 'What makes you different, and how can that difference make my life more interesting?' That's what NDG is. That's what Canada is. (Jordan, Zoom interview, April 2021)

The pandemic scene is brief, but it helps clarify what Jordan means when he describes NDG's orientation toward fairness. It gives him a concrete situation in which people with different resources find themselves in the same line and accept the same informal rule. One package each. The story matters because difference is visible, but it does not overwhelm the situation. In Jordan's telling, the person with BMW keys and the person with a bus pass occupy the same temporary arrangement. They wait. They talk. They do not have to become close in order to act in a coordinated way.

Jordan's narrative offers a strongly affirmative account of NDG as a place where difference becomes part of ordinary routines. He describes a locality where diversity becomes a strength because people encounter one another repeatedly in schools, parks, through sports and other civic settings. His idea of "glue" is not sameness. It is the capacity to recognize difference and still bring it into shared local life. This helps explain why home is so tangible for him. NDG is not an abstract place of residence. It is where the routes of his childhood still shape his adult life. His involvement in sports, parenting, and civic work has allowed those earlier attachments to keep gathering force over time. At the same time, Jordan's confidence in NDG's openness comes from a pathway that has been relatively stable and secure. He grew up in the area. He stayed close to where he had lived as a child. The institutions that shaped him remained available enough for him to return to them as a parent, coach, and volunteer. Arash's narrative brings another angle into view, one that does not dismiss Jordan's account but shows how unevenly that openness can be experienced. He also became "from NDG" over many years and he too

experienced some of the community glue that Jordan describes. But his story begins differently. It begins with childhood migration, linguistic disorientation, and the work of entering a place that was not yet familiar.

Read alongside Jordan, Arash's account shows that the openness Jordan describes may be real, but it is not entered from the same position by everyone. For Jordan, difference was woven early into the ordinary spaces of sport and schooling. For Arash, difference first had to be negotiated through arrival, language, prejudice, and the slower process of becoming comfortable. Their accounts therefore point to different ways that pathways can thicken. Jordan's familiarity accumulates through continuity and structured participation across life stages. Arash's accumulates through the work of re-entering ordinary life after rupture, as he learns where to go, how to speak, and how to move with less friction. Together, their stories clarify that home is not a closed or settled category. It can be deeply felt, as it is for Jordan. It can also be partial, provisional, and made slowly through the fragile circumstances of everyday life.

### *Arash*

I had also known Arash for several years before I interviewed him. My connection to him came through the dojo where my son took karate. Arash was one of the senseis there, and I came to know him in the ordinary way parents often come to know instructors: through drop-offs, classes, small exchanges, and repeated presence over time. This was not a close relationship, but it was a recognizable one. It placed me inside one of the local settings where children's activities bring adults into regular contact with one another. This connection matters because it shows how my own routes through NDG were woven into the stories I came to hear. I did not encounter Arash as a stranger outside local life. I knew him through one of the settings in which children, parents, and instructors become recognizable to one another.

We met at [Prasinos] café in the early afternoon on a weekday in the winter. I recognized him immediately as he came in with his toque on his head, wrapped in a warm, knee-length winter jacket. He had black hair visible at the sides of his toque, striking eyes, an athletic stance, and an engaging, youthful energy. [Prasinos] café was a convenient spot to meet. Arash told me he had been coming there for coffee and a slice of carrot cake for several years. It had become one of his local spots because it was on his way home and he could stop in before picking up his kids from school. When I asked him about NDG, the first word that came up was “home.” At 46, Arash reflected on a life shaped by early migration and long settlement in NDG. He explained, “I’ve basically been in NDG the entire time I’ve been in Canada. I was born in Dubai in 1979...and we left in 1988. Back then Dubai was a fairly small little port town that didn’t have anything that it has now. It was a port with small buildings, lots of ships, we lived right by the Gulf. We weren’t a very far drive to the beach” (Arash, interview fieldnotes, February 22, 2023). When his cousins began leaving Dubai for higher education in Montréal, his family followed. At nine years old, the decision was made for him,

If I had to pick, I probably wouldn’t have wanted to go. In fact, it wasn’t explained to me. I was on a phone call with my cousin and she said, ‘So you’re coming here soon.’ I asked, ‘What do you mean?’ She’s like, ‘You’re moving to Canada soon.’ On the plane I just kept saying to my mother and aunt, ‘Good-bye Dubai, hello Canada.’ It was exciting I guess, at the time, you don’t understand the implications of such a move. (Arash, Interview fieldnotes, February, 2023)

The move was not chosen by him but it became the beginning of the pathway through which NDG would become familiar. His first impression of Montréal was sensory and strongly emplaced. It stayed with him. He related, “[My] earliest memories were smelling rain on wood—petrichor. Wet earth. A smell I never had in the desert. The morning after we came, we all went out for a walk and there was a slight fog. We were walking just over here by Loyola (with my

mom and my cousins)... the apartment building we moved into was right by Café Siesta.” In this memory, arrival was not only administrative or biographical. It came through smell, weather, walking, and the strangeness of a climate he had not known before. As a boy, he also remembered the greater freedom NDG gave him. He related,

It was like I had so much more experience of the neighbourhood because I had more freedom—skateboarding and exploring...Back in Dubai we grew up with my mother and my aunt, myself and my aunt’s three kids so my cousins were like siblings. One by one they started to leave Dubai to come to Canada to go to Concordia...at the time there wasn’t much in terms of higher education in Dubai so they would go. They were the ones who settled in that apartment building first. (Arash, Interview fieldnotes, February, 2023)

Arash’s cousins were central to this pathway. In Dubai, they had been more like brothers than extended kin, because he had grown up alongside them in a shared household arrangement with his mother and aunt. Their departures for Montréal happened gradually, one by one, as they came to Canada for higher education. By the time Arash arrived, they had already begun to establish a foothold in the city. This mattered because his family’s move was not an isolated relocation into an unfamiliar place. It followed an existing kin route, as many migrant pathways do. Family members who arrive earlier can become anchors for those who follow, helping make the new place more legible and providing a first point of practical and emotional orientation. For Arash, his cousins’ apartment near Loyola became that initial anchor. It was one of the first local sites through which Montréal, and eventually NDG, could begin to feel navigable.

That kin route continued to matter later in life. Now an adult with children of his own, Arash reflected on how his cousins live just across from the park: “Big brother cousin has a condo across and now our daughters are growing up in the same neighbourhood. The eldest girl, middle girl and youngest boy...” He decided to settle in the west side because he had a daughter. His cousin’s memories of west NDG were, as he put it, “so different... so little traffic back

then... West of Cavendish. We used to cross the street with our eyes closed... not worry.” He recalled his own childhood too: “I remember as a kid because my mom used to work on Oxford for a family—she used to take care of their kids and stuff... they used to come here and hang out a lot and I would always remark on how difficult it was to cross the street here compared to back where we lived [in West NDG].” Arash situated these memories within a broader history of Monkland,

Monkland village was still getting underway... as a place... the residents were protesting against the bars opening up in the mid-90s... they didn’t want the bars opening up. No bars... they’d have signs set up on the stop signs saying ‘we are the residents of NDG and we don’t want bars [on Monkland]... but it’s the bars and restaurants that raised all of their property values. It brings a lot of people out.’ That period,” he adds, “was right around when my cousin moved from Montreal to Toronto during the 1995 referendum. (Arash, Interview fieldnotes, February, 2023)

His memories touched on a period marked by referenda and language politics. His family was affected, as many others were, by the movement of Anglophones out of Québec in the 1980s and 1990s toward destinations such as Toronto. But in Arash’s account the first sense of freedom that Montréal offered was soon shadowed by exclusion within the school system. His first placement was at a welcoming “Classe d’accueil” for immigrant children. “It was great, because all of the kids there were from all different places. That felt very much the same as in Dubai” (Arash, Interview fieldnotes, February, 2023). After one year, however, he was transferred to a different school, an almost entirely white Francophone school. He still found it difficult to recall:

It was probably the worst time of my life. I was bullied every day...just endure, endure, endure it. Very little compassion from teachers. Everything was in French and my mom didn’t speak French. She couldn’t advocate for me. She would come to parent teacher nights and do like the minimum things that the school was asking her to do in terms of ‘come we are having trouble with your son’. But it was an absolute barrier for her in terms of being able to talk to the school to understand what was going on, understand why her son was being bullied, and then try to get an intervention. The teachers saw me

as an obstacle rather than a kid who was suffering. (Arash, Interview fieldnotes, February, 2023)

He paused and became visibly emotional. “I am in therapy now because of that time in my life.” Arash’s account shows how language can become a barrier not only to communication, but to protection. His mother could not easily advocate for him in French. Teachers did not step in in the way he needed. The school, which might have been a place of entry into local life, became instead a place where arrival was made painful. He remembered how bullying became normalized, and how even classmates who might otherwise have been kind seemed to conform to the group dynamic. As he related, “Once your position is established within a group, that’s just how you get treated. Even the teachers mocked me for my broken French. Rolling laughter in class. No one stepped in.” Arash described how a final confrontation with a bully had made him think that things might finally change, but the hoped-for intervention never came,

I cried in the principal’s office, I told them it had been going on since grade four. Nothing came of it. In fact, I got bullied more [by that boy] because of all the crying I did. My whole time there and also my time in grade school afterwards...that had been a recurrent theme...‘othering’ the foreign kids. That was I think amongst everything that was really the hard part and the damaging part. Things improved in high school which was far more diverse and international. (Arash, Interview fieldnotes, February, 2023)

In Arash’s account, a pathway does not only accumulate through comfort and familiarity. It can also accumulate through experiences that remain difficult to revisit. Earlier moments of exclusion stay present in how he remembers schooling, language, and the vulnerability of arrival. This is where his account complicates Jordan’s description of NDG’s openness. Arash does come to call NDG home, but that sense of home was not immediate. It had to be worked toward under difficult conditions. It had to be built through time, through later forms of support, and through his own efforts to create better conditions for others.

Arash said that after that, he discovered hockey which gave him an outlet: “That was a way to forget about what I was going through at school during the day.” Now, as an adult, Arash is committed to making sure kids today do not experience what he endured. He assists at a local karate school and has been working with an NDG organization supporting newcomer and vulnerable youth: “With Alexis, the sensei, I see how much difference one adult can make. We’re starting an eight-week pilot program with Loyola Centre, one class a week. The kids are referred by schools, mostly newcomers or those needing extra help. They need that support, those extra sets of eyes on them” (Arash, Interview fieldnotes, February, 2023). What is slow and noticeable across his story is the shift from being placed into settings he did not control to trying to change how younger people experience those settings now. As a child, Arash was carried along by decisions he could not yet fully understand. He was moved across countries and then across schools, and daily life became something to endure. Later, sport gave him a small outlet. As an adult, he returned to children’s activities from another position: as a father, a sensei, and a mentor attentive to newcomer and vulnerable youth. His trajectory, from a bewildered nine-year-old saying goodbye to Dubai to an adult helping to build programs for kids in NDG, shows both the fragility of emplacement and the possibility that a pathway can become grounded through the effort to make local life more supportive for others.

### ***Pathways Anchored through Family, Return, and Life-stage***

The next accounts shift away from childhood arrival and long local formation. They focus instead on pathways shaped by family proximity and by the changing demands of adult life. In these stories, NDG is not simply a place where someone grows up. It becomes a base that people leave, return to, and make workable again under new circumstances. This helps clarify that settlement is not only produced through attachment to place. It is also produced through practical

arrangements that allow daily life to hold together. Living near relatives, sharing property, or arranging care around children's routines can make NDG viable at a particular moment. In this sense, home is not only a location. It is also a relational infrastructure, sustained through the people and arrangements that make ordinary life possible.

### *Julia*

I first met Julia before the pandemic at an independent café on Somerled Street, a small place with the kind of informal warmth that made it easy for parents to linger. Near the tables, there was a charming nook where young children could play within sight. I had my young son with me that day, and Julia was there with her son who was about the same age. We began talking in the easy way parents sometimes do when children bring them into the same space. The conversation quickly became comfortable and led to an invitation from Julia to attend a children's group at a local family resource centre that connected families in the district. After that, we frequented the same family resource centre and stayed in loose contact. In this way, I came to know Julia through the ordinary settings that organize early parenthood in NDG.

Years later, when Julia spoke about newcomers arriving in NDG she returned to her own first experiences in the area. "I keep running into people who have arrived here very recently. And it's always around the Benny Park area, near those tall apartment buildings. And it just reminds me that this is where we started when we arrived. We landed here and this is all I knew at first. And now, these people are having the same experience. Figuring out how to get around in the neighbourhood" (Julia, Interview fieldnotes, March, 2021). Our interview took place over Zoom in March of 2021, during lockdown measures. Julia came to NDG from Ukraine with her family in 2000, at the age of twelve. Today, she is in her early forties, a practicing Muslim, and a mother of two. For her, NDG has been both a landing place and an anchor point. It is a place she



has left and returned to at different stages of her life. Her family's decision to come to NDG grew out of connections already in place. "I find that people tend to land in the neighbourhood that they have some connection with. Our friends arrived in the community, and they started here and told us you should arrive and start here." Their first apartment was in a high-rise on Sherbrooke Street. Julia remembers its looming presence over the busy intersection, with a grocery store and pharmacy nearby: "The big high-rise there, that you can see from the airplane...that was our first apartment. We lived here a couple of years until my parents got a condo in the borough of Lasalle." The high-rise was more than the family's first address in Montréal. It was the first local anchor through which they began to orient themselves in the city. Like Arash's account, Julia's story reveals how migration often follows routes that are already partly formed by friends or kin.

People arrive through someone else's earlier arrival. They begin with a referral or a known contact, some small point of orientation that makes the new place less opaque. After moving to Lasalle for a time, Julia continued to commute back and forth for high school and then CEGEP. Later, graduate studies brought her to Toronto where she lived for four years while completing her M.A. degree at the University of Toronto. Yet she describes NDG as the place she returned to: "I moved back to NDG afterwards, my home base. And basically, started living in the same duplex my mom owns on Cavendish. Now we are living on the ground floor and my mom lives upstairs." This intergenerational arrangement gives her current life in NDG a practical stability. Her mother is upstairs. Julia is raising her own children below. The same locality now holds a different stage of the family's trajectory.

Julia's integration into NDG unfolded through these earlier connections. Her family did not arrive without any local knowledge. They had friends who had already settled in the area and

could tell them where to begin. Those contacts shaped the family's choice of NDG as a landing place. They also helped form Julia's own pathway into local life. She moved back later with her spouse and their two children. Her partner, however, never developed the French fluency that she had acquired through high school. Although he had taken some French classes, he lived and worked downtown and did not have an immediate need to speak French fluently. Julia felt that this had affected his ability to find work in Montréal, despite having a degree from Concordia. He had more career options in English in Toronto. After her own time in Toronto, Julia also felt that she identified more as an Anglophone.

Language remained central to how Julia understood everyday life in NDG. She explained that local parks were good places to speak with other Russian speakers. Parks mattered because they allowed her children to enter social life through languages they already knew. "My son can interact with the kids more that way...when he was little he only spoke Russian and Urdu. We would go to the parks where he could meet the Russian-speaking kids." She also noted the presence of established Eastern European immigrant populations in the area. This is where Helen Wilson's (2013) discussion of playgrounds and collective life becomes useful. Wilson argues that playgrounds are not only spaces for children's play. They are also sites where parenting is observed and where social differences become visible through ordinary encounters. Parents may exchange advice, form acquaintances and watch one another's children, but these settings can also carry judgement and anxiety. In Julia's account, the playground is important for precisely this reason. It is a space where children enter local social life, but also where parents hear which languages are being spoken, notice who feels comfortable, and work out how their families fit into the wider locality.

When I asked whether one language seemed to predominate on the playground among the children, Julia explained that from her perspective, NDG is fairly anglophone and allophone dominant. She said that “it’s a multilingual neighbourhood, but francophones love to ask, when are you going to learn French, how long have you been here? It’s an intergenerational thing, I think.” She believes that allophones who grew up here are probably more integrated into the francophone environment and its institutions. “We just tend to start out the conversation in English,” she remarked (Julia, Interview fieldnotes, March, 2021). For Julia, English often functions as the default language of convergence in NDG, while Russian and Urdu, which she speaks at home with her children, connect her to a broader diasporic social world.

The interview shifted to her time as a CEGEP and university student living in NDG. She related,

NDG was a sleepy neighbourhood...For a while NDG felt like that to me. I slept in NDG and lived downtown. There was nothing to do in NDG. In Ukraine, NDG would’ve been known as a sleeping district...where my only concern was how many buses can get me downtown. At the corner of Cavendish and Sherbrooke Street, I would be fond of this intersection because on my corner where we lived there was a 420 express that goes downtown. If I walked two blocks there’s a 66 bus that takes me straight to Guy-Concordia. And so, everything was about buses. This bus 20 minutes, okay if I take the 51, I can get breakfast at Snowdon, I can go to the disgusting Tim Horton’s that’s there and get my breakfast and eat it on the Metro while I go to university. You know, pre-pandemic things. Later on, I started cycling to school, at that point you get a little more aware of your neighbourhood. You’re in your headspace. I started to appreciate more of the layout of the neighbourhood. (Julia, Interview fieldnotes, March, 2021)

During this period, NDG was not the centre of Julia’s day-to-day life. It was where she slept, not where most of her social world unfolded. Her friendships, classes, and leisure time were oriented downtown. NDG mattered as a place of departure and return. It gave her access to buses, metro connections and cycling routes that made downtown reachable. This was still a pathway, but a thin one. It was built around transit rather than local attachment. The corner of Cavendish and

Sherbrooke was important because it organized her movement. The 420 express, the 66 bus, the 51, and the metro connection at Snowdon were not just transportation options. They were the practical coordinates of student life. They allowed her to leave NDG each day and re-enter it later.

Julia also noticed that different modes of movement changed what she saw. On the bus, NDG did not present itself in the same way. She related,

[On the bus], you're not going to look out the window really. If you're a young person, you're reading your notebooks, or you're on your phone or whatever...listening to music...There's people all around you, you can't see outside. A lot of the buses have those frosted windows, and you can't see out of them anyway. You're in your own headspace...and on the bike you kind of have to pay attention. I would be so focused on going downtown and getting back. That was NDG for me, for the longest time. (Julia, Interview fieldnotes, March, 2021)

The bus was a self-contained space that carried her from home to school. She passed through the area each day without necessarily attending to what was around her. Cycling altered that relation. On a bike, she had to look outward. She became more aware of the layout of the locality, the shops and stores along the way, and the feel of the route itself. Her account shows how pathways can remain thin for years, even when someone lives in a place. Residence alone did not make NDG dense with meaning. That density came later, when her routines changed.

During high school, Julia travelled an hour each way to the end of the green metro line for a special Arts-études program that allowed her to pursue Fine Arts training. Throughout her CEGEP years at Dawson College, her everyday routine took her to the Atwater campus by bus. This period was important for the development of her social networks and friendship ties. She explained, "We were all children of immigrants, so we all had the same experience [going to] French high school and then English CEGEP" (Julia, Interview fieldnotes, March, 2021). Most of her classmates had ties to the east of Montréal and had also come from somewhere else. They

were, as she put it, “mostly Francophone originally, but we were all bilingual, at that point,” referring to allophone immigrants who had integrated into the French stream.

For Julia, language shaped both integration and difference. Learning French opened doors socially and culturally. It smoothed her way into Québec life. Her husband’s experience was different. He arrived later, studied primarily in English, and struggled to access francophone-dominant job markets. In her account, language is not simply a marker of identity. It affects where one can work, how one moves socially, and how secure settlement can feel. Julia completed her Fine Arts degree at Concordia. All of her classes were located at the downtown campus. Toward the end of her degree, however, the Loyola campus in NDG became a more significant space in her routine. The Concordia shuttle bus connected the downtown campus and Loyola in about thirty minutes. She explained,

When you wanted to study quietly, to get into a quiet headspace, me and a few of my friends, who mostly lived downtown, started studying at Concordia’s Loyola campus. There was less distraction from downtown, where you’d always run into people, it was too busy there. [My friends] they’d take the shuttle bus down to Loyola and I’d bike and meet them there. They [the university] started doing overnight library hours at Loyola. Loyola library was actually the sleepy place where you could actually get work done. (Julia, Interview fieldnotes, March, 2021)

Loyola campus altered NDG’s meaning for Julia, but only slightly at first. It was still not the centre of her social life. It was useful because it offered quiet. The “sleepiness” that had once made NDG feel uninteresting became, at another stage, an advantage. The same quality took on a different value when her needs changed. Once she had children, local spaces in NDG began to matter much more. “Your schedule is defined by a child in some ways and their needs, they need to play, they need to socialize. You need to go to a place where kids are welcome. I want to go somewhere I can enjoy myself, relax but there are not a lot of places like that downtown” (Julia, Interview fieldnotes, March, 2021). Parenthood changed the scale of her daily life. Places close

to home became important because they could accommodate both her children's needs and her own need for ease. Local cafés and everyday meeting places offered practical anchors. They allowed her to combine work, childcare, and a small measure of social connection.

During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, however, these pathways were suddenly disrupted. "Some of these places are also gone now," she said. "I never got to go back there." She especially valued local drop-in spaces that were flexible and had room simply to "be." [Café Forêt], a café on Sherbrooke designed for parents and young children, was one such place she frequented before the pandemic. "I went there often with my eldest," she recalled. "It was a place I could sit, bring my notebook or my laptop, do a little bit of work, while my son played" (Julia, Interview fieldnotes, March, 2021). The café was bright and spacious, with a large forest mural, soft carpets, bright pillows, and a life-size playhouse. A small "kidnasium" area allowed toddlers to run and play. Nearby tables and low chairs let parents relax and talk while keeping their children in sight. [Café Forêt] also hosted story time and music sessions. It sometimes offered small gestures of care, including free lattes for parents or iced water with lemon slices on hot days. Julia told me she often chatted with other parents there, sharing advice or stories about their children. On one occasion, she met a newly arrived mother from Ukraine who was struggling to communicate in English. They connected in Russian, and Anastasia helped her find other play spaces for her daughter. Such encounters show how the café functioned as more than a commercial venue. Its significance lay in the everyday ways it cared for its clientele. It responded to parents' needs. It created flexible rhythms of participation. It made room for the small, sustaining sociabilities of daily life. It was not only a business. It was a space of care, oriented toward parents and children who needed somewhere to be.

After the café closed, Julia began turning to other local places that could fill a similar role. Because she no longer drove and preferred to walk or use public transit, proximity shaped her choices. The Benny Library became one of these spaces. It was nearby and walkable. She could spend time with her children there, find relief from the routines of home, and occasionally meet others. Libraries, as Melike Peterson (2017, 2023) observes, are “micro-urban spaces” whose atmospheres shape how people experience belonging. Bodies in these spaces respond to light, sound, and the hum of shared activity because sensory cues structure how comfort and attentiveness are felt. These environments can evoke ease but also moments of discomfort that, as Peterson (2023) argues, are not simply negative; they reveal “the social and cultural dynamics that shape the production and consumption of shared urban spaces, the multiple and iterative points of connection that people foster in informal settings, and their capacity to translate into wider notions of recognition, belonging, hospitality, comfort, and multicultural exchange in society” (3). She also explains that such atmospheres “can influence people’s experiences of the surrounding urban areas and the city as a whole, thereby shaping social inclusions and exclusions, and a sense of belonging or non-belonging” (Peterson 2023: 2). In this way, libraries operate as affective infrastructures of coexistence because they generate conditions where social differences can recede into the background, allowing people to share the same space without hierarchy or pretense (Peterson 2023).

At Benny, this atmosphere was tangible because the space invited lingering. The bright foyer opened into wide staircases and colourful seating. Parents sat reading beside students. Conversations in French, English, and other languages blended softly. Staff circulated quietly. They maintained order, but they also supported the gentle sociability of the space. Julia explained that she came here often before the pandemic: “It had a drop-in space that was crucial

for me ... you could sit there, read with the kids, it was accommodating” (Julia, Interview fieldnotes, March, 2021). The children’s nook beneath the staircase was small but important because it allowed parents to remain close while their children played. Low shelves framed the area. Toys and cushions softened it. The design balanced the library’s calm atmosphere with the liveliness of family life. In this setting, minor encounters unfolded naturally. Parents exchanged glances or brief words when children quarreled over toys. Someone might watch another child while a parent stepped away. These small moments created a rhythm of shared attention because everyone recognized the quiet demands of parenting in public. The space provided a form of togetherness grounded in civil inattention. Its stillness and shared quiet allowed Julia to feel less isolated. In this sense, the library embodies what Lofland (1998) describes: a setting in which co-presence and distance coexist, allowing people to be together in common so as not to feel entirely alone.

Julia described how repeated visits sometimes produced familiarity: “When we went regularly, I got to know the people who ran the programs. You’d start to recognize faces, they’d say hi to you on the street—it makes you feel part of the neighbourhood” (Julia, Interview fieldnotes, March, 2021). For her, the library’s importance lay not only in its resources but in the kind of participation it enabled. Because it was close to home, she could adjust her schedule around the children’s moods and energy. “Your pace is slower,” she said, “and you have to think which place you can get to before his legs give up.” These small calculations show how care reshapes movement. Julia’s pathway through NDG became more local when she had children, not because the area changed all at once, but because her needs did. The Benny Library functioned as more than a public institution. It was a lived and felt space where proximity and openness made everyday sociability possible. It allowed different forms of closeness and



distance to coexist. For this reason, it became part of Julia's pathway of settlement: an accessible anchor where fleeting encounters helped make daily life in NDG feel less isolated.

[Café Forêt] and the library reveal how care can take different forms across urban settings. The café extended hospitality through personal attention and informality. The library offered something quieter. It gave Julia a place to go where she could be with her children without feeling entirely alone. Both took on resonance for her because they accommodated the contingencies of everyday life. They gave parents, children, and newcomers room to find a place for themselves. When the pandemic forced small businesses like [Café Forêt] to close, Julia felt the loss deeply. These were not only convenient spaces. They supported her sense of connection during early motherhood. Their disappearance meant that the small daily encounters that had once punctuated her routine were suddenly gone. Casual greetings disappeared. Children no longer played together there. A quick chat with another parent was no longer available in the same way. "I feel like a lot of the things, after [the pandemic] is over, I would like to return to but I'm not sure how well they were doing before," she said. "Seeing those places go under makes me sad—they were places where I could go and feel welcome" (Julia, Interview fieldnotes, March, 2021).

The closures also underscored how fragile the infrastructures of everyday sociability can be. They depend on repetition and proximity more than formal ties. Without them, Julia found that isolation crept more easily into her days. "Meeting people in these spaces, I would chat with the owner a little bit every time," she explained. "But it's not a deep relationship... It's a place to get out." These small parochial encounters were significant because they generated comfort and recognition without demanding intimacy. As Radice (2016) notes, such forms of place-based conviviality allow for coexistence and small gestures of care that, though modest, are essential to

feeling part of a locality. The pandemic's closures made visible how easily those subtle infrastructures of belonging can disappear and how much they had quietly sustained Julia's everyday life in NDG. Julia's story makes visible how arrival can be shaped by networks already in place. It also shows how the meaning of NDG can shift across the life course. As a student, the locality functioned mainly as a base from which she left each day. As a parent, it became a field of proximity, care, and return. For Julia, home is less about uninterrupted rootedness. It emerges through the arrangements that make return possible. In Julia's case, proximity to family gives NDG a practical base, while local places such as cafés, parks and the library help make everyday parenting more manageable. Antonio's account also centers on relational anchoring, but his pathway into NDG is longer and more uneven. It unfolds within the pressures of cross-border movement, blockages to professional advancement, and the difficulty of resettling later in life. Read together, Julia and Antonio show how family obligations and institutional constraints shape the work of building stability across adulthood.

### *Antonio*

I had already come to know Antonio through brief but repeated exchanges at the dépanneur where I occasionally stopped on my route home. We knew one another by face, by the usual hello, and by occasional small talk, often about Cedric, the neighbourhood cat who liked to perch on the pallets of beer in the store. Tall and slender, in his mid-seventies, Antonio had a warm, inviting smile and an easy joviality. He had a way of making conversation feel light, even before I knew much about his life.

One day, I asked whether he would be willing to speak with me about his experience in the area and how he had come to live in NDG. We later met during a short go-along in the summer of 2023. He did not have much time before his shift, but he told me he would show me

the area where he lived on the way to the dépanneur. He lived very close to the store, so the walk covered only a few blocks along Sherbrooke Street. Its shortness was analytically useful because it showed how much of Antonio's daily life was organized within a small area. Home and work were connected by a short route, where he regularly encountered people he knew. I later interviewed Antonio again, and that material appears in Chapter Nine in the discussion of commercial interactions and the dépanneur. Here, I focus on the short go-along as a way into his biographical pathway and the forms of later-life settlement that brought him to NDG.

Antonio's story traced a long and uneven trajectory across borders. His English, coloured by a soft South American accent, carried easily alongside his genial presence. His account showed how people may come to inhabit a place through conditions they did not fully choose. His pathway into NDG was shaped first by the loss of professional recognition. Later, family ties and daily routines became the means through which stability was rebuilt. He did not arrive through a single decision to settle. His life in the area took shape gradually as certain arrangements became dependable over time. He related,

I went to veterinary school there [in Venezuela] because I couldn't get into veterinary school here. In those times they only had three faculties and a quota of eighty people each. We were seven kids and we all came to Canada to go to school. When I came back here in October 1995, I started working with a vet. I have a degree in this. We took the courses because they paid us. I didn't want to be a technician. (Antonio, Go-along fieldnotes, July, 2023)

Like many immigrants in Québec, Antonio faced the frustration of seeing his qualifications go unrecognized. His expression tightened when he explained that his veterinary credentials were not accepted. He had already completed his degree in Venezuela, but Québec's licensing regime would have required him to repeat his education. "I would've had to take all my university again if I wanted to work here," he said, shaking his head. Instead, he took

government-funded technician courses, not because he wanted to downgrade his profession, but because this was the available path to income. “I didn’t want to be a technician,” he emphasized. “I wanted to be a veterinarian” (Antonio, Go-along fieldnotes, July, 2023).

When Antonio spoke about veterinary medicine, his tone shifted. He took pride in recounting what he had learned and the work he had once hoped to continue. There was pleasure in the telling but also visible frustration. His professional training had shaped his sense of himself, yet it did not carry over easily into Québec’s licensing system. When I first met him, what struck me was not only his humour but the way he situated himself through language. “I’m Castellano, the name of my language is Castilian. Call me Tony,” he said, then laughed, explaining that it was the same as Spanish but with different roots. The clarification was small, but it mattered. It showed how Antonio made himself knowable in interaction. Language was not only part of his biography. It was part of how he introduced himself and kept conversation open across difference. His ease in shifting between Spanish, English, and French reflected the mobility that had shaped much of his life. It also sat alongside the institutional limits he had faced. His credentials had been devalued. He had to retrain. His work and sense of place had to be remade more than once.

Antonio was born in Caracas and came from a middle-class family that placed great emphasis on education and travel. “My father was a car dealer,” he explained. “He sold Land Rovers and the big Mack trucks. With the money we got, we spent it on education.” His mother, a pneumologist, worked long hours, and the family’s professional success reflected a wider Venezuelan aspiration for mobility through study abroad. “We were seven kids,” he recalled. “My mother always needed help. When I was a kid, we always had a maid. My mother worked,

my father worked. On my mother's side, they are doctors, dentists, accountants, lawyers—very well educated.”

His parents sent him to Montréal in the early 1970s, when he was seventeen, to learn English and French and attend university. “When you leave Venezuela, you need to speak English, anywhere you go,” he told me. That early experience of mobility became the foundation for his later migrations. It familiarized him with Canada, but it also placed him between worlds. He had come to gain linguistic and cultural capital, not necessarily to stay. Because these movements grew out of family strategy rather than his own settled plan, Antonio's early years in Canada carried a sense of provisionality. That sense of provisionality would recur later in his life.

After a short period in Canada, Antonio met a Québécoise woman, but their relationship was interrupted when he returned to Venezuela. Years later, they reconnected and eventually married. They lived in Venezuela for ten years and had a daughter. When the political and economic situation deteriorated, “when Venezuela got too dangerous,” as he put it, they decided to return to Canada. “We settled in Ottawa,” Antonio said. “My wife wanted to pursue her Ph.D. in Sociology. She had her networks already established there, and my sisters were also in Ottawa.” This phase of return migration marked another layer of his pathway. Antonio's movements were relational. They were tied to his wife's studies, to kin already nearby, and to the search for a stable base. Ottawa became viable because those supports were already in place. For Antonio, however, professional reintegration remained difficult. His degree was still unrecognized, and he turned to construction and masonry work to make a living.

After his wife passed away in 2008, he remained in Hull for eight more years, working for a masonry company. “I came to NDG in 2015,” he explained. “I had been working with my

brother since I arrived here.” When the company laid him off a year later, he found himself again in transition. “In 2016, I was expecting to get my call to go back to Ottawa, but they told me, you’re too old, we don’t want you. I was 65 years old.” The bluntness of that moment, he said, made him reconsider what stability might mean in later life. His skill and work history no longer aligned with what the labour market would recognize. He turned instead to family, moving into a triplex owned by his nephew in NDG. Read as a pathway, this was less a single turning point than a moment when his options narrowed and he had to rework what was possible.

Over time, what counted as viable began to depend on access to family property and on the daily work of keeping life steady. Antonio’s current life in NDG was grounded less in occupational identity than in proximity and routine. “I don’t pay rent,” he said matter-of-factly. “The building belongs to my nephew. I built two apartments with my nephew and I live in the basement. I renovate and take care of the place.” This arrangement sustained his independence while keeping him embedded within family networks. It allowed him to contribute labour in exchange for housing. The triplex was not simply a place to live. It was the material base that allowed him to remain in NDG. He described a daily rhythm that rarely extended beyond a few blocks: “After work, I go to the tienda to get my groceries. I go home, and then I come back [to the dépanneur] if I don’t have anything else to do with the house.” These short movements formed the backbone of his social life in NDG. His errands, brief conversations, and repeated returns to the dépanneur created an ordinary geography of emplacement. This is one way his pathway thickened once his life in NDG became organized around a smaller radius. It did not thicken by covering more ground. It thickened because the same route came to hold more. The familiar became dependable because it was repeatable.

The *dépanneur* appears here as part of Antonio's pathway rather than as the main object of analysis. It was one of the places where his later-life routine became recognizable and repeatable. I return to the *dépanneur* in Chapter Nine, where I examine its commercial and interactional life in greater detail. Here, what matters is how the shop became part of a small local circuit that helped Antonio remain steady in familiar surroundings. Antonio's pathway shows how later-life emplacement can be built after formal recognition has failed. His veterinary credentials were not accepted, and later the labour market treated him as too old. In NDG, stability came through another route: family property, practical contribution, and a small radius of everyday recognition. His movement was no longer expansive. It had become rhythmic. The triplex, the *dépanneur*, and the nearby streets allowed him to remain steady in familiar surroundings.

Antonio's pathway foregrounds how later-life emplacement can be secured through reciprocity and kin property. Housing and everyday purpose were sustained through ongoing contribution. Zoe's narrative shifts the scale again. Her account traces how a feel for locality can be learned through contrast: between car-oriented landscapes and walkable streets, and between institutions that feel socially enclosing and those that allow more ease. Zoe keeps life-stage and return in view, but she does so differently. For her, return is both biographical and practical. It is a return to a particular part of the city, but also to a set of routines that make the place feel workable again.

### *Zoe*

I had known Zoe for several years before interviewing her. We first met at Trenholme Park while our children were playing in the park pool. Our children were young then, and the conversation began in the easy way parents sometimes start talking when they are watching children move

through the same play space. Over time, we realized that we also went to [Prasinos] café, and we would occasionally bump into one another there. Like several of the interlocutors in this chapter, I came to know Zoe through the ordinary settings of parenting and local routine. Our connection remained loose, but it was recognizable, built through repeated encounters in places where adults and children often lingered.

Zoe was a Filipino mother of two and had been working as a real estate agent for about a decade. She was spunky and quick-witted, with large, bright-rimmed glasses that matched the liveliness of her observations. She described the profession as a good fit, though not because she was drawn to salesmanship. What interested her was the attention real estate required. It gave her a reason to notice houses, streets, and the particular feel of different corners of the city. Real estate allowed her to pursue something she had always done instinctively. She noticed what made a street inviting. She paid attention to how people related to one another and how spaces became meaningful. For her, the work was less about extracting value than about understanding how people live and why they stay.

Her connection to NDG was anchored in places like [Prasinos] café, where we met one winter morning for the interview. She greeted Chris, the owner, and ordered her coffee. As we settled in, she smiled at his avocado incubator, which was a small sign of the café's familiar humour and daily improvisation. For Zoe, [Prasinos] was not simply a place to buy coffee. It was part of the rhythm of her week because it gave her somewhere to be lightly known outside the more formal settings of family, school, and work. She explained,

There's so few places where we can go and just sit and see familiar faces...and you can establish, you know, ties outside of our families and outside of our school friends and just be easy...be at ease, you know. I tell people it's a small-town café... Everything here is amazing—the soups are amazing, the carrot cake is amazing... he [Chris] won't make you an avocado sandwich unless he has a good avocado...if you ask him...he'll squeeze



them and frown and be like, ‘you don’t get an avocado sandwich.’  
(Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023)

The café mattered to her because it offered a form of ease that was not private, but also not anonymous. It gave her a place to be known lightly. The recognition did not require deep intimacy. It came through repeated visits, small jokes, and the comfort of seeing people who had become familiar over time.

In NDG, she discovered a walkable radius for the first time. This was not only about distance. It was about scale: the sense that daily needs could be reached on foot. It was also about sociability, because walking made casual encounters more likely. Over time, she also became attentive to the layers of history visible in older buildings, mature trees, and street blocks that had not all been built at once. Long before she settled in the district, she had come to understand streets and local life through contrast. She grew up in a brand-new subdivision in Rivière-des-Prairies (RDP) in the early 1980s, when “everything was built at the same time... there was massive uniformity.” She remembered the area as orderly but isolating. “I grew up with no mature greenery, no feasible walkable park spaces. It was a very drive culture...the street blocks were very long” (Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023).

What she described was not simply the presence or absence of amenities. It was the way distance organized daily life. In RDP, getting to places required more effort and often depended on a car. That changed the likelihood of encountering others casually. The street did not easily support the unplanned meetings that later became part of what she valued in NDG. In RDP, the destination parks with soccer fields, bocce courts, and swimming pools were only accessible to those living close by. “What looked like opportunity on a planning map became, in practice, a city of long distances” (Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023).

Her parents eventually enrolled her in a private high school, which required a long daily commute but also brought her into NDG's tree-lined streets. She remembered the contrast vividly: "It was magical...like going to Narnia. You walk into that building with the trees and the neighbourhood around it, and it was so different from RDP." The school introduced her to an environment scaled for walking, in which the difference from RDP was visual but also practical. The trees and older buildings stayed with her. So did the feeling that daily life could unfold at a closer scale. Movement felt less dependent on the car. These early crossings became important because they gave her a way to describe locality later. NDG became legible to her through contrast: it had a different atmosphere from RDP, and its streets made movement on foot feel more possible.

Growing up, Zoe often occupied the position of observer. "Because I was different...you gain the perspective of the observer all the time because... kids won't necessarily be purposively cruel... but if you're different and very visibly I was like the little brown kid with the big glasses who always had the books, right?" (Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January 12, 2023). She had attended a Catholic Italian elementary school, where, as she put it, "my siblings and I were the only visible-minority kids." She learned that setting closely. She absorbed its humour, its social cues, and even the cadence of speech around her. "Until grade six I had an East-end Italian accent in English," she recalled, describing a way of speaking that still felt familiar years later. "I didn't know that's what it was, just that I sounded different from people on TV. When I meet people [now] who have an Italian background I think, this is home, it's like I understand the humour. There is so much wordplay, the playful attack—it's a lot of fun" (Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023).

Zoe's account gives familiarity a more uneven texture. She was immersed in the dominant Italian milieu, but she was also aware of being visibly different within it. She could recognize the humour and feel at home in its rhythms. At the same time, she was still marked as someone who stood out. Years later, when she ran into former classmates in college, she was reminded that they had continued to remember her through the visible differences that made her stand out as a child. She explained,

I didn't know this at the time but when I went to college years later and bumped into those same kids... because we all re-met at college, and they're like, you're Zoe. I was like yeah, who are you? Because it was easier for them to remember the 'me' than it was for me to remember Peatro of 400 kids... yeah you're the one who knew karate, and like yeah yeah... you were that Asian kid who knew karate and you skipped those grades... uh... one of those things is right...(Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023)

Her account shows that recognition does not always mean mutual familiarity. Being remembered by former classmates did not mean being known in the same way she knew them. For her former classmates, Zoe was easy to remember because she had been marked as different. For Zoe, many of those same classmates blurred together. This asymmetry is important because familiarity can be shaped by social marking as much as by shared history.

Zoe also credited her grandmother with helping her find her footing. A former schoolteacher in the Philippines, her grandmother brought a strong sense of education and social connection into family life in Montréal. This was important in RDP, where Zoe often felt spatially isolated and where her parents were still learning the routines of Canadian life. During the week, her life was organized around the East-end Italian institutions she attended. On weekends, however, another set of pathways opened across the city through the Filipino community gatherings her grandmother helped organize. "On the weekends, we would travel across the city to join all the Filipinos at this one park. And that will be our daughter's social life,

and so they were not the kids I saw every day at school” (Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023). Her grandmother’s backyard gatherings brought together dozens of families, in which food, conversation, and children’s movement between house and park helped sustain a wider social world. Her grandmother was widely known in Montréal’s Filipino community. Zoe explained,

A part of it was my grandmother was—is like the matriarch of the community. Like 30,000 Filipinos in Montreal and area, you know all of them know my grandmother because she came here really early compared to a lot of the others. She came here late 60s, early 70s leaving her family behind... this was what so many people did—had to do. She was a young mom when she left... the way to make a life for her kids was—okay... my grandfather, they had the community support to be able to say, alright, your wife is going to leave, because she is really smart and she was the first one from this whole town to go to university and she is going to blaze a path forward for you guys. (Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023)

She contrasted this with later arrivals, who often struggled under the live-in caregiver program: “So that first wave... they were all able to come and form a pretty comfortable life for themselves pretty quickly and then after all the laws changed... it created a different class of Filipino-Canadians. And you see it even within our own community, those who came here before... middle-class West Island, big houses... and those that came after... struggle, struggle so much”. Her story links mobility to intergenerational strategy. The travel across the city is not incidental. It helps organize family life and sustain social ties when the everyday institutions nearby do not hold the fuller social world of the household. Her awareness of such divides was reinforced in everyday observations. As a teenager, she worked at the Côte-St-Luc library which meant a long commute from RDP. She explained,

I used to do part-time work when I was a kid, a teenager, at the Côte-St-Luc library, I lived in RDP Riviere de Prairie, and I would public transit all the way, and it meant that at like 7:15 [am] I would get on a bus and it was filled with Filipino women. Filipino and West Indian women who were all taking a short bus ride—the 161—corner of Victoria and Van Horne which is basically little Manila, so many women would come from those small apartments and get on that short bus ride for like 15 min... and once you cross the

Decarie you'd be in Hampstead, Côte St-Luc and they'd all get off and disperse and walk to the homes they'd be working in for that day... unless they happened to live with their employers. But it was such a visual example of here are the people who wake up at 5:30, to take a 15-minute bus ride, into a living room the size of their apartment. (Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023)

She remembered being the last one on the bus, heading to her shift at the library.

Thinking to herself, she recalled, “[And now] I have to go and iron the newspapers, to have crisp, clean newspapers...these are the expectations for people who use this library space?” (Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023). Zoe explained that she sometimes had to iron wet newspapers so patrons could read them “crisp [and] clean.” Reflecting on those routines, she added, “There were all these opportunities to observe, to be slightly on the outside of things.” These observations stayed with her. They gave her concrete images of class expectation and of the kinds of labour that often remain in the background of comfortable spaces. They also became part of how she later evaluated local environments.

In adulthood, Zoe made a deliberate choice to settle in NDG. She traced that choice back to her earlier crossings into the district: “My introduction to NDG was when my family decided to pop me out of my East-end bubble and send me to [...] High School. Two sisters and my aunt... were [...] girls.” She explained that she was able to attend this school because her father had attended an English-language school for one year, which allowed him to pass that right on to her. NDG had first entered her life through school. Later, it became a place she chose more consciously, in part because it offered the walkable life and local recognition she had come to value.

Now, as a real estate agent, Zoe's daily life involved many interactions with people, some already familiar and others newly encountered. She knew that any of these interactions could potentially become a source of business, depending on whether someone was thinking about

buying or selling a house. Yet she also described why she distanced herself from the “relentless sales push” that defined much of her industry. “I don’t want to burn out. My husband already did, working in a network job to support the family” (Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023). With two children, she stressed that quality of life was more important than turning every encounter into a business lead.

Her responsibilities also reached beyond her own household. As a board member of a youth organization in NDG, she advocated for young people and families facing precarious housing situations. She was acutely aware of how rising rents had pushed newcomers out of the sector. She described the organization as “a flashing beacon of hope” despite its lack of a permanent space. During the pandemic, staff improvised by calling families, offering tutoring, and arranging meals for students who did not have enough to eat. Her account held a tension that also ran through her work. As a real estate agent, she knew that housing was shaped by the markets and by legal agreements. Yet she kept returning to the question of livability. Who could remain in the area? Who was finding it harder to stay? What kinds of daily arrangements could still hold? These questions were important to her because she did not understand place only as property. She understood it through the everyday conditions that allow people to build a life in the district.

Zoe’s affection for NDG was tied to this sense of workable proximity. She was conscious of what NDG offered that RDP had not. One example was the winter sociability that emerged along residential blocks during snowstorms. Shovelling created side-by-side activity. It brought people outside at the same time, turning a chore into a small occasion for talk. “We help shovel and we chat house to house.” Her block, she noted, was unusual in its closeness. She explained,

Tomorrow is most likely a snow day, and the best of my street will emerge...because all the kids come out and we help each other shovel each other's walkways. I love my block because otherwise ...we are toiling alone, it's like, no we are going to go over and chat there, because we know each other and we're going to chat. And then we are going to go over here and chat and then...four or five houses down...even if we don't all know each other's names, oh yeah the guy who builds film sets, and oh yeah the daycare is on my block...[Zoe's children go to that daycare]. (Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023)

She went on to say,

My block is unusual. The more I learn about real estate and community and the more I learn about what's missing and the more I appreciate how unusual my block is in how well we know each other and look out for each other. And it's down to the efforts of three people. My block, because of its proximity to the university, has quite a number of academics who bought a while ago when it was relatively affordable. There are a diversity of people, it's not your standard like two people and two kids and a dog...you know, my vocation is my academic career in some ways. [Along my block there are] people with more time—more free time in some ways... to walk around and form those relationships. Because their schedules are not 9-5. They have blocks of time during the day to come out and mingle and have made it a priority. This is one place where repetition becomes visible as an everyday practice. (Zoe, Interview fieldnotes, January, 2023)

The block became recognizable through seasonal routines and through small encounters that repeated without requiring formal intimacy. For Zoe, this was part of what made NDG different from the settings she had known earlier. Her childhood had taught her to read places through contrast. RDP had shown her how isolating a built environment could feel when daily life depended on distance and the car. Her school years had shown her how familiarity could be learned, but also how it could remain uneven. The weekend gatherings organized through her grandmother showed her that a social world could extend well beyond one's immediate surroundings, and that maintaining it sometimes required movement across the city.

These experiences became part of how she came to understand locality. The years of travelling from RDP to school, the weekends spent with Filipino families in parks and backyards, the rides on the 161 bus with domestic workers, and the hours in Côte-St-Luc ironing newspapers all shaped how she read everyday environments. They taught her to notice not only

whether a place was accessible, but what kinds of life it made possible and who had to labour in order to sustain it. Her childhood was therefore divided between two kinds of circuits. One was the daily reality of an isolating suburban landscape. The other was the wider network of Filipino community life that her family maintained across the city (Freitag and von Oppen, 2010). Moving between these settings shaped how she came to read different parts of Montréal in relational terms. What she valued was not “community” in the abstract. It was the ordinary experience of sharing life with others: seeing familiar faces, exchanging small kindnesses, and feeling recognized as part of a place. As she put it, “There’s all the things I would like about having a walkable life. Short walks to the important things and community points.” For her, this was not only about housing. It was about choosing a way of life.

From this perspective, pathways are not simply about where one lives. They are also about how people make spaces of connection when the immediate environment does not provide them easily. This sensibility later informed Zoe’s adult choices. She valued local areas for their capacity to support everyday relationships, rather than treating housing primarily as an investment. Her everyday life in NDG brought together many of the forms of connection she had learned to value over time: local cafés, children’s spaces, street-block sociability, and involvement in a youth organization. In Finnegan’s terms, these are pathways made through overlapping spheres of participation. What becomes “local” is not only where one resides. It is also made through repeated movement and through the forms of recognition that help a place become inhabitable.

### ***Pathways Made under Constraint: Arrival, Uncertainty, and Learning the City in Fragments***

The third set of narratives follows pathways formed under more acute constraint. Here, people are not only settling into a district. They are trying to get through the day while also securing



something more durable. They moved through NDG while trying to find housing and make sense of systems that were new to them, often under time pressure and in a language they were still learning. These are stories of arrival, but arrival does not appear as a single event. It unfolds through small problems that have to be solved in real time. People have to find a place to live before any routine can begin to settle. They have to reach classes, services, appointments, and points of support. They have to learn transit routes, arrange childcare, hold onto work, and manage fatigue. The margin for error is often small. In these accounts, emplacement is not already achieved. It is still in progress. Familiarity has to be built while people are moving through partial knowledge and improvised routes. Stability is assembled from what is accessible, affordable, and workable in the moment. The web of routine routes appears first as necessity. Only later, if conditions allow, can these routes begin to feel familiar.

### ***Malik***

I first met Malik at [The Food Marché], a small grocery-store-style space attached to a local food bank and resource centre in NDG, where I was volunteering during my fieldwork. He was also volunteering there once a week, helping residents select groceries and find what they needed. When I met him, it was Ramadan, and he was fasting during his three-hour shift. The setting was important because it was one of the first local places through which he was trying to orient himself. He volunteered partly to meet people, partly to learn about local resources, and partly to become more familiar with the district. In this sense, [The Food Marché] was not only a site of assistance. It was also a place where Malik was trying to establish a foothold.

We later met on the Loyola campus, at a picnic table tucked into one of the green courtyards. The space felt calm, almost set apart from the motion of daily life around it. Malik greeted me warmly, though I sensed a quiet reserve beneath his smile. He had dark, slightly curly

hair and brown skin that reflected his Sudanese roots. His voice was soft, measured, and a little weary. In May 2023, we walked together through the routes he used most often near home, moving from the campus edge toward Sherbrooke Street and the park. Early in the walk, he mentioned that he had been fasting for Ramadan and felt tired: “Every year since I was 15 years old. It’s a challenge. Sunrise to sunset. It’s a lot like intermittent fasting. You only eat within the gap of eight hours. Even without fasting I only eat two meals each day” (Malik, Go-along fieldnotes, May, 2023).

Malik’s pathway brings a different relation to home into view. Here, home was not yet a tangible attachment to the district. It was closer to a hoped-for condition of stability, something that depended on housing, legal security, work, and the gradual learning of everyday routes. His days were organized around necessary tasks. He was buying groceries, working out bus routes, searching for work, and keeping up with French classes. Those classes were downtown, and public transit made them possible. He travelled by metro and bus, then returned on the same lines, trying to keep his schedule manageable. When I asked how he had come to live in NDG, his answer made clear how uncertain his beginning in Montréal had been.

Malik arrived in Canada in January 2022 as a refugee claimant seeking asylum. Originally from Khartoum, near the North Sudan/South Egypt border, he had completed a master’s degree in mechanical engineering in Illinois before coming to Montréal from the United States. His mother, who had stayed behind in Khartoum, passed away while he was studying in Illinois. He did not want to disclose all of the circumstances that led him to leave the United States, explaining that he did not want to compromise his ability to stay in Canada. That limit in the conversation was important. It showed how precarity shaped not only his movement, but also what he felt able to narrate.

He explained that he came through the Roxham Road border crossing in January 2022. Upon arrival, he stayed for several weeks at a refugee reception centre in downtown Montréal until he could find more stable housing. He eventually found a small apartment in NDG, shared with a flatmate. As we walked, he showed me the area around Loyola Park and pointed out the building where he lived. We stopped briefly to watch children playing soccer and a few older residents walking their dogs. The walk stayed close to home. It followed the routes he knew well enough to use without much effort.

Housing came up quickly. Malik described the difficulty of finding a place he could afford, as well as tensions with his flatmate at the time. Moving had already become a recurring part of his life in Montréal. He had found his first apartment on Facebook Marketplace, at a point when he did not yet know much about the area. He said he was drawn to NDG mainly because it felt more English-speaking and the rent was affordable. His first place was on Walkley Avenue. Later, he moved closer to the park, on Fielding. By the time we spoke, he expected he might have to leave again at the end of the month. In his account, life in Montréal was still shaped by administrative steps and practical constraints. He described leaving the United States as a forced rupture, and he emphasized that he was trying to rebuild a footing through documents, appointments, and repeated attempts at employment. When he described those first days, he stressed secrecy, uncertainty, and how close he felt to the edge,

When I first arrived here, it was my lowest point, I came by bus, train and taxi in secret. There was a lot of uncertainty and I was [in a very dark place and overwhelmed about what would come next]. There were a lot of explanation marks [question marks] about what I am going to do. I asked myself, what I am going to do?...Whenever you find you build yourself, you fall down. You go through different mood swings. If I had an option, I would not leave [Illinois]. Why? I had friends, I'm working in my field—I have—I know people. I'm sure I will find it's for the better maybe there is a better opportunity. (Malik, Go-along fieldnotes, May, 2023)

When we spoke, Malik had been living in NDG for a year and three months. After arriving in Québec, he applied to a Ph.D. program and was accepted into an engineering program outside Montréal. Although the program was offered in English, he deferred it because it did not specialize in his field. He still described himself as trying to establish a secure life in Montréal. He wanted to stay, but staying required work on several fronts at once. He was taking French courses at an immigrant and refugee settlement centre in Côte-des-Neiges. He had also recently decided to leave his volunteer position at [The Food Marché] so that he could devote more time to finding stable employment. A case worker at the Promis Centre in Côte-des-Neiges had been assigned to him, giving him another point of support as he tried to navigate the next steps.

When I asked about his impressions of Montréal, Malik contrasted the city with his time in Illinois. “People in the U.S. are more nosey—but in a good way,” he said. “They love to know who you are and why you’re there.” Montréal felt different to him. People seemed more reserved, and he framed that reserve through his own sense of being newly arrived. “It’s their place. I am a guest.” He returned to this language when he spoke about French. “It’s their right, their province. I am a guest. If someone came to my country, I would expect the same thing” (Malik, Go-along fieldnotes, May, 2023).

Language shaped many of his first encounters. He described online exchanges through Facebook Marketplace that began in French, even when he was still more comfortable in English. He often translated his replies before sending them. Sometimes, he said, people did not respond. These barriers made everyday tasks slower. They also made social connection harder to establish. Malik admitted that he had not yet made friends since arriving. This was not only a matter of personality or preference. It was part of the difficulty of trying to build a life while housing, work, language learning, and legal security were still unsettled.

By the end of our walk, what stood out was how his sense of NDG was assembled from a small number of geographic references. He knew the park near home. He knew the route that took him downtown for French classes and brought him back again. He knew where to buy groceries. He knew the locations tied to paperwork, settlement services, and other forms of support. Beyond these points, much of the district remained unfamiliar. We finished at the Second Cup on Sherbrooke. The café was full of students, along with a few parents and children. Malik told me he rarely went to places like this. “I’m not really going to cafés or restaurants” (Malik, Go-along fieldnotes, May, 2023). The comment was brief, but it clarified the limits of his local map. For some interlocutors, cafés were places of recognition, ease, and return. For Malik, they remained mostly outside the routines that structured his days.

Malik’s pathway was narrow at the time of our walk. It unfolded through the practical demands of keeping going: finding housing, managing paperwork, securing food, learning French, and searching for work. Public transit extended his day beyond the small area he otherwise stayed within. The metro and bus connected his immediate circuits near home to the places that he needed for his next steps. Movement, in this account, was less about exploration than about maintaining continuity across necessary destinations. His sense of the locality was still in the making. It came from doing the same trips again and again, and from learning the return routes that allowed him to move without getting lost. Familiarity accumulated slowly because it was grounded in routine and necessity rather than in a fuller set of social attachments. Malik’s account therefore depicts arrival as a series of provisional arrangements. It unfolded through the practical work of keeping life going. Housing had to be found. Paperwork had to be managed. Food, French classes, and work all had to be fitted into a routine that was still unstable.

Xiao-Wei's story also follows the theme of learning the city in fragments, but her pathway took shape under different conditions. She arrived during the pandemic, when ordinary forms of contact were limited. Language barriers made daily movement more difficult, and the metro became one of the main ways she learned how the city held together. Seen alongside Malik's account, her story shows that knowing NDG is unevenly distributed. Urban familiarity is built through repeated acts of orientation, even when confidence remains tentative and the area has not yet become easy to inhabit.

### *Xiao-Wei*

It was a chilly afternoon in early spring when I met Xiao-Wei on Monkland Avenue. The street was lined with small commercial storefronts: an artisanal bakery, cafés, restaurants, and shops that drew people in and out in uneven bursts. At certain moments the sidewalk felt busy, and then it thinned again. This was the kind of street where the movement of the district was visible at eye level, as people carried coffee, paused at a bakery window, or moved quickly between errands. In her early sixties, Xiao-Wei had deep brown eyes and a short bob cut with long bangs across her forehead. She wrapped her scarf tightly against the wind as we spoke. I had first met her months earlier at one of the collective gardens, and she had agreed to participate in my project.

A Chinese immigrant who had lived in NDG since 2020, Xiao-Wei spoke in hesitant, sometimes broken English, and admitted that French was still difficult for her. Before we met, I had asked her to think about the places she used in her daily rounds. When I asked where she would like to go, she suggested we walk to her apartment so she could show me the courtyard behind it, a space she used regularly. As we walked, she began recalling her first adjustments to life during the Covid pandemic. When I asked how she came to live in NDG, she explained that

the move was not so much a deliberate choice as something made possible by necessity and convenience. After separating from her husband, she searched online for apartments and visited several across the city. What was most important, she explained, was finding a place close to the metro, since she did not own a car. Public transit was her way of reaching what she needed. NDG, with its metro and nearby bus routes, became the easiest option. It was not so much a matter of knowing the area beforehand as recognizing its accessibility once she arrived.

Xiao-Wei explained that public transportation was one of the first systems she had to learn. The metro was easier for her than the bus because its direction was visible and its stations could be photographed, repeated, and remembered. Still, taking it for the first time was overwhelming. She recalled,

I didn't know French, so the names of the stations made no sense. I took photos of the station signs so I would remember where to get off and how to come back. Once, a big man saw me taking pictures and asked what I was doing. I explained I was just trying not to get lost. He gave me a small metro map, which helped me a lot. Another time, when I was trying to find McGill University, a stranger noticed me confused at a street map and offered to guide me there. Encounters like this gave me confidence, even when everything felt strange (Xiao-Wei, Interview fieldnotes, September, 2023).

The bus was more difficult. Routes were less visible to her once she was on board and she could not always tell when she was supposed to get off. She explained,

I often didn't understand the routes, or the drivers forgot to tell me when to get off. Once, I ended up on a highway in Longueuil with no way to cross back. Another time, I waited outside in the freezing cold for more than half an hour after boarding the wrong bus. It was exhausting and frightening. After those experiences, I decided to rely mostly on the metro, where at least I could see the direction of travel" (Xiao-Wei, Interview fieldnotes, September, 2023).

Xiao-Wei's pathway was initially a practice of wayfinding rather than a story of attachment. She was learning the city through return. She had to make a trip, find her way back, and repeat it until certain signs became reliable. The metro helped because it offered a structure she could read in

real time. The station names, maps, and directions gave her something to hold onto when the city itself was still difficult to interpret. The small gestures she described also mattered. A map offered by a stranger, or someone guiding her toward McGill, made the system usable at the moment she needed it. These encounters helped build confidence because they made orientation possible before familiarity was secure.

Xiao-Wei also reflected on her first years in Canada and on how the pandemic shaped her experience of settling. Just before the pandemic began, she had returned to China, where strict lockdowns soon made leaving extremely difficult. She remembered the atmosphere of uncertainty vividly: “Whenever you left home, you were stopped four times a day to have your temperature taken. Even in the big food markets, you had to be scanned before entering. It was frightening because no one really knew how dangerous COVID was yet” (Xiao-Wei, Interview fieldnotes, September, 2023). Highways were closed, flights were cancelled, and travel was heavily restricted. When she finally found a flight back to Canada in March 2020, each stage of the journey involved another health check and the possibility that she might be denied boarding. At one point, her temperature registered too high after she had eaten hot noodles in the airport lounge. She recalled, “The attendant had me wait and retested me after 20 minutes. My temperature went down to 36.8—under the limit of 37. I was so relieved.” Only after waiting and being retested was she able to leave.

Her time in NDG after that was marked by ongoing adjustment, especially around language. Xiao-Wei described French as one of her greatest challenges. She had arrived from China with basic English, while French remained difficult and often frustrating. She also encountered an expectation that, because she lived in Québec, she would already be able to understand French. She explained,



When I first arrived, I took a French conversation class in NDG. I went to classes once a week, offered in the neighbourhood, on Belgrave near Sherbrooke. It was very difficult for me. French is hard, especially because so many words end in silent letters. For example, in English it's 'dinner,' but in French it's dîner—the ER is silent. I tried to practice at the Benny Library. I borrowed a book, and when the librarian asked me to return it, she spoke French very quickly. I could not understand. She realized and [switched] to English.” (Xiao-Wei, Interview fieldnotes, September, 2023)

English became a more natural second language for her than French. At the same time, her life remained tied to Hangzhou. She returned there for several months each year to care for her parents until their recent deaths. “Usually I spend two or three months with my parents for Chinese New Year but this year I went for four months,” she explained. Her mother had been in hospital during Chinese New Year, and Xiao-Wei wanted her to come home so they could celebrate together. Both of her parents had passed away within one month of each other. She regretted that COVID travel restrictions had kept her from seeing them for three years before that. The memory remained vivid because the restrictions had interrupted the family routines through which she maintained her life across places.

Xiao-Wei also had a son in his mid-thirties who lived in Florida, and he had stayed with her for two months in Montréal. Xiao-Wei’s account complicates any facile distinction between settlement and mobility. Her life in NDG was local, but it did not stop at the boundaries of the district. Her transnational connections and ties remained active, especially through extended travel to China and visits to see her son in Florida. She also moved across Montréal to reach the Chinese groceries and restaurants that made everyday life feel more familiar. In this sense, NDG functioned less as a complete social world than as a practical base within a wider field of movement. Mobility was therefore not opposed to emplacement. It was one of the conditions that made her life in NDG sustainable. Moving between places allowed her to maintain transnational

ties and reach familiar resources across Montréal, even as language barriers made ordinary navigation difficult.

Much of Xiao-Wei's everyday life in NDG was organized around her immediate surroundings. She invited me to walk with her across Monkland Avenue to the apartment complex where she lived. The housing complex connects directly to the public library, and as we exited through the back, a wide courtyard opened before us. She pointed out her apartment building and led me into the central green space. The grass was still patchy from winter, but the space itself was striking. A broad rectangle of lawn was framed by U-shaped brick buildings whose balconies faced inward. The design encouraged mutual visibility between the housing units. Walkways cut across the lawn, and as we paused, a few neighbours passed through, nodding as they went. Mature trees and benches lined the paved paths. Along one edge, a collective garden had been planted in raised beds.

The design of her apartment complex carried the imprint of its history. Originally built as veterans' housing after the Second World War and later redeveloped in the early 2000s, the site retained a functional, communal layout. The courtyard's openness fostered small but regular encounters. Xiao-Wei told me she often saw her neighbours there each day. She recognized everyone and had some sense of their daily routines. She talked with them and sometimes exchanged small favours, such as helping with chores or running an errand if someone was unable to go out. As she put it, "We see each other every day, so we help [each other] a little." These gestures, though modest, created what she described as "small connections." This was not the language of deep friendship, and Xiao-Wei did not describe it that way. What mattered to her was a form of connection that remained close enough to be useful without becoming demanding. The small connections she named were built through repetition and minor reciprocity. The

courtyard made it hard not to see one another, and daily co-presence created openings for small acts that did not require intimacy. In this sense, the courtyard made closeness manageable through repetition. Seeing the same neighbours each day created enough familiarity for small favours and brief exchanges to become possible, while the semi-public character of the space kept those relations bounded. People could recognize one another, help in small ways, and then return to their own lives. It was not necessary to convert those encounters into deeper ties.

She had been living there for almost three years. The role of spatial proximity in Xiao-Wei's neighbouring relations within her apartment building supports the idea that material arrangements shape what kinds of social ties become easy to sustain (Felder et al., 2023). Maxime Felder, Guillaume Favre, Marina Tulin, and Petros Koutsolampros (2023) show that when residential design generates repeated, ordinary contact, neighbour relations often take the form of recognition and small reciprocities that remain workable without becoming intimate. This helps clarify why Xiao-Wei's "small connections" felt steady to her, even as she kept them within the limits of what the courtyard made ordinary. The courtyard's semi-public character is important here because it demonstrates how spatial design can hold people in view of one another without requiring sustained interaction.

We then walked to Benny Park, a large park across from the library and near her apartment building, where she practised Tai Chi each morning. Over the year before our meeting, Xiao-Wei had begun organizing Tai Chi on Wednesday mornings with some of her neighbours in the apartment building. She enjoyed being active, and the practice was already part of her daily routine, whether or not others joined her. She loved the northwest corner near Terrebonne because it offered a comfortable open space that felt more accommodating than the courtyard at her apartment building. During the construction of the skate park, however, the

group's usual space was cordoned off, forcing them to relocate to the top terrace of the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Sports Centre. This accidental displacement made them more visible as a group, and staff soon invited her to teach a weekly class. What began as a casual practice among neighbours became a job opportunity and a more institutionalized role within the sports centre. Since then, the group has continued its practice on the second-floor terrace, a small concrete space that now holds their weekly routine.

After leaving Benny Park, we walked along Monkland Avenue and continued to chat. I asked where she would like to go next. Xiao-Wei admitted that she was not familiar with the street. "I don't really know here... like I did not really find some Chinese restaurant here, not in this area." She told me she liked green tea, so we adjusted our walk and made our way to a tea house further along Monkland, letting her preference shape the direction of our route. Over tea, she reflected on her ties to Hangzhou. She spoke about the city she came from, the things she missed, and the conveniences that were not available in her new home. She contrasted everyday life in Hangzhou with life in NDG. She did not shop for groceries nearby because NDG had no Chinese supermarket, so she took the metro to Côte-des-Neiges or other parts of the city to reach stores like T & T. Chinatown also felt familiar and special to her. She told me that she used some of the amenities on Somerled Street occasionally, but her preferred routes for food and familiarity often led elsewhere:

Still, I try. I go shopping at the Metro supermarket on Somerled, sometimes also on Sherbrooke. But I wish there were more Chinese grocery stores nearby. They have Japanese and Korean shops on Sherbrooke, but not much Chinese food. I like to go to Chinatown for that. I love the restaurants there—especially hot pot. You can sit for hours with friends, adding food to the broth, all the sauces, and eggs." (Xiao-Wei, Interview fieldnotes, September, 2023)

Xiao-Wei's story illustrates how settlement in NDG took form through mobility and everyday improvisation. Proximity mattered too, especially in the courtyard where repeated encounters made small connections easier to sustain. Metro access shaped her choice of locality. Her apartment courtyard provided a setting in which daily recognition could develop. Benny Park and later the sports centre anchored her Tai Chi practice because they gave her routine a place to gather. At the same time, her transnational connections and ties continued to shape how she inhabited the district. What stands out is how routine practices can become stabilizing, even when language remains difficult and the city still feels only partly legible. For Xiao-Wei, attachment to NDG was not immediate or complete. It took form through repetition, as provisional routines became more dependable. Rather than formal integration, the important work happened through small acts of everyday association that made her days workable and helped the district become easier to inhabit.

Xiao-Wei's pathway emphasized how navigation and language became the primary work of settling. Small encounters with strangers accumulated into a fragile but meaningful sense of capability in the city. Bianca's story extends this focus on constraint, but under the abrupt temporalities of war displacement and the compressed schedules of work, childcare, and language requirements. Her account shows the ways in which institutional schedules and commuting needs can organize everyday movement, because people have to build their days around fixed obligations and the routes that make those obligations reachable.

### ***Bianca***

I first met Bianca while volunteering at [The Food Marché], a small grocery-store-style space attached to a local food bank and community kitchen in NDG. The larger site included a lunch area where homemade meals were served during the week on a pay-what-you-can basis, with no

one turned away for lack of funds. The marché allowed residents to choose groceries during scheduled visits or emergency appointments. Each household received a budget based on family size, which represented the value of the food they could select. Volunteers helped residents choose what they needed and kept the small marché running smoothly. I met Bianca while helping her distinguish between different kinds of bread that were available that day. The exchange was brief and practical, but it became the first point of contact for the interview that followed.

Bianca and I later met at [Café Strada], a small café tucked along Somerled Avenue. From there, we began our short go-along. Somerled had a quieter commercial feel than Monkland or Sherbrooke. Along this stretch, small eateries and neighbourhood shops sat close together, including an Indian curry house, Chinese take-out, a sushi counter, and a dépanneur. Inside, the café was quiet. Long wooden benches lined the room, soft Persian music played in the background, and the faint bitterness of coffee beans hung in the air. It was still early, around eleven. Bianca arrived soon after: tall and slim, with thick blond hair and an open, friendly manner. Her English carried a noticeable Russian accent, but I had no trouble understanding her.

After brief introductions, I asked about the challenges she had faced since leaving Ukraine. She explained that she had come to Québec as a refugee about a month after the war began. The decision had been made quickly because she had little choice but to flee with her young daughter while her husband stayed behind. “I had only two days after the war started and we had to decide. I took my daughter and left. My husband stayed behind” (Bianca, Go-along fieldnotes, May 2024). As we talked, our conversation turned toward the routines of her new life. Her days were organized around commuting, French classes, online work in Ukraine, and care for her daughter. She was studying French to reach level seven for permanent residency. “I have

permission to work, but I need two years of experience,” she said. “I’m a Deputy CFO in Kiev. I work online every day. My French classes are from nine to three, and after that I go home to do my Ukrainian job, then to the garderie to pick up my daughter.” She took the metro to her French course near Namur because the bus route between Monkland and Sherbrooke “changes its way” and made her wait too long. For Bianca, pathways were not open-ended routes of exploration. Her days had to be fitted around fixed requirements. French classes took place at set hours. Her daughter had to be picked up from daycare on time. Her Ukrainian work continued online after class. Her routes through Montréal followed the demands of the day more than the pull of curiosity or choice.

In recounting her former work life, Bianca emphasized how completely her days had been consumed by the demands of management because she was responsible for balancing accounts, addressing problems as they emerged, and maintaining the company’s financial flow. She recalled being constantly on call, taking urgent phone calls at any hour, even while on vacation or during her honeymoon, laptop in hand. She described herself less as a boss and more as someone who had grown alongside her employees because she was closely attuned to their family struggles, financial pressures, and everyday concerns. Managing nearly 300 employees, with 50 to 60 reporting directly to her, she came to see her colleagues as a kind of family. Her work responsibilities extended into every corner of her life because free time only existed when her daughter was asleep or during short breaks on weekends. During our walk, this connection to Ukraine remained active. At times, she stopped to take a phone call, speaking Russian, or to text colleagues she was still working with in Kiev.

Bianca also described her living situation as difficult. In Montréal, she was sharing an uncomfortably small apartment with her mother, her daughter, and her brother-in-law. This was a

sharp contrast to the home she had built with her husband and daughter in Ukraine. The apartment also reminded her of childhood, when she had lived with her parents and brother in a two-room home. One room was for her parents, and the other was shared by Bianca and her brother. “When I worked in Ukraine, we both saved and built our own house in 2018 and now I’m living with my mom again,” she exclaimed.

Her adjustment to Montréal also meant learning winter differently. When I asked about her first winter, she laughed and said she had learned to wear “more and more clothes.” In Ukraine, she had relied on a car, but in Montréal she needed boots, warm socks, and a hat for everyday movement on foot and by transit. She mentioned showing her new boots to her husband over FaceTime. He was still in Ukraine. “My husband is working there he’s not in the war though he can’t leave the country because men cannot leave if they’re under 60, they must stay during wartime” (Bianca, Go-along fieldnotes, May 2024). Unlike Xiao-Wei’s more mobile transnational life, Bianca’s ties to Ukraine were sustained under conditions of constraint. They remained active through online work, phone calls, and images of the home she had built, even as war made ordinary return uncertain and kept her family separated.

Leaving the café and stepping onto the sidewalk, Bianca remarked that the décor inside [Café Strada] reflected an Iranian aesthetic. As we walked past the shops and restaurants along Somerled, she noted that the street felt “a little older than Sherbrooke or Monkland” and asked what this area was called. I showed her on Google Maps where the café was in relation to her home, since she had never been this far down Somerled before and did not yet know the area. She observed the mix of storefronts along the street and commented on the slower tempo of Montréal. “People here they don’t care about time. Everybody here is so relaxed. In Kiev, everyone’s always in a rush...the culture is driven by what time it is. And it’s so relaxed here.”



Her observation captured a shift in tempo that she was still learning to read. The difference was not only about pace. It was also about how everyday time was organized, and how she was learning to recalibrate her expectations in a city where urgency seemed to gather differently.

When we reached Monkland Avenue, near the elementary school where her daughter was registered to start in the fall, Bianca began asking practical questions because the school system was still unfamiliar to her: admission fees, school uniforms, start times, and the differences between public and private schools. She had chosen a bilingual school so that her daughter could learn both English and French. “My daughter speaks Russian with me, Ukrainian with my mother, and French at the daycare. But half of the kids speak English” (Bianca, Go-along fieldnotes, May 2024).

As we continued walking through the residential streets, Bianca remarked that the architecture was “so different” from what she was used to in Ukraine (Bianca, Go-along fieldnotes, May 2024). She noticed that “the houses here are attached,” whereas in Ukraine, “they are detached unless one lives in central Kiev, where it is all tall towers and apartment buildings.” She looked at the yards and asked whether many houses had them. I explained that some did and others did not, and that they varied in size. Thinking aloud, she said, “Maybe you don’t need a big yard because it’s a lot of work.” Her reflections on yards and houses opened a window into her process of comparison, because she was measuring this new residential setting against the home and urban forms she had left behind.

As we walked, her thoughts often drifted back to her husband, who remained in Ukraine. “My husband sent me a picture yesterday...he now cuts the grass...I used to do it,” she said with a laugh, before showing me a photo on her phone of the home they had built together. “This is my yard here...I designed it with my husband.” Her voice softened as she scrolled through the

images. “We built our own house and I have my own space, my own backyard. The trees have grown a lot...we don't know what to do with the house yet because if he comes here, we will have to figure out...maybe my parents can live there...maybe...because we just built the house.” Bianca was still living across two overlapping worlds: the life she was assembling in Montréal ran alongside an ongoing attachment elsewhere. During one phone call, her mother-in-law had been standing on her balcony when a missile exploded nearby. “There was a lot of smoke,” Bianca recounted, “and small drones were flying in front of her, and then other small rockets came to intercept them.” The memory of that call unsettled her because it underscored the distance between her new daily routines and the instability her family continued to face.

Walking through Montréal’s residential streets with Bianca drew out embodied comparisons because her memories of Ukraine were interwoven with her sensory experience of this new place. The quiet sidewalks and tree-lined streets registered strongly for her, as did the absence of fear. On our way down Marcil Avenue, I asked her where she would like to go next. “We will walk toward that way [towards Girouard Park]...we go to that park often,” she said (Bianca, Go-along fieldnotes, May 2024). She explained that parks had become an important part of her daily life in NDG: “I use the park...everyday I use the park...it’s a little different in my country...but Montreal has really great parks, especially when they have a special playground with the [splash pad].” These comments revealed how she was mapping her new environment through routines of care and shared time with her daughter.

As we made our way toward her daughter’s daycare, Bianca admitted she did not know the street name. We stopped, opened Google Maps, and traced the route together. When we found it—Avenue Prud’homme—she repeated the name slowly, working to pronounce it with me. She laughed softly, explaining, “I know where it is but not the name of the street.” This

small exchange showed how her spatial knowledge was still forming because her sense of the area was embodied, linguistic, and experiential all at once. She knew the route through use before she knew it by name. As we continued, she asked questions and pointed out landmarks, testing her bearings against the map and her own recollections. The go-along itself became a moment of place-learning, where knowing unfolded through movement, repetition, and shared orientation.

As we continued walking, Bianca noticed several Ukrainian flags hanging from porches along the street. She paused for a moment, remarking that she saw many of them around NDG and that they always made her think of her first months in Canada (Bianca, Go-along fieldnotes, May, 2024). When she and her daughter arrived, they spent three months living with a host family in St. Eustache. The sight of the flags moved her because they recalled the solidarity she had experienced then. She explained that the woman who had hosted them had offered help to a Ukrainian family online, and her husband had reached out after seeing the post. “She didn’t want money, she just wanted to help,” Bianca said, recalling the generosity that had made their arrival easier.

Her reflections then shifted toward her time in St. Eustache and toward how language had shaped her early adjustment. She remembered that everyone there wanted to speak English with her, but when she interviewed for a job, she was told she needed stronger French. “They liked me,” she said, “but they said I really need French.” She spoke about her temporary visa and the uncertainty of her status, including her hope that she would be able to renew it when the time came. “Canada needs people like me,” she added, “and they need my daughter too. I hope there are programs for us.” Language surfaced again as a central thread in her account because it shaped work, schooling, and everyday exchanges in public. In Ukraine, she explained, people

spoke Ukrainian or Russian, and English was not part of school education. “Here it’s different,” she said, “because you need English, and also French.” Learning both languages at once had been difficult. Once, she recounted, a man asked why she did not speak French, and she was not sure whether he was refusing to switch languages or simply could not speak English himself. Moments like that left her unsure how to respond. Still, she appreciated how many people in Montréal tried to speak English with her, often slowing their speech to help her understand.

Bianca’s story showed that settlement was not only about housing or routine. It also involved learning to move through new linguistic and spatial worlds. Her questions about schools, her tentative place-learning, and her reliance on shared navigation highlighted how her sense of the district was still taking shape. Finding one’s footing in a new place took time. It happened gradually, through small acts of asking and noticing. Language worked both as a bridge and a boundary because it created openings for connection while also exposing what she could not yet access.

The final narrative shifts from arrival and adjustment to the question of staying. Jean-Pierre’s account foregrounds what it can mean to hold onto a place over decades, especially when economic pressure and uneven urban resources shape daily life. His story also shows how inequality becomes visible through everyday movement. It appears in the condition of sidewalks, in access to services, and in the effects of municipal boundaries as people move from block to block. Ending with Jean-Pierre keeps the chapter’s focus on pathways while clarifying that staying is not simply a background condition. It is an active accomplishment sustained over time. Remaining in place often requires continual adjustment to pressures that do not stop. Rising costs, shifting services, and uneven public infrastructure all shape what staying demands. In his

account, “staying” is produced through the same kinds of everyday decisions and constraints that shape arrival, only stretched across decades.

### *Jean-Pierre*

I first met Jean-Pierre while volunteering at [The Food Marché], where he had come to receive his monthly groceries. Like Malik and Bianca, he entered the project through a setting organized around food access and local support. In his case, however, we did not conduct a go-along. Given his financial strain and the practical difficulty of arranging an in-person meeting, it was easier for him to speak with me later over Zoom. We met online in May 2024, when he told me more about his childhood, his arrival in NDG, and what it had meant to keep living in the area after three decades. Jean-Pierre was a short, animated man in his mid-sixties, with white hair and a sharp sense of humour that ran through even his most difficult stories. Although Jean-Pierre was born in Montréal, he began his account with his family’s move to the Bahamas when he was very young. This beginning matters because Montréal did not appear in his account as a simple place of origin. He began instead with movement away from the city, and with a childhood landscape that was vivid, precarious, and physically remembered. He recalled,

When we got to the Bahamas, I was about a year and a half old. Being born in Montreal, yeah...we were quite torn. And so, my very first memory, my first point of recall, is literally of a wooden shack in the scrub jungle. Its foundation was four oil barrels, one at each corner, just to lift the house high enough above the local wildlife. Oh my God! And this was not a safety era... No sidewalk. And on both sides, there were cactus! I fell off into the side once when I was about three, I think. I still remember it—it’s one of my first memories. My dad had me laid across his thigh, my ass in the air, with a pair of pliers, pulling spine after spine after spine out of my tender body. (Jean-Pierre, Zoom interview fieldnotes, May, 2024)

His family’s move to the Bahamas was not a one-way departure. They retained ties to Montréal, especially through relatives who remained in the city. His mother was French-Canadian, and he

remembered returning to Québec from time to time as a child before coming back more permanently at the age of ten. A poignant memory he carried was seeing snow for the first time,

I know because my mom did a wonderful thing. My mom was not easy, but she woke me up at 2 o'clock in the morning and took me by the hand and led me outside to the balcony of my grandmother's house on De Lorimier Avenue. Because there was little dusting of snow, and she wanted to show it to me, and she knew we would melt by morning. And I remember my first look at... I tasted it, I leaned down and I licked it. I didn't know what it was. I knew it was trying to do what it was, but I'd never seen it before. (Jean-Pierre, Zoom interview fieldnotes, May, 2024)

When he returned to Montréal a little older, the city came into view through language and schooling. The transition was not clean, because he entered Québec at a time when access to English schooling was already organized through documents and eligibility rules. He could understand French, but he could not speak it easily. His primary language was English, and Spanish also belonged to his childhood because he had grown up in the Caribbean. He explained,

When we came home permanently, that was different. One of the first shocks I remember was: What do you mean my son needs a paper to go to English school? The truth was, I understood French perfectly, but I couldn't speak a word of it. My primary language was English, and my secondary language was Spanish—I grew up in the Caribbean. So I could follow French but not speak it. My mother even gave me French lessons on the cruise ship we took between the Bahamas and Florida, going over the alphabet and numbers one by one in French. My mother spoke French to me all the time, but I never practiced it. Back then, people didn't really push the culture onto the kid. The attitude was: the kid will figure it out... So when my mother was told I couldn't automatically attend English school, she was bewildered. She couldn't understand why Quebec would try to force me into French school when I had already been educated in English. She herself was francophone, and her English was broken, but she didn't get the policy. She had to prove I had report cards in English from another country to get me into the English system. Back then it wasn't as strict. There were exceptions, but you needed papers to be exempt. This isn't new—what people call the 'tough rules' now were already there in the 1970s. Culturally, I still love Quebec, but I also see how policies have grown increasingly harsh over the decades. My mother used to tell me about an incident when she went with my grandmother to Simpsons downtown. My grandmother was trying to buy perfume, and the salesperson refused to serve her in French: 'We talk English here, madam.' My grandmother never forgot that. My mother never forgot that. (Jean-Pierre, Zoom interview fieldnotes, May, 2024)

Jean-Pierre did not treat these language tensions as isolated incidents. He placed them within a longer history of injury and response in Québec. His own position was complicated. He had

moved through English, French, and Spanish, and he could understand why francophone resentment had taken shape even as he remained critical of how language politics affected people like him. He explained,

So when I see measures today that make Anglophones feel targeted, I try to remember: these are the reactions of at least three generations who were continuously wounded, discriminated against, and humiliated. Before the Révolution Tranquille in the 1960s, 95% of Quebec was francophone, but almost all the bosses and companies operated in English. If you wanted to succeed, you had to learn English. The French majority were made to feel like second-class citizens in their own province. I understand their anger. If I had grown up fully in French here, I probably would have been a séparatiste, because of that constant humiliation. Street names, businesses—everything was English: Simpsons, Eaton’s, The Bay. That left a mark. I lived through that transition—between an era when English dominated everything, and the years after, when many Anglophones packed up and left for Toronto along the 401. (Jean-Pierre, Zoom interview fieldnotes, May, 2024)

This was how Jean-Pierre often narrated his life. Personal memory opened into historical interpretation, and both were tied to his sharp attention to what had changed around him. From there, he turned to the difficulties of his more recent life in NDG. Though he had lived in the district for thirty years, he described a precariousness that did not feel temporary to him. It felt structural, and it felt close, he explained,

I was about to fall off... I mean, you know why I’m having money issues right now. Three years ago, it was bad enough that I almost became homeless. All you have to do is sit on the corner in front of the food bank and watch. People used to get \$50 worth of groceries, now it’s down to \$40 because the demand is overwhelming. It’s happening everywhere. (Jean-Pierre, Zoom interview fieldnotes, May, 2024)

Jean-Pierre had lived for many years in the same two-and-a-half loft high above Girouard Park. After spending much of his twenties in Côte-des-Neiges in what he called a “slum” apartment, he found his current place in NDG. He described it with a mix of pride and defensiveness, as though he had learned to justify its smallness by pointing to what it made possible. “People wondered, why have you lived in this tiny place for so long? And then I open the door, put them on the

balcony, and they understand. I've got a million-dollar condo view from here. The sunsets are to die for." He stayed, he told me, because his childhood had been marked by instability. He connected that history to the decision to hold onto one place once he finally could: "My father left us when I was ten. My mother, who suffered from the same mental health issues I inherited, moved us every two years and never unpacked. So when I found this place, I didn't want to go anywhere."

Some of his memories made clear how much NDG had changed over the decades. When he moved into the building in 1992, he said the area did not yet feel safe. In his first year, he lived near drug dealing, sex work, and violence. Over time, he witnessed the area shift, and he spoke about NDG as something that could be read through its streets. It was not only where he lived. It was an uneven urban landscape he had learned to interpret. He explained,

I've seen this corner change from Times Square in 1972 to somewhere you can actually invite a date without being afraid. I've seen the layers of the neighbourhood—the safer, tree-lined streets near the park, the big six-story apartment blocks along Cavendish, the rundown strip near the train line. You can read the socioeconomic divide right in the urban fabric. I know all the areas of NDG, and some parts are beautiful—green streets, kids in alleys, renovations everywhere—but walk down toward the food bank and you see another story. A boarded-up bank, there is a Dollarama on the corner, massive tenement buildings. I laughed out loud the first time I walked there—it was so perfect, like a sociological paper written in the streetscape. The have and have-not divide, visible block by block. (Jean-Pierre, Zoom interview fieldnotes, May, 2024)

He emphasized NDG's social and cultural richness, describing it as more diverse than anywhere else in Montréal. By contrast, he told me that Westmount made him uncomfortable, and he registered that difference quickly. "I'm actually not that comfortable in Westmount. It's too damn rich, and it's too damn Anglo—or Franco. They don't talk to each other. Over there it feels divided, while NDG doesn't have that. And the thing is, it's only a few blocks apart, right?" (Jean-Pierre, Zoom interview fieldnotes, May, 2024). His point was not only that adjacent areas felt different. It was that the difference could be sensed almost immediately, in the atmosphere of



the street and in the ways people appeared to occupy public space. He returned more than once to walking as a way of sensing the city's boundaries. These boundaries were not only symbolic. They were also material. Sidewalks, snow clearing, and basic maintenance became ways of reading unequal municipal investment. He explained,

I used to walk downtown all the time, to the Westmount Towers, along Sherbrooke. I love walking, even in the winter, as long as I have proper clothing. But the sidewalks—you know how they are: ice everywhere, half-cleared, garbage cans in the way. I remember one time I was walking with a friend. I said, 'Don't look up, just look down at your feet.' And then, midway down the street, suddenly—literally a line on the sidewalk—all the ice was gone. Everything was shovelled clean, perfect. I said, 'Stop. Now look up.' And right there, the sign said: Welcome to Westmount.  
(Jean-Pierre, Zoom Interview fieldnotes, May, 2024)

For Jean-Pierre, that contrast condensed a broader difference in municipal capacity and public infrastructure. It gave him an ordinary way to name inequality because it was something he could feel in the basic conditions of moving through space. The difference did not need to be explained only through policy. It appeared in the small calculations walking required: where to place his feet, when to slow down, when to step around an obstacle, and when to brace for ice. In this sense, inequality became legible at ground level. It was built into what the sidewalk asked of him from one block to the next. There were points in our conversation when Jean-Pierre moved into more personal terrain. The pandemic amplified what he described as long-standing mental health struggles, and he talked about how difficult it was to keep himself steady through that period. Just before COVID, he had again come close to losing his footing financially. He could not afford rent in May 2020, but emergency government support and then frontline work in a private eldercare home in NDG allowed him to keep going. The work gave him income, but it also exposed him to the unequal and often brutal conditions of private care. He described nurses collapsing from exhaustion, ambulances waiting outside so residents would not panic, and elders

suffering in overheated rooms because private homes were not required to have air conditioning. For Jean-Pierre, this was not only a pandemic memory. It was also part of how labour, survival, and place became tied together in NDG,

I've unfortunately had the burden of severe anxiety, depression, and PTSD for most of my life. My real self would come up sometimes and people were delighted by it, and then they couldn't understand why I couldn't seem to get my life together. Things have changed now, but for a long time I was more of an observer, in the corner watching other people. Right before COVID, I almost fell off the cliff again. I couldn't afford rent in May 2020. But then the government threw money at the problem. I took a job offer—frontline work in a private eldercare home right here in NDG. They paid me well, but I saw things you would not believe. Nurses falling to their knees crying from exhaustion. Ambulances parked quietly outside so the residents wouldn't panic, stretchers slipping out with sheets over heads. People dying in sweltering rooms because private homes aren't even required to have air conditioning. Thirty-five degrees, eighty percent humidity, elders lying in pools of their own sweat. (Jean-Pierre, Zoom Interview fieldnotes, May, 2024)

These vivid portrayals bring to the fore a first-hand account of how challenging it was during the pandemic inside a private eldercare residence in NDG. He laughed at one point and said he had “seen the neighbourhood from the inside out” through that work. He related,

I should have a T-shirt: I survived. Eighteen months of laundry, sterilizing, washing floors, watching people die. I was the only white guy there—now I know why so many attendants are Black women or Filipina. They're underpaid, they're desperate, their status isn't always regularized. It's a perfect recipe for a hellhole. I burned out completely, but I lasted long enough to qualify for Employment Insurance. That was my survival. (Jean-Pierre, Zoom Interview fieldnotes, May, 2024)

He described stopping once he had enough hours because he could not keep going. He was also explicit about the racialized distribution of precarious labour inside that setting, and about how quickly exhaustion could accumulate. Recovery, he told me, was slow. A change in medication helped, and in recent months he felt better than he had in years, although that improvement came alongside renewed financial strain as rent again became difficult to manage.

Jean-Pierre recounted his life with humour and sharp critique, often moving through cultural references as he made sense of what he had lived. His story stood apart from some of my other interlocutors, yet it also connected with them because it revealed how hardship can sharpen perception and how long-term residence can still be lived under constraint. He described a long practice of remaining in place, but that practice did not look like comfort. It looked like holding onto a small apartment. It meant keeping routines workable while also reading inequality through the ordinary infrastructures around him: the food bank, the affordability of nearby groceries, and the condition of the streets he moved through. These were the systems that helped make daily life viable. They also made the city's unevenness visible in ways he could name without needing policy language. In his account, staying was not an endpoint. It was ongoing work because stability remained fragile and could shift quickly.

### ***Conclusion***

The stories presented here show that pathways into NDG are more than stories of arrival. They are accounts of how people come to make daily life possible under changing conditions. Settlement is shaped by practical contingencies because daily life only becomes manageable when people have what they need to keep going. This begins with somewhere to live but it also depends on the forms of access that make ordinary life possible. Language can determine whether services are reachable. Family support can make staying easier to sustain. Reliable routes, meanwhile, can make movement through the district less difficult. For some interlocutors, NDG became familiar through long residence and repeated movement. For others, NDG remained more provisional. It could be a temporary dwelling or a practical base made usable through the routes and small recognitions that helped daily life hold together.

These accounts also speak to the everyday diversity that characterizes NDG, where differences of language, migration history, class position, and life stage are part of ordinary local life (Wessendorf, 2013). But this does not mean that all residents encounter the district in the same way. Some people can move through public settings with relative ease. Others have to work harder to understand institutional expectations and find services. Sometimes an individual may not feel confident entering a certain space. This affects how quickly ordinary routines become manageable. Some interlocutors had lived in NDG for much of their lives. Others, like Xiao-Wei, were more recent arrivals whose foothold developed through practical routes and small connections to others in her building. Language was one of the clearest ways these uneven pathways became visible. It shaped access to schools and work, and it also affected how easily people could use services or move through ordinary public life. For Zoe, her East-end Italian accent marked how early social worlds had shaped her speech, while her access to English schooling depended on her father's brief education in an English institution. Antonio's multilingual ease in English, French, and Spanish allowed him to move across different social settings with humour and flexibility.

Jordan's hockey memories however, showed how language operated differently. In the locker room and on the ice, children came from households where different languages were spoken, but repeated participation made interaction feel ordinary. By contrast, Arash's experience revealed how linguistic exclusion could leave deep marks. Arash's account makes this unevenness especially clear. For him, language became a site of exclusion rather than ease. He was mocked for his French and the school did not offer the support he needed. Because his mother could not easily advocate for him in French, that exclusion became harder to interrupt.

His later work at the youth centre and karate school was, in part, an attempt to make sure that other newcomer children received forms of support that he had not been given growing up.

Family and other social anchors also mattered because they helped explain why some people came to NDG, and why staying there became possible at particular moments. Antonio, Julia, and Jordan each described family as central to their relationship with NDG, but not in the same way. For Antonio, kin property made it possible to remain in the district after work and professional recognition had become uncertain. For Julia, family proximity helped make a return to NDG practical during a particular stage of life. For Jordan, family, sport, and civic involvement had accumulated over many years into a strong attachment to the area. Bianca's account showed a different configuration. Her family ties remained active across distance but war made ordinary return uncertain and kept her household divided between Montréal and Ukraine.

Local settings also shaped how pathways became more familiar over time. The settings that appear across the chapter did not simply function as backdrops. These settings were places where people learned the terms of ordinary interaction. A café or courtyard did not require deep involvement, but it could make repeated recognition possible. A school or sports space could bring people into contact through shared schedules and practical routines. Food access sites could also become places of encounter, even when the reason for being there was need rather than leisure. In each case, the setting helped shape how much contact felt possible and what kind of ease could develop over time. Helena's walking routes across Sherbrooke and Monkland were layered with memory and recognition. Zoe's attachment to [Prasinos] grew through repeated visits and the ease of being lightly known. Xiao-Wei's courtyard made small connections possible because neighbours saw one another often enough to exchange help without needing

deeper intimacy. In these cases, local familiarity was produced through repeated use rather than through a strong claim of belonging.

The go-along method was particularly useful because movement through space influenced the knowledge produced in the research encounter. Walking made the fieldwork encounter itself more processual because knowledge emerged through movement, in real time, as participants responded to changing surroundings rather than through retrospective description alone. Participants responded to what they passed and to the settings they chose to show me. These responses often brought memory into view, as well as uncertainty about what was still unfamiliar and attachment to places that had become important. Walking alongside participants such as Bianca, Malik, Xiao-Wei, Antonio, and Helena made it easier to see how spatial practice and social adjustment unfolded together. During the walks, this often became visible in modest but telling moments. For example, someone might slow down near a corner and point to a building, not because it was exceptional, but because it held some practical or remembered significance. At other times, the important moment was a hesitation, such as a pause over a street name, a correction on the map, or a decision to take a route that felt easier. These moments helped me think about emplacement as something worked out in motion rather than as something already achieved. With Bianca and Malik, walking foregrounded how partial this could feel, because their knowledge of NDG was still being assembled through limited circuits and tentative acts of orientation. With long-term residents like Helena, walking made a different layer visible. As we moved through familiar streets and past familiar storefronts, memories came up in response to particular places. Repetition appeared as a form of knowing because she could read the area through what had happened there before, in conversations and encounters that had accumulated over time.

This aligns with Thrift's (2004) attention to the affective force of everyday urban environments in which space is not simply a setting but part of what shapes the tone of interaction and what kinds of encounter become possible. It also returns to Finnegan's (1989) usefulness for this chapter. Pathways are not only routes across space. They show how people come to know a locality by moving through it, and how that knowledge remains unevenly distributed. For some interlocutors, repeated movement made NDG feel more settled and familiar. For others, repetition produced only a thinner confidence: enough to find the metro, reach a class, visit a food bank, pick up a child, or return home without getting lost.

Jean-Pierre's story added a final perspective on duration. His long residence in NDG did not mean that life there had become secure or easy. It gave him a sharp knowledge of the district, but that knowledge was tied to real concerns over precarious work and financial strain. His account complicated any simple idea of feeling settled, because staying in place still required ordinary decisions and adjustments that continued over time. In this sense, Jean-Pierre brings the chapter back to one of its central claims: emplacement is not a finished state, but a process that remains vulnerable to shifting circumstances.

Across these accounts, pathways appear not only as biographical routes into NDG. They are also practical routes through which co-presence becomes manageable. People come to know the district through practical effort, in which finding housing, learning transit, returning to familiar settings, and adjusting to language become part of the same gradual process of orientation. Over time, they also work out what can be expected from others. These processes are uneven. Pathways thicken when repetition begins to accumulate into memory, recognition, and practical ease. They remain thinner when daily life is still organized around the work of *getting through* things rather than the confidence of already knowing. The chapters that follow carry this

argument into other forms of everyday coexistence. They examine how people manage passing encounters, neighbouring relations, commercial interactions, and collective initiatives, showing how the ordinary work of living alongside others continues beyond arrival itself.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: PORCHROCK: SOCIALITY, MOBILITY, AND SHARED SPACE IN A STREET FESTIVAL**

It was the weekend before the much-anticipated PorchRock NDG music festival, an annual two-day event in which hundreds of amateur bands perform on porches and balconies across the locality. I had arranged with Samara and Enid, two of the organizers, to volunteer and observe as part of my ethnographic project, because this would let me be present in the practical work that helps bring the festival into being. We met on Sherbrooke Street to hang posters promoting the upcoming festival, stopping at street corners, bus shelters, cafés, restaurants, and local shops to speak briefly with owners as we put them up. The bright PorchRock posters showed a lively street scene: neighbours barbecuing in driveways, children biking ahead of parents, people stretched out on blankets, and musicians standing on porches with guitars. Spectators mingled under spring blossoms. The image promised movement, sound, and a shared anticipation of the weekend. As we walked, Samara explained how she became involved in early discussions that helped bring PorchRock to NDG.

Growing up in the western part of the locality and later leaving the city for more affordable housing off-island, Samara remained attached to NDG. Sitting one evening on her back porch with a friend, she had imagined a day when all the musicians in NDG would play at once, creating a “self-guided walking tour” made up of porch-to-porch circuits. That idea grew into a festival that is now attended by thousands, supported by volunteers, and organized through an open sign-up system. Any band, whether local or from outside the locality, can participate so long as they can find a porch willing to host them. During the festival, some residents tried to get home, navigating around crowds, while others paused in the street to listen to a band or moved slowly toward the next porch performance. These distinct mobilities created moments of tension but they also offered a different way of thinking about and moving through NDG, one that did

not align neatly with its usual patterns of street life. Whereas the previous chapter examined pathways formed through routine, biography, and repeated movement, this chapter turns to routes produced by an event. PorchRock matters because it briefly reorganizes how people move through NDG. It draws residents, former residents, visitors, musicians, volunteers, and passersby into the same streets, but not always under the same expectations.

In this chapter, I treat the routes people follow during PorchRock as short-lived trajectories. These event-generated pathways differ from the habitual and biographically shaped pathways I discussed earlier because they are produced by the festival itself. By short-lived trajectories, I mean the improvised movements people make because the festival is happening. These routes do not carry the same weight as daily commutes, routine errands, or dog walks. They arise from the timing and location of each show, drawing people down streets they might not otherwise use and toward porches or corners they may have only passed at a distance. In doing so, they bring people into proximity with unfamiliar houses and unfamiliar others.

A defining feature of PorchRock is the temporary blurring between public and private space. Drawing on Kusenbach's (2006) interpretation of Lofland's (1989, 1998) work on parochial realms, the festival creates a semi-public threshold in which neighbours, friends, and strangers are invited to stand at the edge of someone's home to hear music played from a porch, balcony, driveway, or lawn. These domestic thresholds produce a particular sense of closeness because people listen at short range and in plain view of one another, while also being within sight of someone's front steps, balcony, or yard. The setting compresses distance in a practical way. Sound travels outward, bodies cluster, and spectators become part of each other's field of attention, which makes co-presence feel more immediate than it does on an ordinary walk down the street. This closeness is not always comfortable, but it is part of what makes the festival

socially consequential because it changes what feels possible in the moment. People pause rather than pass through, they recognize neighbours they might otherwise only nod to, and they sometimes take up small openings for conversation or shared enjoyment that everyday routines do not usually support. Music that is normally confined to parks, clubs, or private homes moves out into the street block, and for a short time, the block becomes a collective social setting.

For many residents, this became a meaningful layer of local street life. It was organized through small circuits of movement, as people drifted from porch to porch and learned the map by walking it. It also mattered because it was close to home. The routes were familiar enough to navigate, and for many people they folded easily into the routines that already shape how they move through NDG. But this ease was uneven. I also encountered residents who were simply trying to get on with their day. They navigated around crowds and sound without stopping to attend. The festival was less a circuit that they wanted to join than an interruption they had to work around. For them, PorchRock was not primarily an invitation to participate. It was a temporary reworking of the streets that had to be managed alongside errands, work schedules, and other practical demands. What has analytical salience is that they still became part of the event's social field. Even when they were only trying to pass through, their movement had to be adjusted in relation to the crowd. Participation also extended beyond NDG, drawing people from adjacent parts of the city and off-island suburbs. Many participants had routes that brought them back to the locality even if they no longer lived there. The festival contributes to a sense of NDG as a creative, volunteer-driven locality. Other annual events, such as the NDG Art Hop, add to this identity. That event also invites people to move on foot through the area. People can visit home studios, speak with artists, and view work displayed in cafés and restaurants. Though smaller than PorchRock, it also emphasizes accessibility, walking routes guided by a map, and

interaction between neighbours. The chapter moves through PorchRock in a sequence that follows the event's own logic. I treat these materials as distinct vantage points on the same practical problem of shared streets and event-generated co-presence, not as evidence that 'verifies' a single account. I begin with how the festival is organized and how porches and balconies become stages that draw crowds into the street, because this spatial arrangement shapes what becomes possible interactionally. I then turn to the interactional range that formed around performances, from quiet co-presence to brief conversation and neighbourly recognition, in which openings could be taken up or left alone. From there, I focus on traffic relationships, where the streets remained open to circulation and participants had to negotiate competing uses of shared space in the moment. I end by returning to mobility and place-making, tracing how these event-generated routes become short-lived trajectories that attach people to particular blocks, memories, and senses of NDG.

### ***Making PorchRock***

I begin with PorchRock's organization and spatial form because the festival's interactional range is produced through the placement of performances and the ways people assemble around them. With more than a hundred musicians playing in its most recent incarnation, PorchRock has grown considerably since its inception in 2015. The bands cover an eclectic mix, including amateur pop and rock singers with newly written songs, more established musicians, jazz and blues groups, folk and pop bands, youth choirs, salsa ensembles, teen bands, and older groups known affectionately as "dad bands." What struck me the first time I went to PorchRock was the sheer range of instruments and the number of talented people performing. Bands were scheduled to start on the hour and play sixty-minute sets, usually from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the Saturday and Sunday of the May long weekend, which meant that the hour itself became a pacing device

for movement as people timed their departures, crossings, and arrivals around the start and end of each set.

The musicians are free to play without permits as long as they perform on their own property or on a host's property. Many NDG duplexes have upper balconies above the main entry that create a sheltered space below, which provides a natural stage. Other performances take place along commercial streets, in street corridors, alleyways, and on driveways. Some shows draw large crowds, sometimes up to 150 to 200 spectators, who congregate around houses, stand on lawns, gather on sidewalks, or spill into the road and onto adjacent properties. Some people stand holding their bikes, while others lean bicycles against trees and iron fences. The older, narrow streets, the mature tree canopies, and the wrought-iron fences that line many front yards create a sense of intimacy, but they also add to congestion because they leave less room for pedestrian and bike movement.



**Figure 3. PorchRock street event in NDG. Source: author's photograph.**

Unlike many music festivals, PorchRock does not happen in a park or enclosed venue. The space in front of each performance is not cordoned off. Cars remain parked on residential streets, and the main arteries stay open for shopping. People who are not taking part in the festival continue to use the streets for their regular errands and routines. For two days, a party atmosphere overlays these blocks, but many residents still try to go about their normal activities. Performances are technically set up in private spaces, yet the crowds assemble in the public space of the street and sidewalks, and in so doing they create a notable interplay between public and private realms and a kind of natural invitation into more intimate domestic settings. Shows also take place on commercial street corners, in parks, and on the steps of churches or other public buildings. One recurring venue is “Artist’s Alley,” a small courtyard formed by two

apartment entrances set back from the sidewalk. Portraits of cats hang on the brick walls, turning the courtyard into a casual gallery. Because PorchRock happens only two days a year, many people welcome this temporary reworking of the streets. It disrupts regular routines, but only briefly. At the same time, these altered pathways also generate points of tension, especially between those simply trying to get home and those drifting from one performance to the next. This spatial arrangement matters because it sets the conditions for what happens interactionally, including the small forms of recognition, co-presence, and conversation that emerge as people gather around a porch and decide how close to stand, where to look, and whether to speak.

### ***Thresholds and Interaction***

I turn now to the interactional range that formed around performances, because PorchRock's spatial arrangement did not only reorganize where people stood but also how they oriented themselves to others in the crowd and what kinds of openings they treated as available.

During PorchRock I observed a wide range of forms of sociability. Performances attracted different kinds of participation, in which some people watched quietly on their own while others chatted, drank, or danced. Because people gathered to listen to the same band, their shared attention could encourage forms of togetherness, and in so doing it sometimes created brief but meaningful social interactions. Instead of passing neighbours on the street while occupied with tasks, people slowed down, stopped to listen, and sometimes struck up conversations because they had a reason to stay in place rather than move through. They encountered differing genres of music and an array of characters—musicians, volunteers, long-term residents, visitors—without knowing what to expect, which meant that the crowd itself often felt a little unpredictable. These shifting dynamics also meant that not everyone related to the event in the

same way. Some embraced the interruption, while others worked around it, in which they treated the festival as background to their day rather than as something to participate in directly.

Vered Amit's (2020) discussion of "ambiguous openings" is useful for understanding how these slight, sometimes fragile forms of sociation unfold because her emphasis is on how possibilities are made available without being guaranteed (57). In her terms, both joint commitment and watchful indifference can open possibilities for social association without presuming intimacy. Joint commitment can encourage collaborative moments, while watchful indifference names forms of live-and-let-live coexistence in which people can be alongside others without pressure. But Amit also reminds us that neither form works automatically. Pressing for deeper involvement may make people pull back. Distance can also be misunderstood. What is meant as tact or restraint may be read instead as a lack of regard for others. Thinking with this helps clarify why moments at PorchRock shifted so quickly, because interactions were shaped not by certainty but by the unfolding effects of openings that may or may not have been taken up. Contingency is central to how sociation arises and how long it lasts. I could see this in the crowd itself. A mood could shift as a set began. Someone laughed, and the atmosphere loosened. A gap opened in the cluster of bodies, and people adjusted around it.





**Figure 4. PorchRock street event in NDG. Source: Author's photograph.**

Ambiguous openings occurred frequently during PorchRock because shows often moved beyond everyday civilities. People were not only exchanging quick hellos as they passed. They were also standing in place for a set, sharing the music, and sometimes dancing together, which created more time for an interaction to stretch out even if it remained temporary. In these moments, conversations were often initiated because people found small points of reference they could use. Connections to NDG, shared schools, earlier PorchRock years, or a remembered café or park could become quick anchors for conversational exchanges. They gave people something concrete to name, and in so doing they helped an exchange continue for a few minutes longer than it otherwise might have. At the same time, these openings could just as easily close. A set

would start, someone would turn back to the porch, or a friend would arrive and shift the attention elsewhere. Mood and timing mattered, and sometimes the simplest factor was that someone preferred to keep to themselves. For that reason, it was often hard to predict which direction an encounter would take.

Attending shows linked people to specific stretches of the street block, turning these small areas into local social spaces. I focus here on the modalities of encounter because doing so helps clarify how relationships take shape and how social life is carried out in ordinary ways within the communal spaces of the area. Conviviality was one possible outcome of this clustering, but it was never assured. People arrived for different reasons and with different thresholds for interaction, and many came primarily to listen rather than to talk, which meant that co-presence could remain quiet and self-contained even in the middle of a crowd. Radice helps sharpen this point because she insists that conviviality is not something we can assume simply because people are gathered. As she posits, “Conviviality is not a given; it is emergent, contingent upon what people say to each other and do together, and how they treat each other” (Radice 2022: 3). What I saw during PorchRock fits this emphasis on contingency. Small encounters took shape through tone, timing, and the minor decisions people made in the moment, including whether to smile, whether to comment on a song, whether to make room, or whether to hold their attention on the performance and remain silent. These moments could build a brief ease between strangers, but they could also fail to materialize, or dissolve quickly, without anyone having done anything “wrong.” Radice (2022) also notes that conviviality “always carries the risk of its opposite: conflict, or inhospitality, or communicational rupture” (3). That risk was present in PorchRock’s crowd dynamics, where an interaction could shift in an instant if someone misread another person’s distance, brushed too close, spoke too sharply, or reacted with

impatience. In this sense, the duration and quality of interaction were uncertain not because PorchRock was unusually volatile, but because the event concentrated the everyday work of sharing space into dense, short intervals in which people had to decide, repeatedly, how to be alongside others.

When the music was enjoyable and people felt comfortable swaying in time or sitting together on the grass, the event could create a sense of relaxed participation, in which people shared a collective experience while remaining aware of their own feelings, sensations, and practices. I often saw individuals watching a show on their own and staying that way for the entire set. At one performance, while some people were chatting with acquaintances and sipping cold drinks and others were laughing in small groups, several individuals stood alone at the edges of the crowd. They were “standing apart together,” engaged in the same collective activity yet maintaining distance, which meant that co-presence did not necessarily translate into conversation. Amit (2020) suggests that people in such situations adopt a watchful stance as they share public space, and that this involves a “watchfulness embedded in an event as it happens, allowing people to take up or shape opportunities as they arise” (57). In PorchRock’s case, this meant that even those who kept to themselves were still part of a scattered semblance of awareness. They monitored the crowd, the music, and the shifting configurations of bodies around them, and in so doing they left open the possibility of responding if something or someone invited a different kind of engagement.

One man in his early sixties stood with his hands in his pockets on the outskirts of the crowd. He was clearly aware of those around him and seemed careful to preserve enough space between himself and others, creating what looked like a personal bubble. From time to time he scanned the crowd in brief sweeps, but he did not seek eye contact or conversation. He was co-

present but socially distant. When people walked near him, he shifted slightly to maintain space. At one point a dog licked his hand; he and the owner exchanged a quick smile, then returned to their previous positions. It is reasonable to think that he, like many others, was there to enjoy the music and the social presence of others without feeling any obligation to engage further, because the crowd offered company without requiring interaction. He was part of the scene but kept enough distance to feel comfortable, and this small self-positioning was one way of participating.

These quiet preferences show how the festival accommodated a spectrum of participation, including those who wanted to hang back without engaging. Irving Goffman's concept of civil inattention is useful here because it helps specify the kinds of minimal gestures through which people acknowledge one another without inviting deeper contact. Spectators like this man employed small cues to signal awareness while maintaining distance. If eye contact occurred, it was brief and not prolonged, in which the gesture affirmed co-presence without turning into conversation. In this stance, attention is active but restrained: people keep track of the crowd's movement and the immediate demands of proximity, while still preserving the option of responding if an opening presents itself. This is what I mean by dissociative involvement, a mode of sociality grounded in urban co-presence, because the work here is not to build a relationship but to keep co-presence manageable. Amit (2020) frames this as a stance of "watchful and therefore self-conscious indifference" to "the co-presence, activities, and occasional infringements of other people," a stance that "allows people to share space alongside, rather than with one another" (63). At the same time, this successful distance is not automatic. As Amit notes, "Being together but staying successfully apart" draws on "watchfulness over time ... as well as the watchfulness entailed in husbanding a particular moment in time" (57). In PorchRock, that effort shows up in small, ongoing adjustments—where people stand, how they

hold their gaze, and how quickly they yield space when the cluster tightens—without turning those accommodations into interaction. The coordination is real, yet it remains oriented toward accommodation rather than engagement, which is why the scene can feel socially full while still holding many spectators in careful distance.

At other shows, the personal space that some spectators tried to maintain was briefly compromised when cars came through, forcing people to move closer together and, at times, exchange quick civilities. These moments made visible the tension between the street as a route for passage and the street as a temporary gathering place. People who were there for the music had to adjust to those who were simply trying to get through, and vice versa, and in so doing they revealed how the same reconfigured streetscape could be experienced differently depending on what someone needed from it in that moment. Other instances of sociation went beyond watchful indifference. In these situations, co-presence did not remain at the level of tacit acknowledgment, where people register one another through small, unspoken gestures, alongside careful distance. Instead, people oriented themselves toward the event as a shared occasion, and being part of the crowd carried an implicit permission to be responsive to others. I use this wording deliberately because the festival provided a frame that made interaction feel available: people arrived expecting to stand together, to share attention, and to be temporarily gathered in the same place, and that expectation subtly shifted what kinds of gestures and remarks could be offered without seeming out of place.

PorchRock's atmosphere encouraged this kind of sociability, especially among people who already felt inclined to talk because the festival supplied immediate, shared points of reference. The music, the band's style, the volume, the weather, the map in someone's hand, or the question of where to go next all offered ready-made ways into conversation. These were not



intimate disclosures. They were situational comments that let someone test the waters, acknowledge another person's presence, and see whether an exchange would be taken up. Some spectators were clearly comfortable and "at home" in this space, taking part in the celebratory dimension of the shows. For them, the familiar streets of the area, now filled with music, created a setting where informal exchanges felt easy. Speaking to a stranger did not have to feel like an imposition, because the event itself provided a reason to speak. The interaction could be framed as part of attending the set—an observation, a quick laugh, a shared reaction—rather than as an interruption of someone else's day.



**Figure 5. PorchRock street event in NDG. Source: Author's photograph**

At one porch, I noticed two spectators begin to talk during a brief pause between songs. One appeared to be an older man of East Asian origin in his mid-sixties. The other was a casually dressed white man in his early fifties, wearing black glasses. They had not spoken before and did not seem to know each other. I was standing close enough to hear their brief exchange, and I could also see the small gestures they used to direct each other's attention toward the porch. The exchange began as an offhand comment about the band, the kind of remark that could be offered without demanding a response. The other man answered, and they added a few more lines back and forth. They gestured toward the porch as if to underline what they were noticing. They laughed once, briefly, in a way that signaled ease without pushing the interaction further. For a minute or two they shared the small work of making the moment talkable, while still keeping their attention on the performance. When the music started again, they both turned back toward the stage and the conversation fell away. It did not end with a closing phrase or an explicit goodbye. It simply returned to listening, as if the set itself reabsorbed them. The interaction was small, but it shows how the festival could draw strangers into situational connections that were real in the moment and did not need to extend beyond it.

Existing social networks also helped generate interactions among larger groups. On several occasions I saw three or four spectators standing near another cluster when one person recognized someone across the informal boundary between groups. A brief greeting between those two individuals often led to a wider conversation, drawing the rest of both groups into a shared exchange. These encounters show how familiar ties could pull others into a broader social circle, at least for the duration of a show, because recognition created an immediate bridge across the small gap between clusters. Acts of sharing the street space took different forms, and the responses among neighbours varied. Some collaborated enthusiastically, helping to set up

performances or offering practical support, while others endured the disruption and waited for the weekend to pass before returning to their usual routines. For them, participation meant tolerating the event more than embracing it. One popular funk band, for example, has performed every year since 2015 on the wide porch of a 1910 semi-detached house that shares a common driveway with the neighbouring property. The slight elevation of the house creates a natural stage as the street begins to slope away from Mount Royal. Each year, just before the show begins, the singer welcomes the crowd and asks if they are “ready to get down.” As the upbeat set starts, the crowd thickens, and people begin to dance and sing along. This band has also become one of the strongest fundraisers of the festival because a friend brings home-brewed beer in kegs and offers it in red cups in exchange for donations to a local organization, which meant that participation also took on a practical, supportive form.

A neighbour with whom I spoke, who lives a few doors down and plays hockey with one of the band members, explained that the group has been performing in the same spot with the same line-up for eight years. Their porch show has become a highlight of the pre-summer period, and many spectators planned their itineraries around it because it was a predictable anchor in an otherwise dispersed festival. He also told me about the beer provider from Westmount, also part of the hockey circle, who brewed a Japanese lager and a Mexican jalapeño lager for that year’s show. The lead guitarist lives in the house where the band performs, and another member lives next door. Here, the intimacy of the space is palpable, because neighbours perform for fellow neighbours on front porches that are usually sites of family life. The show sits at the intersection of private and public spheres, in which domestic space becomes a temporary venue and the street becomes an audience area.



Because PorchRock takes place in early spring, some residents used the crowds as an opportunity to hold yard sales. On a neighbourhood Facebook page, Terry wrote: Hi Deegers – As I love + support the musicians of PorchRock for 5 years going, I also plan on foraging the garage sales today along the way. Please recommend who’s holding them and where, in the hood (Neighbourhood Facebook post, May, 2023). Replies listed specific streets and lanes where sales were happening. Yet in other places, relations were more strained. At Artist’s Alley, a neighbour’s complaint about noise led to that location no longer being used as a venue. Steve, who had hosted shows there, wrote online,

I love this shot from PorchRock 2019, the last one we hosted at Artist’s Gallery as the pandemic has put the fest on hold since then and one of my residential neighbours doesn't want me putting on events here anymore (please move ok thx). I've participated in a lot of music festivals over my 50+ years and PorchRock is definitely the mos' def. Huge shout out to everyone who participates and the acts who have played our little part of it. (Facebook post, May 2023)

This contrast underscores that while many people treated PorchRock as a welcome, celebratory interruption, others experienced it as an unwelcome break in their routines. The same qualities that turned the alley into a lively performance space—sound, density, foot traffic—were experienced by some residents as an unacceptable disruption. The alley became a site where competing claims to the street, as both route and venue, came into conflict, because the festival’s openness also meant that not everyone consented to the temporary reworking of shared space. These tensions point toward another set of relations that ran alongside the festival’s convivial moments, because sharing the street also required negotiating circulation when drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians encountered crowds treating the roadway as part of the event.

### ***Traffic Relationships and Shared Street***

PorchRock offered rich opportunities to observe what Ulf Hannerz (1980) calls ‘traffic relationships’ on the ground, because crowds spilled onto streets and sidewalks and, in so doing,

made negotiations of passage more visible. Crowd control became a central part of sharing space between PorchRock-goers and people moving through on foot, by bike, or in cars. Large gatherings could slow or block through-traffic, and the fluid movements of people sitting on blankets, standing in groups, or dancing in the street created logistical challenges that were practical before they were interpersonal. The most popular bands, which played year after year, attracted the largest crowds and thus the greatest degree of disruption. Because organizers did not have permits to close streets, one-way residential roads remained open to vehicles, which meant that circulation continued alongside celebration. Volunteers handled traffic control, alerting spectators to oncoming cars and guiding drivers through the narrow passageway left between parked cars and human bodies. Sometimes volunteers made handmade “Slow Down” signs to signal caution.

On the day I volunteered for crowd control at a Stargazers performance, I stood with three other volunteers in front of a row duplex on a street that connects directly to a main commercial artery. We anticipated congestion because cars would be trying to use the street as usual while people stood in the road to watch the band. As the crowd formed, there was a sense of excitement: neighbours chatted, children ran up and down the sidewalk, and two children at the house next door set up a lemonade stand to sell refreshments. When cars appeared, I often had to stretch my arms across part of the street to keep people from stepping out, because the crowd did not always register the proximity of moving vehicles. Some drivers tried to thread their way through, their cars creeping forward. From time to time, individuals stepped from between parked cars into the road and even danced in front of moving vehicles, seemingly oblivious to the potential risk. These moments underscored how differently people were using the same street: festival-goers treated it as a gathering place and stage, while drivers expected it

to function as a route. Several drivers showed visible frustration. One man sighed heavily, hit his steering wheel, and muttered under his breath. When I motioned for him to slow down, he became more impatient but did not yell or make eye contact. Another driver slowed to a crawl, shrugged in exasperation when she realized she would not pass quickly, and looked straight ahead. Their reactions contrasted with other drivers who inched along patiently, looking around, sometimes smiling or exchanging glances with spectators, in which a small gesture could signal tolerance even when someone was delayed.

On the other side, some festival-goers were not particularly courteous to cars. I witnessed individuals yelling at drivers as if they had no right to be there, which was striking because the street was not closed and the festival depended on that openness. Some cyclists also faced obstructions which made clear that the festival reorganized not only where people stood, but who could pass smoothly and who had to wait. Though they did not express as much open frustration, the crowds clearly impeded their passage. A few cyclists stopped to watch part of a show before moving on; it was unclear whether they had intended to attend or simply found themselves drawn in while passing through. Pedestrians trying to get from one side of the street to the other navigated more easily, weaving through the bodies in ways cars could not, and this difference in maneuverability shaped who had to wait and who could continue.

These scenes are examples of traffic relationships in situations of minimal interaction. The main concern was to negotiate movement, prevent collisions, and manage irritation in real time, often through gestures rather than conversation. Despite signs of annoyance, most drivers did not honk or escalate to open confrontation. There was a baseline of civility even when claims to the street were in tension, in which people tolerated delay while still registering that they had somewhere else to be. A social media post captured this concern,

PorchRock is great. And truly brings the community together but that being said, like any growing festival, it needs to up its game in terms of organization. I saw many problems with people crowding streets and causing problems for drivers. I understand we all want to have a good time but blocking streets so people can't drive down them needs to be fixed. I even saw some festival-goers yelling at cars. Remember people still live on these streets and need to use their vehicles. City vehicles need access for emergencies. As far as I know, PorchRock does not have a permit to close streets off, not yet anyways. I think it's great we have these festivals but we have to look at the bigger picture. We need to accommodate everyone respectfully. On another quick side note, I heard some people complain about garbage on their property and people walking through their gardens and stuff. We all want to look back and say 'this was amazing' and it was. But there are still issues to figure out to make this a better event. Just my two cents. (Facebook post, May 2023)

This emphasis on circulation also points back to the festival's defining feature, because PorchRock required people to keep moving between dispersed sites, and it is through these movements that the event generated the short-lived trajectories that shaped both encounter and attachment.

### ***Short-Lived Trajectories and Place-Making***

Mobility was central to PorchRock because people moved continuously between shows. The festival was not anchored in a single park or venue. It unfolded across residential blocks, commercial corners, porches, balconies, sidewalks, and front yards. People walked or biked from one performance to the next, noticing architecture, gardens, storefronts, and other people along the way. This made the locality feel less like a single destination than a sequence of small stretches that had to be crossed, chosen, and sometimes improvised. Each hour featured several concurrent shows, so participants had to decide where to go, how long to stay, and which route to take. It was common for people to bump into acquaintances at one show and then meet them again at another further along their chosen route. Recognition could travel with them across the day. A brief greeting at one porch might be picked up again on another street. In this way, the

festival created informal pathways that shaped both people's engagement with music and their experience of the local environment.

These routes brought people into contact with others they might not ordinarily encounter, whether because they lived on different streets, moved through different social circles, or came to the festival with different ties to NDG. The encounters mattered partly because they were casual and non-compulsory. People could enter and exit without explanation. A spectator could stay for one song, follow friends to another block, pause at a yard sale, or leave before a set ended because music from another street drew them away. These short-lived trajectories were produced by the event itself, shaped by where shows were scheduled, how long people stayed, and who they encountered along the way. They drew attention to houses, front lawns, and small stretches of street that usually remained peripheral to everyday movement.

Not everyone who attended lived in NDG. For many, PorchRock was an occasion to return. One middle-aged woman explained that she had moved away but still came back each year, arranging her social calendar around the event. She travelled frequently for work and had few opportunities to see her friends otherwise. PorchRock gave her a reason to meet them, walk the streets they used to share, and reminisce. She described NDG and the festival as intertwined in her memories: "I organize my social calendar around PorchRock. We all do. None of us live here anymore. I don't have many opportunities to see my friends outside of coming to PorchRock" (Festival-goer, Informal conversation, PorchRock, May, 2023). At another show, a group of first-year McGill students told me they lived in the Plateau but had come because a friend who had recently moved to NDG invited them. It was their first PorchRock. They said they enjoyed getting to know the area by walking through it and watching local bands on

porches, something they had not experienced at larger, more formal outdoor concerts (Festival-goers, Informal conversation, PorchRock, May, 2023).

Bands also moved into NDG through these event routes. The River Jackets, for example, travelled from Eastern Ontario each year to play at PorchRock, combining the festival with a family reunion. Other musicians came from elsewhere in Montréal, including neighbouring Westmount. Their presence reflected the broader reach of the festival, but it still depended on local connections and invitations. Posts on the Thrive NDG Facebook page showed bands actively seeking porches:

Hello NDG! My band The Pudding Chômeur is looking for a friendly porch to play at for this year's upcoming PorchRock. We are an acoustic duo of 2 banjos and vocals. We are a goofy and joyful time. We played a friend's front stoop last year but are looking for a place with a little bit more space this year. The fest falls the weekend of May 17 + 18. Thank you so much in advance, please comment here so I see ya! (Facebook post, February, 2023)

Another band wrote,

UPDATE: Looks like we have found a porch to fest on! Thanks everyone for your interest & support, and I have a feeling others will be looking for a nice place to play, so keep a look out! (Btw it's May 16 & 17) Hey fellow Deegers, who would like to host The Saturn 5s for PorchRock – PorchRock 2020. Last year Steve graciously opened up Alley Cat Gallery to us, and it went phenomenally well, massive crowd literally dancing in the streets! But alas, that is not to be again. Where I live is just too far off the beaten path...we are open to your graciousness! Thanks in advance! (Facebook post, March, 2023)

These posts show how bands and residents negotiated the use of domestic space for public performance. Hosting a porch became one way of participating in the festival. A host offered more than a surface to stand on. They provided a location on the map. Once listed, a porch became a named stop that others could choose, avoid, or build into their route. In practical terms, hosting meant deciding that the edge of one's home could become a small venue for an hour. It also meant agreeing to the foot traffic, sound, and proximity that followed. Once a porch was

listed, it became part of other people's expectations. It drew strangers into a street block in ways that did not happen on an ordinary weekend.

Thinking with Finnegan, PorchRock made pathways visible because participation was organized through movement rather than through gathering in a single site. People did not simply attend a festival and remain in one place. They moved through a sequence of stops. Each porch became a point along the way, and people built these stops into their own routes as they decided where to go next, how long to stay, and which streets to take in between. PorchRock was therefore not only an event that happened in NDG. It also organized pathways through NDG, because each porch created a new reason to walk a particular stretch of street.

For some people, PorchRock was closely tied to their sense of NDG as a place. Samara made this clear. She now lives off-island, but NDG remained part of her weekly routine. Each week, she returned to work at a used bookstore in the area, and organizing PorchRock became another way of keeping NDG in her life (Samara, Interview, January, 2022). As we walked together and talked along the way, she reflected on why she brought PorchRock to NDG and what she hoped the festival would make possible. She grew up in the western end, with her parents and siblings on Park Row East. Later, she moved away reluctantly because buying a house became more possible off-island. Even so, her account showed that attachment to NDG did not depend only on current residence within its boundaries. It could also be sustained through return, memory, and continued involvement in the locality's collective life.

She described the moment when she first imagined bringing the PorchRock concept to NDG. Sitting on a back porch with a friend over a glass of wine, she thought about the district's porches and musicians,

There's a lot of porches in NDG, and there's a lot of musicians...I thought that NDG is a neighbourhood with a lot of history, a mixed bag of people...it has weird characters and it has the same kind of vibe like...I dunno....like Queens... small town working class, urban neighbourhood—eccentric mix of people. I imagined what if we had all the musicians in NDG play together in one day? It would be like a self-guided walking tour of NDG, with mini-concerts as your stepping stones (Samara, Interview, January, 2022).

What matters here is that PorchRock was imagined from the beginning as an event organized through movement. People were not asked only to attend. They were invited to make their way through the district by following a sequence of porches, pauses, streets, and encounters. The concept of neighbours performing for fellow neighbours on porches began in Ithaca, New York, in 2007 and later spread to different places across North America. In NDG, however, the important point is how the model was taken up locally, in relation to the district's own social and spatial character. Samara still returned each week to work at a second-hand bookstore.

Organizing PorchRock became another way of keeping NDG active in her life, not only as a place she remembered but as a locality she continued to help make.

A long-term resident, Lee, whom I met as he studied the festival map in front of a porch, illustrated another version of this relation between movement and attachment. He had arrived early, lawn chair in hand, and planned to attend a show in every time slot over the two days. He listed the bands he would see and told me he had attended from the very first PorchRock (Lee, Conversation, PorchRock, May, 2023). Lee had moved to NDG in 1958 as a child. As he spoke, he recalled the old train line along Sherbrooke, early streetcar routes, and the age of the surrounding buildings. Now living on a different street, he still saw PorchRock as capturing much of what he enjoyed about the locality: bands he followed, musicians he knew personally, and familiar spaces tied to his earliest memories. His map-reading and scheduling practices showed how attachment could be maintained through repeated, routinized returns to the same local reference points.



For Lee, PorchRock was one of the threads that helped hold together his longstanding attachment to NDG. Another Facebook comment echoed this sense of return and repeated recognition: “Great fun, once again! Enjoyed performing, catching neighbours performing, and catching up with old & new friends... So many great moments...” (Facebook comment, May, 2023). The festival therefore became a moment in which existing attachments, returns, and routes were drawn into a more visible pattern. Samara’s story showed one version of this, because her relation to NDG continued through memory, weekly return, and the work of organizing the festival. Lee’s story highlighted another version, because repeated return over decades gave his itinerary through PorchRock a denser relation to the locality. He was not simply moving from one show to the next. He was moving through a landscape layered with earlier memories, so that each stop on the map carried more than the performance itself.

Appadurai’s account of locality helps me hold onto this point without treating NDG as a fixed container for social life. Locality, in this sense, is something produced through practice. As Appadurai (1996) posits, “locality is not a property of space but an aspect of social life, a phenomenological quality constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts” (178). PorchRock made this especially visible because it drew together people whose relations to NDG differed: current residents, former residents, musicians, hosts, volunteers, visitors, and people simply passing through. The festival did not make attachment to the district mean the same thing for everyone. Instead, it made different attachments and distances briefly visible through movement.

Bringing these scenes together clarifies how PorchRock temporarily redrew the pathways of NDG. For two days, residential streets became corridors of music and sociability. People slowed down where they might otherwise hurry past, and they approached houses they usually

saw only from the sidewalk. Porches and balconies stopped functioning only as private thresholds. They became temporary destinations that drew people across the district and made ordinary residential streets newly noticeable. These altered routes created openings for conviviality while also exposing tensions between celebration and circulation.

Across porches, sidewalks, and streets, I saw how people carried conversations forward by drawing on small points of shared reference. A school drop-off, a familiar park, a local café, or an earlier year of PorchRock could be enough to give an exchange continuity in the moment. These references anchored interaction even when people did not know one another well. Because the event unfolded outdoors and at close range, people were also exposed to more than the music. The street became audible in a different way. So did the rhythms of front-yard life: neighbours talking on their steps, people moving in and out of view, and the ordinary sounds of a residential block briefly turned into a gathering place. People listened and watched. They moved through the music, caught bits of laughter or conversation, and sometimes stood in the same place as others without needing to do more. Some exchanges opened into brief talk. Others remained at the level of co-presence, where people sensed one another's presence but chose to keep to themselves. Both forms matter because they show that sociality in public space is not stable or uniform. It shifts with mood, timing, disposition, and the immediate environment.

In this sense, PorchRock is not simply an arts event. It is a temporary form of place-making. For a brief interval, it brings people into shared space and gives them reasons to orient themselves to one another. Social life in a diverse urban setting depends on this kind of practical work. It depends on moments when people are open to others, and also on moments when they hold back. It depends on small acts of recognition, including glances, nods, and brief words that acknowledge co-presence without requiring a deeper relationship. The festival does not erase

difference or resolve tensions, but it creates a setting in which people can share space in ways that are relaxed, improvised, and sometimes unexpectedly connective. It shows how an ordinary urban landscape can be reanimated through temporary configurations of sound, movement, and sociability that carry traces of both celebration and ambivalence. Read through the lens of this fieldwork, these scenes show that locality is learned through movement rather than simply recognized as a place. People come to know it by following routes and pausing at certain thresholds, sometimes only briefly, alongside others whose presence gives those places social meaning.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I used PorchRock to show how a mobile street festival redirects everyday movement and reveals the work involved in sharing space. Domestic thresholds became public-facing stages. As people gathered around them, residential streets also began to function as temporary places of assembly. Ordinary routes were redirected by the sound of music and by the presence of crowds, so that people moved through NDG in ways that differed from their usual routines. These changes created openings for sociability. Some people remained quietly co-present, while others took up brief exchanges or moments of neighbourly recognition. They also produced friction, especially when celebration and circulation pressed against one another in the same street.

PorchRock therefore does not simply illustrate conviviality as a positive social mood. It shows conviviality as a situated and uneven achievement, held together through small adjustments, temporary permissions, and the willingness to share space under changing conditions. The event's importance lies in this concentration of ordinary urban work. What is usually dispersed across daily routines becomes briefly visible: people move, pause, make room,

hold back, respond, and sometimes withdraw. Through these short-lived trajectories, PorchRock reveals how locality is not only inhabited but actively made through movement, attention, and the practical negotiation of shared space.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: MARIGOLD GARDEN**

Marigold Garden provided an opportunity to observe everyday sociability in a collective garden where participants did not simply cultivate adjacent plots but worked together in a shared enterprise. In contrast to many urban community gardens, where residents tend individually allocated plots, this garden required participants to coordinate their labour over several hours at a time. They worked through the garden tasks together, from planting and watering to the later work of dividing the harvest. For this reason, my investigation focused on collaborative practice in the collective garden. This is where the norms of participation took form, because gardeners had to work through the decisions that needed to be made during the session. Expectations sometimes diverged in the course of that work, especially when people had different understandings of what the task required or how the collective project should proceed. I trace how these practices were sustained over time through the facilitator's organization of tasks. I also attend to the everyday judgments participants made about whether work was being done properly these included whether others were contributing fairly and how shared tools and harvests should be handled. Examining the garden is therefore part of my broader investigation into the creative capacity of ordinary individuals to manage conflicts and differences in the course of their everyday lives and routines as co-residents in an urban locality.

The chapter examines how collective gardening made certain forms of conviviality observable in practice. Taking seriously the embodied creativity of social practice in a collective endeavour like gardening requires attention not only to what people did together, but also to how they felt their way through the work. The membership of Marigold Garden was diverse in socio-ethnic, linguistic, and cultural and religious terms, but the most consequential distinctions often emerged through the work itself. Horticultural knowledge, levels of investment, and differing expectations about proper technique influenced how people positioned themselves in relation to

the project. These practical differences often carried more weight in everyday interaction than categorical markers of diversity alone, because they affected how gardeners cooperated, disagreed, and judged one another's participation. The joint commitments of gardening together as a collective could therefore be manifested through several forms of sociality, from quiet cooperation to more explicit negotiation. In this sense, the garden became an important site for thinking about convivial repertoires because it showed how people learned to proceed together through shared work, partial understanding, and ordinary forms of adjustment.

I began my fieldwork as a volunteer in the shared collective garden, first spending time observing and learning how its routines worked. As I became more familiar with the participants and built a stronger rapport, I started attending the Tuesday gardening sessions each week during the spring of 2022. This allowed me to spend longer periods in the garden and to get to know some of the gardeners more closely. The growing season usually ran from mid-to-late May until the end of October, with planting beginning in mid-April. The gardeners came from different socioeconomic backgrounds. They also ranged widely in age and experience. Some had gardened for years, while others were newcomers who wanted to learn. This difference in experience created opportunities for mentorship, because more experienced gardeners could show newer participants how to carry out particular tasks.

The garden was organized by a local non-profit community organization that facilitated the sharing of gardening knowledge and supported initiatives related to food insecurity. It also taught and promoted gardening techniques over the course of the season.<sup>1</sup> The garden provided food for the gardeners themselves, and it produced a harvest that was used in 100 home delivery

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<sup>1</sup> The nonprofit organizes gardening-focused training activities, including free permaculture workshops, introductory courses on edible-plant cultivation, seed exchanges, and periodic workshops during the growing season where participants share ideas, recipes, and food-preparation tips.

emergency food baskets each month for other clients of the non-profit who were in need. A small group of facilitators organized roughly 50 gardeners each season. Their role was important because the collective enterprise depended on repeated direction and coordination. Without this facilitation, the garden would have been much harder to sustain as a shared project.

Marigold Garden provided an instructive site of inquiry because participation depended on coordination. The work was organized as a shared undertaking rather than as a set of parallel individual projects. Moreover, this distinction between the collective garden and the neighbouring community garden was important because the collective garden made the everyday labour of cooperation more visible. Participants could not simply garden in parallel. They had to share time, tools, instructions, harvests, and decisions, and this meant that working together became part of the work itself. Observing how people managed a joint task under the hot sun, over several hours at a time, made it possible to see how conviviality took form through embodied forms of sociality. Gardeners learned enough about the task, and about one another's ways of working, to proceed together. This did not necessarily produce lasting ties beyond the garden. Rather, the gardening experience itself created a contained and situated way of being alongside others. Familiarity accumulated in this setting through repeated work, and at times this situated familiarity allowed a small openness toward others to percolate through the sharing of tasks. In these moments, convivial practices could bridge and smooth communication, not by overcoming difference completely, but by allowing people to keep working together through the activity at hand.

Next to the site of this collective garden, there was a "community garden" with individualized plots cultivated privately by other individuals or families. The community garden maintained approximately 60 individual garden plots. In this type of garden, residents were

responsible for cultivating and maintaining their own plot, and they collected all of the harvest from it. Gardeners varied in what they chose to plant in their beds. Some planted many different vegetables, and some planted a mix of flowers and vegetables. They often worked alone and did not depend on others for the success of their work. Although there were opportunities for sociability, given that plots were aligned alongside those of other community gardeners, the activity of gardening required very little collaboration from others. Each gardener could decide when to come and what to plant. They could also move through the work at their own pace, without needing to coordinate each task with others. In this sense, it was a much more solitary engagement with gardening.

In the collective garden, then, convivial practices were necessary because people had to communicate and coordinate in order for the garden to function. These practices were not automatic. They did not simply emerge because people were gathered in the same outdoor space or because they shared an interest in gardening. They had to be produced through the small adjustments that allowed people to keep working together. During my fieldwork, I observed how food and the activity of gardening could make conversation easier, especially when people were working side by side rather than facing one another in a more formal exchange. Gardening created a setting in which people could talk lightly, ask questions, share tips, or simply continue working in comfortable proximity. The tactile nature of the work also mattered. Handling soil, passing tools, watering plants, and preparing the harvest opened small opportunities for collaborative problem-solving and mutual support. At times, the physical labour involved in completing a shared task brought gardeners into a more direct relation with one another. These moments did not necessarily produce lasting ties but they could briefly deepen the social texture of the session.





**Figure 5. Marigold Garden, NDG. Source: Author's photograph.**

The collective garden was organized through the different roles of facilitators and gardeners. These roles mattered because the facilitator was instrumental in directing how each session would unfold. She explained what needed to be done that day, which tasks had to happen first, and when gardeners needed to work in pairs or small groups. This was especially important during periods of heavy growth or harvest, when large quantities of zucchini, summer squash, and cucumbers had to be picked, sorted, or prepared within the time of the session. Gardening knowledge also had to be shared and transmitted during the sessions, because not all gardeners had extensive experience, and not all experienced gardeners had the will or patience to engage in facilitation and teaching.

The chapter proceeds by first describing Marigold Garden as a site, including where it was situated, who participated, the role of the facilitator and community organization, and the routines that organized a typical session. I then examine how convivial practices helped the facilitator and other gardeners work through a language barrier with two newer Chinese-speaking gardeners, who had limited English and French and were also still learning how the garden worked. The next section turns to moments of tension, because collective work also produced disagreement around experience, expectations, and adherence to garden etiquette. The final section follows several forms of sociability and exchange that circulated as gardeners carried out their work, including knowledge-sharing, cross-cultural learning, gift-giving, recipes, snacks, and other small gestures that moved through the sessions.

***Description of Marigold Garden: Site, layout, history***

Marigold Garden was located on urban land owned by the City of Montreal. The site was leased to a non-profit organization that oversaw several collective gardens in different parts of the

district. It sat in a densely populated residential area, and an elementary school was located directly across the street. The garden covered a large cultivated area of land, approximately 40 metres by 50 metres. As already mentioned, the large fenced-in rectangular space was divided between a community garden on one side and the collective garden on the other. The collective garden was made up of a diverse group of individuals who shared and cultivated the garden together in order to support the mandate of the non-profit. Part of that mandate was to provide food for people facing varying degrees of food insecurity. In this sense, collective gardening contributed to food security because it grew food in underused spaces, increased access to locally grown produce, and created opportunities for connection around food and cultivation in this part of the city.

This area also had a longer agricultural history, where farmland once predominated across much of the surrounding landscape. As far back as 1925, Montreal melons were grown on farms in the area. The facilitator explained that the area had a microclimate capable of producing strong growing conditions because of its position between the St. Lawrence River and Mount Royal. The farms were once cultivated on land roughly between Sherbrooke Street and Monkland Avenue, before housing was built. The facilitator told me that Marigold Garden was the oldest collective garden in Montreal. Marigold Garden began in 1996, in the same location it occupied during my fieldwork.

The pride in and experience of this particular garden were apparent in the mature feel of the space. Some of the old fruit trees, including apple and plum, were still there, and you could sense the long history in the established garden beds and in the sections of earth along the fence where older vines and brush had taken hold. The garden was enclosed by a six-foot fence with a locked gate at the perimeter. Within it, the collective garden was cultivated directly in the soil.

The space, however, did not look like a series of individually numbered allotments. It looked, rather, like a shared garden worked in common. Vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers grew densely across adjoining beds, with trellises, string supports, and curved metal frames running through the plots. In the height of the season, the garden had a lush and productive feel, with plants spilling outward into the paths, calendula flowers brightening the rows, and climbing vegetables winding their way through the supports. What stood out was not the separation between one gardener's plot and another's, but the sense of a space being tended and maintained through collective labour. The hands-on work of tending the soil and caring for the plants also meant sharing tools, moving around one another, and paying attention to what others were doing. These activities created opportunities for interaction with the environment and with others involved in the garden's upkeep, because they depended on cooperation and attentiveness to each other's actions. Participation required a small fee, set on a sliding scale based on what each gardener could afford because the organization aimed to make involvement accessible to people with different financial means.





**Figure 6. Marigold Garden, NDG. Source: author's photograph.**





**Figure 7. Marigold Garden, NDG. Source: author's photograph.**

### ***How the Collective Garden Worked in Practice***

A picnic table nestled under a large maple tree offered shade and respite during the three-hour evening sessions. It gave gardeners a place to pause after working in the beds, to drink water, to sit for a few minutes, or to talk with others before returning to the tasks. These short breaks sometimes became moments of casual connection, because they allowed people to interact in a less directed way than they did while working. The atmosphere was often calm and welcoming, and people could choose to join a conversation, withdraw for a while, or simply rest. Nearby, a gardening shed held the tools and materials used by the group. Gardeners also shared one central hose, taking turns watering different sections of plants. Spring, summer, and fall crops kept the

work moving across the season, because one growing cycle was often maturing as another was beginning.

Before the start of the growing season, there was a seedling workshop onsite in the garden greenhouse that provided instruction on how to start seedlings, and on the conditions and timing needed for different varieties of crops. We were mostly sprouting seeds because it was still early spring, and Montreal's spring weather made it difficult to predict which seedlings would fare well in cold snaps and shifting conditions. We sprouted calendula, sunflowers, scarlet runner beans, beets, and some mint and basil. These workshops were especially helpful for people with little gardening experience, because they introduced the timing and uncertainty involved in growing plants through Montréal's changing seasons. This was particularly relevant for newcomers who had not previously gardened in this climate. The facilitator discussed early spring plants for pollinators, including bees and butterflies, and she also explained which plants were more conducive to growing in hot sun and which did better in cooler conditions.

On a usual day, at the beginning of each session, the facilitator detailed the progress made since the previous session and laid out a plan for what needed to be accomplished. She explained what was to be planted, picked, weeded, pruned, watered, or harvested. Once the facilitator determined the tasks, participants formed small voluntary groups and carried them out. The facilitators also assessed how vegetables and fruits were progressing and their stages of growth. Arriving on time was an established rule since each member needed a clear sense of the tasks and work projects for that day. During each gardening session, between 15 and 20 gardeners shared resources during the work time. The facilitator, Maria, told me, "the garden, it's like a little family for the three hours we spend together." Although the group changed from day to day, the same gardeners returned at a set time each week. "They get familiar with each other,"

she said. Maria had been gardening in various collective gardens in NDG for 23 years. She shared her knowledge and skills, and she helped gardeners make decisions during the season and the harvest. The rules and practices of the garden were based on collaboration and joint effort in monitoring the garden's stages and maturation because each phase of the growing season required careful attention. Cultivating the vegetables, legumes, herbs, and fruits successfully took more than knowing what to plant or when to harvest. It required attention to who was doing what. It also required attention to how people were affected by being brought together in the garden, and how concern for others emerged through the work itself.

The garden also had an institutional dimension, as it was overseen by a local community non-profit organization. This group received funding from various local sources and ran training activities throughout the growing season, including free permaculture workshops and introductory sessions on cultivating edible plants. It also hosted seed exchanges and periodic gatherings where participants shared recipes and preparation tips. At other points in the season, the organization arranged potlucks, garden tours, and an end-of-season event where participants reflected on their experience. The organization managed membership and received requests from people wanting to join. Fees varied depending on circumstance. Youths and residents facing food insecurity paid five dollars for the year, while others contributed amounts between twenty and eighty dollars, or whatever they could afford. A central part of the non-profit's mission was producing food for distribution in local food baskets. The collective garden was framed as open to all, with particular attention to those without private garden space or access to a community plot, especially newcomers, asylum seekers, and low-income residents.

The gardeners themselves formed an eclectic group. Over the season I heard Spanish, Mandarin, French, English, and Arabic spoken among the rows, sometimes within a single



session as people moved between tasks and conversations. The mix also showed up in ordinary arrangements of participation. Some members came with children and gardened as families, while others arrived alone or worked in pairs, and people's age and experience ranged widely across the group. In my sessions, for example, three Middle Eastern women wearing hijab gardened alongside their children, and nearby several elderly women tended their plots while two middle-aged Jewish women worked together. Others included a British man, a Latino couple with their two children, an Italian woman and her daughter, a South Asian couple, and a mixed group of Chinese women, both younger and older. In this mix, the garden became a setting where cultivation and social contact unfolded together. People who might not ordinarily meet worked side by side. Sometimes they exchanged brief conversations; at other times, they simply shared the same space in comfortable silence. This is where Elenor Jupp's insight is helpful. As she writes, "a focus on feelings and micro-level interactions can help us understand some of the potentials for small-scale community groups in generating individual and group empowerment" (Jupp 2008: 334). What I observed echoed her point: participation in the garden did not come from formal structures alone but from the ordinary, small exchanges that made people feel able to take part.

As I discovered later, some of the members also gardened beyond Marigold Garden, including at home, on school grounds, and, in some cases, in the alleyways alongside their buildings. Working with land and soil was not only something they did during the weekly sessions, but part of the texture of their everyday routines, and it carried across multiple settings. Most gardeners lived nearby, although some travelled from further out. Julie, for example, was an older Jewish retired gardener who lived in Côte Saint-Luc and took the bus to Marigold Garden each week. Others like Roxanne, an Italian woman, came with her two children; her

daughter was in high school, age 12, and her younger son was in grade five at the elementary school nearby. As Roxanne explained, they came to Marigold Garden because she had always loved gardening. Growing up with her grandmother she learned the basics. She wanted to pass on that knowledge to her children, imparting an appreciation for growing one's own food with one's own hands. After getting to know her a little more, she recounted the memory she had of being in her grandmother's garden, planting seeds, cultivating the vegetables, and spending time with her. She said her appreciation for nature came from these sorts of childhood experiences. On one occasion I asked whether smaller children were allowed at the garden and the facilitator answered in the affirmative, but with a careful response. She related to me that a year prior, in the spring of 2021 during the height of the pandemic, the garden was full of young children at a tumultuous time when people were looking for ways to get outside and interact again. She told me there were so many kids coming with their parents that they needed to hire a volunteer to help supervise them so that the gardeners could focus on their tasks and the work could get done.

Another member, Norman, an older white man of British origin, was an avid, knowledgeable gardener and told me he had been engaged in collective gardening for more than 40 years. He said he liked being outdoors, with other people, sharing what he knew, engaging in "physical activity and getting some vitamin D in the sunshine." I noticed that there were some gardeners who came all the time, rarely missed a week, and were much more involved over the growing season. Others came more sporadically. Some were retired and were gardening in their spare time. Helena, for example, had been living in NDG for more than 25 years and she had been working with Marigold Garden for as long as she could remember. She was involved in many of the garden plans and decision-making. A small group of three or four Chinese women came periodically as well, but did not speak much English or French, making communication

difficult at times. There were others too, such as Miguel and Amaranta, a Mexican couple who lived close by, in an apartment block with their two school-age children. They told me they couldn't get to the garden every week given their work and their children's busy schedule, but they tried to come as often as they could. Over time, I began to notice a pattern among the gardeners: a kind of like-mindedness that took shape through repeated work. It emerged as people planned the session, watered the beds, tended the plants, and returned to the same shared tasks week after week. These routine collaborations required people to make decisions together. The work had to be completed in a shared space and within the limited time of the session. One person's way of working could affect what others were able to do next. Coordination therefore depended on timing but also on knowing when to wait or when to let someone continue.

The gardeners' investment was not only in the plants themselves. It was also in the collective effort required to keep the garden thriving. Tending the garden meant paying attention to one another's contributions, since one person's work could affect what others were able to do next. Over time, this created a mutual stake in the project. The relation was not necessarily one of personal closeness. It was a more practical relation, built through repeated work and through the knowledge that the garden depended on many people returning, noticing, and taking care. Among some long-term participants, this practical relation developed into a stronger sense of responsibility for the space. It carried pride, but it could also produce tension when people disagreed about how the garden should be managed or who had the authority to decide. This was especially visible when experienced gardeners pointed out what needed attention as the work unfolded. As I walked along, one experienced gardener, Margaret, showed a few of us the fungi that can grow on the plants, as well as the invasive bugs that can come along. She explained,

The squash, the leaves they are all starting to turn brown, it's [the fungus] definitely on the stripy ones, and on some of the other ones too. I don't know what it is, it's a fungus I think, but it hasn't affected the others this week so we will try and harvest them...Be careful over here, it's very uneven here, it's not very flat, it's easy to trip...It's rained and the soil and mud is very soft. Once in a while we will get invasive bugs too, [on certain] varieties of fruits and vegetables so we try to work out the best times to harvest certain crops, so that we stay aware of the developing growing conditions as the season progresses. Legumes, haricots, we have lots of usual plants like tomatoes and beans too. Sometimes we have varieties that are unfamiliar like black tomatoes. (Fieldnotes, July, 2022).

More experienced gardeners often shared this kind of knowledge with others, and these exchanges became an important medium for interaction. They also had a supportive function because they helped newer participants learn how to cultivate and helped the garden run more smoothly. At the same time, experience could also become a basis for authority. Some long-term gardeners seemed to carry stronger claims to the garden space than newer participants, especially when they had spent years learning its routines and caring for its plants. Gardeners also participated for different reasons and the benefits they described were not the same from person to person. Some were primarily motivated by the food they could grow and eat, while others valued the social engagement and the experience of contributing to a collective project. For some, the garden also functioned as respite, since the physical space offered a calm routine and a temporary break from the stresses of the day. Others emphasized children and intergenerational learning, because gardening allowed them to pass on knowledge about food, cooking, and the traditions attached to cultivation. Some gardeners I spoke with viewed the garden mainly as a place to grow food. For others, like Mehar, it was also a hobby and a site of learning. She said she liked learning about the plants and about the environmental sustainability of the garden. She also valued learning how to grow and cook with varieties of plants that she would not normally be able to cultivate on her own. Gardeners told me they enjoyed the actual work in the garden, whether it was weeding or planting, but especially harvesting. Julie related: "I find the garden

work very healing, very grounding. I like the collective garden approach rather than the community garden because it is less responsibility and less commitment. Once a week works for me” (Fieldnotes, August, 2022).

While many of the gardeners came from NDG or adjacent areas and shared an interest in gardening, ethnic, religious, racialized, and linguistic differences still played out in their social relations and behaviours. There were two long wooden picnic tables, along with several smaller plastic tables, set up for breaks, eating, and socializing. Many different conversations took place during the harvest party, or on other occasions as people ate their weekly harvest together. However, I observed that while seated and eating, people tended to maintain distinct social groups, such as the Muslim families who sat together and the Chinese friends who sat beside each other, as did several white, middle-aged women.

From year to year, membership was constantly in flux, with some gardeners coming back every year for decades and others participating for one year and then not coming back. When members joined, there was no guarantee that they would return the next year, and integration was often a challenge depending on the context and profile of new gardeners. Integrating new gardeners could pose a challenge to established gardeners. On one occasion, I asked Julie, a long-term gardener, about her perception of new gardeners and the extent to which they could develop a connection and participate or adapt to the garden. She said: “I think it is a lovely idea in theory. However, having seen many immigrants come and go over the years, unless they make a serious effort to integrate, they are left to their own devices. It is a sad truth that most people in general feel more comfortable with people they can converse easily with.” She appreciated working with the long-term gardeners, and she related that, “Having these garden relationships... it brings me and holds me here.” (Fieldnotes, June, 2022)

It was a very hot, humid day in the garden, and as I hurried through the large gate the thick bushes of black raspberries consumed my senses. I was late. I noticed that the recycling and compost containers were lined up, and that more chairs and tables had been placed in some of the free spaces. I could hear children playing, shouting, and running in the large park nearby. I spoke briefly to the facilitator and then walked over to a large plot containing long rows of lettuce, spinach, and cabbage, and I decided to begin weeding there. My eyes caught the honeybees at the far end of the garden, sucking nectar from the soft yellow okra flowers, which were in full bloom. It was mid-September and the harvest was fast approaching, and the fruit and vegetables were ripening at varying stages. Meanwhile, the facilitator was busy introducing the garden to some of the new members who would begin working in the garden the following spring. She began by showing the various sections of each garden plot, and her commentary moved between French and English,

On partage du travail, on partage du récolte...There's a lot of history here to this garden...this is the first collective garden to be established in all of Quebec. This land was agricultural land always, from early times. A very popular melon...the NDG Melon Montréalais, le cantaloup...they just brought these last year to relocate from another garden...we are growing oka melons in the back over there. You can see some small trees, un peu mieux, là-bas—and that's our little orchard, we have des pommiers, des prunes, des poires, des cerises, juste là bas... near the black raspberries, we have a special plant it's a kiwi...right now, it's finished... during the growing season we can grow kiwis here and they are very small, but they are delicious. It's called an arctic kiwi and three trees over there ...we have hazelnut trees over there too.<sup>2</sup> (Fieldnotes, September, 2022)

As the group of prospective gardeners moved along the worn dirt paths between the large sections of verdant vegetation growing inside the garden beds, the facilitator continued,

We have lots of varieties...this over here is a special plant, it's called bitter melon, it's a vining plant and this plant will get bigger. We have harvested quite a few. It's delicious. You can slice it up and put salt on it and I cooked it with eggs. It's the one hanging from the big vines over there, it looks a little bit like a cucumber and the flesh has a watery,

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<sup>2</sup> Translation (author's): "We share the work, we share the harvest." She also pointed out the "NDG Melon Montréalais (cantaloupe)," gestured "over there / right there" toward the orchard (apple, plum, pear, and cherry trees), and described the plants and trees in a mix of French and English.

crunchy texture. You can also use the leaves for tea it's very good...so you can dry the leaves too and one of our gardeners, Aoumi was just telling me that often in Japan, if you have a lot of glass windows and when the heat comes in and they'll build a sort of, a wall of melons, they call bitter melon "goya" and because it grows like crazy and it also provides shade and helps keep the apartment cool. It's a beautiful special plant that is also really good for people that have diabetes. (Fieldnotes, September, 2022)

I heard our facilitator call out, as she was assessing the different stages of the garden, exclaiming happily, "the yarrow is almost ready and the tomatoes will need to be surveyed and culled for ripe ones. The cucamelons are coming along too!" At the beginning of the session, the facilitator had explained that the gardening tasks that day included weeding, watering, and raking the dead leaves and winged maple seeds that had fallen onto the garden beds. Once we had our directions for the day, we divided up the tasks as a group and set off to work. Sometimes a specific task needed to be thought through and strategized together, and then worked on, like building a lattice fence for the pole beans to climb.

Earlier in the season, during my initial sessions, I felt my presence might be intrusive because I was not known to this group of gardeners. At the same time, because I was a long-time resident in the area, relationships toward me were congenial and most of the garden members welcomed my contribution. Labouring in the garden as a volunteer helper alongside the members fostered conversations about food and gardening more generally, and at times deeper conversations emerged of a more personal nature, in which people felt open to discuss more intimate aspects of their lives. After several weeks, I noted that some of the gardeners started to feel more comfortable with my presence. On one occasion, while collecting plastic pots from the shed, a gardener related her struggles with her landlord, who wanted to repossess her apartment the previous spring so that he could renovate the house and then sell the property. She was put into a difficult position. She explained to me that she was not given enough forewarning. She said she was happy when she gardened, and that it helped her "think and sort through her

worries.” Working with the soil was her therapy. It offered her something of a refuge, and she felt a sense of purpose in tending to the tasks in the garden and getting things done (Fieldnotes, May, 2022).

I observed how sharing knowledge and personal stories through the cultivation of food could lead to conversations that might not have occurred otherwise outside the garden. Light conversations, information exchange, and fleeting interactions between gardeners were often tied to the tasks at hand, such as watering, soil fertilization and care, turning compost, and harvesting techniques. I observed people singing to themselves, puttering around, and enjoying the sounds, tastes, and scents of the garden. I could see how the physicality of gardening could become a routine and reliable source of calm and comfort, because it meant having my hands in the soil, observing the quiet talk among others, and seeing things grow while directly intervening to nurture the life and fragility of the plants. During these light conversations, the gardeners discussed a whole range of topics. I overheard one gardener explaining, in an authoritative but well-intended tone, to another as they were arranging a trellis-type enclosure around young vining cucumbers: “Growing cucumbers on a fence will help them climb up and save space as they grow. It also keeps the vegetables from falling on the ground and those cucumber beetles, and the borers, we want to keep those bugs away!” (Fieldnotes, June, 2022) Throughout the garden season, and particularly near the end, I noticed that the frequency of interactions led to relationships of familiarity between people as they got to know each other.

Collective gardening was a shared responsibility, whereby a plot of land was gardened by a group of people who shared in the garden work and made decisions together regarding layout and planting. The ethics of the collective garden focused on gardeners working together to create a permaculture design approach. It was a collaborative enterprise that emphasized joint effort in



the garden tasks, and there were group decisions about growing the food and about the ongoing schedule of harvesting throughout the season. When fruits and vegetables started to ripen for harvest, they were eventually shared amongst the group. The harvest that was gathered each week, particularly towards the end of the summer, was always divided and shared, and it was laid out in baskets on a picnic table.

Ensuring that gardeners followed rules was crucial to the smooth functioning of the collaborative effort. Simple things such as arriving on time each week were important, because people needed the information and the plan for the session. As such, the daily harvest was reserved for members who were less than 20 minutes late. One day, as we were getting our gardening tools from the shed, Helena, a spunky Jewish woman who was a long-time gardener and who frequently showed up late, arrived suddenly and in a flurry. She was wearing a broad-rimmed felt hat, a pair of baggy blue jeans, and a red t-shirt. The facilitator glanced over briefly at her as she came in. Helena told me later, “It’s why I got a complaint from the other gardeners because I always arrive so late and so I had to be realistic and say, if you want to walk [to the garden], you’re going to have to leave earlier.” Helena’s habitual lateness contravened the garden rules, as the facilitator did not want to re-explain the day’s tasks to people who arrived late. There were even rules about the sharing of tools, which never seemed to be plentiful enough. Sharing the watering hose, for example, required certain practices of civility and patience because certain fruits and vegetables required longer watering periods than others. It is in this everyday management of shared work, and in the small negotiations that made it possible, that convivial practices and collective efforts became visible.

### ***Convivial Practices and Collective Efforts***

It was late into the summer, and a group of five of us were about to harvest the large burdock root together in the centre of the garden. This vegetable, the facilitator told us, would become part of the group harvest we would prepare and eat afterwards. Li and Xiao Wei were newer participants in the garden that year. They observed the prospect enthusiastically, and they wanted to be part of the process, so they initiated the work to dig out the thick burdock root. They didn't speak English or French very well, and they had less experience in gardening, but we were still managing together as a group. With the language barrier present, the facilitator first guided the process by demonstrating how to do it, and in doing so she coordinated the effort among us. When Li and Xiao Wei took hold of the shovels, it was evident that they lacked the experience and know-how to excavate such a large vegetable. The facilitator explained to the group: "You dig the roots first. It's really deeply rooted so you want to dig around the outside first and then loosen the soil. If you cut two [burdock roots], dig deeper to find the rest. You have to pry the root as you pull it out. It takes a good shovel and careful digging to get the whole thing." She then handed the shovels to Li and Xiao Wei and said: "Be careful of the burrs from the plant, these sticky seed pods cling to everything."

They seemed reluctant, but they took the shovel in hand. Looking at the burdock, a bit hesitant and timid, Li replied, "I don't know what's root ...[and what's not]." Her words and gestures indicated that she was unsure and didn't understand what to do, and it seemed that they didn't immediately want to attempt the excavation. It was apparent to me that the facilitator and the other gardeners present had to spend much more effort to communicate through the language barrier and to try to reassure them that they could do it, even though it was evident that they lacked experience in this kind of gardening. The facilitator noticed her hesitance, and also her reluctance to be able to express herself in English, and replied, "Look here how the leaves are

attached to the roots... but I think at this first stage, maybe try turning the shovel as you dig. It's easier to just pull once the roots are exposed." Another gardener bent down to help and started loosening the root gently with a trowel. After an awkward attempt with the spade, and after a few turns, Li replied, "more deep" as she etched the shovel around the edges into the soft dirt. The apparent trepidation among these first-time gardeners was certainly linked to their lack of experience, because they were uncertain about using the shovel and trowel and were uneasy about making a mistake. They frequently needed to wait for help or direction from the facilitator. The facilitator's guidance and experience were crucial to this collective endeavour, because it depended so much on different levels of experience, willingness to try, and the ability to collaborate and communicate with others.

Another gardener then jumped in enthusiastically to help. One gardener held the large fleshy leaves and gently pulled while the other continued with the trowel. These roots were particularly large. They pulled on the roots together, trying to get a hold of the central core. Other gardeners watched and offered their support and advice, suggesting wiggling and turning inward on the root at the same time to loosen it. The group of us were struggling and laughing at the same time! Although a language barrier was present and made it somewhat difficult to converse, the act of working together helped to bridge this gap because coordination required attention to gesture, rhythm, and mutual adjustment. Through shared tasks and cooperative effort, individuals learned to anticipate one another's actions and intentions, which in turn created a practical form of understanding. The communication barrier was broken down reflexively because the collaboration itself generated new ways of responding and aligning that did not rely on spoken language, but on the immediacy of doing the work together. The facilitator continued, "Gently dig around and use the rake to lightly pull." "Oh look," shouted

someone, “there’s a big earthworm!” “Eww,” replied two of the participants. The facilitator replied, “those are very good for the soil, the nutrients.” We shook off the excess soil from the roots and then cut off the leaves and stems. The fleshy white roots were finally dug up. Someone excitedly remarked, “Oh nice, it’s beautiful.” Everyone cheered (Fieldnotes, September, 2022).

Askins and Pain (2011) provide a useful framework for thinking about participatory projects as messy social spaces in which interaction is shaped through the material process of doing something together. This framing helps me think about the garden because the joint commitment did not exist as a settled relation before the work began. It had to be made through the task itself. People came to the garden with differing identities, differing histories, and differing ideas about how the work should proceed. Yet the process of handling tools, loosening soil, pulling roots, and responding to one another’s gestures created a shared orientation toward making the task succeed. In this sense, the burdock episode was not only an example of cooperation across a language barrier. It showed how conviviality could emerge through the messiness of a collective task because participants had to keep adjusting to one another while working toward a common outcome.

Amit (2012) notes that “we might even coordinate our own actions on the basis of these mutual expectations without this form of coordination necessarily requiring or generating a particularly strong linkage between persons” (7). In the burdock episode, this kind of coordination became tangible through a small relation of interdependence organized around a shared task. The commitment was temporary and bounded by the work itself. Pulling the root from the ground did not require a durable social tie, but it did require attentiveness to one another’s movements and a willingness to keep going despite uncertainty. It also drew on ordinary forms of civility and care that make joint action possible without assuming intimacy or

shared background (Neal et al. 2018). In the garden, coordination was made more difficult by uneven language capacities and by the Chinese gardeners' uncertainty about how to proceed. Yet the task itself created a way forward. Gesture, demonstration, encouragement, and shared physical effort became practical means of translation. Heil is helpful here because he treats conviviality as a set of practices that make coordination possible without assuming that difference disappears. He emphasizes that interaction, translation, and negotiation are basic to convivial life, and that "maintained difference" can persist even when people manage to act together in the moment (Heil 2015, 2020). The important point was not full mutual understanding, but the ongoing work of getting something done together under conditions of partial comprehension and uneven ease.

Afterwards, some of us walked back toward the picnic table with the burdock, and our garden facilitator explained the value of the root and how to use it: "along with eating, it can be used for many other things. We've made handmade paper with it by cooking the stem and the root from the burdock and adding Iris leaves...we did this back at the center by blending the plant fibers into a pulp, and then we rolled out the pulp to make the sheet-forming paper." Li paid close attention as the facilitator chopped the root into small pieces. She pointed to the burdock and asked, "cook it?" She seemed hesitant about eating it raw. The facilitator replied, "yes, you can cook with it and we will make it, as part of our stir-fry." We then all got to try some of the root. It had a mild and earthy taste, with a slightly nutty flavour, a little bit like celery to my thinking.

Nowicka and Vertovec (2014) point to how individuals in everyday urban spaces "develop everyday practices of conviviality that seek to manage, rather than eradicate or subsume, differences with proximate Others" (344). In other words, difference was

simultaneously significant and temporarily subsumed into a shared collegiality during the tasks and activities that gardening involved. In this kind of bridging work (Wise and Velayutham, 2009), the facilitator and other gardeners used patience and encouragement to work through the language barrier and to keep the collective task moving. Moral support was important here because the work asked participants to stay with one another, even when communication was uneven. The commitment was expressed less through explicit agreement than through the physical effort of working side by side and responding to one another's gestures.

At the same time as we were contemplating the burdock, at the other end of the picnic table another gardener showed fellow gardeners how to braid a bunch of garlic that had just been pulled from the garden. She told everyone that “[folding the stems] this way, it will last longer when you take it home.” Engaging in garlic braiding was an activity that some of the gardeners were interested in, and they enjoyed collaborating in weaving the braided garlic. The aesthetics of the craft, and why and how braiding preserves the herb's freshness and flavour, became an important point for sharing and discussion. The conversations between Li and Xiao Wei and the other gardeners were sometimes halting and slow, but they nonetheless participated and had exchanges with fellow gardeners about the garlic. When there was no common language, people still communicated in workable ways, engaging in translation through bodily movement, gestures, and smiles. Despite the limited verbal communication, there was nonetheless a shared achievement and purpose. We all worked together to achieve the removal of the burdock root, and then we worked together in learning how to cook it, which represented the overall collective.

But the garden naturally also gave rise to situations of conflict and tension among gardeners. The collective garden was similar to any social enterprise that required communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution. There were certain causes or origins of

conflict and tension, such as cultural differences or perceptions of divergence from garden social norms and behaviour, especially garden etiquette. The gardeners employed various strategies and practices to deal with or manage these instances, and the garden facilitator often played a role in helping to manage or diffuse moments of tension and conflict. One afternoon, I was weeding in the north corner of the garden in the pumpkin patch, next to one of the gardeners who had been weeding in the shrubby eggplant bushes. This other gardener was piling up what appeared to be weeds, which she had just pulled from the garden bed: purslane—is it a weed or plant? I glanced over and saw that she had been working hard, digging up and turning over the soil, her face covered in dirt. Beside her, she had accumulated a pile of what appeared to my eye to be fleshy leaves with multiple reddish stems, a kind of sprawling plant that grows low to the ground. She declared, “It is taking over the space entirely. We don’t need it in the soil.” I asked her what it was. She replied, “It’s some kind of weed I think. It grows fast if you don’t weed it, and it steals the moisture from the eggplants.” Looking at it, it did appear to carpet the soil. Close by, another gardener with more experience, Helena, overheard our conversation and interjected, “It depends on who you ask.”

In a self-assured tone, she bent down and picked some leaves off the ground and said, “purslane actually helps with moisture retention and keeps the soil soft and fertile. It’s often considered a weed, but you can eat it and it tastes so good! It’s got loads of healing properties, it’s full of nutrients and it has omega 3s.” She puts a few fleshy buds in her mouth. “It’s kind of crunchy too. You can wash it, cut it up and eat it raw, or put some in your salad.” Gesturing towards me, she said, “Here Amanda, try it.” The fleshy buds tasted a bit lemony and slightly salty. I replied, “Not bad, I can see putting this in a salad.” The first gardener scoffed and said that she didn’t want to try it. The garden facilitator passed by and eyed the purslane but didn’t

intervene. She only mentioned that it seeds very easily and that they can take root and grow back if they're not pulled out properly. She added it is important to remove enough so it doesn't get out of control (Fieldnotes, July, 2022). Helena scooped up the pile of discarded purslane and declared that she would take it home and make a salad out of it. As she walked away, she muttered to herself, "they don't appreciate the value of such a special plant." Reflecting on this interaction, I don't think this was a question of people's like or dislike for purslane. The gardener weeding away this plant didn't even know what it was at first. What really caused the conflict was that there were two differing points of view. Each gardener had a different point of view and both seemed married to their reasoning, but the facilitator left this discretion (how much to let it grow) up to the gardeners.

As I thought about this, it seemed that Helena was looking to me to validate or substantiate her position. It was obvious to me that one member valued growing purslane in the garden and the other member did not. It was clear that nothing had been done with bad intentions. It was a case of different ways of working, and what one individual valued as a delicious food another merely saw as an intrusive weed and deemed it was overtaking the other plants in the garden. As a manifestation of conviviality, mutual avoidance as a practice of minimal consensus appeared to be the best way of dealing with this situation because it was common enough to encounter these types of interactions in the garden (Heil 2015). We all went back to our tasks and didn't engage in this particular conversation further.

I noted that some tension arose when gardeners perceived the behaviour of other gardeners as not conforming to what they understood as the garden norms of etiquette. As Julie recounted to me, on one occasion Li and Xiao Wei took a share of the harvest that triggered a reaction from one particular gardener. After gardening, all of the harvest was set out on the



picnic table, ready to be shared. Li and Xiao Wei went ahead and took a larger amount of many of the fruits and vegetables available, which were to be divided equally among all of the members present that day. Julie was adamant that they took more than their fair share, and that this contravened the established garden etiquette of only taking one's fair and equal portion of the harvest. Julie was certainly aggravated that they took more than their fair share, but she employed a passive strategy in dealing with the conflict. She did not confront Li and Xiao Wei. Rather, she chose to confide in me—and potentially others—because she wanted to feel that she had at least called it out, even if indirectly, as a derogation from acceptable behaviour.

Sometimes divergent views, and the conflicts that followed, resulted in disenchantment with one of the gardening groups or even with the garden as a whole. Julie, an experienced gardener, recounted to me,

I had a difficult exchange this year with another long-term gardener. I was planting some seedlings that someone had given to me. I had checked with the facilitator who sent me towards a certain area to plant them. The other gardener followed me and basically kept insisting that I put them elsewhere as they were not organic seedlings. I have had difficulty with this gardener in the past and I basically told her to back off. I can say in my defence that it was very hot and humid. I have felt quite uncomfortable around her since despite apologizing for my rudeness. (Fieldnotes, August, 2022)

Julie told me later that she preferred the Thursday group and that she would ask the facilitator to change groups. She said, “the gardeners are less opinionated there.” The disenchantment of another gardener threatened an even greater disconnect. After having been a participant in Marigold Garden for 12 years, Renata related that,

This year, I have become less keen about the garden. This particular garden used to have three garden time slots and now, it has been reduced to two slots to accommodate the facilitators. The group I am now in has over 20 participants. I find the garden too busy, too active. The individual people are lovely. But I have less joy than in previous years. I find I go less. My excuse is the weather. But at the root, I am less inspired by it. So perhaps despite being a long-term commitment over the years, I will consider not going back next season. (Fieldnotes, August, 2022)

### *Instances of Sociability and Exchanges*

Social encounters and interactions in the garden can foster connections temporarily in limited but significant ways. I observed that the material space of the garden, and the way of being together with “loosely connected others” to accomplish the daily tasks, facilitated an opportunity to let one’s guard down and cultivate temporary forms of familiarity. The frequency of interactions led to relationships of familiarity. People got to know each other because they shared the same space and time each week. In the collective garden, the shared experience of planting, tending, and harvesting a large plot of land together each week gave rise to opportunities for extended familiarities among the gardeners. In effect, difference was not subsumed in the encounter; rather, those differences were decentred so that the work could get accomplished. People’s individual personalities, their humour or light-heartedness, and the relaxed pace of moving slowly while cultivating the soil, helped accomplish convivial practices of bridging and smoothing difference, and opened up “differing types of relational possibilities” (Samanani 2023: 2123). These types of sociality did not often transcend the garden boundaries, but the shared affinity in achieving a collaborative project together with diverse others helped achieve a common goal and purpose.

One day in conversation, some gardeners were discussing food and the origins of a particular plant. They were engaged in light banter, and they translated words for vegetables and fruit as they moved between their own languages and cultural reference points. I overheard them talking about the types of recipes that could be made with the plants and herbs. Sometimes, people would bring a dish back that they had prepared from the vegetables they had helped to cultivate in the garden. I noted that there is a type of hazelnut in the garden that makes a really good tea, and one gardener brought some of the tea she made with it for others to try on a

following week. Another conversation I overheard was about the benefits that could be derived from a particular flower that is grown in the garden. One gardener explained the process: “Sometimes we plant flowers that will attract beneficial insects like this one. Calendula! Extract the oil and then you can draw out the properties of the flower... with the leaves, the blooms, you can make a curry. It’s delicious and it grows so well here.” An Indian participant, Mehar, chimed in, “I use for cooking, wash it and boil, add garlic and parsley, with lots of different spices and then cook in oil” (Fieldnotes, August, 2022).

When people learned across difference, they invoked and enacted past knowledge and experience, and they used it to bridge learning and negotiation as they developed new understandings. Other forms of sharing culturally specific knowledge also invoked the ways that taste and smell—of herbs, fruits, and vegetables—prompted sensory feelings and memories. Here, culturally specific knowledge was shared with the group of gardeners while learning about other people’s traditions and cultures. Giving gifts and sharing food, recipes for instance, was considered a gesture of conviviality. Likewise, during the garlic braiding activity, where gardeners wove the harvested garlic together, the facilitator and others often brought hazelnut tea to share. Askins and Pain speak to the ways in which the materialities of the tasks involved in a group art project led to particular interactions and social bonds among participants (Askins and Pain 2011; Askins 2016). Similarly, gardening and connection with the soil/earth can provide fertile ground for social exchanges and openness. Askins (2016) further relates that an everyday framing pays attention to the process of contact, involving diverse social and personal characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity, etc.) embedded in a complex interplay between actors, materials, and space, in which new social relations may emerge (3). In this way, activities such as garden workshops, garlic braiding, and potlucks created opportunities to interact and learn

from each other, and to build relationships. Categorical notions of diversity often did not play a major role in shaping how people worked together in the garden. What mattered more were the practical demands of cultivation—the rhythms of planting, weeding, watering, and deciding what grew where. In some cases, such as the welcome offered to the two Chinese-speaking gardeners, fellow participants showed an active willingness to overcome barriers of communication. They helped new members learn basic techniques, exchanged seeds and recipes, and sometimes brought homemade dishes to share. These gestures illustrate an openness that was enacted through shared labour rather than through talk about difference. At the same time, much of the activity in the garden was simply about getting on with the work of gardening.

Collaboration in this space was not without strain because shared projects brought together people with different expectations, levels of expertise, and ways of working. Some of the most persistent tensions arose around questions of technique, commitment, and authority because these issues carried both practical and emotional weight for those who had invested years in the garden. These tensions revealed more than differences in gardening knowledge or style; they show how long-standing members developed deep attachments to the space and a sense of ownership over its routines. The collective garden therefore required ongoing negotiation and careful adjustment because, as Askins (2016) describes, it was sustained through “an everyday praxis of engagement” in which people acted together in ways that were both precarious and possible (517).

Returning to the burdock episode in light of Heil’s work helps clarify the broader pattern I observed across the garden. The cooperation between the two Chinese-speaking gardeners and the rest of the group required little shared language or explicit agreement. It relied instead on gestures, encouraging words, and a mutual orientation to the task. This was not an attempt to

bridge or erase difference once and for all, but to work with difference in the process of doing something together. The effort was practical, embodied, and affective, reflecting what Heil (2015) terms “minimal consensus”: a limited but sufficient alignment that allows collective work to proceed amid difference. The garden, in this way, highlighted the labour involved in sustaining a joint commitment, and the ongoing effort that held a project together even when agreement was partial or provisional. Heil’s account of conviviality provides a useful lens for understanding the collaborative practices I observed in the collective garden. He describes conviviality as “the process of living among people who share an everyday neighbourhood life while remaining culturally different,” a mode of being together that “requires negotiation and translation in interaction to achieve and maintain at least minimal consensus” (Heil 2020: 3-4). In his view, conviviality is not a stable condition but a practice that “encompasses both cooperative and conflictual situations that keep it fragile and permanently in flux” (4).

This framework helps illuminate the garden as a setting where cooperation was made through practice rather than assumed in advance. The work of pulling together and coordinating silently, and also responding to one another’s cues did not erase difference. Instead, it acknowledged difference and worked through it. Conviviality here was not about sameness or full understanding, but about the minimal agreements and incremental adjustments that made shared participation possible. The burdock episode stayed with me because it showed how collaboration often depended on forms of attention that were practical and embodied, even when speech was limited. It was not an exceptional interaction in the garden, but one of many small situations in which participants had to find ways of proceeding together despite uneven language, experience, and expectations. In that sense, conviviality was not a background atmosphere. It

was something made in practice, as the work required people to keep adjusting to one another as they went.

### ***Conclusion***

Marigold Garden made visible both the possibilities and the limits of conviviality in a collective setting. The garden was not always harmonious, and this is important because the work depended on people finding ways to continue together even when their expectations did not fully align. Some tensions emerged quietly, in moments where participants disagreed about the task at hand or stepped back from an exchange rather than pursue it further. At other times, the difficulty was more practical, because gardeners had to work out what needed to be done, who would take it on, and how shared resources such as tools or the harvest would be handled. Communication could also become difficult, especially in situations in which participants were working across uneven language capacities and only partial understanding. In these moments, coordination was not simply a background condition of gardening. It became part of the work itself.

Under these conditions, conviviality depended on more than a general atmosphere of friendliness. It required patience and improvisation because participants had to remain responsive to one another even when communication was incomplete. When words were limited, the work itself sometimes became the medium through which people understood what was being asked of them. A shovel passed from one person to another, a gesture toward the soil, or a shared effort to pull out a stubborn root could stand in for fuller explanation. These forms of embodied attentiveness did not erase difference. Rather, they made collaboration possible in situations where people had to proceed without full verbal understanding.

It is through these small adjustments that the garden becomes analytically significant, not simply as a sociable setting, but as a site in which a convivial repertoire takes form. The

practices I observed were often modest, but they helped people keep the collective project going. A gardener might encourage someone who was hesitant, wait while another person figured out how to use a tool, or let a disagreement pass rather than make it larger. These gestures did not necessarily create lasting intimacy, nor did they resolve the unevenness of experience, authority, or participation in the garden. What they did do was allow people to continue working together under conditions of partial agreement. In this sense, conviviality in Marigold Garden was not a settled atmosphere. It was something made and remade through ordinary acts of adjustment.

The chapter also shows that the most consequential differences in the garden were not always socio-ethnic, linguistic, or religious ones, even though these forms of difference were present. More often, tension gathered around horticultural knowledge and around the different levels of commitment people brought to the work. These differences came into play when gardeners disagreed about proper technique, or when they made claims about who had the authority to decide how the work should be done. Long-term members often had deep attachments to the garden, and this sometimes gave them a stronger sense of responsibility for how the space should be cared for. But that attachment could also produce friction, especially when newer or less experienced participants did not share the same expectations. In this way, shared work generated both connection and strain, because the collective project depended on people who did not always approach the garden in the same way.

Taken together, Marigold Garden shows that collective work can open forms of familiarity without requiring durable friendship. Shared labour could soften the distance between people who did not know one another well, especially when learning and harvesting moved into cooking, eating, or the exchange of food. Yet these openings remained partial and situated. They were tied to the garden, to the growing season, and to the tasks that brought people into relation.

What mattered, then, was not that the garden produced harmony across difference. It mattered because it made visible the work through which people continued together despite uneven ease. In this setting, everyday coexistence was sustained through coordination and restraint, but also through the practical care that allowed people to continue working alongside one another.



## **CHAPTER SIX: NDG PACERS AND THE NDG BAKING NETWORK**

In this chapter, I examine two voluntary forms of collective activity in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce: the NDG Pacers, an open local running group that met weekly at the Confederation Park track, and The NDG Baking Network, an online-organized network of home bakers who prepared weekly donations for an Indigenous-run drop-in centre downtown. These two settings differed significantly. The Pacers gathered people through bodily co-presence at the track. The NDG Baking Network brought dispersed household labour into relation through online messages, porch drop-offs, containers, and driving routes. Even so, both settings show how residents created workable forms of sociability through limited and voluntary participation that was always shaped by circumstance.

Placing these cases alongside Marigold Garden clarifies that shared practice depends on more than people's dispositions or repertoires. It also depends on the organizational conditions that make participation possible. Marigold Garden was organized through a non-profit that provided materials, guidance, and an institutional frame that helped stabilize participation. The Pacers and The NDG Baking Network were held together more lightly. Their scaffolding was thinner, more improvised, and more dependent on participants' continued follow-through. In the Pacers, continuity depended on routine co-presence, predictable timing, and Jack's ongoing work of greeting, organizing, and maintaining the weekly run. In The NDG Baking Network, continuity depended on work carried out at a distance, as participants baked in their homes, left goods on porches, reused containers, and relied on driving routes to bring the donations together.

My broader aim is to show how people in NDG generated workable forms of sociability and coordination through shared activities that required ongoing adjustment and cooperation. By workable forms of sociability, I mean relations that can be sustained under ordinary constraints of time, energy, and obligation. These relations do not necessarily involve intimacy. They

depend on people aligning their actions enough to share space, acknowledge one another, or carry out a joint activity. At the Pacers, this was produced through bodily movement in a shared outdoor space. Runners circled the track, adjusted their pace and lane, and monitored the tempo of others. In The NDG Baking Network, sociability was produced through distributed labour. People baked, packaged, dropped off goods, and transported items, often without meeting face to face. The work relied on coordination, reassurance, and gratitude because the relation was maintained through tasks as much as through direct interaction.

Both settings illuminate what Noel Dyck (2002) refers to as consociation. Earlier, I described consociation as a mode of social affiliation that develops through shared practices rather than shared identities, often in what Dyck calls “slices of time.” In his chapter in Vered Amit’s edited volume, Dyck (2002) argues that such relationships may be “relatively narrowly circumscribed in time and space and decidedly partial or situational in content, and yet highly salient as means of affiliation” (107). He further notes that this restricted dimension of community-making “underscores the capacity of mobile strangers to generate spaces and possibilities for fashioning satisfying social connections out of limited, voluntary, but deeply textured and meaningful activities” (Dyck, 2002: 107).

This observation is useful here because the Pacers and The NDG Baking Network both functioned as modest yet meaningful collectives. They depended on people choosing to participate and on the practical work required to keep the activity going. For some Pacers, participation was highly limited. It might involve one or two runs in a season, brief exchanges at the start line, and no further interaction beyond the track. For others, the weekly run became more regular while still remaining contained within Confederation Park. They showed up, completed the workout, acknowledged familiar faces, and left without extending the relationship

beyond that hour. For others still, regular attendance created openings for relationships that moved beyond Wednesday evening sessions, through joint runs elsewhere in the city, informal training groups, or encounters at races outside the district. Whether consociate relations developed through the Pacers, and whether they extended beyond the track or remained bounded within it, depended on the constraints, motivations, and circumstances of each runner.

The same uncertainty was present in The NDG Baking Network, although it took a different form. The weekly cycle of baking, packaging, porch drop-offs, and deliveries created a recognizable structure of distributed labour. Yet the sociability it supported was shaped by uneven and shifting life circumstances. Some volunteers contributed only sporadically because of work, illness, or childcare. Others participated regularly but remained minimally communicative. A smaller subset became more closely connected to Gloria, the primary organizer, or to other consistent contributors. In this way, the project generated a form of affiliation that was sustained without regular face-to-face contact. It also remained vulnerable to interruption whenever people's schedules or energies changed. This raises a related question: what forms of sociability can emerge when collective work is dispersed across households and mediated primarily through digital communication, and how do these relations persist, or falter, when the labour involved is voluntary and unevenly distributed?

Amit's (2020) discussion of watchful indifference further sharpens this point because it draws attention to the uncertain relation between collective activity and social connection. She argues that both joint commitment and watchful indifference can create openings for sociality, but that neither produces a predictable outcome. Pressing for joint commitment may invite resistance or withdrawal, while watchful indifference may be experienced as accommodation in one moment and as disregard in another. For Amit, the point is therefore to consider the

“possible effects of ambiguous openings” rather than to assume “stable accomplishments” in advance (2020: 50–51). This formulation is directly relevant to the Pacers and The NDG Baking Network. In both cases, organizers created openings without being able to control what participants would make of them. Jack could make the track welcoming, offer a repeatable structure, and greet newcomers, but runners still decided how often to come and how far to extend the relation. Gloria could organize reminders, collect baked goods, and thank contributors, but volunteers participated according to uneven schedules and changing capacities. In this sense, both settings involved ambiguous openings. Opportunities for relation were made available, but their social consequences remained uncertain.

Viewed together, the Pacers and The NDG Baking Network are two examples of the wider range of voluntary associations that can be mobilized within a locality like NDG. Some associations are informal and fleeting. Others become more structured or extensive in their reach. Such organizations create the possibility of social engagement, but what unfolds when people participate is difficult to anticipate. Their sociality depends on people’s shifting capacities and on what they are able or willing to sustain. Both cases therefore illustrate the complications that attend even small, delimited forms of engagement, where opportunities for connection exist but cannot be guaranteed in advance. Both cases also require attention to mobility, constraint, and time. People joined the Pacers when the one-hour weekly run fit their schedules, and the open format allowed them to come irregularly without penalty. The NDG Baking Network depended on volunteers being able to bake when time permitted. Shortfalls in labour or coordination had immediate effects on the weekly donation cycle. In each case, shared activity created opportunities for sociability, but those opportunities remained uneven and contingent.

As Amanda Wise and Greg Noble (2016) remind us, conviviality must be treated as something “situated, performed, and contingent” rather than an inherent attribute of diverse urban life (426–427). This insight is central to my analysis because it keeps attention on the ordinary conditions that shape what people can reasonably do, what they are willing to sustain, and what forms of sociability follow. A running track and an online-organized baking network create different rhythms and demands. They also create different possibilities for engagement. The two sections that follow trace how sociability is made workable under these different organizational conditions. The Pacers make sociability visible through routine co-presence in a shared public park. The NDG Baking Network does so through interdependent labour carried out at a distance. I begin with the Pacers.

### ***NDG Pacers: Keeping a Weekly Run Going***

I first encountered the NDG Pacers, a local running group, through a running partner in NDG who suggested that I meet Jack, the coach. She knew I was interested in local collective activities and thought the Pacers would be relevant to my research on everyday sociability. When I met Jack, it became immediately clear that his ongoing commitment was what kept the group functioning. Jack was in his late seventies, a long-distance runner who had completed seventy-five marathons. He explained the origins of the group in straightforward terms. One evening, more than a decade earlier, he had been cooling down at the nearby YMCA when a friend approached him and asked whether he would consider starting a running group in NDG. He thought about it and eventually agreed. He recruited a handful of people in 2009 and suggested they meet at the only outdoor running track in NDG, located behind a local French-language high school. Jack described the early days of the group as modest and inconsistent, but he kept showing up and gradually built momentum.

What stood out as he told this story was the degree of practical labour he invested in running the group. He checked the track in early spring to see when the surface became safe after winter. He created a one-hour weekly workout that people of different fitness levels could follow. He made the effort to greet newcomers personally. The group's continuity depended on his willingness to do this because there was no formal membership system, no fees, and no institutional backing. He created a setting in which people could show up once, twice, or every week without any obligation to maintain a longer-term commitment. He explained that he had first imagined the group while running alone around the track one evening, thinking that "there must be people out there who want to run but don't want to do it by themselves" (Fieldnotes, March, 2023).

Confederation Park, he felt, was a good site because it was centrally located, well-lit in the evenings, and felt safe at dusk. "It's a standard size topped with aggregate gravel stones. Nothing special, but it does the job," he told me, treating the track's ordinariness as an asset because it made the space accessible to a wide range of people (Fieldnotes, March, 2023). Jack took his role seriously because he saw himself as responsible for creating conditions in which people felt supported and motivated. Each Wednesday, he arrived early to brush debris off the track, check for ice patches in the colder months, and assess whether sections needed light repair. He once said to me, "This track isn't perfect, but if we take care of it, it takes care of us" (Fieldnotes, April, 2023). His work was voluntary and unannounced, but regular enough that runners came to expect a certain level of order when they arrived.



**Figure 8. NDG Pacers at Confederation Park track. Source: author's photograph.**

His instructions about the running format were pragmatic: “If you find it too hard, it’s your fault” (Fieldnotes, April, 2023). By this he meant that the pace was adjustable because people could run, jog, or walk during intervals, and the structure allowed them to work at their own level. He told runners to be “good to themselves” and emphasized that the group always started and finished in the same place so that nobody was left behind. These guidelines created a predictable weekly structure in which many people felt comfortable trying the group without pressure. They also made the Pacers legible as a setting where participation could remain limited and self-directed, which is part of what allowed strangers to join without needing to explain themselves.

On a windy day in early March, I met him at the track while he was surveying the surface. Snow had melted quickly that year, and he was evaluating whether the ground was dry enough for the Pacers to begin meeting. He pointed out soft patches in the gravel, areas where trucks had driven over the track during the winter, and pockets of meltwater at the 200-metre mark. As we walked, he remarked: “We’ll need a few days of plus-10s and plus-15s to dry this up” (Fieldnotes, March, 2023). He was matter of fact about the work required to keep the group running because he took responsibility for assessing the track, reporting issues to the city, and deciding when the season could begin. This labour was not dramatic, but it was continuous. It formed the background work that made the Pacers a stable weekly practice.

Dyck’s (2002) account of suburban sport organizations is useful here because he notes that such groups create “organizational forms that feature regularity, predictability, openness and relative comprehensibility” (112). The Pacers functioned in this way because runners could rely on the weekly meeting time, the workout format, and the presence of the coach. The simplicity and consistency of these features made the group accessible to people with different schedules, physical abilities, and motivations. Analytically, this regularity is not only an organizational feature. It is part of the social condition that makes recognition possible over time, even when interaction remains brief.

The running track was a 400-metre oval made of compacted gravel, encircled by a chain-link fence with clear municipal signage posted at the entrances prohibiting dogs from entering the track area. These signs were not always visible because branches or overgrowth sometimes obscured them, but they were legible when standing directly at the entrance. The track bordered a large open green field used for soccer and football, and behind the north end of the fence there was a small, fenced dog park, physically separated from the track itself. Confederation Park



stretched along a long rectangle bordered by mature trees, playground structures, and wide green areas. Benches and a few exercise structures formed a small cluster near the track entrance where people often sat to watch the activity while remaining slightly removed from it. The park was widely used by teenagers walking home from school, parents with young children, dog owners, casual walkers, and people sitting on benches along the outer perimeter.

On a spring afternoon outside the Wednesday session, I saw two women, possibly mother and daughter, talking quietly on a bench. A group of men in their twenties played an informal soccer match in the central field. Children in school uniforms sat on the bleachers eating lunch, and dogs barked excitedly as their owners entered the adjacent dog park. This mix of activity showed the park's importance as a shared public space in which multiple uses converged. The physical layout helped organize proximity, allowing people to be near one another without all being drawn into the same kind of interaction. Parkgoers could sit on the benches and watch the runners from a short distance. Parents could supervise their children at the playground while glancing up occasionally at the track. Casual walkers moved along the periphery. These overlapping uses meant the Pacers operated within a shared public space in which different purposes coexisted.

Sociability is therefore not an abstract capacity but something worked out in concrete environments marked by uneven rhythms, material constraints, and overlapping uses. The track was open to everyone, and the Pacers did not have exclusive use. This meant that people continually encountered one another while absorbed in different routines and purposes.

My first evening with the Pacers was in early April. The track had dried enough for the start of the season, and about thirty runners spread out along the perimeter, stretching or chatting quietly (Fieldnotes, April, 2023). The group was diverse in age and background. It was not

unusual to hear Quebec French, English, Mandarin, British English, Parisian French, and Spanish among the runners. Although most participants appeared white, there were runners of East Asian, Chinese, and African backgrounds. These differences did not dictate interactions because people were primarily oriented toward the shared activity, but the multilingual soundscape created a noticeable atmosphere of diversity.

Participation varied widely. Some people intended to run regularly because they had personal training goals. Others came to regain fitness after life changes, such as one woman who had recently had a baby and said she was trying to “get back into shape” (Fieldnotes, April, 2023). Some ran only when weather permitted. One long-time member, Peter, had been running with the group for eight years and now commuted from Pointe-Claire each week because he still found value in the group structure (Fieldnotes, April, 2023). Motivation differed from person to person. People joined the run because it fit into their routines at that moment, and because the voluntary format gave them freedom to come as often or as irregularly as they wished. The group’s openness did not erase difference, but it did shift what mattered in the moment, because the shared task provided a workable basis for being alongside others without requiring prior familiarity.

When I first began observing the Pacers, I was struck by how the group settled into a routine with little explicit instruction. People arrived in small clusters or alone, walked toward the track entrance, and exchanged nods or brief greetings. Jack often began by asking how people felt that evening, which gave runners an opening to mention injuries, fatigue, or accomplishments from the previous week. These check-ins were informal but significant because they gave each participant a small place in the group’s weekly rhythm. As the group assembled, Jack began the customary “ritual of congratulations.” Runners who had recently completed races

brought their medals to the track. Jack introduced them and held up each medal so that the group could applaud. He explained that it was important for people to receive recognition because many runners competed alone and rarely had support at the finish line (Fieldnotes, May, 2023). This ritual created a moment of collective acknowledgment because people responded with warm applause and brief expressions of encouragement. In this context, the ritual of congratulations functioned as a small but meaningful practice that fostered goodwill and mutual recognition, creating a moment in which conviviality was actively produced rather than assumed.

The warm-up consisted of easy laps in which people chatted lightly while settling into their pace. The sound of gravel shifting underfoot, the intermittent clang of metal from the nearby exercise bars, and the soft hum of traffic on the adjacent street formed part of the sensory backdrop (Fieldnotes, April, 2023). Runners adjusted their strides, stretched briefly, or paused to retie a shoe. These ordinary gestures mattered because they helped make the group workable in practice. People did not need to enter the track as close companions. They only had to tune their movements to one another enough for the shared run to hold. As the session progressed, the group spread across the track according to pace. Some runners focused intensely on their breathing or foot placement. Others ran alongside someone of similar speed. A few maintained distance to concentrate on their own goals. Even so, people remained aware of one another because their movements shaped the shared rhythm of the track. Participation was both individual and collective because each runner managed their own pace while also adjusting to the presence of others.

Dyck (2002) suggests that within activities governed by routine participation, individuals “proceed from being recognized faces to named persons who spend much of a season talking to one another,” and that incidental contacts may “flower into serial conversations” (111–112). I

observed this trajectory among the Pacers because some runners spoke only briefly during intervals, while others developed conversations over weeks or months. The group did not require or expect deep social ties, but it provided opportunities for them to form gradually.



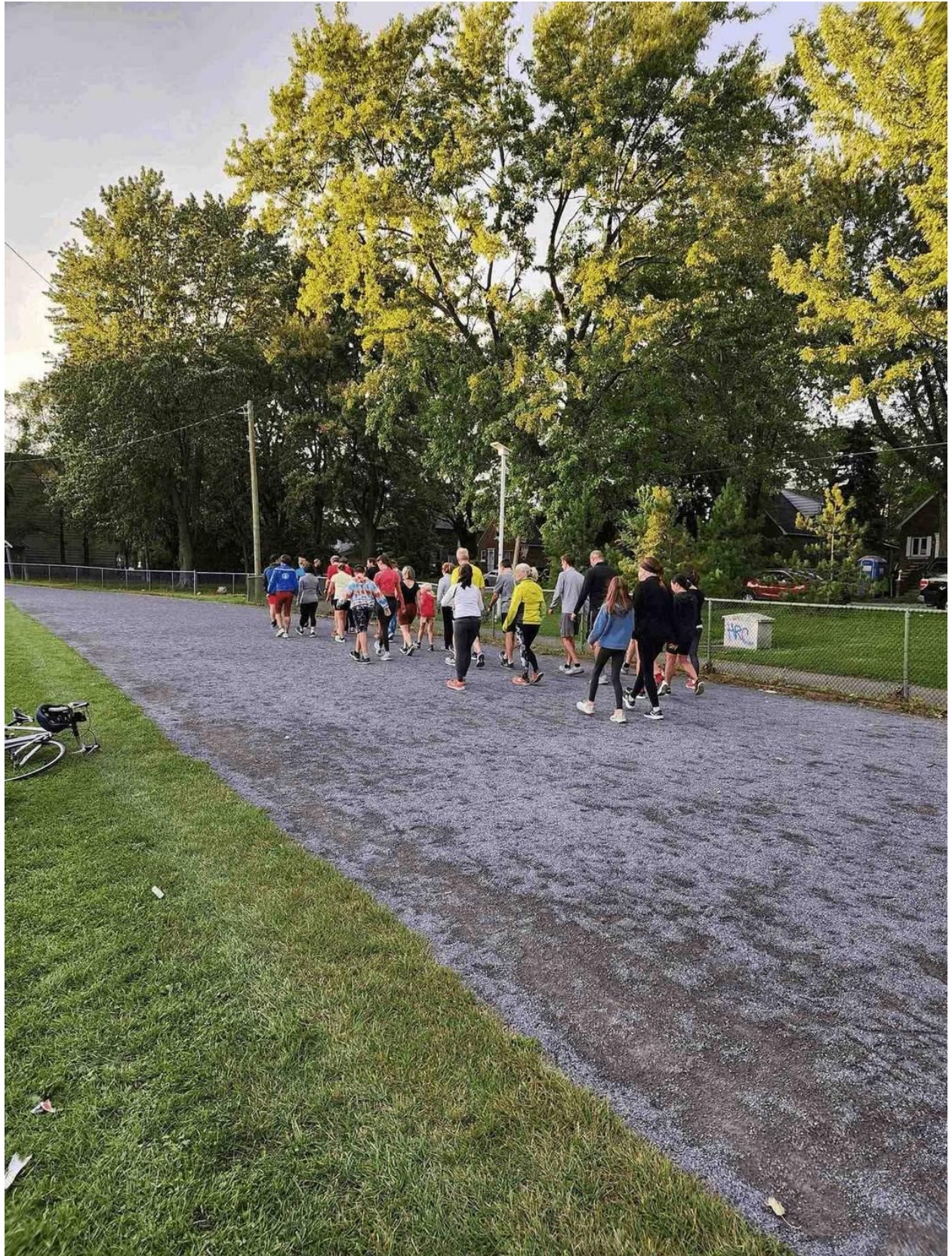




**Figure 9. NDG Pacers at Confederation Park track. Source: author's photograph.**

*Co-presence, Friction, and Negotiated Use of Space*

Hannerz's (1980) account of traffic relationships clarifies why attention to movement matters in the Pacers case. He argues that people often encounter one another while they are "busy doing something else," and that interaction is shaped by the demands of the activity rather than by an intrinsic wish to socialize (Hannerz 1980: 219). This is clear at the Confederation Park track, where runners, dog walkers, teenagers, soccer players, and people relaxing on benches occupy the same environment while orienting themselves toward different purposes. The Pacers' training run created a moving, circular rhythm in which proximity to others was continuous, but direct interaction was often limited because people were focused on pacing, breath, or avoiding collisions. These conditions made the park an instructive setting for observing how sociability emerged, stalled, or was redirected, because the structure of the run shaped what runners could do, and because other users of the park continually required negotiation.

As I outlined earlier, Amit's (2020) concept of watchful indifference helps clarify this scene further. She describes how people in shared public environments often adopt a stance of attentive co-presence in which they remain aware of others while maintaining distance, creating "ambiguous openings" in which interaction may emerge but remains unpredictable (Amit 2020: 50-52). In what follows, I treat these openings as observable in small moments when runners decide whether to intervene, to joke, to avoid, or to keep moving, and when restraint can be read as accommodation in one moment and as dismissal in another. Public running tracks invite forms of co-presence that do not necessarily result in interaction. Watchful indifference captured the Pacers well because runners often ran side by side without speaking, acknowledging one another through glances, shifts in pace, or slight nods rather than conversation. This stance allowed

runners to decide when and how to engage. Someone could remain entirely focused during an interval, or choose to exchange a brief comment during a recovery lap. The form of sociability remained flexible because the group structure did not demand uniform involvement. Co-presence created a shared field of awareness in which people could keep interaction minimal, and it could also create moments when people limit their involvement rather than extend it.

The park environment also required people to manage co-presence with other users. As we ran, a group of men at the bleachers smoked cannabis, played dominoes, talked loudly, and cooked on a propane barbecue (Fieldnotes, July, 2023). Their gathering was intergenerational, with infants, teenagers, and older men present at different times. Their activities did not interrupt the run, but the drifting smoke had an effect on some runners, one of whom joked that we would “get high for free tonight,” which caused brief laughter (Fieldnotes, July, 2023). Another runner said the smell irritated her lungs. None of the runners approached the group at the bleachers. The runners assessed the situation. While the smoke was unpleasant, the group did not read it as presenting immediate danger. Although there was irritation, the situation did not escalate because runners decided to keep moving and keep their attention on the run. Here, the unspoken decision not to intervene is part of what makes watchful indifference analytically useful: people remain aware of others, but they choose restraint because they are managing competing uses of space without taking on the burden of adjudicating them.

It also shows what Wise and Noble (2016) mean when they argue that conviviality depends on “the affordances of social space” (427). The physical layout of the track and bleachers allowed each group to continue their activities without direct engagement, and the conditions of shared space made a functional distance workable. The strongest example of conflict occurred when a dog owner entered the track during a Pacers session. Shortly after we

lined up to begin warm-up drills, a man walking his dog stepped onto the track. The dog became startled by the movement of the runners and darted forward, weaving between people (Fieldnotes, July, 2023). Jack stopped the runners and approached the owner. His tone was firm but not aggressive. He explained that dogs were not permitted on the track because they posed a safety risk to runners and because posted municipal signage prohibited dogs from the area. The owner appeared frustrated, saying the track was a public space. Jack responded by pointing to the sign at the entrance, which was partly obscured by overgrown branches but still visible. After a short exchange, the owner left with the dog. This moment made visible that the issue was not only one of runner etiquette. It also concerned how different users understood the track and what kinds of movement it was meant to support. It was a clash between divergent uses of a shared space, sharpened by a safety concern and by the fact that the dog owner had not anticipated that the track would be in intensive use at that moment. The encounter required quick interpretation and adjustment.

Jack later posted about the incident on the group's Facebook page,

There were 28 runners on the track tonight running. I had to tell two dog people, no dogs on the track. One person insulted me and there were also three bicycles on the track. I've asked our councillor as well as 311 for signs at the entrances.<sup>3</sup> There is one sign covered with bushes growing on the track. And still there are no team benches. Runners are putting their jackets in the dirt. The new water fountain is leaking. I believe I need to go to a city council meeting to ask the mayor about the lack of caring for the track. (Pacers Facebook post, Jack)

Jack's frustration reflected both safety concerns and the considerable labour he had already invested in maintaining the group. The incident also illustrates the kinds of moral reasoning that

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<sup>3</sup> 311 is the municipal information line through which residents submit service requests.



occur in small moments, in which someone must decide whether to intervene or let a minor infraction pass. Jack's firm but measured approach, maintained order without deliberately escalating the situation. Here the analytic relevance of Amit's (2020) provocation becomes especially clear, when she asks,

What of the possibility that indifference can be marshalled to claim or share limited public space in the face of multiple potential territorial claims and usages, whether or not these are identified with particular social categories? Is it not possible that two (or more) people, who are largely indistinguishable in terms of lifestyle, taste, or ethnocultural identification, could still struggle over the issue of how to address their divergent uses of public space at a particular moment in time? In other words, civility may still be in question even when categorical difference is not. (61)

This captured the dynamics of the dog-walker encounter precisely because the tension did not hinge on cultural or demographic difference but on divergent uses of a shared space at a particular moment. The runners sought predictable conditions for coordinated movement, while the dog owner sought an open track to walk through. Civility was not guaranteed simply because people shared a public setting or because a categorical difference did not appear to be at stake. Instead, sociability depended on how individuals interpreted the situation, recognized competing claims, and negotiated their obligations. The moment required judgment and restraint, and it demonstrated how public space can generate tension even among people who might otherwise seem socially similar.

Midway through the 2023 season, Jack proposed that the group design and purchase T-shirts to represent the Pacers. People responded enthusiastically at first, and we spent part of a post-run gathering discussing colours, styles, and prices (Fieldnotes, July, 2023). The process soon revealed how difficult it could be to mobilize consensus in a voluntary group. What appeared at first to be a small and manageable undertaking became more complicated as people began to weigh in with different preferences. Some wanted a lighter colour that would absorb

less heat while running, while others preferred black. The group eventually settled on red as a kind of middle ground. Other questions followed. Some runners were concerned about whether a crew neck would feel too restrictive, while others wondered whether a V-neck would fit too loosely. A sleeveless option appealed to some runners because it would be cooler in summer heat, while others strongly preferred sleeves. One person asked whether there was an option with a UPF rating. Most people agreed that the shirt should be breathable, but agreement at that level did not resolve the practical decisions that had to be made.

Jack collected size information and tried to coordinate the order, but the process kept slowing down. Some runners were absent when the idea was first discussed and wanted to give their input later. Others forgot to send their measurements, did not reply in time, or asked for changes after the ordering deadline. Some had concerns about the price and thought thirty dollars was too expensive. Others cared more about the quality of the fabric or the style of the shirt. The vendor later informed Jack that the logo could not be produced exactly as requested, which required another round of discussion. There was also the problem of the minimum order. Jack had to know how many people would actually commit to buying a shirt before the order could go ahead, but not everyone who expressed interest followed through. Some people did not openly object to the choices but quietly decided not to buy one. At each step, someone new raised a question that had to be worked through. What began as a simple idea, a symbol of group identity, became a slow and uneven process that required repeated effort to move forward.

Amit's (2012) discussion of joint commitment is useful here because she shows that shared projects rarely proceed smoothly when they require interdependence. Interdependence can bring friction, delay, and disagreement into view. The T-shirt initiative demonstrated this clearly because people had different degrees of commitment to the group and different thresholds

for how much effort they were willing to contribute. Despite the delays, the shirts eventually arrived several months later. Those who chose to buy one seemed pleased, while others quietly opted out. The episode shows how small voluntary groups rely on continuous, negotiated labour because nothing happens automatically. Even minor collective undertakings demand coordination.

The T-shirt episode also revealed the limits of constructing affiliation through symbolic markers. The Pacers' association formed through routine, shared effort, and mutual recognition. It could not be manufactured on demand because people participated under different conditions and with different levels of investment. A shirt could symbolize the group, but it could not make all runners want the same degree of identification with it. Some people may have wanted the camaraderie of the weekly run without needing a visible marker of membership. The episode clarified how difficult it was to turn a flexible, open group into a more formal association. It also clarified what runners seemed to value in the first place: a setting that was structured enough to hold them together for an hour, and loose enough to allow them to come and go without pressure.

### ***Extending Relations beyond the Track***

Over the season, I also saw how some runners developed relationships that extended beyond the weekly sessions. A small contingent of NDG runners—four of us—after meeting at the Wednesday track also began running together in addition to participating in the Pacers. Our group name is an acronym of our initials. We call ourselves “SAGA.” We coordinated through WhatsApp. In the following exchange, we were attempting to arrange a run outside the regular session, and the thread shows how quickly coordination becomes a practical challenge structured

by transport, caregiving schedules, social obligations, and weather (SAGA WhatsApp thread [SAGA-01], 16–19 April 2023).

### **April 16**

G: “Wed 6pm is the start of the track season”

S: “I can also run in Dorval between 1–2pm on Saturday”

G: “Saturday 3pm or later works for me. Sunday after 11am works for me too.”

S: “Ok. Let’s see what works for Amanda and Alice”

### **April 17**

A: “I am planning to go to the RR opening day tonight. Let’s meet up there. As for the weekend, let’s do Saturday aft run in Dorval. Sounds fun!”

G: “Oh, I forgot — I am unavailable for much of Sunday afternoon — birthday dinner for one of my sisters. I either have to finish by 1 or start at 5 or later. You three figure out when you want to run on Sunday. If I am available, I will join you. Otherwise, I will run on my own.”

Am: “Sounds good.”

S: “Saturday — can everyone get out to Dorval though? If that is the day we can all run together, maybe we should do 3pm at Rene-Levesque or something like that?”

S: “Sunday — This could be our hill run towards the mountain, ladies!!!”

### **April 19**

G: “So, what shall be our plan for tomorrow?”

A: “What time were people thinking?”

G: “Between 1 and 2 if we do Dorval (that is where Suzy will be then) or 3 or later if we meet somewhere else.”

Am: “I’m flexible, whatever’s easiest, I’m free tomorrow afternoon.”

S: “Why don’t we do Rene-Levesque Park at 3pm? That way we have more flexibility to run whatever distance we want. If we run in Dorval, I am limited by my daughter’s violin lesson time.”

G: “OK. If we go there, dress on the warmer side. Running near the water likely will have a chilling effect.”

A: “That sounds like a great plan.”

G: “I have found that a good place to park for free is near Rue Jeannette & Rue Lyon (often on Lyette). And then maybe meet at Parc Ranger at the end of Rue Lyon.”

S: “That works for me. If anyone needs a ride, we can leave from my place at 2:45pm.”

G: “Forecast for 3pm is a mix of sun and clouds. But a bit windy at 29km/hour (enhancing the chill a bit).”

Ag: “[I won’t make it] I’m in a spring-cleaning frenzy, have fun!”

What stands out here is how many small decisions had to be made before the run could happen at all. The plan shifted from Dorval to Parc René-Lévesque because it reduced the transport burden and accommodated a violin lesson. It was also shaped by a birthday dinner, a preference for free parking, offers of rides, and weather conditions that affected what to wear near the water. The difficulty was not a lack of goodwill. It was the problem of aligning time, energy, and obligations across several lives. This is where the limits and possibilities of consociation became especially clear. The Pacers’ Wednesday run created a predictable setting in which people could become familiar through repeated co-presence. Once some of those relations extended beyond the track, however, the structure no longer held the encounter in place. A separate run had to be actively assembled through messages, compromises, and small accommodations. In this sense, the relationship moved beyond the original setting, but it did not

do so automatically. It required practical coordination, and that coordination was shaped by the ordinary constraints of work, care, transport, weather, and fatigue.

The SAGA thread helps clarify what Dyck (2002) means by consociation. Dyck argues that people build relationships “in slices of time” even when they have multiple competing responsibilities (p. 107). The thread makes this visible because the run depended on a chain of incremental accommodations rather than a single shared availability. Jack sometimes attempted to schedule informal runs outside the weekly Wednesday practice more generally. These required significantly more negotiation because people’s schedules rarely aligned. Messages such as “I might be able to make it, depends on the kids’ soccer,” or “Only if we run early—I’m working after,” accumulated until the plan eventually collapsed (Fieldnotes, August, 2023). Regular Wednesday runs succeeded precisely because they occurred in a fixed time and place. Anything outside that structure required more negotiation than most runners could sustain. Here again, the issue was not simply willingness, but the ordinary problem of aligning time and energy across multiple lives.

The Pacers’ sociability developed through a loose repertoire of recognitions, shared pacing, and occasional conversations. Runners often congratulated one another after a difficult interval or shared short reflections on how their bodies felt that evening. These exchanges did not deepen into friendship for most participants, but they created modest forms of connection that endured because they were repeatable. Familiar faces, brief check-ins, and small acknowledgements accumulated across weeks. Taken together, the Pacers demonstrated how voluntary associations can create opportunities for consociation even when participation remains episodic and uneven. The track made strangers recognizable. Over time, it also made some strangers knowable, not through an expectation of intimacy, but through repeated co-presence

and shared effort. Participation could remain minimal, expand modestly, or occasionally extend beyond the track, depending on what runners were able and willing to sustain. I turn now to The NDG Baking Network, where sociability was sustained through interdependent labour and coordination at a distance.

### ***The NDG Baking Network***

The NDG Baking Network offers another example of voluntary association in NDG, but one organized through dispersed labour rather than shared bodily co-presence. As with the Pacers, involvement was uneven. Some volunteers contributed only sporadically. Others participated more consistently but remained limited to the tasks they could reliably manage. A smaller group became more regularly involved in the project's weekly rhythm. In this sense, the Baking Network extends the broader argument of this chapter: even modest and highly delimited collective activities can generate forms of sociability, but those forms remain contingent on people's motivations, life conditions, and levels of commitment. What the running track concentrated into an hour of shared time, the Baking Network stretched across the week through small tasks fitted around other obligations. What follows draws on my conversations with Gloria, fieldnotes from porch drop-offs, and posts from the group's Facebook page to trace how coordination and recognition were sustained week by week.

### ***Organizing Care at a Distance***

Gloria's role in The NDG Baking Network was not only administrative. It drew on a longer practice of moving through NDG, volunteering, and making herself available to everyday encounters. I met Gloria at the public library one winter afternoon, a place she visited whenever her schedule allowed. She was seventy-three, fluent in both English and French, and had been

living in NDG since 2000. Before that, she had grown up in Mile End and later worked for many years as a homeopath. She carried herself with a mix of reserve and intensity.

When we spoke, she described her relationship to NDG as something developed through daily walking and through routes she chose depending on what she felt able to encounter that day. “There are areas that are more social than other areas,” she explained. “There are areas that are more wooded and treelike... It depends on what I feel like encountering.” She liked “neat places,” as she put it, including benches at small pocket parks, courtyard squares she discovered behind buildings, and the chairs that the borough placed seasonally along Sherbrooke Street. She noticed people, but she also attended to the mood of a place and to the small atmospheric shifts that changed how a street or gathering felt. She also described herself as someone who became “intensely social” when out on the street.

Her description of “relational intelligence” clarified how she moved through NDG and how she handled everyday encounters. She said it meant she could talk to anyone and stay attuned in ways that made encounters manageable and sometimes meaningful. Even something as simple as letting her hair go white created new recognitions. “All the white-haired people started smiling at me,” she remarked. “Just because my hair went white” (Interview with Gloria, NDG public library, January, 2023). These small recognitions became part of how she moved through the area. They shaped the routes she took, the pauses she made, and the ways the area seemed to respond to her presence. She was also clear-eyed about her own privilege as a white, bilingual, educated woman. She said this gave her choices and a sense of security that allowed her to move widely and sustain conversations with strangers. In practice, this made her widely recognizable among residents even if most people, as she put it, “only half-knew” her.



It was this grounded familiarity with people and places that positioned her to take over the volunteer project that became The NDG Baking Network. Her confidence in her ability to “connect regardless of who they are” shaped how she organized the work and how she kept it going over time. The Baking Network began abruptly in March 2020. During the first weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, another NDG resident who had been coordinating weekly donations of baked goods for an Indigenous-run drop-in centre downtown broke her wrist and announced she needed to pause the project. Gloria recalled writing to her that same day: “It doesn’t have to stop. I’ll take it over. I know how to do this” (Interview with Gloria, NDG public library, January, 2023). She made that decision because she could not stand the idea of deliveries being interrupted at a moment when the centre was overwhelmed. Those early weeks established the practical and moral terms that guided the project. Gloria said she built it “on kindness and compassion,” meaning that interactions with volunteers had to be handled with care because the project depended on unpaid labour and uneven capacities. She also explained that she could only sustain this one initiative because she was already caring for her ninety-six-year-old mother at the time. She could not take on additional collective responsibilities, but she could maintain this one circuit.

Dyck’s (2002) account of restricted forms of community-making is especially helpful here. He argues that relationships may be “relatively narrowly circumscribed in time and space and decidedly partial or situational in content, and yet highly salient as means of affiliation” (p. 107). This is directly applicable to The NDG Baking Network because the group depended on small, regular inputs of labour from people who knew one another only distantly or not at all, yet whose participation generated a fragile but enduring circuit of care. Gloria’s role also helps specify the connective labour through which that circuit was sustained. Wise and Velayutham’s

(2009) notion of the “transversal enabler” draws attention to people who help foster and broker relationships across difference through ordinary acts of mediation. Gloria’s role in The NDG Baking Network was not identical to the face-to-face settings Wise and Velayutham describe, but it involved a similar kind of work. She created the conditions through which people with different capacities, schedules, and social positions could contribute to the same project.

The work held together through a steady but fragile web of small tasks. Baking had to be done each week. Food needed to be nut-free. Containers had to be chosen so squirrels could not get into them. Drop-off times had to be coordinated around work and childcare. Drivers had to be found for Tuesday and Friday mornings. Weather sometimes required rerouting or delaying deliveries. Beyond those routine tasks, Gloria also did substantial organizing offline. She visited schools to ask teachers whether classes could take on baking as a service project. She contacted local bakeries to arrange weekly donations and phoned in the evenings to confirm quantities and pickup times. There were nights when she crossed the area to collect leftover loaves from a participating bakery. She also maintained relationships with the homeowners who offered their porches as drop-off sites. These details make clear that the system did not run automatically. It depended on Gloria’s availability and judgment, and on her willingness to keep re-aligning people and things as the situation changed. This is what Wise and Noble (2016) describe as the “improvised labour” that sustains convivial practice in everyday settings (426). In the Baking Network, that labour appeared in the weekly need to repair the plan as capacities shifted.

### ***Coordination, Recognition, and Small Infrastructures***

Much of the coordination unfolded through a private Facebook group moderated by Gloria. She organized weekly baking requests, coordinated pickups, and managed distribution sites. Unlike the Pacers, whose sociability emerged through shared bodily co-presence, the Baking Network

generated affiliation through distributed labour: baking, packaging, driving, and online messaging. Wise and Velayutham's (2009) emphasis on quotidian recognition helps here because many interactions took the form of brief acknowledgements, encouragement, and expressions of gratitude. These messages created small recognitions that accumulated over time and helped the project feel workable. Gloria's weekly posts appeared with consistent warmth and clarity, often written late at night, because that was when she could plan, list what was needed, and respond to comments. As she explained, "I'm up until midnight matching who bakes what, who drops where, and what's missing. And in the morning, I'm picking up from two bakeries before work" (Interview with Gloria, NDG public library, January, 2023). Several excerpts convey the tone of the weekly process, while also showing how much coordination was needed and how easily the plan could shift:

**Excerpt 1 (December 12, 2023)** (NDG Baking Network Facebook post, December, 2023)

"The bin will be out for 1:30 p.m. Thanks for baking.

It doesn't seem to matter how many times I am downtown at the centre.... I am always struck by the people outside, and the numbers of people outside.

I know that what we bring has become something the team can count on to help them feed so many."

Here, practical instruction sits alongside a reminder of ongoing need.

**Excerpt 2 (January 6, 2024)** (NDG Baking Network Facebook post, January, 2024)

"Thanks to everyone who baked this week.

Some people froze their baking due to last-minute drop off changes.

David is heading to pick up the baking from the schools — and — I am heading to — and — schools.

If anyone can help with a Tuesday or Friday morning pickup and drive, please let me know.

Next week, the — baking pickup will be donated to the bake sale at the music concert. All proceeds will go to the shelter."

This excerpt shows rescheduling, coordination with schools, and the ongoing practice of thanking people as part of keeping the rhythm intact.

**Excerpt 3 (February 7, 2024)** (NDG Baking Network Facebook post, February, 2024)

"Thanks again for contributing. We seem to manage in all types of weather — thankfully — because the drop-in centre is feeding about 800 people a day.

They are down to the wire. They need funding to stay open.  
They have pulled through in the past but must be exhausted.”  
Here, she links volunteer persistence to the precariousness of the centre, keeping purpose close to practice.

**Excerpt 4 (April 8, 2024)** (NDG Baking Network Facebook post, April, 2024)

“Thanks to all of us for participating in this week’s delivery.

Bruce drove twice this week.

Jack and Maureen managed bakery pickups twice.

The 4861 crew continue to host.

Through all Canadian weather, we manage to bake.

For the next three weeks, we have schools contributing.

This has been, and continues to be, a meaningful engagement for me, and I appreciate all of you.”

This excerpt shows how distributed labour was made visible through naming, and how recognition was used to hold together a collective that depended on uneven contributions. Shorter posts also carried the emotional and practical texture of the work (NDG Baking Network Facebook posts, 2023–2024):

“Hi everyone We have 20 families this week. Can anyone bake muffins or banana loaves?”

“Thank you SO much to everyone who baked last week... Seriously, you all make such a difference.”

“Running behind this week—if anyone can add one more dozen, I’d be grateful. I’ll be doing pick-ups Thursday night.”

“Wow you guys!! We already have 15 dozen muffins pledged. Incredible.”

These messages show how encouragement and responsiveness were not “extra” to the logistics. They were part of the work because they acknowledged effort while also keeping the weekly plan moving. Amit’s (2010) discussion of joint commitment clarifies why this ongoing adjustment was necessary. As she writes, “when you depend on other people to effect an enterprise... the disagreements or divergences amongst you become all the more crucial and unavoidable because they need to be taken into account and dealt with in some way in order to effect or sustain the joint commitment” (Amit 2010: 359). In The NDG Baking Network, this was visible in the weekly need to reassign tasks, accommodate last-minute changes, and respond to gaps in baking or driving. Amit adds that one can “politely ignore disagreements” with people one does not depend on, but that it is harder to be blasé about divides with collaborators (59).

That observation captures why Gloria's ongoing negotiation, reassurance, and recalibration were not optional. They were part of what made the project possible in practice. It also aligns with Amit's broader point that joint commitments do not automatically generate consensus or collegiality (360). Reliance brings divergence to the surface, and the collective holds only if someone does the work of managing it.

### ***The Porch Drop-off and the Work of Coordination***

The porch drop-off was one of the small infrastructures of coordination that made this dependence workable. I use the term small infrastructure here to name the modest arrangements that made the Baking Network possible week after week. Care and sociability were not only emotional or interpersonal. They were also held together through material, digital, and logistical supports: Facebook posts, porch drop-offs, containers, labels, pickup windows, and driving routes. I do not treat the porch as the centre of the group's relational life, but as a practical arrangement that supported coordination and made distributed labour briefly visible. It served as a convergence point where many small contributions were gathered and aligned with need, so that the group's reliance on one another could take an organized form. Several evenings each week, containers were arranged and marked with names and quantities. The porch light created a small pool of brightness that made the space feel ordered and cared for, even when the work itself was repetitive and quiet (Fieldnotes, Porch drop-off, September, 2023). Depending on the season, extra bins were also placed out—winter clothing, hand warmers, and other items that travelled alongside the baking and responded to the same ongoing need (Fieldnotes, Porch drop-off, November, 2023). Bakers sometimes left small treats for one another as well, gestures that did not add efficiency but did add morale and a sense of shared attentiveness. Some posted a photo of two large paper bags full of goods along with their weekly baking donation and a note

like the following: “My drop-off this morning which included (2 bags on the left) a hefty supply of hand-knit hats from Beth, a community supporter at large. Special thanks to Beth and everyone who finds the time and resources to support the shelter.”

The Facebook group helped hold this coordination together by turning individual errands into a shared schedule and by giving members a clear sense of what was needed, where, and when. Posts like the following did not simply “announce” information. They asked members to plan around a narrow pickup window, bring the right containers, and signal their intentions so that the quantity could be managed. In other words, coordination depended on effort: someone had to source the item, store it, set out the bin and scoop, write the instructions, and then rely on others to follow them closely so the process would not unravel.

**Marla, Facebook post:**

Good early evening. Tonight's news involves cocoa!

On TUESDAY (November 19).

Between 9:30am - 3pm

At [----]

(Liz's place)

You will be able to come and take cocoa powder from a large 50lb bag that is in a closed bin.

The bin will be located on the driveway.

The powder can disperse easily, so please try to keep it in the bin and not on the driveway. There will be a large spoon provided to do the scooping. For now, this opportunity is exclusive to us [the Bakers].

If your schedule does not allow you to get there on Tuesday, please ask somebody to get your cocoa for you.

There will be no Distribution after 3pm.

Please sign on saying you will be coming so I get a sense of how much we will use of this generous quantity.

Thanks.

At the porch, this labour became visible in small, careful actions. Gloria and another volunteer often arrived in the evening and loaded goods into her car while checking labels against a list. They moved items to make space for baking that would be picked up at the next stop, checked quantities, and made sure nothing was missing before the delivery chain continued

(Fieldnotes, Porch drop-off, October, 2023). The moment was brief, but the work that made it possible was not. It required attention to practical details, such as containers, quantities, and pickup windows. It also required the social maintenance that kept people willing to participate. The group's posts marked what counted as completion. Deliveries were recorded and thanked publicly, which acknowledged effort while also confirming that the chain of coordination had held.

**Gloria, Facebook post:**

This morning two carloads full of baking (ours and St. James School and Preston Academy), breads and croissants [local bakery], and generously donated socks, hats, & assorted warm clothing were delivered to the Indigenous-led drop-in center. Thanks to everyone. There was much appreciation expressed by the staff at the centre as they helped to unload the car.

Together, these porch exchanges and posts show how the undertaking relied on more than goodwill. It depended on ordinary acts of coordination: instructions followed closely, contributions made on time, and confirmations that the work had been received. This made dependence manageable, and it allowed the collective to come into view again, briefly, week after week.

Most participants did not gather in the same place at the same time. Apart from occasional greetings at a porch, people stayed connected through small acknowledgements: Facebook comments, emojis, quick thank-yous, photos of baked goods, and notes about who could cover a gap. Wise and Velayutham's (2009) emphasis on quotidian recognition helps here because these interactions were often minimal, yet they still registered effort. Over time, they accumulated into a shared sense that the project was active and that people were responding to one another. Participation shifted week to week. Some people baked consistently. Others stepped in only when they had extra time. Illness, work deadlines, and family responsibilities shaped who could contribute and when. This unevenness was not treated as a problem to be corrected,

because the group assumed that involvement depended on circumstance. Gloria often reassured members in precisely these terms, saying variations were expected and that people could contribute when they had the capacity (NDG Baking Network Facebook posts, 2023–2024).

The emotional tone of the group emerged through this mixture of purpose and constraint. Participants wrote that they were thinking about the people receiving the baked goods. Some said they involved their children in baking so that helping could become a shared household practice (NDG Baking Network Facebook posts, 2023–2024). Motivations varied, but they converged in a willingness to keep a small circuit of care moving. The weekly rhythm created predictability. Members learned when Gloria would post, when drop-offs tended to happen, and what counted as a contribution. Recognition also played an important role because it validated effort and gave limited participation a visible place in the undertaking. Replies such as “thanks for organizing” or “couldn’t do this without you” were small, but they helped keep the work going (NDG Baking Network Facebook posts, 2023–2024). Here, tone was not separate from the logistics. Acknowledgement and reassurance helped keep people responsive, especially because participation was always uneven.

Read alongside the Pacers, the NDG Baking Network shows a different route into consociation. Here, consociation is produced through interdependent tasks carried out at a distance, where people become mutually knowable through repeated contributions, brief acknowledgements, and the practical work of aligning timing, drop-offs, and pickups week by week. The Pacers made people recognizable through repeated co-presence in a shared public space. The Baking Network did something similar through timing, messaging, porch drop-offs, and the recurring visibility of small contributions. In both settings, affiliation remained partial



and uneven. Yet it could still become durable because it was sustained through practice rather than through claims of shared identity or deep familiarity.

Both cases also clarify something about the labour of keeping voluntary collectives going when the scaffolding is thin. In the Pacers, continuity depends on routine co-presence and on the practical work of maintaining a weekly meeting in a shared public park. That work includes organizing the workout, greeting newcomers, sustaining a rhythm, and negotiating competing uses of the track when friction emerges. In the NDG Baking Network, continuity depends on the ongoing coordination of dispersed tasks and on the tone of communication that makes people willing to keep contributing. It also depended on Gloria's organizing labour, especially her ability to keep track of donations and invite participation without demanding too much, even as contributors' availability shifted from week to week. In one setting, the work is concentrated into an hour of shared time. In the other, it is stretched across the week and carried through small acts that have to fit around other obligations. Taken together, the Pacers and the NDG Baking Network show how NDG's social life is made through small, provisional arrangements that do not guarantee connection but still make it possible. They also show that conviviality is not automatic. It has to be produced, sustained, and repaired. Participation could expand for some people and narrow for others, because involvement depended on what they could manage at a given moment. Conflict could also emerge when space, timing, or expectations became difficult to align. People withdrew when circumstances changed, not necessarily because the activity no longer mattered, but because the conditions that made participation possible had shifted. Yet even with these limits, both collectives created workable forms of sociability because they offered ways of being alongside others that were compatible with ordinary constraints of time, energy, and responsibility.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: NEIGHBOURING RELATIONS

In this chapter, I examine neighbouring relations as a key site for understanding the forms of social encounter that people experience as they go about their daily lives in NDG. As discussed earlier, I treat NDG as a lived locality shaped through everyday movement and the routes people use. It is not only a fixed geographic setting, but an environment made and understood through the pathways of daily life. I focus on informal neighbouring relations because they form a significant part of people's routines. The district of NDG, which we study in this work, just like the broader 'city', can be treated as a multilayered social environment in which "situations" unfold and can make and break aspects of conviviality as people engage in interaction (Radice 2022: 2). At the same time, these situations do not unfold on equal terms. Access to streets, sidewalks, parks, and other shared spaces is shaped by material arrangements and planning decisions so neighbourly encounters are also conditioned by the built and institutional organization of urban life (Vodicka and Rishbeth 2022). These encounters occur between next-door and nearby neighbours along street blocks, and they also take shape in semi-public settings around home. Homes and the 'micro-settings' around them matter for this chapter because they are where residents spend time and repeatedly come into view of one another (Kusenbach 2003, 2008). While modern urban life in large cities often emphasizes independence, very few individuals are entirely self-sufficient. Being near one another can therefore become a practical condition for everyday support, reciprocal care, and the ordinary work of coexisting with others. This chapter argues that neighbouring relations are not a stable or uniformly positive feature of local life but a contingent set of practices produced through proximity, repetition, and informal norms. These relations emerge unevenly, range in intensity, and require ongoing negotiation. People may exchange brief greetings over long periods without becoming close. They may also become involved in one another's lives through practical assistance or shared routines. At the

same time, neighbouring can generate tension or withdrawal when expectations are not shared. Neighbouring requires ongoing adjustment as people balance recognition and privacy in conditions of proximity.

The chapter develops this argument through a comparison between two forms of neighbouring. The first is routine neighbouring, which takes shape through everyday encounters in parochial spaces and is often improvised and uneven. The second is an annual block party, which depends on deliberate planning and collective coordination. By comparing routine neighbouring alongside the organized sociability of a block party, the chapter demonstrates how different degrees of planning, coordination, physical infrastructure and collective effort alter the forms that neighbouring can take within the same locality. The block party does not replace everyday neighbouring. Instead, it brings certain aspects of neighbouring into sharper view by concentrating interaction and making participation more explicit. To keep the analytic focus clear, this chapter distinguishes neighbouring relations from broader and more elastic uses of the term neighbourhood. Neighbourhood is commonly used to describe the area surrounding one's home, but it often functions as a diffuse idea rather than a precise object of analysis. It can refer to an administrative unit, a sense of belonging, or a loosely defined area of familiarity. In this chapter, NDG provides the locality within which neighbouring relations unfold. The analysis stays with neighbouring as the lived relation that develops among people who live near one another and encounter each other through routine movement and shared boundaries.

Following Lofland's (1998) distinction between private, public, and parochial realms, I use parochial here to name an interactional register of local familiarity that is neither private nor fully public. It refers to forms of locally embedded familiarity among people who live close enough to become practically relevant in everyday life without necessarily becoming intimates.

Private life is organized through intimate ties and obligations, whereas public life is organized through relations among strangers and more impersonal norms. Parochial space sits between these two orders. It is neither intimate nor anonymous. It is made up of routine familiarity and local attentiveness that can accumulate through repeated co-presence, even when people prefer to keep relations limited. In these spaces, people can acknowledge one another without committing to more. Over time, repeated co-presence can also generate small, often unspoken expectations about what counts as appropriate engagement. Although modest in scope, these expectations shape when to keep distance and when, if at all, to offer assistance. Attending closely to these settings helps clarify how neighbouring takes shape through proximity and repeated encounters, rather than through shared identity or formally declared affiliation.

The chapter is organized in two parts. The first examines neighbouring relations as they unfold through everyday encounters in parochial spaces within the locality. It begins with *Everyday Reciprocity*, focusing on small exchanges that help people live alongside one another. It then turns to *Proactive Intervention and Informal Vigilance*, focusing on moments when neighbours monitor situations and judge whether to intervene. It also examines how digital platforms enter local relations by extending contact and organizing visibility. *Deepened Neighbour Relations* considers cases in which ongoing contact becomes more involved over time. *Trust and Asking Favours* provides an examination of how people test the limits of what they feel able to ask for and what they feel responsible for offering. *Situational or Emergency Neighbouring* focuses on short-term obligations that arise in specific moments, even when relations are otherwise limited. *Limits, Tensions, and Breakdowns in Neighbouring Relations* examines disagreement and conflict, including a confrontation surrounding a Diwali celebration. The second part of the chapter focuses on the block party as a distinct but related form of

neighbouring. Set alongside routine neighbouring, the block party shows how coordinated sociability can intensify co-presence while leaving participation partial and uneven.

### ***Conceptualizing Neighbouring Relations***

Neighbouring relations unfold in semi-public settings that gather around home: along sidewalks, on front steps, in shared driveways, and at front-yard edges. Kusenbach (2006) treats parochial spaces as territories governed by informal but recognizable rules for engaging with others (282). Over time, these rules can create expectations about what kind of acknowledgement is appropriate and how much contact feels welcome. They matter as well for deciding when help is appropriate and when stepping in would be out of place. Kusenbach (2006) also reminds us that much of everyday social life happens in such shared settings. She notes that people routinely participate in forms of communal engagement with their neighbours, coworkers, and acquaintances, and that “most of our life outside the home takes place in communal territories such as neighbourhood street, workplaces, coffee shops and bars” (Kusenbach 2006: 280). For my purposes, what matters in this formulation is not the label “neighbourhood street” but the point that everyday life is routinely lived in spaces that are neither fully private nor fully public. Moreover, neighbouring can produce a shared local world that sits between private life and public anonymity, because it is held together through the informal norms people come to rely on. Neighbouring relations also develop across a spectrum of interactional intensity. Kusenbach (2006) argues that relations among neighbours vary in “frequency, degree of knowledge, and emotional commitment” (280). Oftentimes, some neighbours will exchange brief greetings and little else. Others will share tools and information including small responsibilities around their respective properties. In some cases, relations deepen into friendships although this remains less common than the maintenance of partial and uneven ties. Lofland’s (1998) discussion of

“relational fluidity” is helpful here because it captures how relations can shift between anonymity and familiarity depending on context. Neighbouring is therefore not defined by the depth of the tie. It is defined by the presence of interaction under conditions of proximity and by the need to manage that proximity in ways that remain workable.

Proximity plays a foundational role in these relations. Ruonavaara (2021, 2022) notes that neighbours are, at the most basic level, “persons living at a closer distance to us than other people, whatever that distance may be” (Ruonavaara 2021: 3). This closeness entails local expectations about how one should behave, including the expectation that when people live close to us we “...behave in a manner that is expected of neighbours locally” (Ruonavaara 2021: 11). Proximity also creates opportunities for cooperation and for conflict. Shared space does not guarantee harmony. It creates a social and material context in which relations have to be managed, because people are close enough to help and also close enough to irritate, and because avoidance can be difficult to sustain over long periods. At the same time, I do not treat “difference” here as a fixed attribute that determines in advance what kinds of neighbour relations are possible. In these everyday settings, difference often shows up through the practical work of judging what counts as acceptable conduct, whose noise is tolerable, what is read as ordinary, and what is marked as out of place. This framing helps carry the chapter’s broader argument by showing how people handle shared practice in concrete situations. It directs analysis toward small accommodations and forms of restraint, including moments of repair, rather than toward stable categories of identity or a settled ethos of “diversity.” The Diwali vignette later in the chapter brings these neighbourly expectations into especially sharp view. A brief driveway celebration became the occasion for a confrontation. In that moment, an ordinary cultural practice was no longer treated as part of everyday street life, but as something that exceeded

local expectations about what properly belonged there. The episode shows how neighbouring relations can be made workable again through gestures of repair, while the assumptions through which difference was judged remain unresolved.

At the same time, proximity is not only a material condition. It is also something people interpret and narrate as part of how they orient themselves in the locality around home. People come to recognize familiar faces along their regular routes, and they may take this familiarity as a sign that a place feels livable or welcoming. Kusenbach (2008) notes that people often feel a sense of familiarity within the area they can easily walk around, while areas beyond that tend to feel more anonymous or unknown. Walking can also induce spontaneous forms of interaction, because it creates repeated chances for small acknowledgements and for what she calls “friendly recognition.” One of my interlocutors, Julia, described this in relation to her regular walk from home to the local library. For her, repeated visibility mattered because it made the area feel more socially understandable: “It makes you feel part of the neighbourhood when you have these familiar points, you know you’ll walk into the space, and you’ll see the same faces you see every time” (Julia, Fieldnotes, March 2021).

A number of interactional concepts help to clarify what is happening in the ethnographic sections that follow. As explained in the introduction to this thesis, I employ Goffman’s (1963) term “civil inattention” to describe a practice in which people acknowledge one another’s presence without opening interaction further. Kusenbach (2006) uses the concept of “friendly recognition” to describe minimal but intentional gestures such as nods or greetings that acknowledge familiarity without implying deeper involvement. These forms of interaction matter in neighbouring relations because they allow familiarity to build without requiring much of either person. A nod or brief greeting can signal recognition without requiring a longer

conversation or a closer relationship. This is one way in which residents keep everyday contact workable while also protecting one's privacy.

In writing about neighbouring, it is also necessary to be careful with the term stranger, because it is used in contrasting ways across the literature. In traditional sociological and philosophical work, the Stranger is often treated as a figure of otherness, marked as out of place and tied to questions of boundary-making and belonging (Ahmed 2000; Simmel 1950, 1971). By contrast, studies of everyday urban interaction use terms such as familiar stranger to describe people one recognizes through repeated encounters, even when one knows little about them personally (Felder 2020; Kusenbach 2006; Ye 2016). Ye's (2016) account is useful here because it treats the familiar stranger as an ambivalent relation rather than a simple movement from anonymity toward belonging. Familiar strangers are personally unknown, but they are not socially meaningless. They become recognizable through repeated co-presence, shared routes, and the ordinary situations in which people learn how much contact is expected, welcome, or best withheld. This makes the concept especially useful for thinking about neighbouring relations, where familiarity can produce ease and local legibility, but also irritation, apprehension, distance, and uncertainty. As Ye argues, the familiar stranger carries "a politics of diversity that emphasises respect for distance rather than cohesion" (2016: 79). In the ethnographic material that follows, when I describe people who are repeatedly encountered along shared routes, what is at issue is not strangerhood as a marker of exclusion, nor familiarity as a sign of intimacy. It is the more ambivalent recognition that develops when people become part of one another's ordinary surroundings while remaining only partially known.

Repeated recognition, then, does not resolve the ambivalence of these relations. It may make another person familiar but it does not determine whether contact will be welcomed,



avoided, reciprocated, or allowed to pass without comment. Kusenbach (2006) treats neighbourly distance as a practical accomplishment shaped by residents' ongoing judgements about what kinds of contact are welcome and what begins to feel intrusive. She also notes that "any deeper involvement between locals quickly ends or never even develops when friendly recognition is not given or reciprocated" (Kusenbach 2006: 291). This framing sets up the chapter's turn to everyday reciprocity as one ordinary way neighbouring relations are enacted and maintained.

### ***Everyday Reciprocity***

As discussed earlier, Kusenbach (2006) employs the term 'parochial helpfulness' to denote forms of neighbourly support that are not grounded in intimacy, yet still signal recognition, emerging obligations, and a willingness to contribute to another person's well-being (282). These relations grow out of proximity and repetition rather than friendship and they develop through practical acts that allow people to live alongside one another in workable ways. The following cases show how everyday reciprocity takes shape through small, cumulative exchanges that remain anchored in neighbouring roles, even as they acquire warmth and trust over time.

Jeanette, my elderly francophone neighbour in her late eighties, illustrates this clearly. Our relationship began with brief greetings when my family and I first moved into the next door house and gradually grew into a multi-year pattern of mutual support. Because she was dealing with some physical limitations, we helped her with lawn mowing, hedge trimming, and small repairs, and later assisted her with her ailing husband when she lacked external support. Over time, this routine assistance expanded to include us sharing parts of her garden, exchanging produce, and caring for her home during emergencies. Although our relationship involves regular contact and familiarity, it is not a friendship in the conventional sense. Rather, it exemplifies a neighbouring relation grounded in proximity and repeated interaction, where trust and

responsibility developed through our side-by-side living arrangements. A similar dynamic appeared in Sarah's long-standing relationship with her next-door neighbour. What began as casual greetings evolved over the years into small favours such as house-sitting and watering flowers, and later into a more involved commitment: taking care of the neighbour's cat when the family travels. This arrangement required a higher level of trust and responsibility from both sides. They exchanged keys, Sarah entered the neighbour's home, fed the cat, and sometimes brought the cat to her own house so it had company during the day. Their children attended the same school, which added another layer of recognition and practical coordination over time. There is also reciprocity. The neighbour looked after Sarah's home when Sarah's family was away and kept a key to Sarah's place as well. Sarah even bought a cat bed and toys, which signaled how this care relationship can take on its own small infrastructure over time. That is, it begins to rely on small objects, routines, and handoffs that make the care practical and repeatable rather than occasional. At the same time, despite the level of trust involved, this relationship remained distinct from a close friendship. They do not regularly socialize or invite each other over for dinner. The tie stayed anchored in mutual responsibility and practical care that comes from living side by side, rather than shared leisure or emotional intimacy. Reciprocity also appeared through modest acts of gift-giving, which Wise and Velayutham identify as everyday practices that foster connection without requiring familiarity or shared identity (Wise and Velayutham, 2009).

Diana, a resident and board member of a housing cooperative in Upper Lachine, shared an anecdote about Stella, a new tenant who had recently moved into the co-op,

And then these new folks moved in. And one of the first thing was like these gifts and I thought like, that's a bit over the top, there was a whole gift basket, and it was costly too because she put so many different things in it...I was like woah...and she was very disarming, and it really opened the door with other people too. The gift basket was a

thank-you for the work on the board of directors and I know that the board of directors is a point of contention there are people who absolutely refuse to be on the board and the same people keep cycling through the board and on the one hand you don't want to like... its healthier when there is a mix. So, beyond the board a lot of people don't want to be on the board of directors because you get all the shit. If things don't go well, it's your fault. If there's a grievance with another neighbour and you can't figure out how to fix it, you're being neglectful. You get the complaint of why isn't this done yet? It's a thankless task to be on the board of directors, and it took everybody off guard that someone would give gift baskets to thank you for it. (Fieldnotes, August, 2024)

The unexpected gift-giving played an important role in recognizing the labour that Diana and her fellow board members routinely perform, much of which is ordinarily taken for granted or met with complaint. Stella's gesture worked as an act of neighbourliness that opened social relations within the cooperative, signaling gratitude, recognition, and an intention to engage local life proactively. Diana described the gift as disarming precisely because it acknowledged a form of work that is usually invisible. This vignette also resonates with Wise's discussion of gratitude as a moral force in everyday urban encounters. Drawing on Simmel's (1950) notion of gratitude as the "moral memory of humankind," Wise (2009: 183) argues that modest acts of care or recognition can become meaningful because they interrupt experiences of anonymity or social indifference that often accompany urban living. As Wise posits, "inhabitants do not need to know their neighbours intimately or even wish to become friends, but gestures of care and recognition can create a feeling of connection to the diverse people that share the space" (Wise, 2009: 183). Stella's gift basket worked in this way. It did not create closeness. Instead, it marked a contribution and asked, quietly, what neighbours owe one another.

Rose's daily route through NDG extends this notion of reciprocity beyond adjacent residences. Rose was an elderly Black woman who collected bottles throughout the area and had become well known to residents along her route. She had lived in NDG for over thirty years and is now eighty-one. She pushed a shopping cart in all kinds of weather and moved through a

regular circuit that tracked the recycling pick-up days of particular streets. Because she appeared in the same places at familiar times, residents along her route came to recognize her and would often keep bottles aside, waiting for her to arrive, or drop them off at her home to make the work easier. Although she was not a neighbour in the narrow sense of next-door proximity, her regular passage through these spaces had produced a loose cluster of relations grounded in routine visibility and in small, repeated gestures of assistance. These gestures reflected a shared moral sensibility that grew out of her ongoing presence and an awareness of her labour and circumstances. Rose's case broadened what can count as neighbouring because these relations are not organized around shared property lines. Instead, they developed along the routes she walked, the rhythms of recycling days, and the practical impulse of residents to support her work and her informal redistribution of food. She often frequented housing areas adjacent to the commercial corridor around Monkland and Somerled, and over time she has built a dispersed network of recognition and support across these everyday circuits. Once, I sat with her in front of a local bakery and she told me about another part of her routine. She picked up leftover bread and baked goods from local bakeries at the end of the day and distributed them to people in need in the area. The bakery donated what had not been sold, and she filled her cart and planned out where she would take it. Sometimes she brought the baked goods to the local Food Bank for others in need. She told me that she collected the bottles to help pay her rent. She is originally from Jamaica and described herself as a Christian. By moving along a stable route, she became an anchoring figure whose presence elicited repeated gestures of assistance that accumulated into a dispersed but durable network of recognition and support. Taken together, these cases show that parochial helpfulness forms an important layer of neighbouring relations. It reflects the everyday interdependence that develops when people live in proximity and rely on one another

for small, practical forms of support. They rely on small, repeated acts of recognition that make limited forms of support feel workable without requiring a deeper familiarity. Yet over time, they contribute to a moral economy of reciprocity that helps stabilize local social life.

Kusenbach (2006) emphasizes that everyday places have specific qualities that shape how people encounter one another. In these settings, relations among neighbours span a broad range, moving along a continuum of “frequency, degree of knowledge, and emotional commitment” (2006: 280). Neighbouring does not occur in abstraction. It unfolds through repeated encounters in material environments such as sidewalks, porches, laneways, gardens, bus stops, and shared property lines. These settings bring people into relation in ways that require negotiation and accommodation as part of ordinary routine. This place-based emphasis aligns with Nigel Thrift’s (2004a) argument that everyday environments actively “summon life” by shaping the rhythms and atmospheres through which people come into relation. Here, that insight helps clarify that neighbouring relations are not only a matter of intention or disposition. They also develop through the practical and affective conditions of the settings in which proximity is lived.

A feeling of “ease”, as I use the term here, is not a stable disposition that individuals carry with them. It is something people accomplish together in ordinary interaction (Goffman 1963, 1967). When it holds, it can *engender* a particular disposition in the moment: a small opening up, a readiness to acknowledge the other person or to let an exchange continue without strain. In this sense, ease is an ethical atmosphere of everyday life, one that makes certain forms of attentiveness and reciprocity more likely. Neighbouring relations do not emerge solely because individuals choose to interact. They also emerge because local settings make certain encounters more likely, and sometimes more consequential. Read together, Kusenbach and Thrift

suggest that everyday reciprocity is not simply a matter of goodwill or personal inclination. It is an embodied and situated process that depends on routine and on the spatial conditions that make repeated encounter possible.

***Proactive Intervention and Informal Vigilance: Digital and local relations***

A particular feature of neighbouring in Montréal is its seasonal rhythm. Along residential streets, long winters change what people have to do and what feels reasonable to help with. Snow and ice produce practical demands that are difficult to ignore, and they can draw neighbours into one another's routines even when relationships are otherwise minimal. Proactive intervention can take the form of shovelling laneways and driveways, clearing a path for an elderly neighbour, or stepping in when someone is struggling with snow removal to free a stuck vehicle. Winter also brings its own informal etiquette, including expectations around spaces that have already been shovelled out and the question of who is entitled to park there. These moments can generate help, but they can also generate resentment, because they make effort visible and invite disagreement about what others "should" do.

These same dynamics often surface through mundane tensions that arise from shared space and compressed proximity. Parking is one example. Vehicles parked too close to driveways can quickly become a flashpoint because they block access and make everyday logistics harder. In these situations, neighbours often engage in informal surveillance: they notice patterns, track repeat offenders, and respond with handwritten notes placed on windshields. This is usually framed less as policing than as a practical way of protecting shared space and making expectations about everyday conduct visible to others. Increasingly, residents also photograph vehicles and post images in local social media groups as a form of public calling-out. These posts do not simply express individual frustration. They also work as warnings, and they invite

other residents to weigh in on what counts as reasonable behaviour, what counts as inconsiderate, and what responses are justified. Noise complaints operate similarly, especially where residential housing sits close to parks or event corridors. In local online threads, recurring complaints include barking dogs, children playing loudly in residences, late-night gatherings, fireworks, and loud music linked to festivals or street events. What is striking in these exchanges is not only the substance of the complaint but the way digital platforms amplify judgement. Online, people can sanction behaviour more directly than they typically would face to face, because the interaction is less constrained by the politeness and restraint that often govern proximate co-presence. The result is that neighbouring can look more conflictual online than it does on the street, even though the same people may be maintaining workable relations in everyday encounters. In this sense, digital spaces do not replace neighbouring; they reshape its visibility and shift how norms get argued over and enforced.

The above examples help specify what proactive intervention and informal vigilance involve in practice. They show that intervening is not only about care or protection. It is also about the ongoing work of interpreting situations. The slow, ordinary work of making sense of what is happening and deciding whether stepping in will be taken as a reasonable response, rather than overstepping or intruding. Proximity generates obligations and expectations, but those obligations do not guarantee agreement. They have to be managed, and they can just as easily become a site of conflict as a site of helpful support.

### ***Deepened Neighbour Relations***

Some neighbouring relations in NDG intensify over time and evolve into what Kusenbach (2008) describes as *micro-settings*: the “small niches of community that sometimes flourish within subsections of urban street blocks,” where adjacent households share a sense of

connection, engage in patterned interactions, and sometimes participate in collective events (232). These small clusters emerge because proximity creates repeated opportunities for engagement, but they also depend on particular dispositions—sociability, openness, and a willingness to initiate contact—that help sustain interaction over time. Built form matters here as well, not as a backdrop, but as an arrangement that makes certain kinds of everyday visibility and approachability easier to sustain. Darius’s account makes this combination of disposition and setting especially clear. Before moving to his current street, he lived nearby on a block where, in his words, “people were perfectly fine, but they weren’t interested in knowing each other.” He framed this not only as a matter of temperament but as something shaped by housing layout and the distance between houses and sidewalks, which limited casual openings for interaction. By contrast, his current street with more front-yard activity and a more permeable threshold between house and sidewalk supported a different rhythm of recognition and sociability. In this sense, the deepening of neighbour relations cannot be reduced to individual inclination alone. It is also supported (or constrained) by the affordances of the street and by the orientations of those who share it.

We met in front of his house one afternoon in the summer while he was picking cherries from a tree at the edge of his property. He was on a twelve-foot ladder near the sidewalk, and he asked me to help him pick cherries while we talked. Our location—partly on the sidewalk—combined with the activity itself, generated a sequence of interactions with passersby. In a short span of time, several people stopped to engage in brief exchanges, some of whom Darius knew well and others whom he recognized more loosely. As we picked cherries, a neighbour passed by and yelled up to Darius, “Is that going to be cherry pie?” He smiled and called back, “Not cherry pie but cherry compôte...this is going to be on your ice cream soon!” I asked him whether these



were his close-by neighbours that we had just spoken with or if they live further, a few doors down. He answered: “Others I have some acquaintances, like you’ve seen and we’ll hug each other on the street. And we kind of proximately know who’s-who and where we live but we don’t really hang out a lot” (Fieldnotes, August, 2024).

Darius is a clear example of what Felder (2020) calls a “socializer”: someone inclined toward sociability, who is comfortable initiating contact and who becomes, over time, a repository of local information that circulates through the block. Socializers often purposefully develop ties with neighbours. They take time to chat. They organize gatherings when the occasion comes up. They are quick to offer help, and they are also comfortable requesting it when needed. In Darius’s case, this disposition is visible in his comfort with knocking on doors, inviting neighbours over, and treating the porch as a space where contact can occur without heavy formality. One of Darius’s closest ties developed with his next-door neighbour, Max. Early on, he mostly knew him through seasonal routines such as seeing him out shovelling in the winter and he described a small shift when spring arrived: “When Spring came around that’s when things like suddenly changed. I remember being out in front and throughout the winter I had seen the kids in and out of that household, and I remember thinking they have kids our age too, we should talk” (Fieldnotes, August 2024). Over time, the relationship deepened through exchanged favours and small, practical tasks around the outside of their respective houses. They swapped tools, shared expertise, and put in hours on odd jobs—what Kusenbach (2008) calls “extended helpfulness.” Darius described how Max contributed days of work to help with outdoor construction projects,

Max, he’s a very quiet, ‘to himself’ person but incredibly helpful and kind person...he put in...oh I don’t how many days, to help me build my deck in the back, build the stone path that you see here. He offered to help me [because], he said he had done his own front porch and he had all this equipment and he said he could help. I think that same

summer we did my fence, we also had these massive shrubs between myself and with my other neighbour, and we had those removed as well. (Fieldnotes, August, 2024)

Here, trust is built less through intimate disclosure than through reliability: showing up, contributing labour, and following through. These are neighbouring relations that become friend-like in practice, but they remain grounded in the shared infrastructure of living close by and in the repeated opportunities for involvement that this proximity creates. Darius also described how, for him, deepened neighbour relations involve a deliberate willingness to risk approach. By this he meant being prepared to initiate contact, to “impose” oneself slightly by knocking on a door, starting a conversation, or asking for help, even when the outcome is uncertain and the gesture might not be reciprocated. In reflecting on differences between street blocks, he said,

We met a couple of good people [when we lived] on Maple Boulevard, some of the neighbours were nice [but] people...keep a lot to themselves...I think the culture of keeping to yourself is the more prominent thing. Not the culture of being in somebody's face like that...I was... I mean... actually I think it's important to impose yourself on people. That's the thing, like when you do that, you are effectively making yourself vulnerable and making another person feel comfortable and even good—sort of, ...I dunno if it's... you can say it's taking care of you, or being involved with you somehow? I think that's how you create social bonds. So like, I've had comfort going to at times, going to Max and Francine's house and being like I'm exhausted, can I NOT cook tonight? Do you have something, can I just eat here? They're like sure, yeah, come on in, ...here's stuff and whatever. And many times, that I invite them over and be like guys don't cook tonight, just come over. (Fieldnotes, August, 2024)

In his account, ordinary needs become the point where neighbourliness starts to matter more. Being tired, running out of food, or not wanting to cook can become a reason to ask for help or to accept an invitation. That kind of request would feel out of place between people who only exchange greetings. It becomes possible only after repeated contact has made the relationship feel safe enough to carry a small ask without embarrassment or worry about overstepping. At the same time, he emphasized that the built form of houses can expand or limit

the kinds of spontaneous contact that take place. When I asked whether neighbourliness is reciprocated, he tied his answer to the physical layout of entrances and porches,

I mean, I think over the course of the year, others will definitely do it too. I think also, I've been at your place a lot, why don't you come over to my place. I would say the friends that I've made here, [on this street] they are all very social. The structure of the house can sometimes limit the kinds of activities that we can do. Mine is an open porch so you can just walk straight in, John and Orna's as well...Max and Francine's place is small so it can't fit more than four people, and then Chantal and Matt's, theirs doesn't have a street entrance so you have to walk through their house to get to the back porch. (Fieldnotes, August, 2024)

He returned to the porch as a key threshold space, describing how often casual encounters tip into gatherings,

This is actually like a regular occurrence, you're outside picking cherries and everyone is just like 'hi, hello.' This is actually like the most important feature of my life here. Anytime I'm out I see people, we talk, we interact, we exchange and often my patio—which is stuffed with boxes right now, but often I'm sitting there and people just drop by to say hi, we'll have a drink, another person gets attracted to the group and before you know it, it's a party on my front porch. It's mostly the people that know me, it's like an ad hoc dinner party. I like cooking for people and so we end up having everybody over. (Fieldnotes, August, 2024)

When I asked if this happens on any random summer night, he replied: "Yeah, it happens possibly too much...I think one year, we had been eating and drinking too much, we need to slow it down a little. People are gaining weight, not sleeping well. But it is tremendous fun"

(Fieldnotes, August, 2024). He also drew a direct contrast between street forms, linking architecture to the frequency of recognition,

If you compare it to Maple Boulevard [where I used to live]...you look at the architecture, it influences the type of relations you have with your neighbours...over there [on Maple] very few of the houses have patios, they all have front stairs, there is no place to sit and hang out...the street is broader and so you don't see people across as frequently, as you see them here. There are more spaced out and detached houses. (Fieldnotes, August, 2024)

The tomato-sauce event shows how these micro-settings can consolidate into a more deliberate collective practice—one that requires planning, role differentiation, and ongoing negotiation. Darius described how it began,

We started in 2014 and it was during tomato season and it started because I wanted to make homemade tomato sauce and I was at Jean Talon [market] and tomatoes were on sale for crazy cheap and I bought some and I knew that I wanted to invest in the whole stock pot...I actually borrowed the burner from my friend Max and his stock pot, to make the sauce. You can't make tomato sauce inside. It's large volume and you need to be able to like run lots of burners and they produce a lot of fumes. I wanted to make sauce and I think I bought about 5 bushels of tomatoes and I just assumed I would get people to cook with me because I thought it would be really fun...and so I walked over to my neighbour's Francine's, I saw her driving in and I said, Hey Francie, you know what I got...I bought a ton of tomatoes man! How would you like to make some tomato sauce with me? And her face, literally went to a stunned and shock, tomatoes? Yes, I help you...This was before she knew about my "Darius endeavours" and she was too shy to say no to me. Later I understood that...you know, she's Italian, they used to make tomatoes, and it was a big pain, her dad was like always yelling at them and her and her sister always had to do the tomato sauce...She came over and I invited her and all her kids over, and I needed to convince her and we made a small batch of sauce, had the tomato sauce and she said wow, this is really good. I was like yeah, this is what we'd be making...and then she's like I'm in! What do you need? I also told some other neighbours and in the beginning it was a lot of standing around waiting for the stuff to cook. We just cooked the sauce and waited for it to boil down until it finished... In the beginning it was like four or five of us...(Fieldnotes, August, 2024)

He then described how the scale, labour, and coordination shifted over time,

We even did it during the pandemic, we just kept distance, and we did it out in the open air. Early on it was the whole weekend...garlic and onions we prepared ahead of time. But now with more burners we've made it so that it's done in one-day—12 bushels in one day or 600 pounds of tomatoes. Last few years, I've paid for everything and I forgot to ask for the money, the back pay... so now I'm going to collect up front.....It's like you sit there, you're squeezing tomatoes, you're talking, and people eventually change stations, and you mix it up, we do it by the garage so that in case it rains we can do it inside. Some people had different ideas about recipes that we should do. Oh Italians don't do it this way, they do it this way ...but this is my sauce and this is how we're doing it. I don't really care for that. My thought was that I don't really need to change it. The only altercation over the years among the group of neighbours, it was getting super popular and I think that one year, I let a couple of other people come and join, like friends of friends and that year we did 20 bushels and it got crazy out of hand, it wasn't out of hand, I mean we got everything done but then Chantal was like, you know if it's going to be that many people, I don't really want to do it anymore. I was like why? And she said, you know it was something that was special for us and this to me wasn't that special, because

I don't know these people. I could understand her point... Yeah it got a bit too big. It was exhausting and I didn't really enjoy it and I think that is there an upper limit to this sort of thing. You know? That has kind of made me not want to do this communal thing more. (Fieldnotes, August, 2024)

What is visible here is both the generativity and the fragility of deepened neighbour relations.

The event depends on joint effort and joint commitment in Amit's sense: coordination, interdependence, and the ongoing negotiation of expectations as a condition of making the shared activity work (Amit 2012). It also shows how openness has limits. Once the gathering got big enough that it no longer felt recognizable and "special" to the people who had built it, it became harder to keep it going. It started to feel less like something done among known neighbours and more like an open event. In Darius's account, this is not a moral failure. It is a practical limit that emerges once an activity grows beyond what people can comfortably hold in common. It has to be managed through boundaries and decisions about scale. It also requires ongoing attention to keeping the activity aligned with what participants can still recognize as theirs. Wise and Velayutham use the term "transversal enablers" to refer to residents who actively help interaction move across lines of difference. What they do is often ordinary in form. They acknowledge people, make room for them, and adjust the pace or tone of an encounter so that participation feels possible. In this sense, they take on some of the practical work of connection in situations where it might otherwise not happen (Wise 2009; Wise and Velayutham 2014). Darius's account shows how this enabling disposition operates through concrete practices: approaching neighbours, initiating projects, absorbing early costs and labour, and sustaining a form long enough for it to become an annual rhythm. It also shows that this enabling work is not costless. It requires ongoing decisions about effort, money, and limits if the practice is to remain workable over time.

### ***Trust and Asking Favours***

Neighbouring sometimes moves beyond the small exchanges that make up parochial helpfulness. It can involve requests that carry real material risk, where saying yes or no changes what the relationship can be. Kusenbach (2006) treats this as an extension of proactive intervention: neighbours respond to needs that exceed routine support, and they do so because they feel a practical responsibility that comes from proximity rather than from intimacy. These are rarer forms of neighbouring because they depend on trust that is not usually available between people who simply share an adjoining wall, a driveway, or a street.

During the block party, I heard an account that stayed with me because it made this kind of proximate trust visible. Jackie was describing how her neighbour Stephen—who lives in the same duplex—lent her a large sum of money so she could buy the property with him. As she related it,

In 2008, you know Stephen, my neighbour, we bought this house together. So, I live upstairs and he lives downstairs. What did we pay for it? Less than \$400,000 for the whole thing hey? That doesn't happen anymore... but not only that, but I didn't have any money for the down payment and my mother wouldn't give me any and it was Ira who gave me money for the down payment, he gave me \$60,000. I've since paid him back. He's a really good person. We are in a co-property<sup>4</sup>, and you couldn't ask for a better business partner. (Fieldnotes, June, 2024)

What matters here is not the amount of money itself, but the kind of relationship in which lending it became possible. Jackie and Stephen had not known each other for a long time before deciding to purchase together, and the loan was not framed as a favour between close friends. It read more like a decision made under shared conditions, because housing was something they were facing side by side and because living in the same building made each person's conduct

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<sup>4</sup> A *co-property* (or *copropriété* in Quebec civil law) refers to a form of shared ownership—most commonly a duplex, triplex, or divided/undivided co-ownership—where two or more owners each hold exclusive rights to their respective housing units while sharing responsibility for the building's common parts and structural maintenance. In practice, this arrangement requires ongoing cooperation, joint decision-making, financial coordination, and clear communication between co-owners. Because domestic routines, repairs, and expenditures are interlinked, co-property creates a relational environment in which neighbouring obligations become materially embedded in the structure of the dwelling itself.

more knowable to the other. Their trust did not have to be grounded in a deep history. It could be grounded in steady exposure to one another's rhythms and dispositions—who pays bills, who handles problems and who can be counted on in an ongoing relationship concerning their shared property. In this sense, neighbouring produced a trust that was practical and forward-looking, and it did so because their lives were already structurally entangled through the duplex. Once they became co-owners, responsibility was no longer optional. Their domestic and financial futures became linked and so cooperation had to become an ongoing practice rather than a one-time gesture. This is also why the relationship is not reducible to friendship. It is responsibility-laden neighbouring and a form of mutual obligation that emerges because property, living space, and daily life are intertwined. Asking for a major favour and agreeing to it reshapes the expectations on both sides. It creates a new baseline of accountability, and it can make the relationship more durable precisely because there is now something concrete to maintain together.

### ***Situational or Emergency Neighbouring***

Neighbouring relations can also intensify under exceptional conditions, when everyday infrastructures fail and residents have to improvise. The COVID-19 pandemic created situations where institutional supports were suspended or insufficient, and where proximity became newly meaningful because neighbours were often the only people close enough to respond quickly. In these moments, neighbouring can take the form of what Kusenbach (2006) calls emergency intervention: people mobilize space, time, and resources to solve a problem that cannot wait. A conversation I had with a Rabbi about a neighbouring mosque offered a clear example. He described how the pandemic made indoor worship impossible for both communities, and how the shared constraints of place and timing opened a route into cooperation,

I'll tell you a beautiful story that happened in our alley over Covid. My direct neighbour is the Imam (emeritus) of the Mosque [up the street], and the actual Imam lives right behind him. He lives beside us, and we share the alley. We had a problem during the pandemic, and we couldn't do any of our services inside. The neighbouring Mosque had the same problem. So, during Rosh Hashanah, they had a parking lot...and so we put up the tents. One day he hears me on the phone, talking about our issue. We start talking and we have a solution, we put the tents, and he has a parking lot, and we both used it. And that became the Jewish/Muslim prayer tents. And we shared it, in the parking lot. It's still there and we posted it on Facebook. We did it for two years, and they have cars but because no one was coming to pray inside, the Mosque parking lot was empty. It kind of leads itself into the mosque parking lot. I went into there, I talked to them and now we have a relationship, and we got a little friendly. (Fieldnotes, February, 2023)

Here, the relationship did not begin as an abstract commitment to interfaith harmony. It began as a practical response to a shared problem, and it became neighbourly because it depended on adjacency and on the in-person negotiation of space. They could coordinate because they were close enough to overhear one another's phone calls, to step outside, to look at the parking lot together, and to work out where tents could go. The alley, the lot, and the placement of temporary structures had to be managed through co-present adjustment. The pandemic created the pressure, but proximity provided the channel through which the solution became possible. Read alongside one another, these cases help me show why favour-asking matters for how neighbouring relations take form. Sometimes that happens through large material commitments, like co-ownership and a loan. Sometimes it happens through situational cooperation, when outside conditions make neighbours rely on one another in a new way. In both, trust is not something that simply exists or does not exist between neighbours. It can take shape because people have to solve practical problems in shared space, and because repeated exposure makes certain kinds of responsibility feel workable

### ***Limits, Tensions, and Breakdowns in Neighbouring Relations***

Neighbouring is not inherently harmonious, because living in close proximity does not only create opportunities for recognition and support. It also makes people visible to one another in



ongoing ways, and it brings with it small expectations about what is acceptable, what is considerate, and what counts as “reasonable” behaviour. For that reason, neighbouring can just as easily become a site of misunderstanding, conflict, and fatigue as it can become a site of warmth. Proximity can support recognition and care, but it can also magnify disagreement because neighbours cannot easily opt out of shared boundaries and shared routines. The following cases show how neighbouring can break down, and how repair, when it occurs, often proceeds through containment rather than resolution.

In one instance, a local resident, Judy, described a situation with her next-door neighbour that developed around a large tree straddling their shared property line. The neighbour claimed that the tree created too much shade for her garden, and that fallen leaves and other debris created a lot of work to clean up. She also argued that the branches needed to be cut back. Over time, it became clear that her preference was to cut the tree down entirely. Judy, by contrast, liked the tree for the shade, canopy, and the presence of a beautiful old tree. Over the course of managing this situation, Judy moved through many stages. It began with what she tried to keep as friendly exchanges, but these exchanges deteriorated into heated interactions. Eventually, the neighbour delivered an aggressive letter that she wanted Judy to sign, and she also threatened litigation if Judy did not sign (Fieldnotes, April, 2024). As Judy explained it to me, the letter was not only a complaint. It was an attempt to secure Judy’s agreement that the tree or the branches in question sat on their mutual property line, and that this shared property line was the basis for her neighbour’s proposal to remove the tree or cut it back. In other words, the letter tried to formalize the neighbour’s framing of the problem and to establish what the neighbour took to be the relevant rights and obligations. Judy described how various efforts at communication and compromise ended in conflict and in a failure to agree, not only about what should be done, but

also about what moral or legal framework should apply. Her neighbour claimed that she had a right to demand that the tree be cut, and that Judy had to accept this. When Judy refused, her neighbour escalated again and threatened legal action.

Eventually, Judy and her neighbour agreed to have an arborist cut back some branches to enable more light for the neighbour's garden. The neighbour was supposed to pay half of the costs. However, in the end, the neighbour refused to pay. Judy was relieved to have gotten some form of practical outcome, but she also described feeling strongly negative about how the situation unfolded. Her neighbour still lives beside her. This case shows how entrenched and conflictual neighbouring relations can become when people have to manage shared space and shared boundaries. Even when a dispute reaches a compromise, the relationship may not recover. In Judy's case, the tree issue was partially addressed, but the relationship remains tense. Judy also emphasized that she has little choice in this kind of situation. Despite her best efforts over years, she will have to continue living beside this neighbour for as long as the neighbour remains next door.

A different kind of limit becomes visible in moments when neighbouring relations are disrupted by public judgement about what belongs on a residential street. These moments matter because they show how quickly everyday proximity can shift into a question of entitlement: who is allowed to do what, when, and under what terms, in a space that is "home" for some and a shared streetscape for others. One year, Diwali was celebrated at Nisha's house, on the next street over from mine. I knew her as a neighbour and friend, and she had invited a small group of people to mark the festival together. Diwali is often described as the Festival of Lights. It is celebrated in late fall and centres light as a sign of renewal and blessing, and as a way of marking movement away from darkness. It is also a social occasion, one that brings people together

through food, visiting, and shared ritual. We gathered in the early evening to eat together and spend time. Later, children and adults moved outside to the front driveway for the lighting. We lit small clay diyas and helped the children place them along the perimeter of the house. The work was simple and careful: lighting each lamp, finding stable spots so they would not tip, reminding children to keep their hands back from the flame. People paused to look at the line of lights once it was in place, pointing things out and taking photos. After this, we remained out front in a group of about twelve and began a short, informal fireworks display in the centre of the driveway.

As dusk settled, the air cooled, and the smell of food from earlier lingered faintly while we waited. When the first firework was lit, it burned brightly for a moment and then cracked open with a sharp sound. A thin cloud of smoke hung briefly in the air, carrying a sulphur smell before drifting away. The fireworks were quite loud, but they were brief. Each lasted only seconds, and the entire display was not intended to last more than ten to fifteen minutes. It was still early in the evening, around seven o'clock. People stood close together, watching. Children covered their ears and then laughed, shifting between excitement and caution. Adults moved in small steps, reminding children where to stand and when to step back. The display remained informal and contained, unfolding within the space of the driveway and the area immediately in front of the house.

During this time, a woman emerged from across the street, in front of her own house, and began shouting toward us. Her voice cut sharply through the sound of the fireworks and the low murmur of conversation. She yelled at Nisha, accusing her of being too loud and insisting that what was happening was obscene and against the law. She said she would call the police. The words came quickly and forcefully, without pause. After initially shouting from across the street,

she moved off her property and began crossing toward Nisha's house. As she approached, she gestured emphatically, pointing her finger in a physical and insistent manner. What had been a contained celebration on the driveway shifted into a confrontation that unfolded across the space between two houses. In that moment, the driveway no longer functioned only as part of a private gathering. It became a contested edge between households, where one neighbour treated the situation as something that required enforcement. The atmosphere changed immediately. Conversation stopped. The smell of smoke lingered, but attention moved away from the fireworks and toward the shouting. Several adults stepped closer to the children. Nisha tried to respond, explaining that it was a cultural celebration and that the noise would be brief. Her tone remained controlled, but the exchange did not develop into a dialogue. The neighbour continued to shout, repeating her claims as she edged toward the property line, before eventually turning and going back inside. After she left, no one spoke right away. The fireworks were put away without discussion. We went back inside, and the mood had changed. Conversation resumed only in fragments. Not long after, people gathered their belongings, and the evening ended quietly as we returned to our respective homes.

Later that evening, Nisha reflected on what had happened and considered how to respond. She was not contravening local bylaws as fireworks were permissible on private property. She briefly considered posting about the incident on a local neighbourhood Facebook page, but hesitated. She was wary of how such discussions often unfolded and doubted that a public post would lead to understanding or repair. Instead, she decided to take a more contained approach. In the days that followed, she wrote a letter addressed to her neighbours. In it, she explained the significance of Diwali, apologized for the unexpected noise, and emphasized that the celebration had been brief. She then walked door to door and placed the letter in the

mailboxes of the houses immediately around her. The responses were uneven. Not all neighbours replied, but several did. One neighbour brought a pie and apologized for the behaviour of the woman who had shouted. Another came by to talk and express concern. Another left a welcome basket with several small gifts.

These gestures did not arrive all at once, nor did they take the same form. They emerged gradually, through visits, brief conversations, and material offerings. Together, these responses eased the immediate tension. They did not reopen the confrontation or lead to a shared discussion of what had happened. Instead, they offered Nisha small signs of support that made it possible for everyday relations on the street to continue. As Wise (2009) suggests, ordinary gestures such as visits, food, and gifts matter in everyday multicultural settings because they allow people to acknowledge one another and maintain workable relations without requiring deep agreement or shared understanding.

At the same time, the limits of this repair remained visible. The neighbour who had initiated the confrontation did not respond, and the letter did not prompt a collective reckoning with the incident. Daily life resumed, but the terms under which difference had been judged were not revisited. What also became clear once we returned inside was that the episode was not understood simply as a complaint about noise. Nisha described the hostility as discrimination and as racism, and that response matters for how the incident should be read. The objection had moved quickly from irritation to a broader judgment about what belonged on the street and what did not. The celebration was treated not only as disruptive, but as improper, unlawful, and in need of enforcement. In this sense, the altercation suggests more than neighbourly disagreement. It points to a racialized dynamic in which a visible and audible cultural practice was rendered excessive and out of place. If we read the episode alongside Valentine's (2008) critique of

meaningful encounter, it helps clarify how living alongside one another can be made workable through civility and restraint, even as deeper assumptions remain intact. Neighbouring ties stayed recognizable, but they were not necessarily repaired in any deeper sense. What was restored, then, was not transformation, but manageability. The situation was kept from escalating and folded back into everyday routines without being fully talked through. A workable surface calm returned, but the underlying disagreement about what was acceptable, and about whose cultural presence could appear legitimate on the street, was not resolved.

The same limits also appear in less dramatic and more routine forms of sanction and complaint, especially in digital neighbourhood spaces. In online threads about parking, noise, fireworks, or “casing houses,” neighbours often enforce local norms through public naming, warnings, and moral commentary. Because online exchanges are less constrained by the politeness that governs face-to-face proximity, they can intensify judgement and make conflict more visible, even when people continue to manage workable relations on the sidewalk and at the doorway. Finally, limits can appear even where neighbouring is otherwise warm and cooperative, because collective practices require constant calibration. As the tomato-sauce gathering expanded, the intimacy that originally made it feel meaningful was strained by questions of size, boundaries, and competing expectations. What holds a small cluster together is not only enjoyment. It is the ongoing work of deciding who is included, how labour is shared, and how disagreement will be handled without unraveling the practice. Taken together, these cases show that neighbouring relations can falter because preferences diverge, obligations are interpreted differently, labour feels uneven, or behaviour is judged as out of place. They also show that repair is often partial. People find ways to continue living alongside one another, but they do not necessarily resolve what produced the conflict in the first place. In that sense, the

ethnographic vignettes point to a broader pattern across the chapter. Living in close proximity creates the possibility for recognition, support, and conflict, because people are repeatedly brought into one another's awareness through shared space and routine encounter. What happens within these relations is not predetermined. Neighbouring takes shape through ongoing negotiation about how to act, when to intervene, and when to hold back. When a relation continues rather than falling away, it is often because people keep making these adjustments and, at moments, find ways to repair minor strains.

The foregoing discussion shows that neighbouring is usually made in small, uneven moments. It takes shape through brief forms of recognition and practical acts of help, and it sometimes includes tensions that have to be handled so that everyday life can continue. Most of the time, this work stays quiet and distributed across ordinary routines. The block party shifts the scene. It brings many of the same people into view at once, and it makes participation more explicit because neighbours are no longer just passing each other. Instead they are choosing whether and how to join an organized event along a local street.

### ***Block Party***

I arrived at the block party on a warm June afternoon with the sound of live music drifting down the street before I could even see where the festivities began. The street was already cordoned off with temporary barriers. A paper poster, taped somewhat haphazardly to the metal fencing, announced the “Fete Annuelle de la Rue/[Winchester] Annual Block Party” along with a reminder that there was no parking on this street between 9 am and 10 pm.<sup>5</sup> (Fieldnotes, June 2024) That small disruption of ordinary traffic, paired with the anticipation I felt walking

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<sup>5</sup> The Winchester block party, along with street names and personal names referenced in this section, has been anonymized through the use of pseudonyms.

downhill into the crowd, already gave the street an altered presence. Earlier that morning I had also seen a posting on social media on a neighbourhood FaceBook page, an NDG parents group, which read: “Join us this Saturday at the [Winchester] block party! All NDG residents, and friends and family from near and far are invited to join us – the more the merrier. There’ll be many activities for the little ones” (Fieldnotes, June, 2024). As I approached, it was clear that this open invitation had been taken up. Residents spilled out from porches, balconies, and front steps, and visitors wandered in from adjacent streets. The block had become an improvised zone of encounter, occupying a space between private and public life (Wessendorf 2013).

As I proceeded to walk down the street, there were kids playing Zumba games in the middle of the street, and pickle-ball, along with other kids scooting around. All the cars had been cleared off the street and peering down the length of the block, I noted that it was closed off at the one end which borders the train tracks. Because the street doesn’t continue at one end it gives the impression of a smaller, more intimate, bounded space stretching for one block. As a narrow, one-way street with an overarching tree canopy, the specific space of the street block became very parochial and intimate. The physical architecture of the types of housing, combined with their proximity to the narrower one-way street, engendered a particular feeling of familiarity and welcome along this street block.





and public life, where ordinary routines and interactions were at once personal and visible to others. Dozens of people were engaged in selling goods, in the form of selling treats, such as cookies and muffins along with marketing specialty foods such as beverages and jams (Indian chutney, Kefir lemonade) made by the residents themselves. I noticed that many people had also set up yard sales in front of their homes and there were many tables set up in the street at which people were selling various types of art: cards, photography, prints, and jewelry. Interestingly, I learned that these acts of selling wares is a ritual which has evolved over the years. As I went from one stand to the next, I kept noticing how the boundary between inside and outside had loosened for the day. Items from people's homes were spread out on tables and tarps, brought into public view. That material exposure made the street feel temporarily porous. It also made it easier to stop, ask questions, and speak, even when we were not already known to each other. During the block party, I spoke with a variety of people at their stands as well as with those who were involved in organizing the event. I also talked to numerous residents who came out to watch the event from their porches or balconies as well as those who were participating and sharing in conversation with their neighbours. Two young girls in their mid-20s, who appeared to be of South Asian background were selling a type of Indian chutney that they were also selling at the Atwater Market on alternating weeks, downtown. They related to me that they've been making this preserve and selling it in Montreal at various places over the past year. Here, they had a table set up with some samples to hand out to the residents on the street. One of the girls told me that the chutney is rich and textured, full of spice and fruits, and is to be spread on crackers or eaten with tortilla chips. The girls don't live on this street but rather a few blocks away on Rockglen Avenue with their mother and father and their grandparents. They then point

to their grandparents across from them, sitting on lawn chairs, taking in the band that's playing on the opposite side of the street.

I decided to approach the grandparents and ask them why they had decided to come to the block party. The grandmother told me: "This is the first time I'm coming for the street festival. I was talking to my daughter and telling her why don't we have one in [Rockglen]? It's so nice on a Saturday or Sunday. It's nice to sit for a couple of hours. My husband is 89 and I brought him out [with me] for a change. I said, come let's sit and relax." (Fieldnotes, June 2024) She told me that she and her husband came to Canada as immigrants three years ago. Her husband's current state of health is poor. He has dementia. She continues: "We both came on that invitation for parents and grandparents in that, we got a lottery. That's how we came, we are living with my daughter and husband, and he is French Canadian, he's from Quebec." I commented that it must be a lot of work to take care of her husband. She replied,

The CLSC<sup>6</sup> comes and helps us too. They come to maintain his hygiene. We've been here only three years but my daughter has been here for 30 years... 32 years I think, that she's been [here] in Montreal. She has two children. She's divorced, she married an Indian but [then] divorced and got married to a French Canadian. My granddaughter speaks French very well. That's my granddaughter standing there [she points over to the table]. (Fieldnotes, June, 2024)

We chatted a little more about our respective time in the neighbourhood and what had brought us there and then she warmly advanced an invitation: "Come over [to my house], I'll give you an Indian meal!" (Fieldnotes, June, 2024). The invitation rose quickly out of the ordinary talk of the afternoon.

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<sup>6</sup> CLSC refers to *Centres locaux de services communautaires*, publicly funded community health and social service centres in Quebec. CLSCs provide front-line services such as primary health care, mental health support, social work, home care, and public health programming, and are designed to offer accessible, neighbourhood-based services oriented toward prevention and everyday support rather than specialized or hospital care.

The band had stopped playing and my attention turned to the canine beauty contest which had just begun. An animator on a microphone connected to the speaker system was introducing the dogs lined up with their respective owners: “Watson, he is a very sweet guy but he suffers separation anxiety”, exclaimed the animator (Fieldnotes, June, 2024). The first contestant, a Golden Doodle named Watson trotted up to the stage, a wide carpet spread out in the middle of the street, he walked around the carpet and came back to the center. The announcer, shouted, “a big hand for Watson everybody!” The dogs came out one after the other, walked around in a circle, doing their best trot. The announcer continued, “Now this is the moment we’ve all been waiting for, the grand prize. I know it’s been said, we’re not fair, but everyone has to wait....Welcome everyone to the 14th annual [Winchester ]Block Party.” He then added: ...“Hold on, hold on, we have a late comer...Rony, let’s hear it for Rony. Rony looks like he’s keen, he’s keen.” (Fieldnotes: June 2024) The suspense built and then broke into laughter when he declared the winner: “The fix is in... and...it’s Watson!” (Fieldnotes, June, 2024)

People were gathered around the show and the dogs drew in most everyone that was present along the block. People laughed and smiled, applauding the spectacle. The majority of residents stopped what they were doing to participate in this show. After the dog show was done, the music started again, and people went back to more individual or smaller group activities. The shift between collective attention and dispersed interaction was visible in how people moved. They gathered tightly around the carpet, then loosened back into small clusters along the curb, the steps, and the tables. Joanne, one of the organizers told me, “So we pick names out of a hat for the grand prize winner, for the best dog but everyone gets a prize and we totally get the neighbourhood involved, we try to get local stores involved [too].” This year, one of the pet stores on Sherbrooke Street donated little doggie bags for the dogs, as a prize. I found the dog

show to be an interesting element of the block party because it brings people together in conversation around their pets. One individual beside me mentioned that he came specifically to watch the canine beauty contest. Pets worked here as a shared point of attention, a small infrastructure for talk that did not require prior familiarity.

One neighbour who has been living on the street block for 17 years told me,

This block party has been going on for 15 years, we've been doing it on the second Saturday of June every year—except during the pandemic. It all started when one of the neighbours it was her kids' birthday and she just decided to do it. She went to the city and got a permit and never told anybody and the next thing you knew, we all know each other...And it turned out to be this. Usually it's way more busy, it's very quiet today maybe because of the Grand Prix [being held on the same weekend]? (Fieldnotes, June, 2024)

Another neighbour I spoke with related: “This is a really cool event because you get to meet your neighbours and chat. It helps build our community.” I ask how many people participate? She replied: “I'd say at least half the street participate; I mean anyone who has children—this is a great day for children to be able to play in the street without worrying...about cars. We get a permit from the city to close the street down for the day. It's the whole day from 9 am – 9 pm. We just had the dog contest and soon there will be a band. In the past years, sometimes they've been able to organize a movie outside when it gets dark” (Fieldnotes, June, 2024). Another neighbour, Esperanza who moved here from Mexico six years ago and has a kefir lemonade stand set up, said that she loves it when the neighbours all come out and make a party for everyone, “On partage le souper ensemble dehors dans la rue, il commence à 19 h...[we share dinner outside together in the street]” (Fieldnotes, June, 2024).

Margerie and Pierre were the principal organizers, and they set up a meeting early in the year, with a small group of their neighbours, usually in February, to start the planning for the block party. Ideas and suggestions were discussed for what events and activities should be

included and the coordination evolved from that point leading up to June. Joanne, was newer to the process and she had been helping to organize the block party and described how it unfolds each year,

We get a permit, this is like the 14th year. I put in the paperwork and it's the same kind of formula every year, we got the dog show, we do live music, we do a bring your own "al fresco dinner" at around 5 or 6 p.m., so people just bring out their food or BBQs and like have dinner on the street. And then when night falls, we are going to bring out a big inflatable screen and we are going to set it up right where the band is. And last year we screened like Star Wars and stuff and this year we are going to do the hockey game because it's game five! And somebody usually buys popcorn and we just give it out to the kids. It's really nice. (Fieldnotes, June, 2024)

I asked her about the process and how much work is involved in organizing the block party. She told me that they began by going door to door to convince people to get involved. She continued,

It's not so bad [coordination, logistics], it's really just an application a few months ahead of time [for the permit to close the street] and probably a handful of emails, and normally, because we've done it pretty much every year, we have someone who's usually in charge of the music—which is Phil, someone in charge of the dog show, someone who does the application and then the other people just spread the word for the day and like everyone brings out their stuff. We always bring friends too. Etienne, "DJ Groove" for the past three years, he comes [to perform]. (Fieldnotes, June, 2024)

Joanne told me that the organization of the music took some work. She explained that a resident named Phil was the organizer, who put together a group of resident musicians and ensured that they met before the block party to decide on what songs to play and the schedule and which collaborations they would do. Phil organized the logistics and running order for the music sets. Later I learned talking to the band members that one band member hosted the band practices in his basement each week with all of the band members coming from either Winchester or nearby streets. Pointing over to Pierre, Joanne continued: "He's the one in the jean shirt, he's the resident "OG". She carried on, "I've been here just for a few years and I kind of took it over after the pandemic, obviously everyone was like, ah... is it going to happen [this year]? And no one

was like stepping up to organize it and they weren't sure...can we? Is it something that everyone wants again? I'm like yes!" (Fieldnotes, June, 2024).

After talking with Margerie and Joanne and seeing them interact and nod, smiling to various people they knew on the street as they passed, I recognized that they are integral to the organizing process and that this characteristic is a factor that contributes to making the block party happen each year. Because Joanne was a newcomer to the block, she said she'd be willing to organize the party and continue on with the tradition. She told me,

Because NDG is the place to be, it's like, I'm from Toronto [originally], I met my husband in Toronto on Canada Day and he's from here. So that's why I ended up here...I've lived in Verdun, I lived in the Plateau, but its only until a friend of mine, Roxanne said come to NDG... you've got kids. This is the closest to home that I've felt. It's got the family vibe. Because the Plateau is great but here it's a lot more artsy, it's got an art vibe. We've got the parks. And this, people just like hanging out! There's the Art Hop too. (Fieldnotes, June, 2024)

Her account located the block party within a broader sense of what NDG makes possible as a place to live, especially for families, and it also pointed to how people can move within the locality by only a few blocks, carrying attachments with them rather than starting from scratch each time.

Next, I experienced an instance of neighbours casually talking about recent goings-on in terms of a recently deceased woman who had lived on the street and seemed to be well-known to them. The conversation took place between two block residents of Winchester, Louise, a woman in her late 70s has been living on the block since 1981 and Margerie who was in her early 60s, had been living on the street since 2008. They were casually talking together as Louise leafed through some postcards of Margerie's artwork that she had displayed on two tables in front of her house. Margerie asked Louise whether she knew about another resident on the street who had passed away. Louise remarked, "Did you have a tenant upstairs who died...because a few years

ago, there was somebody living upstairs maybe it was upstairs from Sam and Maude, yes it was a lady who died from cancer, and they were selling all her stuff and I got some stuff from her, and I never met her but I feel like I know her because I have her things.” I asked how the two know each other. Margerie answered, “Louise lives further up, but the only reason I know her is because of this block party. Really. We know each other because every year we get to get together here” (Fieldnotes, June, 2024).

Later, I stopped to look at an assortment of metal pots laid out on mats at the base of the front stairs of a duplex. They appeared to be for gardening. Shortly after striking up a conversation with the woman selling them, the exchange shifted from practical talk to something more personal. She appeared to be in her late sixties and explained that she was selling her late husband’s belongings. He had died recently of cancer. This disclosure did not feel out of place. Up and down the block, multiple yard sales were unfolding at once, and the street had taken on an intimate quality as people’s personal possessions were laid out in public view. Talking about the objects—their use, their value, their history—became a way of talking about lives. The act of selling did not remain a purely economic exchange. It opened space for informal conversation, supported by the fact that these exchanges were taking place directly outside people’s homes. In this moment, the front yard felt less like a boundary than an extension of private space into the street.

As I continued speaking with the woman hosting the sale, another woman joined the conversation while browsing the pots. She told me that she no longer lived in the area and now resided on the South Shore, but that she often returned to NDG. She examined several vintage copper pots and asked about their price. “What’s the prices of the pots?” she asked. The seller responded: “\$2 and guess \$5 for the larger ones. They are about one dollar each.” “And it is



copper?” the buyer asked. “I believe so but I’m no expert,” the seller replied (Fieldnotes, June 2024). As we spoke, I asked her where she lived. She clarified that she did not live on the block, but that she remained connected to it through family, property, and long familiarity. She explained,

Oh, I’m actually not [living on the block here]...my friend lives here...[but] I bought the house that my kids are in now. We own the duplex down there where both my girls live. It was my husband’s grandfather [originally] that owned it and he passed away and it went to the aunt and the uncle [and they] gave it to my husband and his siblings. And my daughter at the time was about 21, and she said she wanted to live on her own, so my husband says OK, we can take the house and you cover whatever has to be covered, and you can save [your money in the meantime] to move out...to save for a house of your own. And then my younger daughter, she’s [living] on top of her...And I’m on the South Shore. I grew up in NDG actually, I went to Monkland High. Once we got married we went out to the South Shore. It was the prices of houses at the time, here the houses were so much more expensive. Maybe we will come in and come back one day...but we haven’t come back...I love this [here] because over there we are in a crescent, it’s very quiet over there. And over here, you see the people they talk to you next door whatever, you know they know your name, and like it’s like wow, you know? It’s not the same in St. Hubert. There are a lot more children now in the area, every so many years you get a burst of kids and then they move. But it’s not the same as NDG, I mean I grew up here. I was below the tracks on [Simpson] Avenue with my parents in Upper Lachine. And my mom, my brother they are still, on [Queen] street. They have places there. It’s only me, I went out a bit [left the neighbourhood] ...I want to buy the shiny one. [She points to one of the pots.] No, the small one there. I love the look of those, wrought iron ones? So, I want to put them out in the garden, in the gazebo...(Fieldnotes, June, 2024)

As she finished, she called out to the seller, who was speaking with another neighbour: “Okay, wait just one minute, I have to go get my money.” She then turned to her granddaughter and said, “Say my Grandma’s coming back in a minute,” and walked off down the street. A few minutes later, she returned and our conversation picked up again. She clarified that she now lived in St-Hubert, while her daughters lived independently in the duplex associated with her husband’s family. She spoke at length about the difference between her current home and her memories of NDG. “Over there, it’s quiet, but you don’t have this...people talking to you, knowing your name. Here, you feel it right away.” What she was describing was a pull that did not rest only on

housing or infrastructure, but on the experience of recognition and familiarity. People do move off-island, often because they need more space or they are trying to manage costs. Some still come back to NDG. They return because it feels familiar, and because, as these accounts suggest, the everyday relations there can take on a thickness that is difficult to reproduce elsewhere.

Throughout the afternoon, it became clear to me that the block party was not simply a demonstration of neighbourliness but a setting in which it was heightened. Ordinary greetings expanded into longer conversations. People approached one another with the sense that interaction would be welcome. Even encounters between strangers could carry an implicit warmth. In this sense, the block party acted as a temporary intensification of neighbouring, of convivial relations. It gathered into a single afternoon forms of recognition and ease that, in everyday life, often unfold more slowly, appear only in brief moments, or do not happen at all. The event also made the unevenness of neighbouring more visible. Some residents, especially those who seemed to be long-time members of the street, moved through the day with a sense of deep familiarity. Others stayed closer to the edges of the gathering. They joined in here and there, but their participation did not have the same ease as those who already knew one another well. This unevenness is analytically significant because it shows that block-party conviviality is not a single shared experience. It is layered. It brings different kinds of relations into the same space without making them equivalent.

As the afternoon unfolded, the street itself took on a more active role, in what Thrift (2004) would describe as an affective infrastructure. With cars absent, children moved unpredictably through the open street. Music carried from speakers. The smell of grilled food drifted across the block. Dogs trotted between groups. Neighbours leaned toward one another as they spoke. These sensory and embodied elements contributed to an atmosphere of lightness that

built up over the afternoon and travelled between small clusters. The mood was not produced by any single person. It formed through repetition and circulation, as people responded to shared cues and adjusted themselves to what the event was becoming. Employing Ahmed's (2006) insight that orientations organize how bodies move toward or away from others helps clarify what I was seeing as the afternoon unfolded. The occasion did not only bring people into the same space. It also shaped how they directed their attention, and what kinds of approach felt possible. At least at moments, people faced into the event and found themselves turning toward others nearby. In those moments, interaction became easier to start, and openness felt like a reasonable stance to take.

What struck me most was how the material architecture—porches, front steps, wide landings, yard entrances—gave interactions places to settle. People perched on stoops, pausing to talk to neighbours they only partly knew. Children moved easily between backyards and front lawns. The built environment supported a form of adjacency that allowed sociability to spread without requiring intimacy. This resonates with Kusenbach's (2006, 2008) emphasis on micro-settings and parochial space, in which the phenomenological qualities of a setting are activated through social engagement. The block party was not simply a locale where interaction happened to occur. It was a setting in which relational practices were intensified and, for a time, easier to sustain.

As I moved through the space taking notes, I became more aware of how these relations were being produced moment by moment. I could see people continually adjusting to the environment around them. They chose where to stand and when to pause as they spoke to others. They also made use of what the street made available that day. With cars absent, the space felt wider and easier to occupy. Porches and steps gave people places to perch and linger. People

could also drift between small groups without it feeling like an interruption. In that setting, small exchanges did not stay isolated. A brief greeting could become a longer conversation. A quick comment could draw in someone nearby. Over the afternoon, these modest interactions accumulated. They helped produce a sense that the street was being held in common, and that being present there meant being recognizable to others, even in a limited way. It also clarified a contrast with the quieter, more situational forms of neighbouring described earlier in the chapter. What was taking place here differed from the ordinary rhythm of proximity. It was a deliberately organized occasion, and that mattered for how people used the space. Neighbours stayed longer than they typically would. For a brief period, the street was remade not as a route to move through, but as a place where social presence could settle.

### ***Conclusion***

Read alongside the smaller scenes that make up the first half of this chapter, the block party highlights a different register of the same practical problem: how do people live with others in proximate space without assuming either distance or togetherness in advance. In the mundane, everyday settings I described earlier—on sidewalks, at fences, near driveways, along front steps, and in the small stretches of street where people pass and pause—neighbouring takes shape through limited but repeated forms of contact. These encounters do not require friendship, and they do not depend on a shared project. They depend on small recognitions, on restrained gestures of attentiveness, and on ordinary judgments about what is appropriate in the moment. People decide whether to greet, whether to linger, whether to offer help, and whether to hold back because they do not want to intrude. The work of neighbouring in this register is often quiet. It shows up in brief exchanges, in practical responsiveness, and in the effort to keep proximity workable over time.

At the same time, these relations are not smooth or predictable. They can be strained by competing expectations and by the practical frictions that accumulate around shared space. Following Amit's emphasis on coordination, even minor forms of joint engagement can expose disagreement, fatigue, or irritation because people have to decide how much they owe one another and what counts as reasonable. The chapter's mundane scenes show this clearly. Neighbouring can deepen into mutual support in some moments, and in other moments it can tighten into avoidance, complaint, or moral discomfort. What holds these relations together is not a stable norm of friendliness, but the ongoing interpretive labour of deciding how to live alongside others when the terms of involvement are not settled in advance.

The block party illuminates the same problem in a brighter register. It creates a concentrated setting for encounter. It gives neighbours reasons to pause, to speak, to watch together, and to occupy the street as something other than a corridor of movement. It also shows that these openings have to be produced. They are not automatic. They depend on coordination, on residents taking on roles, and on a willingness to accept that participation will be partial. The event can widen recognition and make contact easier to initiate, but it does so unevenly. Some people move easily through the day. Others remain at the margins. Even when the atmosphere feels warm, conviviality does not erase the differences in disposition, history, or comfort that shape who steps forward and who holds back. The block party can create moments of ease, but it does not resolve the ambivalences that structure everyday proximity.

For this reason, the block party should not be treated as the model for neighbouring, as if everyday life is only a thinner version of what happens on the "special day." The party is a form of coordinated sociality, with permits, tasks, schedules, and planned activities that gather people into shared moments of attention. What it clarifies is how much work it takes to intensify co-

presence. But the more routine forms of neighbouring traced earlier in the chapter matter just as much for coexistence because they are what carry on when there is no event to organize. They are durable because they recur. They persist through repeated small encounters, through restrained acts of recognition, and through the ordinary calibration of involvement.

To conclude, these two registers show that neighbouring in NDG is not simply a matter of living side by side. It is a practical accomplishment that depends on how people interpret one another and how they use the settings around them. Over time, they come to judge which forms of contact are sustainable. The value of these relations lies less in producing intimacy than in enabling people to participate in a shared locality in ways that feel workable. Looking closely at the settings where these interactions occur reveals how NDG is inhabited through lived relations rather than through an abstract idea of neighbourhood. These relations remain provisional because they are shaped by circumstance and by the rhythms of everyday life. They depend, as well, on the uneven energies people can bring to maintaining proximity with others.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: TRAFFIC RELATIONSHIPS

As people move through dense urban public space, they routinely encounter strangers in ways that are easy to overlook. In NDG, these encounters happen along commercial streets, at bus stops, at intersections, in parks, and on narrow sidewalks where people have to pass one another without making too much of the encounter. The immediate problem is usually practical. People are trying to get somewhere. They are waiting for a bus, crossing a street, making room on a sidewalk, or moving through a park while attending to something else. These situations require small forms of accommodation. A person slows down slightly, turns a shoulder, looks ahead rather than directly at someone, or steps aside just enough to let another body pass. Hannerz (1980) described these interactions as traffic relationships. His term captures the minimal coordination through which strangers share space, avoid collisions, and limit the demands they make on one another.

I introduced traffic relationships earlier in the thesis, and I return to the term here because it gives me a way to read observations from NDG that are organized around movement and public circulation. In this chapter, I use traffic relationships to name the slight forms of social engagement through which people keep everyday co-presence going while they are doing something else. Most of the encounters I describe remain practical because people are usually in motion, waiting briefly, or trying to pass through without complication. They do not usually seek interaction for its own sake. They are trying to keep movement possible, to keep waiting uneventful, or to avoid turning a minor crossing into a social obligation. To do this, they rely on gestures that are small enough to be easily missed: a brief glance, a pause before stepping forward, a sideways shift, a careful refusal to stare. Through these gestures, strangers can register one another's presence without making that presence the focus of the moment.

Civil inattention, in Goffman's sense, is one of the key resources for this kind of coordination (Goffman 1963, 1971). It refers to the brief glance that acknowledges another person, followed by a withdrawal of gaze that protects their privacy. The practice is important because it allows recognition without invitation. It helps people move through shared space without having to account for themselves socially at every turn. In the scenes that follow, I do not treat civil inattention as separate from traffic relationships. I treat it as one of the ordinary procedures through which traffic relationships are sustained.

These encounters are not dramatic, but they are widely repeated, which is why they matter for analysis. Their significance does not lie in standing out as memorable scenes. It lies in the way they form a background procedure for everyday life in public space. People have to share sidewalks, crossings, shelters, and park paths with others they do not know. They therefore need ways of managing proximity that do not require each encounter to become a conversation or a negotiation. In this sense, traffic relationships name the ordinary coordination through which public space stays usable.

Traffic relationships differ from the neighbouring relations discussed in the previous chapter. Neighbouring relations are anchored in residential proximity and in the semi-public spaces around home. Traffic relationships arise more often in settings where pace and destination shape what is possible, and where people are oriented toward moving on rather than lingering. Yet the boundary between traffic relationships and other everyday relations is not absolute. Urban encounters do not remain fixed at one level of engagement. Timing can change what is possible. So can repetition. A pause in movement may create a moment where someone offers help, makes a brief remark, or expresses disapproval. A repeated crossing along the same route may produce recognition that is real but still limited. People may come to identify one another as



familiar figures because they share a circuit, even if they do not exchange names or personal histories. In other cases, a small breach, such as refusing to yield or edging forward too soon, can force strangers into more direct engagement because the situation can no longer be managed through quiet adjustment.

For this reason, I treat traffic relationships and other everyday relations not as opposites, but as points along a continuum shaped by the demands of the moment and by what a particular setting makes possible (Hannerz 1980; Lofland 1998). Some encounters remain fleeting. People coordinate movement while keeping attention minimal. Others become more recognizable over time, especially when routes repeat and people begin to identify one another without becoming intimate. In other moments, the situation requires direct speech or moral positioning because someone offers assistance, because a norm has been breached, or because the encounter can no longer be left to gesture alone. The same public spaces can support different degrees of engagement. What changes is often the pace of the situation and the pressure people are under. It also matters whether the encounter happens once or recurs over time. What is at stake in the moment can also shift the encounter, making a gesture of help, a refusal to yield, or a brief exchange more consequential than it might otherwise seem.

The chapter moves between settings where traffic relationships remain smooth and settings where they become more explicit. At times, breaches of expected movement or spacing draw disapproval or require direct negotiation (Goffman 1971; Horgan 2020). At other moments, a brief gesture of help or courtesy interrupts anonymity without creating a lasting tie (Laurier and Philo 2006). In the sections that follow, I turn to ethnographic scenes from NDG, including crossings, bus stops, sidewalks, parks, and routine circuits, to show how traffic relationships

unfold in practice. I conclude by returning to what these minimal encounters reveal about the ordinary moral work of sharing space with strangers in a heterogeneous city.

### ***Traffic Relationships at Monkland and Girouard Intersection***

I observed the intersection of Monkland and Girouard between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m. on a weekday morning during the summer. At that hour, the intersection functioned as a busy corridor connecting pathways into and out of the district. Traffic moved through it steadily. Buses pulled in and out of stops, cyclists threaded themselves between cars, and pedestrians moved toward the métro or away from it, depending on where they were headed that morning. Some appeared to be on their way to work. Others crossed with shopping bags, coffee cups, backpacks, or no visible marker of where they were going. Three corners of the intersection had commercial buildings, while the fourth opened onto the pocket park Paul Doyon. Large trees towered over the space and gave the corner a generous amount of shade. In the park, a raised deck platform held Adirondack chairs and smaller chairs with red tables affixed to the deck, making it possible for people to sit briefly with coffee or a phone before continuing on their way. Bus stops sat on all four corners, and a Bixi station stood nearby. The soundscape shifted with the movement of traffic. Bus engines idled, bicycles clicked as riders adjusted gears, and fragments of conversation in English and French surfaced and disappeared.

The design of the intersection shaped how movement unfolded. Wide turning lanes, traffic signals, bus stops, and the métro entrance all helped produce a rhythm in which people and vehicles moved in bursts rather than in one continuous flow. Because of the layout, particularly the turning lanes, traffic generally remained orderly. Cars accelerated toward the green light and then braked again at the red. Most cars and bikes came to a full stop before moving through, although the pace of rush hour also meant that vehicles edged forward and

slowed again as the signals changed. Each mode of movement had its turn, but those turns were never fully mechanical. People still had to watch for one another, because the intersection was crowded enough that the timing of lights did not settle everything.

Within that rhythm, cyclists positioned themselves in different ways. Some waited at the stop line. Others squeezed forward between cars or inched into the crosswalk while they waited for an opening. One cyclist went through the red light entirely. That small violation drew stares from pedestrians waiting on the corner. Several people responded with quick looks of disapproval, tightening their faces or turning their heads briefly in his direction. The response stayed in gesture. No one called out, but the breach was noticed. Around 8:15 a.m., the pedestrian phase carried a different intensity. When the walk signals illuminated, people moved off all four corners at once. The intersection filled quickly. Some crossed in straight lines. Others crossed diagonally through the middle of the scramble crossing. The streams overlapped, but the scene remained legible because people kept adjusting to one another as they moved.

At the curb, I noticed small hesitations that suggested the rules were trusted, but not completely. As the light changed and the walk sign appeared, one woman paused before stepping forward. She glanced around quickly, scanning for a vehicle that might rush the yellow light before it turned red. Once people were in motion, the crossing depended on these kinds of small readings. Pedestrians took one another into account as they passed. Sometimes they made eye contact. Often they did not need to. Most gazes stayed fixed somewhere ahead, toward the far curb, the signal, the métro entrance, or the space opening between two oncoming bodies. People registered others as moving presences whose paths had to be read, but not necessarily as people to be engaged.

Drivers also participated in this ordering. I watched some make eye contact with pedestrians to signal that they could go ahead. At one point, a delivery truck edged out a little too soon and startled pedestrians who were still crossing. Their pace quickened, and several glared at the driver for his miscalculation. The moment did not become a confrontation, but it made the expectation of turn-taking visible. Other figures stood out as they crossed. A mother walked with a young child in a stroller while speaking on her mobile phone. She was dressed formally, and the scene suggested a morning routine organized around childcare and work. Two school-aged children in uniforms crossed together holding hands. On the opposite side, an elderly man moved more slowly with a walker, watching the countdown timer and adjusting his pace as the seconds disappeared. Other commuters moved more quickly with coffee mugs in hand, most of them heading toward the métro entrance at the top of the street.

Phones also entered into the management of attention. Some people talked while navigating the crossing. Others looked down as they walked, and this seemed to narrow the small field of mutual monitoring that helped the crossing feel safe. Not all encounters at the intersection stayed purely functional. I saw a middle-aged man pass a couple with a baby in a stroller, and as he did, he smiled at the baby. He then made quick eye contact with the parents, offering a brief but genuine smile before continuing on. The exchange lasted only a moment and did not become conversation. Still, it added a small warmth to an otherwise task-oriented scene. For a second, the crossing held more than movement.

Other moments were not as easily absorbed. I noticed an elderly couple crossing at the same time as two other pedestrians who were walking briskly in the oncoming direction. The elderly couple did not change their path or step aside to make more room. One of the oncoming pedestrians had to move out quickly to avoid a collision, and the person beside him adjusted too.

Their gait changed. Their timing changed. The adjustment passed from one body to another. One pedestrian seemed to yield more than the others, not because anyone had spoken, but because the spacing of the crossing required someone to absorb the pressure of the encounter.

The intersection also contained moments when its ordinary rhythm was suspended. While I was observing the crossing, two police cars with loud, flashing sirens approached quickly, then slowed as they entered the intersection. Their arrival produced a momentary freezing of the scene. Pedestrians stopped mid-step. Cyclists held back. Cars remained in place. Once the police cars passed through, movement resumed almost immediately, as if the pause had been released and the crossing could return to its prior rhythm.

Movement at this intersection was organized by signals. Walk signs and turning arrows sorted the crossing into turns, and the red light held vehicles back long enough for pedestrians to move through. But the signals did not settle everything. The crossing held together because people kept reading the situation as it changed. They watched for the pause at the curb, the driver who edged forward too soon, the cyclist moving into the crosswalk, or the person coming toward them at a slightly different pace. These small acts of reading allowed the crossing to continue without becoming awkward or unsafe.

When that rhythm was interrupted, the response was immediate but still contained. A car that nosed forward too soon startled pedestrians who were still in the crosswalk. A cyclist who went through the red light drew sharp looks from people waiting at the corner. Some frowned or scoffed. Others turned their heads for a second and then returned their attention to the light and the curb. No one stopped the cyclist or opened an argument with the driver. The reaction stayed brief, but it showed that people were not simply moving through a technical arrangement of

lights and lanes. They were also relying on a local order, one in which others were expected to wait their turn and not press forward too soon.

At this intersection, traffic relationships were made through quick judgement and the pressure of movement. Most encounters remained practical because the crossing did not give people much time to linger in the encounter. People read the timing of the lights, the hesitation before someone stepped off the curb, and the way a driver inched forward and then stopped again. This allowed the crossing to remain ordinary. At the same time, even small disturbances became noticeable because the scene depended on restraint that was usually taken for granted. Courtesy worked differently. So did hesitation. These moments did not undo the traffic relationship. They allowed the encounter to hold a little more than movement, giving space for a small sign of care or irritation before people continued on their way.

### ***The Pacers at the Track***

During one of our regular Wednesday meet-ups at the park, an encounter on the running track stood out because it unsettled the expected flow of shared space. On an early Wednesday evening, the Pacers gathered at the oval track where we met each week. The park around us was active in familiar ways. Near the entrance, an older couple sat side by side, talking quietly while occasionally glancing at the joggers in the distance. Across the grass, children ran wide arcs, stopping and starting in bursts of laughter. A few cyclists moved along the perimeter path, and other kids coasted along the asphalt loop that circled the park's edge. Along the field, dog walkers moved more slowly, their dogs on leashes and noses down in the grass, while others strolled or lingered in loose clusters.

The track itself felt more structured. Members of the running group formed a line in one lane, facing forward as they waited for the warm-up drills to begin. Their posture and orientation

distinguished them from the looser movement elsewhere in the park. They stood as a group, while much of the activity around them remained scattered and informal. For the most part, runners and other park users shared the space without difficulty. People who crossed the track tended to do so quickly. Single runners cut across the lane briskly, glancing toward the group and then continuing on. Among these different users, Goffman's (1963) civil inattention was visible in practice. People noticed one another and then looked away, sustaining an etiquette that allowed several activities to remain compatible within the same park. The Pacers also adjusted around the park's passing traffic. A runner slowed as a child wandered near the lane. Another shifted her route to avoid someone cutting across the field. These were ordinary forms of coordination, carried through quick attention and small shifts in where people placed themselves.



**Figure 11. NDG Pacers at Confederation Park track. Source: author's photograph.**

That pattern changed when two off-leash dogs ran across the track just as the group began its drills. As the runners queued up to start, the dogs bolted across their path and broke the rhythm of movement. They moved quickly and unpredictably. Several runners faltered mid-

stride. One shortened her step sharply. Another pulled back to avoid contact. The runners reacted because they did not expect dogs to be on the track during drills. The usual assumption that the space would remain readable and safe did not hold, and the situation could no longer be absorbed through quiet adjustment.

Jack reacted immediately. He stepped out from the line and walked toward the dog owners. As he approached, his posture was firm and his gestures direct. Once he was close enough to be heard, he told them that dogs were not permitted on the track because they created a safety hazard for runners, especially when the group trained there at the same hour each week. He pointed toward the adjacent dog park just beyond the hedge, where off-leash use was permitted. At first, the dog owners responded defensively. They insisted that they had a right to be there. They did not initially acknowledge the disruption the dogs had caused, and they resisted the suggestion that they were in the wrong. Their voices rose slightly, and their tone sharpened. The runners remained paused where they had been, no longer in motion but still arranged as a group, with the drill interrupted. Several other park users looked over. The exchange drew the attention of people nearby, even as most returned to what they were doing. Jack continued to explain what had happened. He described how easily a runner could trip or collide with a dog when moving at speed, and how the track became unsafe when dogs ran into the lane during drills.

As the exchange continued, the dog owners softened. Once they understood that the dog park was immediately beside the track, they guided the dogs off the lane and toward the designated area. The group resumed its drills shortly afterward, and the park settled back into its evening rhythm. The scene shows what happened when the usual light etiquette of the park was no longer enough. For much of the evening, co-presence had been maintained through



recognition and withdrawal. Different users of the park could move alongside one another without having to stop and account for what they were doing. When the dogs ran across the track during drills, that arrangement no longer held because the interruption introduced risk into a space that the running group treated as structured and predictable. What had been assumed had to be said aloud.

In Horgan's (2020) terms, the moment can be read as an everyday incivility because it brought disagreement about appropriate use of space into the open. The dispute was not only about the dogs themselves. It was also about priority and timing. For the running group, the track was a training site used at a regular hour, and this created an expectation that others would keep the lane clear while drills were underway. For the dog owners, the track initially appeared as part of the park available for informal circulation. Once that difference was clarified, the encounter ended, and each party returned to what they had been doing before. The incident shows that order in public space depends not only on passing coordination or averted attention. It also depends on shared understandings of what a space is for. Those understandings often remain in the background until someone breaches them.

### ***Morning Rush Hour at the Grand Boulevard Bus Stop***

I observed the bus stop at Grand Boulevard and Somerled during the morning rush. This stop sat along the 103 route, one of the busiest lines feeding into the Villa Maria métro station. At that time of day, passengers arrived in short waves, and the stop operated as a small corridor of movement and waiting. The shelter was an older style and partly concealed by a hedge that curved around the corner. Because the hedge obstructed the view, people often approached without being able to see who was already waiting. The sidewalk was narrow, so those waiting

had to hold their place while also leaving room for others passing through, including pedestrians and, at times, scooters or other sidewalk traffic.

I began observing just after a bus had departed, when the process of waiting began again. A young woman arrived first a few minutes later and positioned herself in front of the spot where she expected the doors to open. Over the next few minutes, other passengers came around the corner. They did not greet one another, and they rarely made eye contact. Still, their movements suggested that a line was already being worked out. Each person paused slightly on arrival, looked at where others were standing, and then took up a place that showed who had arrived first. A line formed without anyone announcing it. People left roughly a metre and a half between themselves and the person ahead. Their bodies tended to face outward toward the road. Hands held phones. Eyes dropped toward shoes, the shelter wall, or the middle distance of the asphalt. Conversation was absent, almost as if silence were part of the etiquette of waiting.

At the same time, people were clearly aware of one another's physical presence. Because the patch of sidewalk in front of the stop was narrow, those waiting had to keep adjusting their relation to others nearby. Someone shifted weight when another passenger came too close. Another tilted a shoulder as a pedestrian squeezed past. These movements kept a thin boundary between bodies while allowing the line to hold. Like the pedestrians at the Girouard intersection, passengers noticed one another just enough to maintain the arrangement, while keeping their attention mostly contained.

As the line grew, its shape was sometimes clarified through small movements. Two passengers who had been lingering slightly apart moved almost at the same time into clearer formation, as if reasserting who was already waiting. A woman arrived just as the bus pulled in and hovered near the front. For a moment, her position could have been read as cutting in. She

stood close to the first boarding passenger, but she did not try to insert herself. Instead, she held back and allowed those who had arrived earlier to board first. Her restraint recognized the line and kept the situation quiet. No one had to correct her.

When the bus arrived, the line advanced in a practiced sequence. Each person tapped a transit card, stepped into the aisle, and then moved into the interior space. People did not crowd the exit as passengers stepped off. The spacing widened briefly to make room, then closed again as boarding resumed. Outside, a new wave of commuters began to form almost immediately after the bus departed. The same pattern started over: bodies facing the road, phones in hand, people taking positions that others could read. Those waiting also continued to share the narrow sidewalk with people passing through. They leaned in, shifted their feet, or turned slightly to create a passage. The bus stop operated as a small setting where several forms of traffic relation overlapped. People waited for the bus, queued to board, and made room for those who were simply moving past.

Later, I noticed another small scene that showed how carefully distance was managed. Two passengers were the only ones waiting for the next bus: a tall middle-aged man and a woman with visible tattoos along her forearm. A few moments after the previous bus had left, he came around the corner as the first passenger for the next bus. A little later, she approached and seemed to assess the spacing with a brief glance. She positioned herself at the same interval used earlier in the line, not close enough to feel intrusive but not so far away that it became unclear who was waiting first. For about three to four minutes, they were the only two people waiting. He looked straight ahead and shifted his weight, seeming uncomfortable in the summer heat. Her gaze moved between the direction where the bus would come, the space ahead of her, and the

ground. They waited in silence, facing the road, and the distance between them did much of the interactional work.

I also observed a brief act of assistance. A mother with a stroller struggled to angle the wheels onto the bus as it arrived. A middle-aged man in line noticed and offered help. He smiled, lifted the stroller with her, and helped guide it onto the bus. She accepted. Her face brightened with a grateful nod, though she did not appear to speak while the action was underway. The act was quick and practical. Once the stroller was on, the exchange ended. He moved down the aisle toward the back of the bus, while she stayed near the front with her child. The gesture did not turn into a continuing relation, but it did show how an encounter could hold more than waiting in silence. In Laurier and Philo's terms, it resembled a moment of non-calculated generosity in public space, offered without expectation of return (Laurier and Philo 2006).

This bus stop shows how strangers produce a line in a space that is constrained and partly concealed. Because people approach without a clear view of who is already waiting, the queue has to be assembled as people arrive. A pause, a glance, a chosen distance from the person ahead — these are enough to make the line readable. Attention remains partial because people are aware of one another, but they do not turn that awareness into open engagement. The narrow sidewalk and the line can therefore be shared without making the situation heavier than it needs to be.

At the same time, restraint did not exclude responsiveness. The stroller assistance changed what the moment asked of people because a small difficulty made help appropriate. The gesture stayed tied to the immediate task. It did not invite further exchange, and it did not become a deeper tie. Still, it showed how traffic relationships can make room for a brief act of care before the situation returns to its ordinary form. The bus stop, in this sense, was a setting

where co-presence was managed through quiet spacing and turn-taking, but where a small practical need could briefly change what felt appropriate to offer.

### ***Helena and the Book Enthusiast***

I encountered this interaction while walking with Helena along Sherbrooke Street during a go-along interview. Helena told me she had been having repeat encounters, on a fairly regular basis, with a fellow book enthusiast for fifteen years, often near the bookstore, as each made their way through the neighbourhood on foot. As we moved along the sidewalk, he saw her from across the street and approached with a stack of books, greeting us as he crossed over. Helena saw him coming and called out playfully, “I’m trying to cut the books back. It’s complicated because it’s a book addiction. But can one have too many books?” They both started laughing. He was a tall, thin man with a reserved manner. He lifted the stack slightly in response and told us that he was coming back from the second-hand bookstore up the street, which I learned they both frequented regularly. They stopped on the sidewalk and, for about five minutes, talked about literature.

The conversation stayed centred on books: what each of them had been reading, second-hand bookstores along the street, and authors they liked. Their tone was relaxed and familiar, and their pacing suggested that this was not an unusual interruption. At the same time, the exchange did not move into personal updates or biographical detail. It stayed with the shared interest that had made the relation recognizable in the first place.

After a brief goodbye, we continued along the street, and I asked if they were neighbours. Helena replied, “No, we’re not neighbours, we’ve just been talking on the street for like decades, right?” This surprised me. Afterward, I asked his name. Helena paused, appearing slightly contemplative, and replied, “You know, I don’t know what his name is.” The fact that they had

spoken regularly for over fifteen years without exchanging names stood out to me. Their familiarity had not translated into personal knowledge in the conventional sense.

This interaction suggests how repetition along a shared route can shift a traffic relationship into a more durable form of sociability, while still keeping it narrow. Helena and the man crossed paths because they followed similar routines and returned to the same commercial corridor. Over time, recognition accumulated. Their encounter took on small rituals: smiles, light banter, and talk about books that could be renewed whenever their paths crossed (Goffman 1963). The tie remained attached to a shared theme and a shared setting rather than extending into biography or obligation. In Hannerz's terms, propinquity supported a relationship that could persist without becoming a neighbouring relation (Hannerz 1980).

Lofland's concept of quotidian sociability helps name what is distinctive here (Lofland 1998). The interaction had moved beyond simple coordination and into a patterned exchange that was familiar without being intimate. Helena did not know his name, his background, or his wider life. She knew him as a person of the street and of the bookstore, someone whose presence could be greeted and spoken with for a few minutes without changing the terms of the relationship. Recognition operated at the level of face, theme, and place rather than biography. The encounter shows how familiarity can accumulate in public life without becoming a deeper tie, and how sociability can remain workable because it does not ask for too much.

### ***Diana, Ayla, and the Photocopy Shop***

I observed a related form of repeated sociability during a brief go-along with Diana, a woman in her early fifties with an animated, friendly manner. As we walked together, she described how walking her dog shaped her everyday encounters in the area. Diana told me that on her daily rounds she often walked up Upper Lachine with Ayla along a routine route, and that they had

some habitual stops. Ayla moved with an eager, forward pull. Diana explained that Ayla loved the dog park and that sometimes she did not respect other dogs' boundaries. She also told me that dog walking made people more open to interacting with her because Ayla was particularly social with both people and other dogs. In Diana's telling, Ayla often set the terms of the interaction.

As we approached the corner near Diana's home, she pointed out a small photocopy shop that had become a regular stop along her route. Diana smiled as she explained that the woman at the photocopy store loved Ayla. The shopkeeper, whom Diana referred to as Poppy, kept a large bag of dog treats behind the counter specifically for dogs who came into the shop. Diana explained that this routine began through an ordinary visit: she had gone in to make copies, Ayla had come with her, and the shopkeeper had immediately greeted the dog and offered a treat. Since then, Poppy had continued to greet Ayla and offer treats, and the exchange had settled into a repeatable sequence.

Diana told me, "At least once a week we go visit the photocopy store just so they can fawn all over the dog and give her treats. They have a huge bag of dog treats just for dog visitors. So we make a point of stopping in to see Poppy, when I walk her...I have to avoid that corner or she will try to drag me to the door. So I take the alley to avoid it." Inside the shop, the exchange followed a familiar rhythm. Poppy greeted Ayla, crouched down to offer a treat, and made brief comments about the dog or the weather. Diana responded in short remarks and then moved on. The interaction remained centred on Ayla. It did not extend into personal conversation beyond what was relevant to the moment.

Over time, Diana came to know Poppy in a more particular way because she knew her name and saw her relatively regularly. Yet it did not develop into a deeper tie. Diana also emphasized a limit. When she was pressed for time, she changed her route to avoid being pulled

into the stop, taking the alley so that Ayla would not drag her toward the door. She explained that she did not always have time for the pause, and so she adjusted her route. Diana's detour through the alley showed that she had a threshold. The exchange was pleasant, but it could still ask for more time and attention than she wanted to give that day.

This vignette shows how a traffic relationship can shift into light sociability through repetition, while still staying close to a particular setting and purpose. The dog functions as a shared point of attention. Because Ayla draws notice, she gives strangers an easy opening for a brief exchange. The interaction becomes predictable. It can be renewed without much explanation, and it does not require the kind of disclosure that would make it feel like a deeper relationship. What emerges instead is a modest form of mutuality built through repeated encounter, close to what Horgan (2012: 619) describes as "soft solidarity."

Lofland's concept of relational fluidity helps describe the position of this relationship over time (Lofland 1998). The exchange sits between anonymity and acquaintance. Recognition accumulates, and the interaction becomes easy to repeat, but it stays attached to the photocopy shop and to Ayla. Diana's decision to avoid the corner when she is in a hurry is important because it shows that even pleasant sociability can become demanding when it takes more time than she wants to give. In that sense, the relationship remains sustainable because Diana can sometimes enter it and sometimes avoid it, keeping the exchange familiar without letting it expand into a broader obligation.

### ***Walking Along Monkland***

One afternoon, I was walking with my father along Monkland Avenue when I encountered a common form of friction that can arise in pedestrian movement. The sidewalk was narrow. People moving in opposite directions generally made room for one another as they passed. As we



walked, an older couple approached from the other direction. They were walking side by side and talking to each other. From a distance, it became clear that they were not going to shift into single file. As they came closer, the expected adjustment did not happen. They maintained their formation and continued forward without acknowledging us. We ended up stepping onto the curb and briefly onto the road in order to pass. The couple continued without comment, and without any visible recognition that we had made space for them.

My father was surprised. For him, it was a natural, unspoken courtesy to make room when you saw someone walking toward you on a narrow sidewalk. His reaction made the norm more noticeable to me. In ordinary pedestrian movement, people rely on this kind of practical accommodation. They notice the path of another body and adjust enough to pass. This is not because they have a relationship with that person, but because the sidewalk requires some shared sense of how passing should happen. This is the kind of low-threshold agreement that Heil describes as minimal consensus, a shared sense of what counts as acceptable conduct in everyday co-presence (Heil 2020).

In this instance, that minimal consensus did not hold. The older couple's refusal to adjust transformed what could have remained an uneventful traffic relation into a brief feeling of being disregarded. The breach did not escalate into confrontation. It stayed at the level of bodily displacement. Still, it forced us out of our line of travel and clarified who was expected to accommodate whom. Most of the time, people make room because they recognize that the sidewalk is shared and that passing requires some give on both sides. Here, that give was withheld. The couple's refusal shifted the burden of accommodation onto others, which is why it registered as discourtesy rather than as a neutral difference in walking style. Minimal consensus

helps name what was being tested in that moment: the fragile expectation that strangers will make just enough room for one another to pass without dispute (Heil 2020).

Across these scenes, traffic relationships appear not as one stable form of encounter, but as a set of situational practices for managing co-presence in settings that place different demands on bodies and attention. The intersection showed this through sequenced movement, because people continued to read one another as they crossed. The track made a different problem visible: a space that usually accommodated multiple activities became conflictual when the dogs introduced risk into the runners' lane. At the bus stop, the issue was not speed but waiting, and the line became readable through posture, distance, and restraint. Helena's and Diana's encounters then showed how repetition can carry traffic relationships toward familiarity, as long as conversation remains tied to a narrow theme and does not ask too much. These vignettes show how public life is sustained through practices that are often small and easily missed, and also how quickly they become noticeable when expectations are not shared or not followed.

### ***Conclusion***

The preceding examples show how traffic relationships and civil inattention help clarify the subtle ways that norms of etiquette guide behaviour in shared public space. Across the settings observed, strangers coordinated co-presence through ordinary movements of spacing, yielding, waiting, and looking away. Much of this work was quiet and taken for granted because it happened as people moved through their day. People stepped aside, held distance, avoided prolonged eye contact, and noticed others just enough to prevent friction. In so doing, public space remained usable because strangers did not have to account for themselves socially at every turn, nor did they have to risk unwanted engagement in order to move along.

Seen in this way, traffic relationships were not simply mechanical. They relied on learned capacities for managing co-presence among people who did not know one another and who often moved through the same space with different aims and tempos. Goffman's concept of civil inattention clarifies how people maintain awareness while also protecting privacy, so that recognition can be offered without becoming an invitation (Goffman 1963, 1971). Heil's notion of minimal consensus names the tacit agreement that supports this kind of coordination, especially in settings where expectations are rarely spoken but are widely recognized (Heil 2020). When that minimal consensus held, interaction remained calm and unremarkable because the situation could be managed through slight corrections in movement or attention. When it did not, the expectations attached to public space became easier to notice. This was apparent at the running track, where an assumed boundary around appropriate use of space was violated and had to be addressed. It was also apparent on Monkland Avenue, where refusal to yield displaced others and produced a small but pointed feeling of discourtesy. These moments support Horgan's argument because they show how even slight encounters can become morally charged when ordinary scripts break down and strangers have to decide whether, and how, to respond (Horgan 2020).

At the same time, the chapter shows that traffic relationships do not always remain at the level of avoidance. In some instances, strangers offered help or courtesy that exceeded what the situation required. The stroller help at the bus stop was one example. It stayed tied to the immediate task, but it showed how assistance can be offered without calculation or expectation of return, and then folded back into the movement of the day (Laurier and Philo 2006). In other cases, repetition altered the terms of the encounter. Helena's long-standing exchange with the book enthusiast shows how recurring contact along shared routines can support recognition and

ease without becoming a neighbouring relation. Diana's account of the photocopy shop shows a similar dynamic, and it also shows how even pleasant sociability can become demanding when it asks for more time than someone wants to give. These cases align with Lofland's emphasis on relational fluidity because they show how encounters can shift between anonymity and familiarity depending on routine and context. They also show how familiarity can accumulate without necessarily becoming obligation (Lofland 1998).

Taken together, this chapter suggests that urban coexistence depends on a continuous, modest labour of coordination carried largely through embodied practice. People manage distance, pace, and attention in ways that allow them to move among strangers without persistent conflict. These encounters do not resolve deeper differences, and they rarely produce durable ties. Instead, they keep everyday public space navigable because they reduce the occasions when difference has to be named or settled. This matters for the argument of the thesis because it clarifies how traffic relationships sit alongside other forms of local relation. Neighbouring does not emerge out of traffic encounters automatically, and most traffic encounters do not move beyond the moment. Yet when everyday movement is held together through these small forms of coordination, it reduces friction in shared space. It can also leave room for other forms of local relation to take shape elsewhere, in settings where people have more time or more reason to engage.

## CHAPTER NINE: COMMERCIAL INTERACTIONS

Cafés, corner shops, and dépanneurs are unassuming yet consequential sites of everyday life.

People go to these places for practical reasons. They stop for errands or a coffee, sometimes just to sit for a few minutes before moving on. But these brief visits can contribute to familiarity over time because they create repeated occasions for recognition without requiring extended engagement. Familiar faces become easier to place. A greeting can begin to feel expected rather than intrusive. In this way, small forms of recognition and comfort can take shape, even when no one arrives intending to “socialize.”

This chapter examines quotidian sociability in NDG’s commercial settings, including cafés, candy shops, dépanneurs, and small outdoor seating areas where people often return and spend brief stretches of time. The chapter’s main argument is that these settings can widen the possibilities for everyday sociability because they organize time and co-presence differently than the traffic relationships discussed in the previous chapter. In many traffic encounters, people pass one another while moving, and contact remains brief. In commercial settings, people often stay in place a little longer. Some also return often enough to become recognisable to staff or to other regular patrons. A greeting or a nod can then become a short exchange, and sometimes, over time, a more durable familiarity.

This does not mean that commercial settings are inherently sociable, or that familiarity generalises across all customers. Many patrons use these places efficiently and leave without conversation. For that reason, I do not treat the distinction between traffic relationships and commercial encounters as a strict binary. Rather, I treat it as a spectrum in which time and return matter. These sites sometimes give recognition more room to develop, but they do not eliminate indifference or the wish to keep to oneself. I approach them as parochial spaces in Lofland’s (1989) sense: semi-public environments in which familiarity is limited rather than intimate.

Recognition can occur, but it tends to come through routine exposure rather than deliberate relationship-building. They are also micro-settings because layout and objects shape what becomes possible. Seating arrangements, counters, terraces, and narrow aisles affect how bodies are positioned in relation to one another. Because of those arrangements, people sometimes find openings for interaction, and at other times find practical ways to avoid it.

The chapter therefore asks what kinds of improvised relations occur in these settings, and under what conditions people remain indifferent or avoid contact. It also asks what these encounters suggest about how residents of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds relate to one another in the course of ordinary routines. I treat conviviality here as an uneven and contingent outcome. It may appear through a verbal greeting, a nod, a small joke, a minor accommodation, or a routine inquiry. At other moments, it may consist of restraint, tact, or civil inattention (Goffman 1963, 1971). These settings also matter because they are precarious infrastructures for everyday sociability. Routine recognition depends on repetition and return. Yet the places that hold those routines in place are vulnerable to rent increases, ownership changes, and market pressures. Commercial change can therefore undo forms of familiarity that took years to develop, and the social rhythms attached to a particular shop or café do not necessarily transfer elsewhere (Radice 2016; Amit 2010). This chapter tracks both the ordinary possibilities of parochial sociability in commercial settings and the fragile conditions that support it.

The material and spatial organization of these settings shapes what can happen within them. Cafés, dépanneurs, and small shops are built around transactions, but they also organize co-presence in ways that can open or close interaction. Laurier (2008) shows that cafés slow the pace of everyday movement and generate moral atmospheres in which contact is possible but

never required. Seating, counters, terraces, and the orientation of bodies toward staff or toward each other matter because they structure where attention lands and how easily people can remain unengaged. Wise and Velayutham (2014) make a similar point through the idea of spatial ordering: built forms and ordinary objects condition how people position themselves and how they interpret the presence of others. In this sense, spatial arrangements shape the degrees of recognition, avoidance, and brief exchange that become possible.

Within these semi-public sites, everyday relations can take different forms. They may involve acquaintanceship, fleeting recognition, habitual familiarity, or occasional conviviality. These relations often cross lines of culture, language, and class. Wise and Velayutham's (2014) account of an intercultural habitus is useful here because it treats everyday multiculturalism as a practical accomplishment rather than a declared orientation (410). People develop ways of managing difference through repeated exposure and situational judgment. They learn when a greeting will help, when silence is more appropriate, and when it is better to let difference recede so the exchange stays smooth. The point is not that people always recognise difference explicitly. It is that they learn how to keep interaction workable with others whose backgrounds they do not fully know.

This helps clarify why small gestures can matter without having to be treated as evidence of "community" in any strong sense. Laurier and Philo (2006) describe non-calculated generosity as one register through which people can remain minimally responsive to one another. A door held open, a brief offer of help, or a small joke can signal attentiveness without implying closeness. At the same time, restraint and discretion can do similar work. A person may choose not to speak, to keep their eyes down, or to keep the exchange strictly transactional. These are

not failures of sociability. They are part of the ordinary repertoire through which people manage co-presence in shared space.

For that reason, it is important not to overstate what these spaces produce. Wessendorf (2013) shows that civility toward diversity can involve both the acknowledgement of difference and the deliberate avoidance of it, depending on what people are trying to accomplish in a given moment (7). People can be civil because they want a brief pleasant exchange. They can also be civil because they want to prevent further contact. Van Leeuwen (2010, 2014) similarly argues that civility often prevails in merchant–customer relations because people work to prevent friction rather than to pursue sociability. He also notes that a certain level of indifference can make personal freedom possible in a tolerant multicultural city (Van Leeuwen 2010, 2014). In this sense, what looks like conviviality is sometimes better understood as a set of practical techniques that help people share space without escalation. Courtesy matters here, but so does discretion. So does the ability to adjust one’s presence just enough for the encounter to remain workable.

Amin’s (2002) emphasis on semi-public micro-spaces further clarifies why these settings matter analytically. His point is not that small venues automatically produce meaningful interaction. Rather, their scale and routines can create conditions in which recognition becomes more likely than it often is in larger public settings where civil inattention dominates (Goffman 1963, 1971). Commercial settings can therefore become places where repeated co-presence yields a little more awareness of others’ routines, even when people remain strangers in any fuller sense. This helps keep the analytic focus on what these spaces make possible without turning that possibility into a presumption.



Two additional concepts help specify how this happens. The first is Radice's (2015, 2016) place-based conviviality, which frames conviviality as an emplaced practice that gathers around particular sites and their repeated use. The second is her codes of sociability, which refers to the local conventions through which people learn what kind of interaction is typical in a particular setting: how greetings happen, whether lingering is tolerated, what kinds of small talk feel appropriate, and how staff respond to different kinds of customers. These codes can invite brief exchange, but they can also make it easier for people to remain unengaged without awkwardness. They matter because they show how recognition can develop through routine without requiring intimacy.

Wise and Velayutham (2009, 2014) also help name the role of proprietors in these settings. Their concept of transversal enablers directs attention to individuals who create openings across difference through ordinary acts of mediation. In cafés and corner shops, proprietors and staff often occupy this role. They may learn customers' names, remember usual orders, offer small accommodations, or intervene to steady the tone of the space. This work is not neutral. It is a form of moral labour that shapes what is possible for everyone else who enters. Importantly, it can also coexist with customers who prefer minimal contact. A proprietor can sustain an atmosphere of ease without requiring conversation from everyone.

Finally, these parochial forms of sociability remain fragile. Amit (2010, 2020) describes conviviality as a fragile achievement, dependent on conditions that are not secure. Commercial spaces are particularly vulnerable to rising rents, shifting ownership, and market pressures. Zukin et al. (2009) and colleagues also show that retail change restructures who can cultivate familiarity and who is displaced, because commercial turnover changes both the material setting and the people who can afford to occupy it. These arguments matter for the ethnography that

follows because they keep attention on what is at stake in the closure of a “small” shop or café: not the loss of an idealised community, but the loss of a routine setting in which recognition, ease, and workable co-presence had been repeatedly produced.

Taken together, these perspectives frame the ethnographic material that follows. Commercial settings can host many kinds of encounters, from brief transactions to more familiar exchanges. What becomes possible depends on spatial arrangement, patterned routines, proprietors’ practices, and the ways customers move between engagement and withdrawal. These sites are therefore not simply service points, and they are not necessarily shared in the same way by everyone who uses them. They are contingent settings in which people work out, in ordinary time, how to live alongside others through small recognitions, tact, and, at times, deliberate indifference.

I begin with [Prasinos]<sup>7</sup> because it shows how a commercial setting can sit at different points on a spectrum between transaction and familiarity. By transaction, I mean an encounter centred on service exchange. The interaction is organized around ordering, paying, and leaving, so it can remain brief and contained. By familiarity, I mean the more gradual effects of repetition. People return often enough to begin recognising one another, greeting one another, and sometimes carrying the exchange a little beyond what the purchase requires, even though many customers still prefer to keep it largely functional. It is a good site to start because different customers use it differently, and those differences show up in the pace and tone of interaction across the day.

### ***Sites of Commercial Interaction: Prasinos***

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<sup>7</sup> All commercial establishments referenced in this chapter are identified using pseudonyms. Square brackets indicate instances where the name of a business has been changed.

I begin with [Prasinos] because it shows how a commercial setting can sit at different points on a spectrum between transaction and familiarity. By transaction, I mean an encounter centred on service exchange. The interaction is organized around ordering, paying, and leaving, so it can remain brief and contained. By familiarity, I mean the more gradual effects of repetition. People return often enough to begin recognising one another, greeting one another, and sometimes carrying the exchange a little beyond what the purchase requires, even though many customers still prefer to keep it largely functional. It is a good site to start because different customers use it differently, and those differences show up in the pace and tone of interaction across the day.

There was no visible decoration in front of [Prasinos] café. The café sat unmarked on Sherbrooke Street, a stretch of the locality dense with small businesses and everyday foot traffic. Its façade was modest. It did not have a prominent logo or storefront sign that would immediately catch the eye of a passerby. A soft turquoise blue framed the large front window, and only the word “Café” was etched across the glass. Once I moved closer, I could see the word “[Prasinos]” painted in bold red letters along an interior ceiling beam. The absence of obvious signage marked the café as a local’s spot. People knew it more through word of mouth and the circulation of regulars than through formal marketing. Nearby residents knew this as the place to get a good coffee and an avocado sandwich. Another favourite was the fresh carrot cake that Chris baked weekly. His Greek family heritage was also visible in his signature spanakopita and in the Greek-style preparation of certain coffees.

From the sidewalk, the café remained understated, even as the street around it stayed busy. The wider setting also set the terms of interaction. The sidewalk in front of the café was unusually wide, and the small patio was furnished with several tables and chairs arranged in a considered way. Around lunchtime, people moved steadily along the street. Dog walkers passed

slowly. Parents moved with children. Workers stepped out on their breaks. These flows formed part of the broader street rhythms of parochial space, where a commercial strip remained functional while also allowing acquaintanceship and familiarity to settle in through repetition.

Inside, the layout was pragmatic and unpretentious. The walls were white, and a long bench, originally a church pew, lined the left-hand side of the room, with small square tables placed in front of it. Along the back, an L-shaped counter and glass food display anchored the café, while a scattering of small, mismatched tables filled the opposite side. The coffee mugs were a collection of odd finds, no two alike. These material details contrasted with the polished branding and standardized décor of corporate cafés. The space felt informal and slightly improvised, as if it had grown gradually through use and habit. It was a place where an unhurried presence felt acceptable.



**Figure 12. Café storefront on Sherbrooke Street, NDG. Source: author's photograph.**

I first came to know Chris through repeated visits to the café, where familiarity developed gradually through return rather than through any single formal encounter. On another day, at roughly the same time, the scene was initially quiet. Then the phone started to ring, and Chris and his father shifted into a practiced choreography: taking orders, preparing sandwiches, and moving between the front counter and the back kitchen. Over the next hour, a steady stream of customers arrived. I noted the ease Chris displayed with many of them. He asked one regular about his mother's health and slipped into a longer conversation as the customer shared worries about her condition. With others, the interaction stayed lighter: comments about the workday, brief updates, jokes.

This was one place where timing mattered. Cafés often have a predictable “quiet time,” and when people return in that same window, they can develop a modest awareness of one another's routines and troubles. What accumulates is not friendship or deep intimacy, but a patterned familiarity: a comfort in being among people who are both known and unknown (Laurier 2008). As Laurier (2008) suggests, cafés slow the pace of interaction and generate moral atmospheres in which contact is possible but not required. The room itself helps set those terms. Counters organize brief exchanges with staff. Tables and terraces make it easier to linger. The way bodies are oriented toward the menu, the counter, a companion, or the room can invite talk, signal privacy, or allow people to remain alongside one another without engaging.

This was also evident in the relationship between Chris and employees from the bank on the corner. A group of women came in to collect their habitual coffee and sandwich order. While he prepared their food, they shared snippets about the busyness of their morning at the bank. Chris also told me that he often delivered sandwiches and coffee to them at work. He took time

to learn people's names, and he remembered small details about their occupations and hobbies. Radice (2016) posits that conversations such as these can be "conducted in a familiar tone but [without] requiring familiar ties" (434). She describes these greetings as "inconsequential intimacy," which can involve friends, strangers, or familiar strangers engaging on comparable terms, without any commitment extending beyond the immediate time and place (435).

Customers described the effect of that attention in plain terms. One regular called [Prasinos] a "community hub," a place where "I'll know at least two people that will walk through the door" (Fieldnotes, January, 2023). Another told me, "This place is a huge beating heart of my week, because I can come here and work, it's a little human touch-base which is so rare when you're in your work silo for much of the day" (Fieldnotes, January, 2023). At the same time, not everyone participated in this kind of ongoing sociability. During my visits, I also saw customers who worked quietly on laptops, read, or scrolled on their phones. They appeared to value shared co-presence without moving into conversation. Even in a place some people experienced as a "hub," engagement remained uneven.

The large round table by the front window offered another vantage point on these layered uses. One afternoon, a group of high school students came in with their backpacks, some carrying paper containers of French fries brought from a neighbouring take-out. Chris glanced over and welcomed them without hesitation. Later, he leaned toward another patron and, in a hushed tone, said,

You know what? They've been coming in...I dunno...for the last year? And they come in and they sit at the big table over there by the window, and they're all quiet, respectful...they come in they eat, they bring their own food sometimes. Those six kids at the round table. They are high school kids—other places, they kick you out as soon as you walk in...here they just come in...some of them order, some don't. I don't care, they sit for 10-15 minutes, then they go back to school...so for them it's a complete deal...they don't make noise, I can never kick them out. They are so cute. They don't even know my name they just know it's that place. (Fieldnotes, January, 2023)

In that moment, Chris's tolerance widened what counted as acceptable use of the café. The teenagers' quiet occupation of the table, their short stay, and their partial consumption showed how a commercial setting could hold a small pocket of shelter and ease without turning it into a managed program. Many cafés enforced stricter rules. Here, Chris's judgment allowed the teenagers to use the café briefly without having to justify their presence through purchase alone.

Chris's role mattered again in a different register when interaction risked fraying. One day, a young man entered the café while clearly experiencing a mental health episode. He raised his voice and occasionally swore, drawing the attention of the few customers present. Instead of asking him to leave or calling the police, Chris addressed him by name, offered him a coffee, and gently asked him to tone down the swearing so that others would remain comfortable. An online post by a customer later described this scene:

A young man came in today who was clearly having some mental health challenges. There were a few customers at tables. The man was yelling and swearing a bit. Chris addressed him by name, offered him a coffee and to sit for awhile. Chris gently asked him to not swear so much but let him stay and listened to him. Some customers came in and out. When I left, the man was still there. Very chill and non-judgmental response from Chris. (Fieldnotes, July, 2022)

This episode showed the proprietor doing a kind of everyday mediating work: not resolving a "problem" once and for all, but keeping the space workable so that co-presence could continue (Wise and Velayutham 2014; Wise 2009). The point is not that a café became a site of care in a broad moral sense. It is that the space depended on small judgments about when to intervene, how to speak, and how to protect the possibility that people with different thresholds and expectations could remain in the room together.

[Prasinos] had been in operation for fifteen years under Chris's stewardship, and these practices had gathered over time. Regulars returned because the café offered a dependable



texture: familiar faces, recognizable routines, and a stable set of understandings about what was allowed and what was tolerated. Yet that stability remained materially contingent. When Chris received notice of a 30 percent rent increase, he told a regular that such an increase would effectively mean giving half of his take-home salary to the landlord. One day, as I sat at a table near the counter, I overheard him explain to a customer: “I’m closing next month, permanently, we’re done. They raised the rents.” “Why?” the customer asked. “Well, it’s [this street]...it’s worth millions of dollars...It’s new beginnings for me, I guess. Somebody else will come in and take it over and set up another shop.”

The closure unsettled many regulars because the space was not interchangeable for them. One customer said plainly that what Chris had built “can’t be replaced” and described it as “a real community here” (Fieldnotes, January, 2023). Another long-time customer reflected,

[Prasinos], one of my favourite NDG spots...this is such a shame, and a profound loss for the neighbourhood. [Chris’] clients come from all walks of life, and he knows most of us by name. When I heard he was closing, I immediately thought of many of the regulars I know, and their stories. Where will [E], a translator who also puts together great playlists, work if she’s not at her usual table? What about [H.], an older gentleman, and former cabinetry teacher, who often stops in for coffee and company? [Chris] always makes a point of asking where [H] is headed when he leaves, as he’s been known to get confused in memory fogs. “I want to know where he’s going, in case someone is looking for him.” And [S], a talented gardener who knows that Chris will always poke gentle fun while prepping her gluten-free sandwiches, and who cares for the impressive hibiscus and aloe plants in the front window? (Fieldnotes, February, 2023)

Chris gestured at the hibiscus, now in full bloom, and joked that he had “stolen” it years ago: “Not really though. You know that some of the garden centres just throw out perfectly good plants at the end of the busy season? Now look at it!” These reflections did not claim that every customer shared the same attachment. They clarified something narrower: for some people, the café had become braided into ordinary routines of work, checking in, joking, and quietly tracking who was doing well and who might need attention. The closure showed how place-based

conviviality depended on ownership, rent, and continuity. Another café might open in the same location, but it could not automatically reproduce the same small care practices that had developed there through repeated use and long stewardship.

### ***Tony and the Dépanneur***

I returned to the dépanneur to speak with Tony again after our earlier conversation and short go-along. This time, I wanted to understand how the corner store fit into his everyday life, beyond the brief exchanges I had witnessed there. When I first addressed him as Antonio, he corrected me gently and smiled: “Do me a favour, I’m Tony. I’m Castellano. The name of my language is Castilian. So call me Tony.” He said this warmly. Still, the correction was not incidental. It was part of how he made himself known in the interaction, situating himself through language before the interview had fully begun.

I pushed open the large wooden door of the dépanneur along Sherbrooke Street. Its threshold was worn smooth from years of use. A small, old tin bell rang above me, a sound that was both matter-of-fact and familiar. It alerted the clerk to my presence and marked my entry into a space that was ordinary yet widely recognizable to most Montrealers. The blue paint on the doorframe was chipped. Inside, the air held the faint metallic smell of aluminum cans. There was also the sweetness of candy and the cool air drifting from the refrigerators along the back wall.

The store itself was compact, about four hundred square feet, and neatly organized despite its density. Narrow aisles pressed inward. Pallets of beer took up much of the floor space, with chips and dry goods fitted around them. Refrigerators filled the back wall with milk, soft drinks, and other everyday essentials. Midway down the aisle, I noticed Cedric, a yellow tabby cat perched lazily on a pallet of beer. Tony and his co-worker laughed as they told me Cedric

was “the neighbourhood cat,” a regular visitor who wandered in much the same way as customers. In their telling, Cedric was not just an amusing detail. He belonged to the rhythm of the corner store. His presence made the place feel locally inhabited.

Tony explained that although he had trained as a veterinary worker in Venezuela, he could not practise that profession in Canada. He had instead worked in masonry in Ottawa before eventually relocating to Montréal. He began working at the dépanneur a few years after his arrival. The corner store had the close, crowded feel of many Montréal dépanneurs. It was a commercial setting, but it could also work as a parochial node, a place where recognition developed through repeated visits. He was finishing his shift behind the counter. Despite telling me he struggled with facial recognition, he said, “I know a lot of people, but I don’t remember their faces...my facial recognition has never been good.” His sociability did not depend on remembering faces. It came through in his tone and in his readiness to talk. He recounted that during the COVID restrictions, before he worked there formally, he would come to the dépanneur to hang out. At a time when many public spaces were closed or restricted, it became one of the few places where he could find company. He passed time with the owner, chatted with regular customers, and lingered on the sidewalk. By the time he began working there, the place was already part of his routine.



**Figure 13. Commercial block along Sherbrooke Street, NDG. Source: author's photograph.**

After he finished his shift, we moved outside to continue talking. On the wide sidewalk in front of the store, a few mismatched plastic chairs were set against the wall, along with one weathered wooden chair with an old cushion. These modest furnishings extended the store's threshold into public space. A portion of sidewalk became a small gathering zone. As we sat, people passing by greeted Tony with brief nods, and others stopped long enough for a short exchange. Residents from the nearby apartment buildings occasionally pulled up a chair beside him. These gestures conveyed comfort and ease. People could acknowledge Tony, stop for a moment, and then continue on their way. Tony often identified these individuals as people he “knew but not by name,” which is one way a street produces familiar strangers, a form of recognition that does not require entry into one another's lives (Goffman 1963).

Tony's interactions regularly moved beyond the purely transactional. At one point, he shouted “Ciao!” to a departing customer while rising quickly to help another man manoeuvre his wheelchair over the small step at the entrance. The gesture was unremarkable in the sense that it

did not call attention to itself. It was a practical response shaped by proximity and routine, an instance of assistance woven into the everyday flow of the storefront (Laurier and Philo 2006).

As we continued speaking, he pointed out people passing along the street. “Hey, that’s ‘Smiley Skylar,’ she’s always here,” he said, explaining that she lived in the apartments nearby. He talked about the optometrist who was married to a Venezuelan woman. He mentioned the grocer a few doors down and the veterinarian on the corner, where he enjoyed lingering because of his own experience as a veterinary assistant. These comments were not “networking” in any formal sense. They showed how his daily routes stitched together a tight geography of repeated crossings. Local information travelled through small talk and recognition, and the *dépanneur* functioned as a predictable point of overlap. It was not an organized group or a formal public space. It was a place where people could linger long enough to exchange news, confirm who was around, and keep up with the micro-events of a few blocks.

He also described how, during the pandemic, the *dépanneur* had become something of an informal gathering place: “Here, this is a speakeasy! Almost every day people come here...customers drink a beer, two beers, three beers. We drink inside or put it in a coffee cup and come out front.” What he described was not simply consumption. It was a way the threshold of the corner store became socially usable. The chairs mattered, but so did the tacit permission to linger and return. Together, these practices formed a small convivial infrastructure through which stories and information could travel across the day (Wessendorf 2014; Wise and Velayutham 2009).

Tony’s linguistic flexibility, moving between French, English, and Spanish, was central to his role in this setting. His greetings and short conversations formed part of a practical intercultural habitus, understood here as embodied skill rather than principle. He seemed to know

when to greet, when to joke, and when to let a comment pass so the interaction stayed smooth (Wise and Velayutham 2014). Through Tony's steady presence, the *dépanneur* became more than a retail site. His humour and small acts of care helped make it a setting where people could feel acknowledged and briefly drawn into the light sociality of everyday life in NDG.

### ***Dolce Vita the Bake Shop***

A few blocks west of [Prasinos], there used to be a small bakery café called [Dolce Vita]. It was run by Gianna, an Italian-Canadian entrepreneur who had first built a home-based catering business before expanding with her partner into a gelato and cupcake shop on Sherbrooke Street. I had come to know Gianna first as a proprietor. During the early years of the pandemic, when small businesses were facing considerable uncertainty, I made a point of supporting her shop when I could. She was an acquaintance rather than a personal relation, someone I knew because I bought from her business and because we chatted when I picked up the cakes she made. Our connection had the kind of familiarity that can form through repeated commercial encounters, because buying from her was also a small way of staying connected to the local businesses that were trying to remain open under difficult conditions. Later, when we spoke over Zoom, she described what it had taken to build the business there and how difficult it became to keep going.

Her storefront stood out along Sherbrooke Street. A bright pink popsicle-stick fence enclosed a small patio with artificial turf, outdoor lights, and a striped pink-and-white awning. In summer, children gathered by a small service window to order ice cream and gelato while parents clustered around the tables. For many families, my own included, it became part of warm-weather routines and short, repeat visits. Inside the small space, Gianna baked and decorated custom cakes while also preparing the gelato, pies, and cupcakes that filled the shop.



**Figure 14. Commercial storefront on Sherbrooke Street, NDG. Source: author's photograph.**

Gianna spoke to me repeatedly about how she understood Sherbrooke Street as a kind of economic barometer for NDG. “People either stay and invest here,” she explained, “or they leave to go establish themselves in the Plateau.” For her, owning a small business in NDG carried a sense of responsibility to contribute to local life and to give something back. She described moments when she quietly offered free food to people in need. She spoke about paying a local man to do odd jobs. She also described handing out cookies and hot chocolate during NDG Arts



Week, and donating food and treats during the pandemic. These gestures were not presented as the primary function of the business. She framed them instead as part of what it meant, for her, to operate as a small local shop and to make a space feel accessible and welcoming. In her view, her shop was not guided by a strict profit logic. It was shaped by livelihood, obligation, and local attachment.

When she spoke about the disappearance of small businesses along Sherbrooke, she framed it as a change that many residents might not register until it was felt in daily life. She told me:

I care about the neighbourhood, these are businesses that are slowly disappearing and I don't think that most people realize how that's going to impact our sense of community – their businesses were the sites where the connection between individuals and the community happened, and they tried to create this type of connective space. [Chris] from [Prasinos] created a friendly space for Alcoholics Anonymous to gather. There's all kinds of things that support the neighbourhood that most people wouldn't know, but it's important. (Interview, May, 2022)

Her point was not that a shop automatically “creates community.” It was that proprietors can shape whether a space is experienced as merely transactional or as a place where people are permitted to pause, be noticed, and return without needing a formal reason. That orientation was visible in the terrasse itself. It was deliberately child-friendly, and it encouraged people to stop for a while rather than simply pass through. The design helped sustain a small pocket of ease on a busy commercial street, making it more likely that people would stay long enough for brief talk to begin.

Dogs became another everyday catalyst for interaction. Gianna noted that her shop was situated in what she described as a “doggy service area,” surrounded by three veterinary clinics, a groomer and pet supply shop, and a pet ophthalmologist. She told me: “And dogs. Our shop was situated in the doggy service area with three vets, a groomer/pet supply shop and the pet



ophthalmologist. We had seen an increase in doggy traffic so much so that we started giving out dog treats for the well-behaved doggies...” She laughed as she described this as an adaptation to local rhythms. “NDG is really all about dog lovers. And the wide sidewalks make it easy for people to pause with their dogs.”

At the same time, she described how quickly that ease could fracture. She recounted an afternoon in June when the terrasse was full and a man entered behaving erratically, leaning too close to patrons and making people uncomfortable:

One afternoon it was really hot outside and busy [there were] families sitting at the tables, kids eating ice cream, everyone enjoying themselves. Then this man came onto the terrace. He was loud, moving strangely, and he started leaning in too close to people, asking things that made everyone uncomfortable. You could feel the mood shift. Parents pulled their kids closer and people stopped talking...everyone just kind of froze. It went from a happy place to really tense in a matter of minutes. I was serving gelato and I had to stop, step outside and talk to him...I told him clearly he had to leave. He argued and mumbled a little, but finally he went back onto the street. After that, things slowly settled down. (Interview, May, 2022)

In her account, patrons managed discomfort through withdrawal and watchfulness until she intervened. She described the shift in the terrasse’s atmosphere in embodied terms: children pulled close, voices dropped, talk stopped. The scene clarified what it can require to keep a semi-public setting usable when different thresholds and vulnerabilities are present at once. Gianna’s intervention did not “solve” anything in a broad sense. It restored the conditions that allowed families to remain and allowed the terrasse to settle again (Wessendorf 2013; Wise 2009; Wise and Velayutham 2014). Her account also made clear that the sociability of the terrasse depended on her willingness to do that work, not only on the space’s design. The setting invited ease, but maintaining it involved judgment and occasional firmness.

Gianna connected these experiences to the larger difficulty of sustaining small businesses under rent pressures and ownership turnover. She was particularly attentive to how rising rents

along Sherbrooke Street were reshaping the commercial landscape. When we spoke about her closure, she told me her rent had increased to an extent she could no longer sustain. Her reflections moved between her own circumstances and the broader patterns she observed around her. “These are businesses that are slowly disappearing,” she said, “and most people don’t realize how that’s going to impact our sense of community. Those shops were places where people connected, even if they didn’t see it that way.” She also drew distinctions between Sherbrooke Street and Monkland Avenue. On Monkland, she said, shops catered to higher-income clientele and saw more foot traffic from adjacent affluent areas. Sherbrooke, by contrast, had historically been more modest and locally oriented. “Sherbrooke is the working-class side of NDG,” she told me, contrasting it with what she perceived as more upscale commercial transitions along Monkland.

When she spoke about the person who took over her lease, she framed it as a conflict over values as much as finances. She described her own approach to the district as grounded in longer-standing ties and responsibilities. This contrasted with what she experienced as a more transactional orientation. She spoke sharply about the new owner and what his priorities implied:

This part of Sherbrooke is the working class area. These are businesses that are slowly disappearing and I don’t think people realize how that will impact our community...For me, being a part of the community means making business decisions that might be based on other decisions...ties and purpose and other reasons...meaning for being in a community. It’s not just the physical space that is important...it’s the values the business reflects...we are from the community he’s not...he’s an outsider...he doesn’t care about [the neighbourhood]...he just wants to make money...‘I don’t care about kids,’ he said. (Interview, May, 2022)

In another telling of this same moment, she described trying to give him her ice cream freezer because she wanted some continuity to remain. “I told him, ‘Please take my freezer. I just want it to stay in the neighbourhood.’” His reply — “I don’t care about kids” — left her with the sense that what she had built could not simply be carried forward by a new tenant. Her frustration was

pointed, but it clarified an analytic point for this chapter. Place-based conviviality depends on the proprietor's ongoing decisions about which uses will be tolerated, encouraged, or refused, and how different people will be received. It also depends on what kinds of obligations the business is willing, and able, to carry.

[Dolce Vita's] closure showed how quickly those conditions can disappear when the business becomes economically unsustainable. While her shop operated for only a few years, it became part of the everyday texture of the street for many families. Its closure revealed how vulnerable such spaces are to rent increases and commercial turnover. What is lost is not only a business. It is a modest infrastructure of familiarity and ease, built through routines of pausing and returning, and through the proprietor's willingness to hold the space open in particular ways. Gianna's account makes clear that these settings depend on economic viability as well as sustained commitment. When either is under strain, the sociability tied to that place becomes precarious.

### ***Fanny's Place***

[Fanny's Place] was a long-standing breakfast diner in NDG, operating for more than 50 years and embedded in the everyday rhythms of Sherbrooke Street. Tucked into a dense stretch of small shops and cafés, it had the feel of a classic greasy spoon: unpolished, crowded, and unmistakably familiar to many locals. Its appeal did not lie in décor or refinement. It rested instead in the disorderly comfort of a space where people could greet one another, squeeze onto stools, joke with the cook, or watch the small dramas of the morning rush unfold.

When I visited, the smell of cooking oil and bacon clung to the air. The counter dominated the room. Eleven stools lined up only a few feet from the grill, creating an unavoidable closeness between customers and cooks. Greetings, quick-fire orders, and snippets

of cross-talk formed a steady hum that drew newcomers into the room almost immediately. In warmer months, a few mismatched plastic tables spilled onto the sidewalk, extending the diner's social life outward. These ad hoc outdoor seats worked as small pockets of parochial space, where people might share a table, pull up a chair, or exchange a quick comment while waiting for food.

Jordan, a lifelong NDG resident, described the diner as “filthy...but perfect” during our interview over Zoom, emphasizing that its messiness was part of its appeal. His account stayed with the practical details of how the place worked, and how sociability could arrive without being planned. He told me about standing outside with his daughter waiting for a seat when a man he had never met invited them to join his table. Later, another customer, not a staff member, brought Jordan his food from the counter. Jordan narrated it this way:

When you go to [Fanny's]—and it's filthy...And it's...the chairs are duct-taped, and the grease lingers and you can ball it up and throw it. And you walk in and somebody says “hey bro, what do you want?” And you order the mishmash, and you grab the coffee yourself and you stand there and then you go outside. This literally happened to me—there's a family of three, a father and his two kids sitting [outside] at one of those beat-up, broken, duct-taped, white, plastic garden lawn furniture tables and I'm standing there with my daughter...And what does the guy, who I've never met in my life, say [to me]? “Grab a couple chairs and pull up.” ...my food comes and who brings the food, another customer—not somebody who works there...And I look at him and I'm like, “thanks dude” and I know not to ask him for a napkin because I know he doesn't work there. ...there's no illusion of I don't see colour...you have to see color, what you do is you sit there and you go oh you're different from me. Tell me why. That's what you do at [Fanny's]. (Jordan, Zoom interview, April 2021)

Jordan's emphasis on visible difference did not describe a deep encounter or a transformation. It described a local style of openness in which people talked across the counter and accepted unsolicited sociability as part of how the diner worked. The point for this chapter is that the diner's material arrangement helped produce this atmosphere. The grill, stools, crowding, and self-service coffee brought people close enough for informal help to feel normal rather than

awkward. A customer could carry another customer's plate without confusion because the social script already allowed people to do such things for one another. That is one way "non-calculated generosity" appeared here: not as a moral performance, but as part of how breakfast unfolded (Laurier 2008; Laurier and Philo 2006).

[Fanny's] showed a version of parochial sociability where transaction receded quickly into the background. People did not only come to purchase food efficiently. Many came expecting the crowding, exposure, and cross-talk that made it possible to be pulled into conversation even when they arrived alone. The diner worked, in part, because familiarity did not depend on knowing names. It depended on repeated participation in the same cramped choreography and the same permissive codes of sociability (Radice 2015, 2016). Ordinary life was shared there for the brief duration of breakfast, and the diner's long presence on the street meant that these fleeting encounters could still feel like part of NDG's local rhythm.

### ***Swirls Candy Shop***

By the time I arranged to speak with Salwa more formally at [Swirls], we already knew one another by name. She had long been a familiar presence in the locality, and my children had visited the shop for years. When I arrived, she was standing behind the counter of the basement-level candy store on Monkland Avenue, sorting bills and answering customers' questions almost at once. The shop stretched long and wide beneath the street, its fluorescent lights reflecting off hundreds of plastic tubs filled with gummies, chocolates, licorice, and sour candies in bright colours. The air held a dense sweetness. Chocolate mingled with the sharper scent of sugar dust drifting from the bulk bins. Along the far wall, shelves were stacked with party supplies, giving the space the feel of an all-purpose celebration room tucked below street level.

As we spoke, our conversation was constantly interrupted by the rhythms of retail life. A group of schoolchildren came in still wearing their uniforms. They gathered around the tubs, scooping candy into bags and pulling out larger bills than I would have expected for an after-school stop. Salwa later connected this to Monkland's position as a family-oriented and relatively affluent commercial strip. She described the street as bright and spacious, with wider sidewalks that made it feel safer for children to walk up and down. "Maybe because the streets are wider, the sidewalks are wider," she said. "Maybe makes it feel safer for kids to walk up and down the street. It's bright here." For her, this mattered because children from nearby schools regularly moved through Monkland before and after school, and the candy shop became one of the places where that movement settled briefly.

During a lull, Salwa described her clientele. Many Jewish families who lived nearby were regulars. She also noticed an increasing number of Muslim and Middle Eastern customers asking about halal candy. Rather than treating this as a formal diversity initiative, she described it as part of the ordinary work of running the shop. Customers asked, she adapted, and the stock changed to meet what people were looking for. Parents and grandparents stopped in with children. Teenagers arrived in groups. Adults came for party supplies. Some customers entered hurriedly, offering only minimal greetings, while others lingered long enough to chat about weekend plans or ask for recommendations. These exchanges stayed light, but they marked the shop as a place where different social worlds overlapped through ordinary errands.

Salwa also drew a clear contrast between Monkland and Sherbrooke. Monkland, in her view, was more expensive and more closely tied to families with disposable income, including customers coming from Westmount, Hampstead, and Côte-Saint-Luc. Sherbrooke, by contrast, felt more mixed and economically strained. That contrast shaped the shop's interactions. Some

customers browsed with ease. Others came in for something specific and left quickly. One interaction made those expectations especially visible. A middle-aged woman pulled up in a black Range Rover, walked briskly into the shop, and asked for a specific caramel candy brand. When Salwa explained that she did not carry it, the woman's expression tightened. She was not openly confrontational, but the irritation showed in a drawn-out sigh and a stiffening of posture. Salwa offered alternatives politely, but the woman left unsatisfied. After the door closed, the tension seemed to linger for a moment before dissolving back into the ordinary hum of the shop.

The schoolchildren gathering around the candy bins gave one version of the shop. The requests for halal candy gave another. So did the hurried parents, the grandparents buying party supplies, and the affluent customer whose irritation briefly changed the tone of the room. [Swirls] was a place where brief moments of ease and friendliness could emerge, but it was also a space where small frictions surfaced around class expectations, cultural difference, and the everyday rhythms of Monkland Avenue. These overlapping dynamics meant that an ordinary encounter could carry different meanings depending on who entered the shop and what they seemed to expect from it.

Salwa navigated this mix with attentiveness. She spoke about wanting to make the shop feel welcoming to a wide range of customers, whether by stocking halal options, learning children's preferences, or responding patiently when someone arrived in a hurry. Her orientation toward the local area was not framed as a formal effort to bring people together. It was closer to the practical work of making a small retail shop usable for many different people. [Swirls] also illustrated how sociability depended on routine. Parents stopped in after school. Grandparents lingered with children. Teenagers arrived in groups. Over time, these patterns created familiar rhythms that allowed light forms of recognition to accumulate. Such interactions remained

situational and unforced. Recognition could remain light. Warmth could appear without turning into intimacy. Sociability was anchored less in intention than in repetition.

These qualities echoed the broader patterns seen in other NDG commercial spaces, where gesture, presence, and routine gave shape to a sense of ease rather than a strong sense of local belonging.



**Figure 15. Monkland Avenue intersection in NDG. Source: author's photograph.**

However, this ease was also fragile. Shortly after my fieldwork ended, [Swirls] closed. Salwa's earlier concerns about rising rents and shifting clientele were not abstract observations. They came from her own daily experience behind the counter, because she watched how even small changes in the locality's economy altered who came into the shop, what they bought, and



how often they returned. These worries pointed to the broader commercial pressures shaping NDG's retail landscape. Small independent shops had to absorb increasing costs while competing with better-resourced businesses along both Monkland and Sherbrooke. Her store, like many others, sat at the intersection of everyday sociability and economic precarity. The interactions that made the shop feel lively and embedded in the area did not necessarily translate into the financial stability needed to keep it open.

### *Lone Wolf Café*

The [Lone Wolf] Café stood out as a recent experiment on Monkland Avenue, a commercial corridor characterized by higher rents, polished storefronts, and a steady stream of customers from both NDG residents and people arriving from elsewhere. This differed from Sherbrooke Street, where many of my other field sites were located and where small businesses often struggled to sustain themselves. When I asked Leni, the café's owner, why she chose this location, she explained that it was precisely the street's existing café rhythm that drew her in. She commuted each morning from Laval on the North Shore, a considerable daily journey, because she believed Monkland had the "right vibe" for what she wanted to build. She also sensed that people on this street were already accustomed to lingering in cafés, and that this would make it possible to cultivate a repeat clientele over time.

Leni, of Greek heritage, opened the café with her brother as part of a family venture. Their timing was deliberate. Both Starbucks and Second Cup had recently closed their Monkland locations, leaving a visible gap in the local configuration of cafés along the street block. For Leni, the departure of these chains marked not a decline but an opportunity. "There are so many coffee shops on this street," she told me, "but most of them are becoming franchises." She emphasized that her café was independently run and rooted in a more personal, localized

orientation. From her perspective, corporate chains “kill the culture because they have the money.” Her claim was not only about taste or branding. It was also about how standardized service models can narrow what people feel permitted to do in a café. She spoke as if chain cafés encouraged people to pass through rather than settle in, and as if they made lingering feel less legitimate. Her aim was to position [Lone Wolf] as something different: a place that could cultivate attachment, recognition, and a sense of care that larger chains could not easily reproduce. In this sense, [Lone Wolf] was meant to feel hand-built rather than formulaic, a space where the texture of everyday sociability would have to be produced deliberately rather than assumed.

The café occupied an unusual position. Unlike most Monkland cafés with sidewalk terrasses that spill directly into pedestrian life, [Lone Wolf] sat on the second floor of a small commercial complex, reached by a flight of concrete steps. It shared the building with a clothing store, a pub, and a pasta restaurant. This elevated location, slightly removed from the street’s casual flow, shaped how the café had to make itself visible. Leni invested heavily in signage to counter the lack of street-level presence, and she spoke about visibility from below as something she had to work for. Once upstairs, the interior was bright and intentionally simple. A row of small tables faced the street through a large front window. Toward the back, a compact cappuccino machine and service counter structured the room. The layout encouraged staying rather than turnover. It was oriented toward a calm and unhurried atmosphere, rather than toward maximizing sales volume.

As we spoke, I noticed framed portraits of musicians and album covers along the walls, mixed with acrylic paintings by independent artists. Leni explained that her vision for the café extended beyond selling drinks. She drew explicitly on Greek traditions of hospitality, describing

how offering rose lemonade or homemade Greek cookies was her way of embedding cultural identity in an otherwise mainstream café landscape. She wanted the space to feel welcoming in a specific, practiced way, not only through décor or menu choices but through how she received customers and made them comfortable. The café did not have its own terrasse, but she mentioned that the neighbouring bar allowed her customers to use its outdoor seating during the day. She described this as an everyday arrangement rather than a formal partnership, but it stood out as a small example of local cooperation that helped anchor her café within the block.

Programming was central to her aspirations. Leni imagined hosting poetry readings, small book clubs, or evenings with local musicians. She was also attentive to the diversity of Monkland's clientele and spoke about it as a resource. In her own list, she named Jewish, Korean, Filipino, Hispanic, Chinese, and others. She did not present this diversity as something that would automatically produce sociability. Instead, she spoke as if sociability had to be built slowly, through steady cultivation and through the small recognitions that make return visits feel possible. In her account, the café could become a parochial space in which people might feel comfortable, recognise one another, and gradually form familiarity through repeated encounters. She positioned herself as someone who could help facilitate these interactions, not through overt efforts to bring people together, but through the ongoing work of producing an inviting atmosphere and keeping it consistent. She also noted that, even when events were planned, much of what makes a café feel social emerges slowly, through minor recognitions and repeat encounters rather than through programming alone (Radice 2016; Wise and Velayutham 2014).

The name "[Lone Wolf]" held particular personal significance. Leni described it as both a symbol of independence and a reference to Muhammad Ali, whom she admires as an underdog fighter who rose to prominence despite structural disadvantages. In her interpretation, the café

was her own version of that struggle. It was a small, independent venture attempting to carve out space in an already saturated commercial strip dominated by well-resourced establishments. The name signalled resilience and ambition, but it also marked a desire to be recognized within a competitive environment.

Leni's project went beyond selling coffee. She was putting cultural, emotional, and personal labour into making the café a place where people could find a social footing, and where coming back could become part of a routine. That emphasis also clarifies something that recurs across this chapter. Proprietors are not neutral service providers. They shape what kinds of interactions feel possible in a space, and they do so under economic pressures that can easily undo the project. [Lone Wolf] showed a more intentional version of commercial sociability than some of the other sites in this section. Rather than inheriting an established circle of regulars, Leni was trying to assemble a repeat clientele and a recognizable atmosphere over time. In that sense, the café made visible how commercial settings can be built as small infrastructures of everyday sociability, and how dependent that sociability can be on the proprietor's presence, judgment, and capacity to sustain the business.

### ***Closures and Turnover***

Several of the sites I describe in this chapter closed during or shortly after my fieldwork. Others changed ownership and were replaced by different kinds of businesses. Some of these closures followed rent increases and lease turnover, while others occurred during the early stages of the pandemic, when customer numbers fell sharply and day-to-day operating conditions shifted with little warning. I name these changes here because they form part of the analytic thread running through the chapter. They clarify that transaction and familiarity are not just different types of

interaction. The distinction becomes visible only when a place endures long enough for people to return, again and again, and for small recognitions to gather.

When a café or shop stays in place, repeated visits can turn a brief exchange into a greeting. A greeting can then become a small sense of being known, because it shifts the interaction from anonymity toward recognition without implying friendship. When a business closes or is replaced, that slow buildup is interrupted. This does not happen because people withdraw from sociability, but because the setting that supported it is no longer there. In this sense, everyday sociability in commercial settings is tied to material conditions that patrons do not control, including rents, leases, and the timing of broader economic disruptions. This fragility also points to a particular asymmetry in commercial sociability. A café, shop, or *dépanneur* may become familiar to patrons over time, and it may hold routines that make brief recognition and ease possible. Yet patrons are not usually direct stakeholders in the enterprise. When rent increases, ownership changes, or the business closes with little warning, there may be little they can do to preserve the place where those routines took shape. The loss is therefore not only commercial. It is also a disruption to the ordinary rhythms through which quotidian sociability had been sustained.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has examined cafés, shops, and *dépanneurs* as ordinary settings through which everyday sociability takes shape in NDG. It has worked from the idea that commercial encounters can sit at different points on a spectrum between transaction and familiarity.

Transaction refers to interactions organized mainly around service exchange, where people order, pay, and leave, and where the exchange can remain brief and contained. Familiarity refers to the thinner but cumulative effects of repetition, where people come to recognise one another,

exchange greetings, and sometimes extend the interaction beyond what the purchase requires, even if many customers continue to keep the exchange strictly functional. The ethnographic cases show that both ends of this spectrum can exist in the same place at the same time, because different users relate to the same setting differently and because the pace of a moment can shift quickly from one register to the other.

Read across the sites, several practical mechanisms become clearer. Spatial organisation matters because it shapes whether people can linger, whether they remain in view of one another, and whether interaction can stay optional rather than forced. A counter that keeps staff and customers in easy conversational range, a wide sidewalk with a few chairs, or a small patio that allows people to pause without blocking others can all create conditions in which recognition becomes possible. Repetition and duration matter as well. When people return at similar times of day, they build a limited awareness of one another's routines, even when they do not know one another well. In these settings, familiarity does not require intimacy. It often takes the form of small acknowledgements, such as being remembered, being greeted, or being treated as someone who is expected in the space.

The cases also show why proprietors matter, without making them the only explanation. In several sites, owners and staff help set the tone of interaction by deciding what counts as acceptable behaviour, how to respond to minor disruptions, and how to extend small courtesies without turning the space into an obligation of sociability. This is not always dramatic work. It can be as simple as letting teenagers sit for ten minutes, learning a regular's order, or responding calmly when an encounter risks escalating. At the same time, these proprietors cannot reliably bring about connection among strangers. They help keep the space workable for mixed uses,

including those who want a brief transaction, those who want quiet co-presence, and those who sometimes want a bit of talk.

These dynamics matter precisely because they are precarious. Many of the cafés and small independent shops described in this chapter close or change hands under pressures that patrons cannot control. When that happens, the social rhythms attached to the site do not automatically transfer elsewhere. The greetings, the routines, and the small forms of care that gather over time can disappear quickly once the place is gone. This is one way the changing commercial landscape of NDG becomes visible at the level of everyday life, not only as an economic shift but also as a change in where and how people can reliably encounter one another. In this sense, conviviality in commercial settings is materially contingent. It depends on infrastructures such as leases, rents, margins, and ownership, which can be altered with little warning.

Across the chapter, conviviality emerges as something that has to be made workable rather than assumed as a background atmosphere of a diverse district. It is a practical accomplishment. It can include small openings for connection, and it can also include ordinary forms of reserve that allow people to share space without friction. Sometimes cultural difference is explicitly acknowledged and becomes part of the interaction. At other times it remains in the background because that is one way people keep an encounter smooth. Either way, these commercial settings show how residents move through daily life while making co-presence workable, and how those possibilities are shaped both by the built environment and by the fragile conditions that allow these places to endure.

## CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined how people in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce live together under conditions of proximity, difference, and uneven participation. It has approached coexistence not as an abstract ideal, nor as the achievement of a settled local ethos, but as an ongoing practical accomplishment. As the chapters have shown, shared life in urban settings is sustained through small and often unremarked acts by which people make room for one another, hold back, acknowledge one another lightly, or keep a moment from escalating. These acts are rarely experienced as especially significant while they are unfolding. They are woven into the ordinary conduct of daily life. Yet they form part of what makes shared space more or less workable over time.

A central claim of this dissertation has been that coexistence should be understood less as a normative aspiration than as an ongoing practical achievement. It is sustained through the ordinary work that allows people to remain alongside one another in specific settings. Such work includes interaction, but it also includes restraint. It involves accommodation, but also the capacity to hold back, to let a moment pass, or to refrain from pressing a claim when further engagement would make a situation less workable. It can take the form of sociability, but it can also remain at the level of bounded acknowledgment, where people register one another without opening the way to further claim. From this vantage point, it becomes possible to describe a wider range of urban relations than accounts centred primarily on strong ties, formal collective life, or explicit declarations of belonging have tended to capture. Much of what I observed in NDG did not fit neatly into the language of friendship, solidarity, or stable collective identity. But neither was it reducible to anonymity, distance, or the mere fact of sharing space. What appeared instead were thinner, more variable, and often more situational forms of relation. Some remained constrained, while others accumulated familiarity over time or deepened into more



practical forms of reciprocity and trust. Still others became strained when shared boundaries, obligations, or expectations came under pressure. Across the dissertation, what comes into view is a gradated field of relations rather than a sharp division between anonymity and attachment. Urban social life, in this sense, is not well described by a simple opposition between intimacy and indifference, or between cohesion and fragmentation. What emerges more clearly is a middle range of relation in which people remain present to one another and responsive in limited but meaningful ways, even when they do not share deeper attachment or fuller mutual knowledge.

This argument has required careful attention to the restrained forms of conduct through which situations of co-presence are kept workable. In everyday urban life, people often register one another without inviting further claim. They notice, hold back, and allow situations to proceed without forcing engagement. What Goffman called civil inattention, and what Amit's work helps clarify as a more watchful form of indifference, belong to this interactional field. They do not describe a simple absence of relation, nor do they merely mark the point at which stronger social bonds fail to appear. Rather, they name ordinary ways of managing exposure, limiting demand, and keeping situations of co-presence from becoming unnecessarily intrusive or conflictual. In this sense, coexistence depends not only on sociability or explicit accommodation, but also on the capacity to acknowledge others lightly and to let proximity remain workable without turning it into obligation. The concept of convivial repertoires has been my attempt to give this practical field more specific analytic form. By convivial repertoires, I mean the patterned but flexible ways in which people manage proximity and difference in ordinary settings. These repertoires include greeting and tactful avoidance, minor accommodations, restrained watchfulness, practical cooperation, and small acts of repair. They do not operate as stable scripts carried intact from one setting to another. Nor do they amount to

a unified moral code. Rather, they are practical accomplishments built unevenly through experience. They are learned through repetition, tested in different situations, and recalibrated in response to changing conditions. A person may draw on one repertoire in a commercial setting, another in neighbouring relations, and yet another in a crowded transit space. The point is not that these repertoires are endlessly fluid, but that they are adjusted in relation to setting and circumstance, and that the capacity to draw on them is itself unevenly distributed.

This is why repetition, setting, and circumstance have been so important across the dissertation. Repetition has been central because familiarity often develops through recurrence rather than declaration. It usually takes shape through repeated exposure and ordinary encounter, not through any formal acknowledgment that a relationship exists. A face becomes recognizable. A routine becomes anticipated. A tone of interaction settles in. Moreover, these forms of familiarity are always situated. The possibilities of conduct vary across the spaces people inhabit. A sidewalk, a bus stop, a café, a collective garden, a running track, a front porch, or a neighbouring relation does not make the same kinds of claims upon participants. Each permits different degrees of pause, visibility, approachability, coordination, and obligation. Circumstance adds another layer, since no setting carries one stable interactional logic in advance. Whether a moment becomes easy, strained, accommodating, or avoidant depends on the conditions under which it unfolds. In this sense, living alongside others does not rest on a fixed disposition or a settled social order. It has to be worked out continually, under conditions that are changing and uneven.

The pathways chapter showed that people do not inhabit NDG evenly or all at once. They come to know and use the district through recurring rounds shaped by arrival and return, by family life, migration, work, life stage, and by the uneven practical conditions under which local

participation becomes possible. This shifts the analysis away from an image of locality as a bounded unit that is equally inhabited by all its residents. In its place, pathways make visible a more uneven field in which emplacement develops through repeated movement, partial familiarity, and practical learning over time. Pathways also make clear that more sustained forms of involvement do not become possible in the same way for everyone. In places like NDG, the concrete possibility of returning, lingering, assuming responsibility, or simply remaining available to others depends on the conditions under which people move through local life. Some have more time, confidence, mobility, or familiarity with a setting than others, and these differences shape what kinds of participation become possible. The capacity to absorb the frictions that local life can bring is also unevenly distributed. Seen in this light, pathways are not simply a descriptive image for how people move through local life. They are an analytic means of showing how familiarity, competence, and involvement are built under uneven conditions. The chapters on PorchRock, Marigold Garden, the NDG Pacers, and the NDG Baking Network extended this argument by showing how coexistence can, under some conditions, become more coordinated and at times more collectively organized. These settings did not produce a single model of sociability, nor did they give rise to a stable collective ethos shared equally by all participants. These chapters show, however, that repeated participation, shared tasks, and practical opportunities for return can sometimes bring individual repertoires into a partial alignment. In such cases, what emerges is not consensus or a fully formed collectivity, but a provisional way of doing things together. Gardening required recurring coordination around shared work, even when participants did not approach that work in the same way. The Pacers involved an elective but still meaningful commitment to move together for a bounded period of time, according to a shared rhythm and purpose, even though that coordination could fray when

the track became a site of competing expectations rather than a clearly shared activity. PorchRock intensified local participation temporarily, creating openings for recognition, contribution, and connection that were real, even if they were not evenly sustained. The NDG Baking Network made visible a more deliberate and distributed form of practical cooperation, while also showing the labour, selectivity, and uneven participation on which such efforts depend. Taken together, these chapters suggest that more collective repertoires are possible, though only in a limited and situated sense. They emerge under particular spatial and temporal conditions, through joint activity and recurring commitment, and they remain contingent rather than settled.

The chapters on neighbouring, traffic relationships, and commercial interactions extended the argument across this wider field of relation. The chapter on neighbouring showed that adjacency alone does not determine social form. Neighbouring becomes more substantial where repeated exposure, built form, practical need, and a willingness to initiate contact begin to align. At the same time, neighbouring relations can fray precisely because people cannot easily withdraw from one another when shared boundaries and expectations become sites of dispute. The traffic relationships chapter focused on highly constrained encounters in public space. These are often among the thinnest forms of relation, but they are not devoid of social significance, since they involve coordination, restraint, and, in some cases, a familiarity accumulated through repeated crossing of paths, such as the recognition that develops among people who regularly encounter one another at the same bus stop or intersection. The commercial interactions chapter showed a somewhat different middle range. Some commercial spaces, and some customers within them, allow more time, more repetition, and more proprietor-shaped recognition. Yet these relations remain uneven and precarious. They cannot be generalized to all customers or to

all commercial settings. The dissertation traces, then, not a fixed typology but a widening range of relations shaped by pace, repetition, practical demand, and the affordances of setting. For this reason, I have been careful not to reify categories such as traffic relation, familiar stranger, acquaintance, commercial familiarity, and neighbouring. They are best understood not as sealed types, but as analytic distinctions that help describe how relations shift with repetition, setting, and circumstance. A relation can remain thin for years. It can accumulate familiarity without becoming intimate. It can deepen into practical reciprocity. It can also move in the other direction and become strained, avoidant, or conflictual. What matters, then, is not to assign each encounter permanently to a box, but to understand the conditions under which different forms of relation become possible, sustainable, or fragile.

Methodologically, this dissertation has also shown the value of tracing movement and of walking with people because these forms of engagement illuminate how local attachment and familiarity are lived through motion. The go-along interviews were especially important here. They made it possible to observe not only what participants said about local life, but how they oriented themselves in motion, how they recognized others, and how they narrated practical choices while situations were still unfolding. This brought into view the situated character of calibration: the ongoing adjustment of attention, expectation, and conduct through which people learn how to move through local life without ever fully mastering it in advance. More broadly, this research has proceeded with a particular orientation to evidence. Interlocutors' stories and recollections matter to the account I offer, but the analysis remains anchored in what could be observed in practice, in the repeated rounds people moved through, in the situational judgments they made, and in the small adjustments through which co-presence was managed.

Attending to these ordinary mechanisms also helps convey how a world that might otherwise appear impersonal or uncertain becomes more knowable, more patterned, and more workable over the course of everyday life. Participant observation, volunteering, and pandemic-era adaptation similarly underscored that co-presence is not a fixed condition that can be read off from demographic composition or declared values alone. It must be studied through the settings and practices in which it is enacted.

The dissertation also speaks to the study of urban difference by arguing that coexistence is not best understood through a narrow set of categorical distinctions alone. Race and ethnicity matter, and at times matter profoundly. But the situations examined here also turn on class, language, housing, migration history, mobility, life stage, time pressure, fatigue, and unequal access to local infrastructures. In other words, living alongside others is not organized only by how people are identified or perceived. It also depends on the conditions under which they move through local life and take part in it. Difference is lived not simply as identity, but through the uneven capacities by which people participate, linger, withdraw, ask, host, recognize, or are recognized within ordinary situations. The possibility of taking part in shared urban life is unevenly distributed. So too are the capacities through which people absorb its demands or benefit from its openings. This matters because a locality is not sustained by identity alone, but by the uneven and practical conditions under which people are able to return, remain involved, and take part in the settings that compose ordinary shared life.

If this dissertation argues that everyday coexistence is sustained through small acts, it does not do so in order to trivialize the subject. Quite the opposite. These acts matter because they form part of the practical groundwork of urban life. They help explain how dense and unequal social settings remain inhabitable without requiring consensus, strong attachment, or

explicit agreement at every turn. Their significance becomes clearest when they falter. A missed acknowledgment, a refusal of a small accommodation, an uncontained irritation, or a breakdown in practical coordination can reveal how contingent the order of a situation always was. What usually remains quiet and unremarkable becomes newly visible in failure. At the same time, these acts do more than keep individual encounters from breaking down. Accumulated across settings, they help sustain the ordinary conditions under which local life remains livable. In this sense, strain and breakdown are not outside the argument. They are among the conditions through which the ordinary work of coexistence becomes analytically legible. This helps clarify the broader scope of the project. I have not sought to provide a comprehensive history of NDG, nor to explain the district as a total object. Instead, I have treated it as a situated field through which broader questions about everyday urban life can be examined. This framing keeps the project modest about NDG, while still allowing the analysis to travel beyond it. The forms described here are not unique to NDG, nor should they be expected to appear unchanged elsewhere. What may travel more productively is the analytic orientation itself: attention to co-presence, pathways, calibration, repetition, setting, circumstance, and the changing range of relations through which shared life is made more or less workable. More specifically, the project suggests that encounter alone is not enough to explain how people live alongside one another. It is also a matter of how local worlds are sustained through repeated returns, uneven forms of participation, modest investments, and the often unremarked labour by which people keep settings, relations, and routines going over time. In that sense, the project opens a comparative framework while resisting the assumption that shared life follows the same pattern across places.

Living in NDG while writing this thesis has also shaped how I understand these findings. The field has not ended. It continues in the routes I still walk, in the businesses that have closed

and those that have appeared in their place, in the faces that remain familiar and those that no longer appear, and in the small adjustments that continue to organize movement and presence. Because I remain part of this landscape, I continue to encounter the same practical demands I once described as data. I still move through situations that call for adjustment and restraint, but I also continue to see how local life is sustained through repeated return and through the modest ways people remain involved in one another's worlds. That experience showed me that shared life is not something I could analyze from a distance, as if it were stable or settled in advance. It is something people take part in, whether knowingly or not, as they decide what to notice, how much to hold back, and whether to keep returning to the settings that matter in their daily lives.

To think about NDG, then, is also to think about the city as an unfinished moral project. As de Certeau suggests, the city is never complete. It is continually produced through the small, tactical practices of those who move through it. As he writes, "the walking of passers-by offers a series of turns and detours that compose a network of trajectories, which is as proper to the city as a map but cannot be reduced to it" (1984: 99). What this dissertation has tried to do is specify that process more closely. It has shown that shared urban life depends as much on minor acts of recognition, restraint, accommodation, and repair as on explicit sociability or collective effort. But it has also shown that coexistence is sustained more broadly through the ongoing cultivation of local life: through repeated returns, partial forms of participation, modest investments, and small acts of support by which a locality is kept inhabitable over time. These efforts do not produce a single shared form of sociality, nor do they dissolve difference or strain. What they produce, more modestly, is a livable world that remains unfinished and open to revision. Seen in this light, coexistence is not only the management of proximity. It is the ongoing cultivation of a shared world that no one inhabits in the same way, where the frictions of living alongside others



do not stand outside shared life but remain among the conditions people must bear, negotiate, or sometimes leave unresolved.

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