

Geocritical Interpretation of Spatial Imagery
in Robert Merle's *Derrière la vitre*



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Introduction

In 2018, the 50th anniversary of the protests of May 1968 was widely celebrated in France. Numerous exhibitions were held, numerous films produced, numerous books — biographies, memoirs, analytical treatises, works of fiction — were issued. However, few of them focus on the early onset of these famous, and often romanticized, student protests, that left a deep impact on the French political landscape, and, supposedly even more — on the cultural and artistic image of this historical period. For this reason, in my thesis I would like to draw attention to one of the earliest novels featuring this subject, and, more specifically, consecrated to the events of one day — the 22nd of March 1968: *Derrière la vitre* (1970), by the French author Robert Merle. It is this date, the day of the occupation of the professors' conference hall by the students of the Nanterre Faculty of Letters, that gave start to the Movement of 22 March, one of the key social movements of later May events, and is often esteemed to mark the start of the spring '68 protests.

The choice of this novel is conditioned not only by its temporal focus, but as well by the author's exceptional observation of the interactions in and with the human space, that was the newly-built Nanterre campus, as well as its surroundings. Through the plurality of points of view belonging to Merle's characters, that includes professors, students, immigrant construction workers, the reader is offered a multifocal view on the spatial structure of the human space of Nanterre. From an underpopulated Parisian suburb, it becomes one of the centers of student social life, from where the larger protest will be known to emerge.

The main methodological framework for this research is the geocritical method of literary analysis (*géocritique*), introduced by Bertrand Westphal. The choice of Bertrand Westphal's geocriticism as the primary method of literary analysis has been justified by its interdisciplinarity, that includes elements of geographical, sociological and imagological approaches to the studying of the literary representations of human spaces and their influence on the formation of collective identities and collective memory. This multifaceted approach offers an opportunity to focus precisely on the spatial aspect of the narrative. However, at the close reading of the novel, it seems equally appropriate to evoke the theory of *lieu de mémoire* of Pierre Nora, as Nanterre's spatial descriptions tend to be closely related to and, in some cases, even to be derived from the collective historical associations that unite the characters and partially define their relationship with the campus space. How can a human space, that, at the first sight, has all the features of a non-place, be at the time at the onset of becoming a site of memory heavily charged with distinctive historical associations?

My analytical claim for this thesis is that in the course of sociopolitical events featured in *Derrière la vitre* the newly built Nanterre campus, that can be interpreted as a *non-place* in the terms of Marc Augé, is obtaining its significance to the national perception of French history and gains a potential to become a *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory). The chronological structure of the novel and author's focus on certain set of events of one day happening in one place, and his focus on social trends and dynamics, shaped by the spatial imagery of Nanterre, allow to examine the effect of Nanterre's spatial characteristics on the formation of a certain image of Nanterre in

the French collective memory.

The research question of this thesis is: can the spatial imagery of Nanterre in *Derrière la vitre* be interpreted as a non-place in the process of becoming a *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory) and what literary mechanisms are at work for it to become possible?

In order to answer this question, a certain conceptual apparatus ought to be outlined. As this research is a follow-up to the MA Literary Studies course *Remapping the City in Modern Literature and Visual Cultures* given in spring semester 2018 at Leiden University, some methodological and theoretical concepts featured in this thesis are drawn from this course's corpus. These include non-place, introduced by Marc Augé, and the theory of spatial analysis of Michel de Certeau. Other theoretical terms, such as *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) coined by Pierre Nora, are inherent to and continue the subject of my Bachelor's thesis defended in 2017 at the Philological Faculty of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (PUDH) in Moscow under the supervision of Dr. Svetlana Sheipak and consecrated to the dynamics of the *lieux de mémoire* in the French literary discourse.

The aim of my thesis is to explore the fascinating aspects of the spatial conditioning of the student unrest and to bring into spotlight the rapidity of transition of a human space from its unremarkability and anonymity to its entrance into the collective memory and commemoration in various media up to the present day.

Chapter I

Behind the Glass: the Conceptual Framework

1. *DERRIÈRE LA VITRE*: ROBERT MERLE'S NOVEL REVISITED

Robert Merle (1908-2004) was a French novelist, born in French Algeria. A professor of English studies with specialisation on Oscar Wilde, he, however, became mostly known for his novels reflecting his experience of World War II. As a military interpreter for the British Expeditionary Force, he participated in the Dunkirk evacuation, the event that influenced his first novel *Week-end at Zuydcoote*, Prix Goncourt of 1949. His second novel, *Death Is My Trade* (*La mort est mon métier*, 1952), explored psychoanalytical aspects of the fictionalized story of Rudolf Lang, the commandant of Auschwitz. Later he as well made himself known as a historical novelist, with his series of novels *Fortune de France* set in the period of the European wars of religion of the 16th century, for which he gained fame as the 'Alexandre Dumas of the 20th century'. In his 2018 interview to Anne Wattel, Olivier Merle, geologist, writer and son of Robert Merle, however, notes, that while some of his father's novels maintain their high popularity in France (*La mort est mon métier* and *Malevil*), others, such as *Un animal doué de raison* (1967) and other works of political fiction, experience a plummeting in sales. (Wattel-Merle 34-36)

Since the 1970s, Robert Merle is known as an author pioneering in the field of political fiction in France. In October 1967 in a special edition of *Le Monde* (*Politique-fiction et angoisse planétaire*) he outlined major features, that, according to him, characterized this «hybrid genre», already rather developed, primarily in the

United Kingdom and the USA, under the circumstances of the Cold War. According to Anne Wattel, for Merle his 'conversion' to political fiction, specifically the *roman d'anticipation*, after the two first novels on the World War II, was not a sudden, but a logically justified turn of the 'viewing angle', that fits in the uninterrupted historical paradigm of his entire oeuvre:

C'est poursuivre, en déplaçant son angle de vue, l'exploration du présent ; c'est dire, encore et toujours, la hantise du demain au regard d'aujourd'hui et parce que le passé ne passe pas. Toute l'œuvre de Merle est historique. Avec *Week-end à Zuydcoote* et *La Mort est mon métier*, il fait « l'histoire du passé » ; avec *Derrière la vitre*, roman-reportage qui relate les événements du 22 mars 1968 à Nanterre, et *L'Île*, qui s'inspire du peuplement de l'île de Pitcairn par les révoltés du Bounty mais qui est en fait une dénonciation de la guerre d'Algérie, il explore « l'histoire du présent » ; quant à ses œuvres de politique-fiction, c'est « l'histoire de l'avenir ». (Merle-Libermann, 1974)

(Wattel 2016, 5)

This periodic approach, similarly to the one of Victor Hugo in *La Légende des siècles*, aims to grasp the human sense of historical progress and the need to apprehend the roots of the future in the events of the present. Politically inclined towards the left, and, from 1974 to 1979, a member of the French Communist Party (PCF), Merle introduces his humanist engagement against 'les horreurs du monde' into his novels. While partially having lost public acknowledgment in France, in 2018 he remains among the most read foreign authors in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, with his novels translated into more than twenty languages. (Wattel-Merle 34-35)

Derrière la vitre (1970) is the fifth novel by Merle. It falls into the category of his majorly forgotten 'political fiction' texts as a *roman-reportage*, an hour by hour novelised recital of the student occupation of the University of Nanterre campus on 22 March 1968. Planned since November 1967, before the main events, this novel was to be based on a series of discussions and conversations held by Merle, who was then a professor in Nanterre, with his students, the primary goal being to describe everyday life at the Nanterre campus. The project took a different turn after the events of spring 1968, starting with the Movement of 22 March. However, in the preface Merle admits that at the time the majority of Nanterre students, who did not take part in the administration building occupation on 22 March 1968, did not experience that day as exceptional, despite the dramatic element of the student strike. Thus, it retained the initial conception of the author:

C'est pourquoi, à la réflexion, je choisis comme objet de mon récit la journée du 22 mars 1968. Pour les douze mille étudiants de Nanterre, ces vingt-quatre heures n'eurent rien d'exceptionnel. Ils vécurent cette journée comme tant de jours semblables d'un deuxième trimestre éprouvant qui tirait à sa fin. Par contre, pour cent quarante d'entre eux, le 22 mars s'acheva par l'occupation de la tour administrative et de la salle du Conseil des professeurs.

(Merle 8)

An immediate response to the events of 1968, the novel was received with mixed impressions by the public as a result of the apparent impartiality of the narrative by a usually engaged author. Merle was criticised for not expressing enough clear support to the matters of feminism and the movement of 1968. (Wattel 2018, 101-102) In the preface to the novel, as well as in his interviews, Merle himself explains his approach

to the 'explosive theme' of the student revolts of 1968 as one made from a position of irony, if not slight antipathy towards the students' political inexperience and even fanaticism. He refuses to paint an idolised image the Gauchiste youth and claims his right for subjectivity in the matter of depicting this movement: a subjectivity, that does not require to clearly state one's side, but leaves to the author the freedom to express his own uncertain and mixed feelings of the events. Merle admitted, that after 1968 several years might be required for the novel to be received impartially by the public. (Wattel 2018, 102-103)

Derrière la vitre focuses on the events preceding the student outburst and then mass strikes of May 68. This day's events marked the birth of the March 22 Movement (*Movement du 22 Mars*), one of the leading forces in many of the following protests, headed by several highly politically engaged students, including Jean-François Duteuil and Daniel Cohn-Bendit ('Dany le Rouge'), who are present among the characters of the novel, providing the *reportage* of events with «realist credibility». (Reader-Wadia 133) The narrative may be considered polyphonic in terms of Bakhtin, as it features multiple focal points belonging to several Nanterre students of different political preferences (apolitical Lucien Ménestrel, Marxist of the upper-class descent David Schultz, member of l'U.E.C. Denise Fargeot, feminist Ida Laurent, etc.), assistant professors (Levasseur, Delmont), North African workers on the Faculty's construction site (Abdelaziz, Moktar, etc.). The use of free indirect speech is combined with the omniscient narrator, for which the novel had been reproached for appearing «old-fashioned» at the time of publication. (Reader-Wadia

131) Merle justifies its application in the preface, identifying this method as *simultanéisme*, the term itself referring to an artistic and literary movement of the beginning of the XX century having Jules Romains (*Les Hommes de bonne volonté*) for its main literary representative:

Characters are presented with no connections between them, living in parallel isolation, at the same time and in the same place, separate existences. It is because the theme of solitude and incommunicability appeared to me from the start (...) as the major theme of student life at Nanterre that I used this type of narration. I did not choose it arbitrarily; it was imposed on me by my project. (Merle 9; tr. cit. Reader-Wadia 131)

This notion refers us to the recurring imagery of glass or window (*vitre*) in the novel. It may be considered an extended metaphor for divide and isolation, both on the spatial (the structure of the new concrete-and-glass Nanterre Faculty buildings and its remoteness from the center of academic and social life in Quartier Latin of Paris) and social (divide between political grouplets on campus, male and female students, students and professors, students and workers, generation gap, etc.) levels, that is experienced by the characters. These factors act as an underlying source of their discontent, that provokes the revolt.

Both outdoor and indoor spatial imagery of Nanterre plays an important role in the novel. It begins with a chapter on the history of Nanterre as a Parisian suburb (*banlieue*). Furthermore, the student characters keep circulating between newly built campus buildings, reflecting on their structure, appearance and functionality, while also prescribing them symbolic meanings (e.g., the administration tower, the

professors' conference hall). Besides, the workers provide an outlook on the Nanterre shantytown (*bidonville*) situated nearby the campus.

The choice of this novel as an object of geocritical analysis is justified not only by the unique role of spatial and local imagery, but also because it stands out temporally from both older and recent corpora of '68 novels' revisited and newly published in the light of the fiftieth anniversary of the protests of May 68. Conceptualised in 1967 as specifically focused on the life of Nanterre campus and, furthermore, consciously set before the beginning of the mass strikes of 1968 in France, *Derrière la vitre* provides a research material that offers an opportunity to determine the progress of formation of sites of memory related to these events. The examination of a «slice» of spatiotemporal narrative, created simultaneously with the historical progress and decline of the French social movement of 1968, is especially useful in this matter. The chronological structure of the novel and author's focus on both daily aspects and the particular set of events of one day, happening in one single place (almost as in the three unities characteristic to Classical drama), allows for the exploration of « l'histoire du présent », while considering its polyphonic perspectives.

2. NANTERRE: GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF *DERRIÈRE LA VITRE*

Derrière la vitre (*Behind the Glass*) focuses on the hour-by-hour narrative of the events of one day, 22 March 1968, that led to the occupation of the Sorbonne's newly built campus in Nanterre, a Western suburb of Paris.

Following *les Trente Glorieuses*, a period of great economic and consumption growth in France after the Second World War, that started under the government of Charles de Gaulle, the demographic numbers increased dramatically, creating the situation of a «baby boom». By 1968, the post-war generation included 500,000 students, compared to 60,000 before the war. (Woodcome 21) The issue of youth's unemployment and lack of places in the universities resulted in increasing discontent and unrest among the younger French population, along with other problems, such as the political rigidity of De Gaulle's government, gradually building up and forming, in the phrasing of Daniel Singer, «a hidden powder keg»:

Naturally French students had plenty of reasons of their own for unrest. Some of these causes were pretty old, though even these were exacerbated by the growing numbers of students. The rigid centralism, leaving the university chancellor very little scope for improvisation; the rigid division of faculties, leaving the student little chance to switch; the ruthless guillotine of examinations; the absence of contacts between professors and students; the total lack of guidance; the routine of set lectures — these are only some of the traditional causes of discontent, aggravated each year by the mass invasion of the universities by a new and bigger contingent of students. And by the mid-sixties, the spread of unemployment, affecting particularly the young and the middle-aged graduates, provided two more reasons for worry: the fear of not finding a job and the fear of being a squeezed lemon at forty.

When two thirds of an institution's members are doomed to failure, it is a perfect hunting ground for political activists, and the university was beginning to be described as a school for misfits. (Singer 54)

Therefore, more and more concerned students were becoming part of one or another political group forming around the university campuses. Believed by the authorities to be insignificant and separated minorities, these mainly left-aligned «grouplets» (*groupuscules*), despite ideological differences, «had to think separately and strike together». (Singer 62)

Massive construction of new housing and facility buildings, where mostly foreign (mostly, North African) labour force had been employed, was a prominent trait of Paris and its suburbs since the early 1960s. The creation of new human spaces within the old city and suburb borders was often in the centre of political and media attention, referred to as another achievement of the French post-war success under the leadership of President De Gaulle. (Paskins 3) Nanterre, like many universities at the time, struggled to maintain itself in pace with these rising numbers in terms of its buildings, facilities, and teaching staff. The construction of the new faculty of arts and humanities, formerly one of the departments of the Sorbonne, relocated to this north-western Parisian suburb, was not yet completed by the time of its opening in 1964. The two Nanterre shantytowns (*bidonvilles*), were still housing thousands of foreign, mostly Algerian, workers, employed at the construction site. It was considered an innovative project, suggested to be the first experimental «American type» of campus in France (in opposition to older French and generally European

universities that traditionally tended to be integrated into the inner cities' territories without separate campuses), though the premises seemed already overcrowded by the initial number of 13,000 students, despite them having been constructed to solve the problem of overpopulation. However, the isolation from the social life and atmosphere of the Latin Quarter, as well as the prohibition of political debates in order to maintain the «neutrality» of the faculty, left the students without any cultural or social outlets that would make up for the isolation. (Singer 60) Many students who witnessed and participated in 1968 events highlighted, that “à Nanterre, hormis la fac, il n’y avait rien”. (Leprince) That resulted in the increase of discontented students' involvement in oppositionally-aligned unofficial political clubs and discussion groups (often gathering behind the doors of the student cinema club and in the faculty cafeteria), and frequent «happenings», such as provocative interruptions during lectures. (Singer 63)

By 22 March 1968, the tensions on campus had built up. The unofficial «last straw» was the restriction for male students to frequent girls' dormitories, brought up by Cohn-Bendit in his speech upon the occupation of Nanterre's campus and administration buildings by «enraged» students («*les enragés*»), who represented different political groups. However, the motivation for it was broader than that. Besides the general unrest, one of the major objections proclaimed by the politically engaged students was that, in their opinion, in Nanterre the classes were taught from a militarist angle. Certain student organizations, such as JCR (*Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire*), UEC (*Union des étudiants communistes*), CVB (*Comité Vietnam de*

Base), expressed their active position against the Vietnam War and general anti-imperialist beliefs. (Pagis 16-21) On March 21, Nanterre student Xavier Langlade was detained by the police in the course of his protest in front of the American Express headquarters in Paris, symbolically chosen as an epitome of American imperialism. The student strike of 22 March began as a manifestation of solidarity with Langlade, but the students took the opportunity to express a variety of other problems that were the source of their discontent, including political, academic and organizational. At 17:00, after the common gathering, the majority of involved students decided to seize the Faculty's Council hall situated on the 8th floor of the so-called «administration tower» building, and start the sit-in strike. The student committee wrote the *Manifeste des 142*, signed by the 142 participants of the strike. The title of the document is a reference to the *Manifeste des 121* (1961) signed by the French intellectuals against the use of torture during the Algerian War. The decision was made to continue the campus occupation until 23:00, and it was largely dictated by a practical reason: the last train from the Nanterre-La Folie train station for the students to catch was departing soon after that time. (Leprince)

In Singer's interpretation of events, the protest of 22 of March 1968 was «a symbolic act, the seizure of the administrative building; that is, the occupation of forbidden territory legally reserved for the authority» (Singer 62). This phrasing, as perhaps deliberately expected by the author, to a certain extent evokes an association with the storming of the Bastille.

3. METHODOLOGICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

In order to answer the research question of this thesis, a certain conceptual apparatus ought to be outlined. As this research is a follow-up to the MA Literary Studies course *Remapping the City in Modern Literature and Visual Cultures* given in spring semester 2018 in Leiden University, some methodological and theoretical concepts used in this thesis are drawn from this course's corpus. These include non-place, introduced by Marc Augé and based on the spatial analysis theory of Michel de Certeau, and *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) coined by Pierre Nora. The analytical approach applied in this research is geocriticism (*géocritique*), introduced by Bertrand Westphal and developed as a method of literary analysis by Robert T. Tally and other researchers. In the following paragraphs, these units of theoretical frame of reference and their relevance to the research are to be covered more broadly.

3.1 Geocriticism

In French critical literary analysis, geocriticism, or *géocritique*, has been primarily introduced and developed by Bertrand Westphal, and it is mainly his definition of geocriticism and its literary applicability that will consist the basis of this research. In his essay *Pour une approche géocritique des textes* (2005) Westphal outlines the main scientific, political and historic background, as well as philosophical sources that lead to the realisation of the necessity of a new method of literary analysis, applicable to a wider variety of issues related to the expressions of geographic space in literary texts.

Among the predecessors of geocriticism Westphal mentions such approaches to the study of human spaces (*espaces humains*) in literature as geopoetics, imagology, thematical critique (*Stoffgeschichte*) and mythocriticism, as well as the geophilosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (around the notion of deterritorialization). The necessity of a new approach, according to Westphal, originates in the restricted and rather narrow focus of the majority of the aforementioned approaches on the different ways of spatial representation within literary texts instead of its relation to, interaction with and influence on the actual human spaces and their effect on the development of cultural identity:

N'est-il pas temps, en somme, de songer à articuler la littérature autour de ses relations à l'espace, de promouvoir une *géocritique*, poétique dont l'objet serait non pas l'examen des représentations de l'espace en littérature, mais plutôt celui des *interactions* entre espaces humains et littérature, et l'un des enjeux majeurs une contribution à la détermination/indétermination des identités culturelles ?

(Westphal *Pour une approche géocritique des textes*)

Firstly, geocriticism, like geopoetics, is an interdisciplinary approach, that, according to Christine Baron, can be applied to a wide range of fields of research. While it is common to examine literary texts in the historical context, the potential of connecting it to the geographical one, in her opinion, is underestimated, despite the frequent use of geographical metaphors in literary studies (Baron 1). The input of geography as a social science is to facilitate the observation and interpretation of the methods people apply to modify the spaces through the application of its descriptive concepts to the way a reader perceives the spaces evoked by their virtual gaze in the

process of reading a text: « La géographie est à la fois cette discipline qui observe les phénomènes par lesquels l'homme modifie son espace et cette science humaine qui invente cet espace à travers les concepts dont elle use pour le décrire. » (Baron 56)

One of the main notions of geocriticism is that of the perception of any human space as an archipelago, both despite and because of its appearance of unity and homogeneity. First introduced as a critical literary concept by Cacciari in 1997, although metaphorically explored in literature significantly earlier (for example, in Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, 1973), it has been then developed as a tool of understanding of mechanisms of human spaces by various scholars such as H. R. Jauss (*enclaves de sens*). According to Westphal's definition, the interpretation of a human space as a dynamic archipelago with a myriad moving islands would allow geocriticism to become an extensively precise tool of observation, a microscope, through which the ever-changing, juxtaposed, intersectional and interactive mobility of human spaces and cultural identities formed within them, avoiding the trap of stereotypes:

Ainsi, du moins, éviterait-elle les sables mouvants dont le nom est stéréotype. [...] Observé au microscope, le plus compact des tissus n'est qu'un réseau de mailles; observé d'encore plus près, il [l'espace] apparaîtrait comme un amas d'atomes - un archipel. Sur le mode de l'optatif, on dira que la géocritique, coordonnant et renouvelant les différentes approches de l'espace humain, devrait être cet instrument [...] qui permettrait de percevoir en tout espace l'archipel qui le fonde, [...], la foncière mobilité des espaces humains et des identités culturelles qu'ils véhiculent.

(Westphal *Pour une approche géocritique des textes*)

The primary application of geocriticism, pointed out by Westphal, is literary analysis:

La vocation première de la géocritique est néanmoins littéraire; c'est en tout cas sur le texte qu'elle prend appui. Elle placera l'oeuvre en regard des espaces humains qu'elle investira, et où elle s'investira. Car les relations entre l'oeuvre et les espaces humains, répétons-le, sont interactives.

(Westphal *Pour une approche géocritique des textes*)

The geocritical idea of *interactivity* and mutual influence between human space and literature is a notion essential to the research on the Merle's *Derrière la vitre*. The human space of the Faculty of Nanterre, both its spatial division with «glass» barriers and social isolation of groups, is reflected upon in the novel through a literary figurative apparatus. Meanwhile, the very project of this literary narrative of Nanterre as an archipelago of interconnected, yet separate human islands has in its origin the geographical structure of the campus space, that in its turn experiences reorganization and obtains certain cultural connotations after the further public evaluation of the historical events featured in the novel. This is a process in the form of a three-element chain of mutual influence outlined by Westphal:

La géocritique, en effet, se propose d'étudier non pas seulement une relation unilatérale (espace-littérature), mais une véritable dialectique (espace-littérature-espace) qui implique que l'espace se transforme *à son tour* en fonction du texte qui, antérieurement, l'avait assimilé.

(Westphal *Pour une approche géocritique des textes*)

For the geocritical approach to be efficiently applied, the literary text should preferably refer to human spaces that exist or existed geographically or, if imaginary,

they should have a «real» prototype. The literary polemics around the divide between «realistic» and «imaginary» representations of a human space in fiction and the question whether the «real» transcends into the imaginary realm via literary representation, according to Westphal, is to be disregarded by geocriticism in favour of the opposite, extended view:

La géocritique n'aura pas à emprunter cette voie, car elle se fonde sur le postulat inverse: les espaces humains ne deviennent pas imaginaires en intégrant la littérature; c'est la littérature qui leur octroie une dimension imaginaire, ou mieux: qui traduit leur dimension imaginaire intrinsèque en les introduisant dans un réseau intertextuel. [...] Les relations entre littérature et espaces humains ne sont donc pas figées, mais parfaitement dynamiques.

(Westphal *Pour une approche géocritique des textes*)

The second characteristic of the geocritically analysed space is that it ought to remain dynamic. To avoid dogmatism and historical determinism, human spaces are to be regarded as dynamic in their relation both to temporal duration and to a certain moment in time (*dans la durée et dans l'instant*), continuing the Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the perpetual movement of reterritorialization of a human space. Geocriticism claims the responsibility to apprehend the stage of deterritorialization on which the human space is situated, and acknowledge its openness to accidental change: «La littérature montre que parce qu'il est humain l'espace est sujet à l'accident, à l'*accidens*, à ce qui arrive et donc déjà est arrivé» (Westphal). This links it to another interdisciplinary aspect of geocriticism, which is a recognition of a human spaces' placement in spatiotemporal dimension. « Dans sa dimension intertextuelle, l'espace s'élevait au carré; voici qu'on l'élève au cube ». (Westphal)

The temporal aspect is of equal importance to the spacial one in *Derrière la vitre*, with the chronological structure of the novel as an hour-by-hour recital of events of one day is crucial in relation to the dynamics of the movement of the student political groups on Nanterre campus leading to the occupation of the administrative tower and de- and reterritorialization of the space by claiming the right to occupy its parts previously restricted to the other social category of its inhabitants (professors, administration), who did not largely foresee it (element of accident).

Thirdly, geocriticism incorporates some of the elements of the imagological approach, extending and redirecting it from the focus on the issue of perception and representation of the Other to «une *série* de représentations de l'Autre, d'un Autre qui serait examiné dans sa relation à l'espace au sein duquel il évolue». (Westphal) The geocritical approach does not only focus on the interpretation of human space from the outsider's point of view, but it extends it to the relation that multiple cultures may have to the same and, in many cases, common space. Otherness (*l'altérité*) in geocritical interpretation loses its monopoly to be the observer of a certain culture, and is observed in return, once again elevating the analysis *au cube*. The specificity of geocritical analysis lies in its focus on the space that is observed rather than on the specific observer. Westphal proposes to examine and compare the combination of several authors' references to the same spatial unity in order to deepen and specify the complex of connotations, reactions and discursive strategies around it. However, while the aspects of cultural otherness (the dichotomy workers/students), and even isolation are present in *Derrière la vitre*, in this research the comparative element of

imagological analysis will be refrained from due to this text's unique focus on the events preceding the May strikes, as well as its particular focus on the Nanterre campus space, that differs it from the variety of other '68 novels', that tend to be mainly set in Paris in May 68 and later. (Reader-Wadia 133)

Fourthly, the objective of geocritical analysis is to «cerner la dimension littéraire des lieux, de dresser une cartographie fictionnelle des espaces humains. C'est ensuite qu'elle permet de situer l'oeuvre en perspective d'un référent spatial plus ou moins largement exploité par ailleurs». (Westphal)

Examined through the prism of these analytical steps, the representation of a human space in the literary text allows to retrieve a better understanding of human spaces in their constant inner movement and the effect of such representations on the formation of cultural identities.

3.2 Non-place

The definition of the term non-place (*non-lieu*) originates from the distinction between place and space, that has been first explored from different perspectives by historian and cultural anthropologist Michel de Certeau. The main dividing line between the two notions lies in the dichotomies of anonymity/inhabitation and stability/mobility.

Michel de Certeau approaches the issue of definition of space and place from a broader philosophical and textual perspective in the two volumes of *L'Invention du quotidien* (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1980), commissioned by the French

Ministry of Culture as a report on future prospects and orientations in the wake of May 68. (Sheringham 212) Sheringham asserts that

...May '68 had oriented Certeau towards contemporary culture, and for him the crucial aspect of the *événements* was the way an event that did change something in the nation consisted not in the invention of a new order, social or linguistic, but in a new way of living, using, and articulating what was already there. In May '68 the 'prise de parole' had consisted in an 'usage différent d'un langage déjà fait' (a different use of an existing language). (Sheringham 218)

In Certeau's paradigm, space and place are not entirely opposed: «Space, for him, is a 'frequented place', 'an intersection of moving bodies': it is the pedestrians who transform a street (geometrically defined as a place by town planners) into a space». (Augé 79) The place is defined as «an assembly of elements coexisting in a certain order» and the space as «animation of these places by the motion of a moving body». (Augé 80)

The non-place as a term was firstly coined by Certeau to define the state of the «lack of place» between the performance of everyday practices such as speech and movement, and their indefinite result and impact on the people performing them, «the indefinite process of being absent and in search of something of one's own». (Sheringham 225) In *Non-Lieux* (1992), Marc Augé develops this definition further, declaring the non-places to be a distinctive feature and a logical consequence of supermodernity. For Augé, supermodernity, being the «face of the coin whose obverse represents postmodernity», is embodied in the «overabundance of events in the contemporary world» derived from its «accelerated transformation», that creates

an excessive apprehension of time and history («history snapping at our heels» due to mass media increasing the awareness on the multitudes of events happening simultaneously), as well as space, the excess of which is paradoxically linked with the «shrinking» of the planet due to the perspective brought into human knowledge by space exploration (small size of Earth in relation to outer space) and the rapidity of new means of transportation. (Augé 30-31)

While speaking of the space and place opposition, Augé outlines his definitions of these terms based on the notion of movement:

Place, as defined here, is not quite the place Certeau opposed to space [...]: it is place in the established and symbolized sense, anthropological place, [that] has to come to life and journeys have to be made, and there is nothing to forbid the use of the word space to describe this movement. [...] Space, as frequentation of places rather than a place, stems in effect from a double movement: the traveller's movement, of course, but also a parallel movement of the landscapes which he catches only in partial glimpses, a series of 'snapshots' piled hurriedly into his memory and, literally, recomposed in the account he gives of them, [...]. (Augé 81-86)

Non-place, consequently, is outlined by Augé as a «space which can not be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity», the opposite of place. Equally to place, the non-place still holds certain anthropological characteristics, that are, however, jeopardized by supermodernity, that strives to deprive both places and non-places from being the source of the stable identity and historical continuity. (Sheringham 312) The most distinctive traits of a non-place is its status of a transitory zone between the places, and its anonymity (e.g. airports, chain restaurants, etc.), that

tends not to evoke the sense of attachment. «Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed». (Augé 78-79) The perception of a certain space as a non-place is subjective, although the non-place retains its status as a human space.

The opposition between place and space and the notion of non-place are of particular relevance and applicability to *Derrière la vitre*, that relies in its structure to the anonymity and seclusion of the unfinished, yet overpopulated Nanterre campus, that is perceived by some characters as a transit zone or an unclaimed land, allowing for it to be divided and remapped due to the initial absence of historical or personal connotations. Moreover, throughout the day of 22 March 1968 the Nanterre Faculty may be considered as a temporal non-place as well, despite the strictly chronological structure of the narrative, as it is pictured in the rapid process of definition of its historical meaning, the result of which is unpredictable to all the characters.

3.3 Lieu de mémoire

Another interdisciplinary concept operated with in this research is *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory, memory space), introduced by Pierre Nora. It emerged from the French historiographical movement *École des Annales*, or *La Nouvelle Histoire* formed at the beginning of the 20th century around the periodical *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*. The historians belonging to this branch of French historiography aimed at studying history as a wholesome and continuous process of social development that involves all the domains of human activity. For this to be accomplished, the interdisciplinary approach has been chosen. The key difference of the

Annalists from the preceding historiographical movements (notably, the positivists of the 19th century) was in their focus on the «silent majority», rather than on the role of particular individuals of a certain era (the «great men» theory), allowing the collective consciousness, memory and mentality to be the key to the understanding of the social mechanisms.

The concept of memory, and particularly collective memory has been profoundly revisited by a member of the «third generation» of Annalists, the French historian and historiographer Pierre Nora. His fundamental work *Lieux de mémoire* is consecrated to the examination of the way the French collective national memory is incarnated in certain places and objects. According to Nora, a *lieu de mémoire* is a unit of the collective historical memory of a nation, «the ultimate embodiment of a memorial consciousness», that includes both concrete (geographical, material, functional) and abstract (symbolic, mythical, subjective) meanings. (Nora 12) A *lieu de mémoire* may take the form of a historical personality or event, object, building, geographical place, holiday, ritual, or work of art: anything to which collective memory attaches a symbolic meaning which it includes in the concept of a social group's heritage (*patrimoine*). Shared and maintained in the process of constant commemoration, the shared *lieux de mémoire* define one's belonging to a collective identity: «It is the nostalgic dimension of these devotional institutions that makes them seem beleaguered and cold - they mark the rituals of a society without ritual; integral particularities in a society that levels particularity; signs of distinction and of group membership in a society that tends to recognize individuals only as identical and equal». (Nora 12)

What was the reason for the emergence of the necessity to distinguish and study places of memory? As Pierre Nora notes, «the modern world is flooded by the surged wave of memories which solidly linked loyalty to the past (real or imaginary) with the sense of community, collective consciousness and individual self-consciousness, memory and identity». (Nora, preface) In Nora's opinion, the special status of France in this process is associated with three main factors. The first of them is the disappearance, as a result of accelerated industrialization, of peasantry as a stratum that was the keeper of collective memory since olden times. «Numerous sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) exist because there is no more memory of social groups». The second reason was the death of general De Gaulle in 1970, which terminated «military historiography» and kindled the interest of the French to historical biographies, history, culture and traditions of France in general.

The third reason was the ideological failure of Marxism and the loss of previous charm of Communism in the eyes of French intellectuals after the publishing of the French translation of *The Gulag Archipelago* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in 1975. After that France, the original country of several internationally influential revolutions, rethought the revolutionary notion of “breaking with the past” and intention to relink with the linear historical tradition from which the French became historically torn away. Besides, of no small importance is the fact that the role of a historian in modern society changed, and historians were no longer the only persons who had the privilege of registering and interpretation of events. The development of the mass media, television and journalism allowed almost any citizen

to take on a similar role. Besides, global decolonization and the powerful movement of emancipation of peoples under colonial oppression and dejected social groups in the metropolitan context led to the emergence of various forms of the *lieux de mémoire* in minorities (ethnic, sexual etc.), whose 'regaining' of their own past became an inseparable part of development and confirmation of their own identities.

All these events, according to Nora, brought forth the concept of «national memory», bringing France and the world into the «memorial era». Acceleration of history, followed by the fast changes in the present and by the imminent uncertainty in the future, combined with «lack of communication» with the past contravened the previous perception of history as a continuous linear chain of events. «We do not have common grounds with the past anymore. We can have them via reconstruction only, with the use of documents, archives and monuments». According to Nora, it induces peoples to actively collect and keep information about the past «where they do not live anymore», in order to get an opportunity to decipher the meaning of historic heritage that hides «the secret of who we are, of our identity». Therefore, the concept of memory broadens and becomes homologated with the concept of history (Nora, preface).

The application of the concept of *lieux de mémoire* to *Derrière la vitre* allows to examine the questions whether Nanterre campus is being actively prescribed a certain historical connotation in the French collective memory in the course of the events of the 22 March 1968, while being spatially rethought by the participants of the student strike, and if so, whether this connotation is forged in the comparison to the *lieux de*

mémoire already present in the collective operational framework shared by the students.

Chapter II

A Geocritical Analysis of *Derrière la vitre*

This chapter focuses on the various aspects of the praxis of the geocritical analysis applied to the Robert Merle's novel. The aim of the analysis is to obtain the grounds to support the hypothesis formulated in the research question of this thesis. Touching upon the role of spatial imagery in *Derrière la vitre*, the analytical part of the research is aimed to examine the spatiotemporal particularities of Nanterre in *Derrière la vitre* and to determine whether in the course of sociopolitical events featured in novel the newly built Nanterre Faculty of Letters campus, that can be interpreted as a *non-place* (in terms of Marc Augé), is obtaining its significance to the national perception of French history and becomes a site of memory (*lieu de mémoire*, as introduced by Pierre Nora), as a result of geocritical interactivity.

1. SPACE AND TEMPORALITY IN *DERRIÈRE LA VITRE*

1.1 Spatial aspects of *Derrière la vitre*

Merle opens the novel with a chapter excluded from and preceding the overall hourly chronological structure and consecrated to the history and spatial organisation of Nanterre as a Parisian suburb before the events of 22 March 1968. This, as well as further features, supports the omniscient nature of the narrator in the novel. Moreover, it also renders the novel to be eligible for the geocritical analysis according to Bertrand Westphal's criteria, the first of which is the real geographical existence of the described place. The chapter specifically refers to the reasons why

Nanterre, once a popular destination of pilgrimage for Parisians, lost its attraction as long as the afflux of visitors with the course of time, which explains the anguish of 1960s students produced by the need to live and study in a place many deemed isolated and empty. The first reason was the loss of religious connotation of Nanterre as a place of veneration of Sainte Geneviève, patron saint of Paris, also known as a protector of girls who sought to abort an unwanted pregnancy, and further secularisation, especially with the gradual abolishment of the traditional annual nanterrois celebration of the *rosières* (girls chosen and ceremonially awarded in the parishes for their outstanding virtuousness) throughout the 19th century. Even with the first railroad connecting Paris with Nanterre created under the reign of Louis-Philippe, the uneventful life of the suburb did not promote the afflux of visitors to increase, causing hardships for local farmers and businesses. (Merle 15-16) The second reason was underpopulation, especially prominent by the turn of the 20th century:

Un demi-siècle passa sur la petite ville, vierge aussi de tout événement. De la III^e République à l'aurore du XX^e siècle, la population augmenta à peine de quelques milliers d'âmes. Gentil bourg aux rues tortueuses enserrant une mairie rococo, Nanterre, en 1900, était entouré de vastes champs, piqués çà et là d'écarts, de lieux-dits et de hameaux. L'un de ceux-ci, – la Folie – comptait à peine dix mesures. (Merle 16)

The third reason for Nanterre's reputation of a deserted town is the acquisition of nearby fields and pastureland by the municipality, that led to the decrease in crop cultivation and gradual abandonment of the lands. This caused the creation of

wasteland and dumpsites with wooden barracks around the town, turning it into a 'vague terrain' with an 'image of purgatory':

Délaissé par l'homme, tombé dans la vacuité et l'indétermination, il devient cette chose affreuse : un terrain vague. Quand les cultures cessèrent avec le départ des derniers maraîchers, un désert d'un millier d'hectares s'étendit autour du vieux bourg. Envahie par les ronces, les ordures, les déblais, les carcasses d'autos et les cahutes des derniers jardiniers, cette « zone » défigurait Nanterre. Étendue vide, espace pour rien, où la seule présence humaine était donnée, à ras de terre, par des baraques de bois pourri que l'hiver enfonçait dans la boue, la vaste commune faisait figure de purgatoire. L'automobiliste la traversait sans s'arrêter, sans même lui jeter un coup d'œil [...]. (Merle 16)

This vast empty land in the Western premises of ever-expanding Paris then is described as becoming 'devoured' by the big city, and presenting interest for industrial and business construction, which, however, occupied only a part of *les hectares vides* that remained empty. With the expansion of construction sites, the terrain becomes occupied by the foreign, mostly North African workforce deprived of proper lodgings despite the legislation. Thus, the Nanterre *bidonvilles* emerge. Remarkable is the tracing by the narrator of the gradual change of the nanterrois landscape and of the process of creation of *les misérables villages* of shantytowns, with the use of syntactic parallelism and anaphora to highlight the dynamism and the rapidity of this change, exponentially increasing with the flow of time in this place, historically unaccustomed to change:

Mais à Nanterre le domaine vide des bâtisses restait immense. Les vignobles du XVIIIe avaient laissé la place aux cultures maraîchères. *Celles-ci*, aux terrains vagues coupés de

petits jardins. *Ceux-ci*, a leur tour, disparurent, remplacés par les bidonvilles. Parpaings *récupérés*, planches de coffrage *ramassées* sur les chantiers, tôles *rouillées*, fenêtres aveugles en isorel, les hameaux des travailleurs nord-africains s'installèrent a titre précaire dans le vent et la glaise, *sans* eau, *sans* électricité, *sans* égout. (Merle 17, italics by the thesis author)

Moreover, the description of Nanterre shantytowns is aligned with the one of the skyscrapers of the suburban business centers, neighboring the nanterrois wasteland: « Des que tombe la nuit, surgissent, au-dessus du pont de Neuilly, en quadrillage sur le ciel noir, des centaines des fenêtres, toutes éclairées, aucune obscure. Car dans ces cellules monastiques, personne ne dort et personne n'a besoin d'intimité ». (Merle 17) Despite the antithesis of «blind windows» of the shantytown with the ever-lit ones of the business centers, both of those share the lack of privacy and intimacy, despite the cellular structure. The public and private in the spatial organization of Nanterre have a structural organization full of contradictions, the pattern that precedes the extended metaphor of glass as both transparent and dividing element, that is an essential concept in the novel.

With irony bordering with sarcasm the narrator touches upon the opening of the new Faculty in 1964, highlighting the muddiness of Nanterre that shocked the new and unaccustomed inhabitants of the campus. The «plant town, dorm town and university town» (*ville-usine, ville-dortoire et ville-universitaire*) opened its «muddy roads» (*ses chemins de boue*) to professors and students in all its unsightly glory:

Le ciel était de plomb, la pluie tombait. Il [un professeur] vit des cubes de béton plantes dans un océan de glaise molle et rouillée où le pied s'enfonçait jusqu'à la cheville. Les alentours –

bidonville, usines de briques sales, H.L.M. grisâtres – étaient d'une tristesse à pleurer. Le visiteur revint au plus vite vers sa majestueuse Sorbonne, et rencontrant un des pionniers dans un couloir, il lui dit avec satisfaction, mon cher ami, vous allez vivre dans la crotte.

(Merle 19)

The narrator links the instant overpopulation of the Faculty to the inherent «gigantism» of everything that appeared in the former Nanterre «zone» area, thus aligning the campus to the two other types of nanterrois human space introduced in the chapter: the shantytowns and the business centers. However, further in the novel only the shantytown of rue de la Garenne and the campus are being focused on.

Applying the geocritical notion of an archipelago to Nanterre in *Derrière la vitre* leads to the distinction of the two major «islands» that are the campus and the shantytown, as well as the «sub-islands» inside both of these spaces. The shantytown is shown through the focal point of Abdelaziz, a 20-year-old construction worker of Algerian descent, who has been living and working in France for two years and is aspiring to graduate the evening course with the French primary school diploma (*certificat d'études*) that will allow him to follow his dream to study maths and engineering in the future. His experience of living in the shantytown of rue de la Garenne in Nanterre, sharing his makeshift barrack with five other workers, is reflected in his observations made in the first person addressed to the unnamed «you» (*tu*), presumably either a correspondent from home, or the reader him- or herself, thus breaking the fourth wall and increasing the effect of «realist credibility» mentioned by Reader and Wadia (133):

Rue de la Garenne, à Nanterre, il faut comprendre, il n'y a pas un camp, mais trois. Le camp familial, le camp des Portugais, et notre camp à nous, les « célibataires ». Enfin, c'est une façon de parler, moi j'ai vingt ans et j'ai pas de femme, mais les autres frères, ils sont presque tous mariés. « Célibataire », ça veut dire que ta femme, elle est restée là-bas, et toi, tu vis seul ici comme tu peux.

Rue de la Garenne, tu penses, c'est une rue ? Pas du tout. Une route qui monte, et d'un haut, tu vois très bien le chantier de la Fac, et pas plus joli de loin que de près. A droite, à gauche de la « rue » de la Garenne, rien. Pas de maisons. Du terrain vague. En haut de la rue, deux bornes-fontaines, tu tournes une manivelle, ça y est. Ces deux pompes, c'est là où les trois camps viennent chercher l'eau. Deux robinets pour trois milles personnes. Quelquefois, trois heures de queue pour remplir tes bidons. (Merle 22)

This abstract allows to recognize the inner division of the human space of the shantytown into several «sub-islands», among which the daily movements of the inhabitants occur: three demographically divided camps, the water pumps, the market, the postboxes, that French postmen do not distribute the letters from. Surrounded by the empty, dirty terrain, they form a precarious, dynamic archipelago, that is prone to accidental or intentional demolition by the outer forces such as weather or local authorities, including recorded cases of police violence. (Vincendon)

The second major «island» in the archipelago of Nanterre is the Faculty of Letters, one of the external departments of the University of Sorbonne, and the surrounding «American type» campus. It is outlined from several focal points belonging to students of different level of political involvement. The Faculty, same as the shantytown, is described to have an inner spatial structure, dominated by the

Administration tower:

Comme le seigneur du Moyen Age avait droit à son pigeonnier, l'administration de la Fac de Nanterre, afin que nul n'ignore qu'administrer est plus important qu'enseigner, a reçu en partage une tour, qui domine de ses huit étages altiers les quatre bâtiments, de quatre étages chacun, dédiés avec humilité aux tâches pédagogiques. Ces quatre cubes plus petits ne flanquent pas la haute tour de part et d'autre, car une asymétrie recherchée veut que la tour se dresse entre le bâtiment A et le bâtiment C, les bâtiments D et E prenant la suite de C.

(Merle 51)

This excerpt, delivered from the narrator's point of view, allows an understanding of the key elements, that consist the «sub-islands» of the campus. The alphabetical markers of the Faculty buildings, all otherwise indistinguishable by appearance, granted a high level of anonymity and detachment from the associations with traditional Sorbonne buildings of the Latin Quarter, as well as from one another. However, the narrator highlights the instantly apparent power imbalance, that the Administration tower (building B) represented, being twice the height in comparison with all the others. The similar in essence, but exaggerated view on the tower is expressed from the focal point of one of the Marxist students, David Schultz, a son of well-to-do parents:

David regarda avec colère, de l'autre côté de la terrasse, la tour administrative. Ce monument de prétention, ce chef-d'oeuvre de hiérarchie verticale, ce symbole phallique de l'autorité répressive, et tout en haut de la tour, au huitième étage, l'immense baie vitrée du conseil des professeurs, chacun bien assis sur sa « chaire » et surveillant, comme du haut d'un mirador, les douze mille étudiants dociles, douze mille bêtes à parquer, à gaver de science

« objective », à sélectionner en fin de parcours, et à restituer enfin à la société, transformées en parfaits petits cadres « apolitiques » et châtrés de la société capitaliste. (Merle 95)

In this passage, the feeling of social detachment and even hostility towards the administration is only supported, in the opinion of David, by the height of the tower and its presumed convenience for surveillance.

The leitmotiv of transparence combined with detachment present in the novel is specifically stressed by the image of glass (*l'immense baie vitrée du conseil des professeurs*). David's sentiments towards the building, that is associated with the abuse of power, support the idea that the Administration exists on a different social level than all the other groups of people on campus, and quite literally is situated «behind the glass», that separates it from the world below, yet allows to observe it in a panoptical manner. The similar type of gaze David condemns the Administration for is contemplated by Certeau in *Practice of Everyday Life*: David positions himself onto a place of «the pedestrian who is ... transformed into a visionary: *it's hard to be down when you're up*». (Certeau 93) The glass walls, windows, doors and other glass architectural elements, that physically exist on the Nanterre campus, are a persistent presence and a source of associations in the eyes of the majority of characters of the novel. « ...le couloir rectangulaire reçoit en principe le jour des portes en glace Sécurit qui ouvrent sur les salles – à vrai dire, faible source de lumière, ces portes, et à l'inverse, faible défense acoustique contre les allées et venues du couloir ». (Merle 51) The glass doors of the auditoriums tended to get stuck, so sometimes both the students and the professors could not enter the lecture halls, also leaving them

«behind the glass» from the «little temples of knowledge»: « Une simple substance translucide sépare ainsi les étudiants d'un petit temple du savoir, mais cette bonhomie n'est qu'apparente. Encastrée dans la glace, la serrure ne se laisse ouvrir que par une clef aussi compliquée que celle d'un coffre-fort ». (Merle 52)

Another glass «sub-island» of the Faculty is the cafeteria, *le Restau*. The reader gets acquainted with this human space through the focal point of Denise Fargeot, a student of literature from a working-class family, member of the U.E.C. (Union of Communist Students) with no specific leanings to any of the minor left-aligned grouplets on campus. Her attitude towards the Faculty is defined as more positive (« Nanterre, au fond, ça l'étonnait toujours qu'on en dise du mal »), that the one of David and other revolutionary students, as she finds it more spacious and liberating in comparison with « le petit appartement étouffant » of her parents, and the restrained conditions and policies (including restrictions on sexual encounters) of her previous place of study, L'Ecole Normale des Institutrices: « ...Nanterre, en comparaison, c'est le paradis, on vous fout une paix royale, on lit ce qu'on veut, on fait ce qu'on veut, même un peut trop ». (Merle 122) The Restau gives her the following impression:

Bien que le rez-de-chaussée du Restau fut immense et vitré sur trois faces, il donna à Denise, en entrant, une impression de tiédeur et d'intimité. Au centre, il fallait descendre deux marches et on se trouvait dans une sorte de piscine carrée et sans eau où dressait le bar. D'énormes plantes vertes la compartimentait et des petites tables se dressaient ça et là, c'était sympa. Eclairé d'en haut, ça faisait glauque et aquatique. (Merle 120)

In the transparent («aquatic») space of the cafeteria Denise observes other students'

division into groups and their inner mobility on the stairs seen through the glass wall, their movement slowed down by the over-crowdedness:

Sur l'escalier, il y avait un monde inouï, au coude à coude, marche par marche, une marche toute les deux minutes, vrai, ceux-là, je les admire, prêts à attendre une heure et demie pour se remplir la panse, c'était presque une allégorie, les impatients, assis, regardait l'ascension des patients. (Merle 121)

All the Faculty buildings are shown to be connected with an arcade (*la galerie*), that similarly to a central avenue of a city (*grand-rue*) pierces through all of the letter-marked parts of the campus. Depicted through the focal point of Lucien Ménestrel, an apolitical student, it is introduced as a central artery of the campus and a place of intense socializing for students:

Cette galerie, il y a des types qui la critiquent, mais moi, je trouve que c'est plutôt une bonne idée. Relier entre eux les divers bâtiments et desservir en même temps les amphis : l'unique grande-rue d'une ville de douze mille habitants. Tout y débouche, tout s'y trouve, les secrétariats, la poste, le bureau des objets trouvés, les petites cages en verre des appariteurs, le stand Hachette, la petite cafétéria. Même l'éclairage est sans cesse varié : du bâtiment D à bâtiment A, l'alternance des zones sombres – quand la galerie passe à l'intérieur d'un bâtiment – et de zones claires – quand elle passe d'un bâtiment à l'autre. (Merle 105)

The inner structural division of this human space is highlighted, with the glass playing a prominent role both in the observability and in the isolation (*les petites cages en verre des appariteurs*). The contrasting lighting is as well significant for «zoning» the space. Ménestrel, similarly to David and Denise, represents an observer, and, in the case of his observant passage through the gallery, that appears reminiscent

of a Parisian arcade, invites an interpretation of him as a flâneur. It becomes more noticeable with the further course of his thought, observant of the benches along the walls of the gallery and associating them with the social reality of the student political «grouplets» (*groupuscules*), who tend to occupy them and even turn them into weapons against the police: « Les bancs, les fameux bancs, que les types de groupuscules, le mois dernier, ont mis en pièces pour s'en faire des armes contre la police ». (Merle 105) Another demographic group observed by Méneestrel in the gallery are the female students of the Faculty, who consist the majority of students. Méneestrel scrutinizes the crowd of girls with his gaze, distinguishing different « types », which is also characteristic to a classic flâneur behaviour. He remarks to himself, that « c'était agréable de se plonger dans ce bain de foule féminine, de se laisser frôler, heurter, emporter par elle... », but soon his thought changes focus towards his own communicational misfortunes with girls, that leads him to an affirmation of an «inadmissible» and unjustly enforced social inaccessibility of the female population of the Nanterre campus (« ce gynécée », « cette ville 80 % féminine »). From his perspective, the girls « elles se mettent elles-mêmes en vitrine », the metaphor that as well refers to the leitmotiv of glass as a means of visibility and inaccessibility persistent in the novel.

The student dorms, or the Residence, are another «sub-island» of the human space «archipelago» of the campus. In 1968 the Nanterre Faculty's dorms were divided by gender, with male and female students having separate residences, both buildings situated in close proximity to the academic buildings. Prior to the events

featured in the novel, the Residence already became a cause for student agitation. In March 1967, the girls' dormitory was occupied by the students engaged in the protest against the erasure of the issues of sexuality in the governmental reports on the French youth's problems and aspirations, such as *Livre blanc* by François Missoffe, then-Minister of Youth Affairs and Sport. It was in January 1968, that during the opening ceremony for a new swimming pool on Nanterre campus, presented by Missoffe, he was confronted by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who proclaimed a demand of free access for the male students to girls' dormitories, supported by the politically involved students. (Seidman 60)

In *Derrière la vitre*, the Residence is first presented through the eyes of Ménestrel, who occupies one of the rooms: « Il repassa dans sa chambre. De vraies cellules, les chambres de la Résidence. Entre le lit et la commode, deux types de gabarit moyen pouvaient à peine se croiser ». (Merle 27) He is preoccupied with the restrictions imposed on him both by the lack of space in the room, reminding him of a cell, and Residence regulations, that, in his opinion, are excessively restrictive, especially in terms of his sexual freedom:

A la Résidence, tout était défendu, même de déplacer un cendrier, de changer la place du lit ou de recevoir sa mère dans sa chambre. [...] Les yeux de Ménestrel balayèrent la petite chambre. Avoir une fille à lui, la recevoir ici, la garder toute une nuit, avec lui, et le matin, prendre son petit déjeuner avec elle. (Merle 31)

As he glances through the window of his room, his course of thought is redirected towards his anxiety related to his future by the associations evoked by the campus

landscape:

Ses tempes battirent, il regarda à l'horizon le chantier de la Fac de Droit, et sur sa droite, les cubes de béton de la Fac de Lettres. Verre, béton et aluminium, les cubes bien carrés et les fenêtres rectangulaires. L'immense usine à fabriquer les licences, rendement faible, très faible, 70 % d'échecs, et qu'est-ce qu'on faisait des déchets, et moi je peux pas me permettre d'être un déchet, ni de perdre ma bourse, ni de piétiner des années comme pion. (Merle 31)

The similarity of the identical glass and concrete university buildings to an imposing human resources factory leads Ménestrel to the thought of his possible failure, characteristic to many Nanterre students of the time. The window in Ménestrel's room has a view on the campus, however, according to the accounts of some Nanterre students of the time, the view from many Residence windows opened towards the shantytowns. (Vincendon)

Finally, a small, yet the most symbolically crucial for the majority of the students, who participated in the protest of 22 March, Nanterre's «sub-island» is of the professors' conference hall, situated on the 8th floor of the Administration tower. The reader first encounters its description in a dialogue between Ménestrel and another apolitical student, Bouchute, who, nevertheless, plans on taking part of its occupation later that day and shares the groupuscules' plan with him. The initial intent is to have a sit-in strike in the conference hall until the six students detained by the police for the protest against the arrest of Xavier Langlade the previous day, would be liberated (« les six que les flics on cravatés pour l'affaire de l'*American Express* »):

- C'est folklo, non ? A mon avis, ils vont occuper la salle du conseils des profs au huitième étage.

Ménestrel leva les sourcils.

- Comment sais-tu que les profs ont une salle de conseil au 8e étage ?

- Je l'ai vu, dit Bouchute victorieusement. Une vaste salle rectangulaire, vitrée des deux cotes, avec vue panoramique, des fauteuils confortables et une énorme table ovale évidée au milieu. Enfin, plutôt un anneau qu'une table, mais un anneau ovale, si tu vois ce que je veux dire. (Merle 166)

In the evening of the 22nd of March, the protesting students, who gather at the base floor of the Administration tower, encounter a difficulty in making a decision if the conference hall should be occupied despite the risk of being arrested by the police. Some students, similarly to David, deem the conference hall a symbol of power (« symbole phallique de l'autorite repressive », « mirador de camp de concentration »), that has to be seized and denounced for the benefit of their cause without the precaution towards their own safety. Other students, among whom Daniel Cohn-Bendit, declare it unnecessary. (Merle 302-303) The professors' perspective on the conference hall is represented through the focal point of Jean Beaujeu, professor of Latin language and literature in Nanterre at the time, who is another historical personality inserted in the novel by Merle for the « reportage » precision. Listening to the students' claims on the symbolism of the tower, he reflects on this matter:

... enfin, ce n'était pas la faute des mandarins si l'architecte avait eu l'idée d'élever une tour et placer a son sommet la salle du Conseil. Ni le doyen, ni les professeurs n'avaient eu a connaître de son projet, c'était une pure fantaisie architecturale, acceptée sur plan par un

fonctionnaire de l'Education nationale, dans l'anonymat d'un bureau [...]. (Merle 304)

Thus, the professor, in his turn, also sees the source of the problem in the dynamics of an «anonymous» governmental power, unreachable for both concerned parties, i.e. the faculty administration and the students. Beaujeu notes to himself, that due to the inconvenience of the council hall's position and its poor accessibility in view of the often malfunctioning lifts, many professors would have preferred to gather at the basement floor, which would have inevitably lead the enraged students to an association with the chambers of the Inquisition, instead of a panopticum or an «aquarium» (as it is later noted by Frémincourt, (Merle 317)): « Que n'aurait-on dit, alors, sur les caves de l'Inquisition et le caractère sournois et souterrain du pouvoir ! » (Merle 304)

1.2 Temporal aspects of *Derrière la vitre*

Derrière la vitre has a strictly linear chronological structure. In the novel all the human spaces appear in the order of the mobility patterns developed on and around the campus. The linear hour-by-hour division of the text in chapters is a part of the author's chosen approach, the *simultanéisme*. As Merle notes in the preface, it indeed enforces the effect of the parallel existence of a multitude of characters at the same time and in the same human space, who do not have a direct or particularly close connection to each other, intensifying the impression of their loneliness and isolation. (Merle 9) At six o'clock in the morning wake up the workers in the shantytown, then, at seven, some students wake up at the Residence. At 8h30, the reader sees David Schultz crossing the campus on his way to class, followed by the

observations of the assistant professors, who are about to start their 9 o'clock classes, and of the students waiting in the galleries and struggling to find a place in the overcrowded classrooms. At 13h, the majority of students are observed by Denise Fargeot to be gathering at the Restau for lunch, etc. This temporally predictable structure implies the prevalence of the features of the initial, pre-'68 project, in which Merle's intention was to focus on the regular life of the Nanterre campus. It is only by 19h, that the regular spatiotemporal schedule of mobility is shown to be disrupted, yet only for a limited number of politically involved students, who decide to hold a strike in the Council hall. The unity of space, time and action could have been claimed to resemble the three unities of the classical drama, although the disconnectedness of the majority of the characters prevents one from making this conclusion.

For Merle, who at the time of the creation of the novel was himself a professor in Nanterre, the Faculty, as well as the town in general, does not completely transcend into the imaginary realm, that Bertrand Westphal warns from in his theory of geocriticism. On the contrary, while being inscribed into a literary text, Merle's Nanterre retains its geographical and demographical accuracy, as this was one of the primary goals set by the author for his almost sociological and journalist project of the novel. It is Nanterre's featuring in the novel that offers the town an imaginary dimension, expressed in the real figures (the Dean Grappin, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, etc.) co-existing on the campus with the fictional characters, and the presence of the latter's various perspectives on the real human space. Thus Westphal's three-dimensional chain of interactivity is established: the space (Nanterre's townscape,

campus structure, witnessed by the author) affects the means of its literary representation in the text (the chapters' division and order linked with the patterns of human mobility on campus and in the shantytown, that in its turn are defined by the places' inner structure), that further affects the space's presentation in the public imagery. Another important trait of the human space in the novel is its dynamism, defined by the spatiotemporal structure of mobility in the geographical reality of the Nanterre campus, observed directly by the author. The inner dynamics, however, is not rigid, and, in Westphal's terms, leaves room for accident, that is represented by the revolutionary students, who breach the social and spatial barrier by intruding the part of the human space at the Nanterre campus reserved for a different social group (the professors).

2. IMAGOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN SPACE AND THE IMAGE OF THE OTHER

The presence of the non-French characters and the recurrent imagery of glass as a barrier, both physical and social, in *Derrière la vitre* invite to apply the elements of imagological approach to the geocritical analysis of the novel, due to the imagology being suggested by Bertrand Westphal as one of the sources of geocriticism. Imagology explores the concepts of one's own group (the autostereotype) and their juxtaposition with the notions of the "other" (the heterostereotype), thus researching the origins and spreading of collective self-images, national stereotypes, prejudice, strategies of inclusion and exclusion and other related issues. (Zacharasiewicz 12)

In the opening chapter of the novel the narrator elaborates on the history of Nanterre, where he refers to the first clash with the Other in the context of the opening of the new Nanterre campus. Based on the national prejudices mixed with the deserted reputation of Nanterre among the middle- and upper-class Parisians, rather than personal experience of interaction, the opinions of the parents of prospective Nanterre students were condemning the place and specifically the population of the shantytowns beforehand:

Quoi, dirent les pères, nos filles, élevées avec le plus grand soin, seraient déportées dans des banlieues industrielles, contaminées par les communistes et violées par les bidonvilles. La presse, toujours imaginative, renchérit. Du sang comme si vous y étiez. Avant même que la première étudiante eut risqué un pied à Nanterre, les Nord-Africains étaient déjà coupables.

(Merle 19)

This passage reveals the strongly rejected image of the Other that exists in the minds of the parents of prospective Nanterre students, who, similarly to the majority of the Sorbonne professors are opposed to the replacement of the campus into the suburban area. Firstly, the Other is represented by the communists who «contaminate» the campus, evoking the «vermin» rhetoric characteristic to the types of propaganda (spoken and printed) against social groups and used for mass defamation, in this case, related to the «Red alert» of the 1960s Cold War. According to Mavhunga, the main goal of labeling a group of people «vermin» or «pests» is to justify one's prejudice against these groups, or even their exclusion or elimination by reducing them into the beings imagined to be «lower than human» or into things — a process, to which the

Martiniquan thinker of the *négritude* movement Aimé Césaire referred as to «thingification». (Mavhunga 154) The other group of the Other represented in the minds of urban fathers as dangerous, and in particular sexually predatory, are the inhabitants of the shantytowns. The image of the sexually violent intruders is as well typical for xenophobic view of the Other, explicitly noted by the narrator to be promoted by the press. The prescription of such a trait as inherent sexual violence to the representatives of a social group (mostly, racialized) is explained by Kim to have roots in the European travel accounts of the 18th and 19th centuries, full of the exaggerated and eroticized details of the «twisted» and «savage» morality of the «less civilized» ethnicities. (Kim 36) By noting this attitude of mostly French and middle-class parents of prospective students towards the shantytowns, mostly inhabited by the North Africans, Merle highlights one of the major «glass» barriers dividing the French society of the late 1960s.

One of the main characters in *Derrière la vitre* is Abdelaziz, a 20-year-old Algerian, who works at the construction site near the Faculty and lives in the shantytown of Rue de la Garenne. His perspective on the life in France is one of the rare ones presented in the novel almost completely from the first person. It can be interpreted imagologically, as through his focal point France and the French are being seen as the Other, offering an example of cross-national perception. In relation to the spacial imagery of Nanterre, it is most vividly expressed in the views Abdelaziz expresses towards the shantytown landscape and weather conditions, and their comparison to the ones in Algeria. The greyness and the rain are the main factors that

Abdelaziz finds repugnant about France and asks himself, if his stay there is worth the pay he is receiving to afford food (*la bouffe*) in the face of insupportable conditions and homesickness:

Quelquefois, je réfléchis : en France, tu bouffes, oui, mais ce qui te tue, c'est le gris, le gris, le gris. Les journées, sur le chantier de la Fac, mon ami, mortelles. La tristesse, la boue, la pluie qui ne finit jamais. Alors, quelquefois, je me dis, Abdelaziz, qu'est-ce que tu fais ici ? Tu es sûr que tu t'es pas trompé ? Qu'est-ce qui vaut mieux ? Le soleil sans la bouffe, ou la bouffe ici, avec le froid ? (Merle 22)

Abdelaziz expresses the interest in the French way of life, despite the instances of racialized prejudice he describes to have had encountered in the predominantly French environments, and retains to a certain extent a notion of positivity in his heterostereotype of the French people, unlike some of the other Algerians who live in the same shantytown: « Les Français, ils sont cinquante millions, ils peuvent pas tous être méchants, c'est pas possible, sur la quantité il en a sûrement quelques bons, voilà ce que je lui dirais à Moktar [...] ». (Merle 109) However, he admits the presence of hypocrisy and racial bias characteristic to the French («even in the working-class circles») in regard of the North African immigrants, whom, in his personal experience, they often imagine being sexually predatory and prone to criminality:

Les Français, quand ils parlent des Noirs en Amérique, ils s'indignent, ils ont bonne conscience. Et pourtant, il y a pas plus raciste que les français, même en milieu ouvrier. En chantier, dans les usines, les compagnons, ils vous ratent jamais. Et allez, à la moindre dispute, toutes les idioties des racistes. Ça part comme une diarrhée : L'Arabe, il est ceci, l'Arabe il est cela, et toujours le couteau à la main, la trahison au cœur et le viol dans la tête.

(Merle 110-111)

One of the particularly interesting cases of the clash of the autostereotype of Abdelaziz and the heterostereotype on Algerians dominant in the collective French consciousness of the time, as perceived by Abdelaziz himself, is the instance of the discussion on Albert Camus's *L'Étranger* between Abdelaziz and Anne-Marie, a literary student from Sorbonne, who helps him improve his French skills to prepare for his exam for the *certificat d'études*. Upon being asked his opinion on *L'Étranger*, Abdelaziz declares Camus a liar (*un affreux menteur*) and explains to Anne-Marie, that he deems his image of Algeria and the Algerians completely unrealistic, and, thus, misleading for the French readers. (Merle 112-113)

Another imagological opposition inside the human space of Nanterre present in the novel is the often-highlighted opposition between the students and the Administration, that tend to be perceived by them as the Other, often evoking hostile tendencies in their the attitude. Particularly this is applicable to David Schultz and several other students, who see the Administration as the usurper of power on campus, who demonstrates it through the spatial positioning atop all the other buildings and is referred to as *les mandarins, le pouvoir répressif* etc.

However, despite his Marxist leanings and sympathies, David is equally unable to associate with the workers. He considers his hypothetical presence among them, «on the other side of the glass», artificial and privilege-induced, referring to the social gap between the working class and the self-reproducing «dominant class», to whom David relates himself:

Ici, dans la journée, on ne maniait que des matériaux ultra-légers, les idées, et à travers les idées, les hommes : fonction essentielle de la classe dominante, transmise pieusement de profs à élèves. Et les dominés, là-bas, de l'autre côté de la vitre, courbés en deux dans le froid, [...] ils n'avaient pas plus de chance de s'introduire jamais dans ce monde-ci, que moi dans le leur. Oh, je sais, je pourrais, moi aussi, me faire embaucher dans une usine, Simone Weil ou l'imitation de Jésus-Christ. Mais pas plus qu'elle, je ne serais jamais un vrai ouvrier. Je vivrais ma pseudo-condition ouvrière comme un intellectuel, qui peut y mettre fin à tout moment... (Merle 96)

These thoughts, tightly connected to the inner spatial structure of the campus, the construction of which was not yet finished, and thus required the presence of the workers. Observing them renders David closer to the realisation of the inner mechanisms of power, in which he believes to clearly see his own position, further motivating him to make his first attempt to talk to Abdelaziz: « Et d'ailleurs, même ces ouvriers, en ce moment, devant moi en quelques mètres, je conçois les idées à leur sujet, mais je ne les regarde pas vraiment. » (Merle 96) A similar thought is expressed by another student, Danièle Toronto, with the extended metaphor of «window» or «glass» as a social barrier brought in the spotlight: «Qui de nous [the students] connaît la mairie, l'église, un seul des 40000 ouvriers nanterrois, un seul des 10000 Algériens des bidonvilles ? Tous ces mondes existent côte à côte, sans fenêtre l'un sur l'autre. [...] Elle pensa avec désespoir, trois mondes fermés, sans aucun contact. Nanterre, les bidonvilles, la Fac». (Merle 106-107) One of the most vivid expressions of this social divide is found in the scene of Brigitte, another Humanities student and David's girlfriend, making acquaintance with Abdelaziz:

- Qu'est-ce que tu fais, comme études ?
- Je suis pas étudiant, dit Abdelaziz en rougissant. Je suis ouvrier.
- Tu es ouvrier ! Dit-elle en ouvrant les yeux tout grands. Vrai ? Tu es ouvrier ?
- Mais oui, dit Abdelaziz avec méfiance – qu'est-ce que ça avait de si extraordinaire, d'être ouvrier ?

(Merle 177)

Despite Brigitte, like David, also being involved in the political life of the Faculty, her initial astonishment on meeting a «true» worker is deep and genuine, revealing the profound detachment between the two neighboring worlds of Nanterre.

The «Other», in this and several other cases in the novel, shifts depending on one's role in this system. The Administration (the Dean Grappin, professor Beaujeu) make a mutual opposition with the politicized students. The opinionated students oppose themselves to the apolitical ones. The student political grouplets have an inner division among themselves to the extent of the existence of two rival groups of trotskysts and two rival groups of maoists on campus. (Merle 61) Both the students and the Administration often see the workers as the Other, while for the majority of the North African workforce, with Abdelaziz as example, France as a whole is perceived as the Other in opposition to the «brothers» from the shantytown. The social division appears to be closely related to the spatial division of the Nanterre's «sub-islands» (the shantytown, the Faculty, the Administration tower etc.) and is often associated with the architectural particularities (the height of buildings, the «aquatic» views, the dominance of glass), that gain metaphorical meanings in the characters' interpretation.

3. THE INHUMAN SPACE: NANTERRE AS A NON-PLACE

Several attributes in the text of *Derrière la vitre* indicate on the applicability of the concept of non-place to the human space of Nanterre as portrayed in the novel.

Firstly, Nanterre is conditioned as a non-place by the presence of the signs of supermodernity, as defined by Augé. The idea of overabundance in Nanterre in the novel is represented by both spatial and social commentary of the omniscient narrator, as well as finds expression in the subjective focalized narratives of the characters. In the spatial dimension, the supermodern overabundance is made obvious by the comparison of Nanterre in the past (poor with local historical events, underpopulated and kept in both geographical and social distance from the capital) to its 1960s rapidly urbanized condition, the aftermath of the *Trente Glorieuses*: gradually absorbed by Paris and its industries, connected with the city by the railroads, with a mass of abandoned barren land (« les hectares vides », « le domain vide immense »), multiple construction sites, newly-built skyscraper office centers, and the shantytowns, overcrowded due to the increasing immigration. The «excess of the prime matter» in the «machine» of Paris, as noted in the same chapter, did not leave the educational system unaffected:

L'excès de matière première immobilisait la machine. L'embouteillage aboutissait à la paralysie. Il fallut prendre une pénible décision. Car enfin, on devait bien admettre qu'une partie des enfants de la capitale ne pourraient plus faire leurs études supérieures à Paris. L'Université, de mauvais cœur, l'admit. Les Sciences émigrèrent. La Faculté des Lettres, tardivement, s'arracha une partie d'elle-même, regarda autour d'elle où elle pourrait la fourrer, et la jeta sur les hectares vides de Nanterre. (Merle 19)

However, the construction of the new campus is remarked to not have resolved the issue of the Parisian overpopulation rooted in the post-war baby-boom, despite the inherent spatial gigantism of Nanterre in the era. This may as well be argued to indicate the supermodern condition of the space, intensified by the rapidity of its excessive and unmanageable population growth over time: « Comme si tout ce qui se dressait dans l'ex-zone devait être atteint aussitôt de gigantisme, la Faculté des Lettres passait, en trois ans, de deux mille à douze mille étudiants. À peine achevée, elle était déjà trop petite ». (Merle 20) The Faculty, similarly to the whole suburb of Nanterre itself, is considered to exist in the state of passage: «...Paris-Nanterre, n'oublions pas, s'il vous plaît, Paris-Nanterre, ce n'est pas tout à fait la Sorbonne, mais ce n'est déjà plus la province... » (Merle 56), «...Nanterre commence à se sorbonnifier, et si vite, si vite, s'est effarant...». (Merle 71) To a certain extent, the clean-slate anonymity and impersonality of the Faculty is expressed in its very project, including the visually identical and alphabetically marked buildings. Of interest in this regard is the Dean Grappin's view on the scale model of the initial architectural project of the campus placed in his office:

Sous ses yeux, [...] la maquette de la Faculté des Lettres de Nanterre était exposée, telle qu'un elle-même enfin. Elle était là depuis 1964, finie jusqu'au dernier carreau, [...] – abstraite par miracle, sous son couvercle plastique stérilisant, de son environnement d'H.L.M. grisâtres, de voies ferrées et de bidonvilles, sans boue, sans bruit, sans chantier, sans étudiants révolutionnaires, en fait – ce qui expliquait son apparence sereine – sans étudiants du tout, sans Résidence universitaire, laissée elle aussi, avec ses problèmes impossibles, en dehors du couvercle de cellophane, et même, chose extravagante, sans

bibliothèque. (Merle 70)

It is stressed, that the Faculty's model is under «sterilizing» transparent cover, that excludes the Residence. The «serenity» of this image of its human space originates precisely from the lack of human presence in it.

Secondly, several characters of the novel express the feelings of acute loneliness, solitude and isolation, derived from the spatial characteristics of Nanterre as an anonymous and even practically inhabitable area of passage, where nobody gets to know each other, despite of its over-crowdedness. These characteristics are the attributes of a non-place, according to Augé. In most of the student characters' inner monologues, Nanterre tends to be compared to the different human spaces, that are, for the most part, not intended to be stayed in for a long time or inhabited by humans. For example, when observing the campus landscape from his Residence window, Ménestrel compares Nanterre to the «immense factory to produce the certified» human resources (« l'immense usine à fabriquer des licenciés »). (Merle 31) Danièle Toronto reflects that it is the solitude and the coldness that make her presence in Nanterre «inhuman»: « C'est d'être seule qui me fait ce effet-la, je ne connais personne ici, oh, je hais Nanterre, je hais Nanterre, c'est froid, inhumain, horrible ». (Merle 53) Further on, she elaborates on the isolation and anonymity of the Faculty as an impersonal zone of transit, comparing it to a train station full of strangers:

Nanterre, les bidonvilles, la Fac. Dans les bidonvilles, au moins, ils se connaissent, ils s'entraident, ils sont malheureux ensemble. Ici, c'est l'isolement total, l'anonymat désolant. Personne n'existe pour personne. A cette heure, dans la galerie, combien sommes-nous ?

Huit mille, dix mille ? Aussi inconnus l'un de l'autre que des voyageurs dans une gare, et c'est bien que c'est d'ailleurs, la Fac de Nanterre, une gare ! Une cohue indescriptible ! [...]
 La solitude la plus irrémédiable, chacun enfermé dans son moi, et sa propre histoire personnelle, oh, c'est affreux, c'est intolérable, je hais Nanterre ! Ces buildings industriels, ce grouillement d'insectes, le gigantisme des amphis, et ce couloir surtout, ce couloir kafkaïen, inhumain, interminable. (Merle 107)

The excessive use of the superlative degree and adjectives with negatory prefixes indicates the overall hyperbolization of Danièle's description, inviting the relation of her spatially-derived feelings to the supermodernity.

Another example of the feelings of anonymity and abandonment derived from the anonymous spatial characteristics of the place can be observed through the point of view of the professor Frémincourt, who returned to an empty amphitheater in search for his forgotten gloves: «...un sentiment d'abandon sans remède. C'était démoralisant [...]. Deux cents jeunes évanouis comme si un siècle avait passé sur l'amphi, les générations abattues l'une sur l'autre comme des châteaux de cartes, et moi, laissé là, par erreur, unique survivant. [...] Cet amphi vide, c'est affreux, ça me donne un sentiment intolérable de l'écoulement du temps ». (Merle 317) The spaciousness of the empty lecture hall is contrasted with its past over-crowdedness and lack of space in relation to the quantity of students. The professor expresses his acute awareness of the absence of the signs of the previous excessive presence of students, whose daily passage through the room is only evoked in his memory on the notion of its devastating emptiness.

The transitive nature of the human space of the Faculty, with the recurring

reference to it as «inhuman», is noted by Denise Fargeot, despite her overall positive evaluation of the life conditions on the Nanterre campus. While observing the slow movement of students arriving to the Restau, Denise reflects on their mobility (« un va-et-vient continuel »). As in the cases of several other characters, it leads her to the ideas about her own position in and feelings towards «the crowd» that passes by:

Il y avait dans l'immense rez-de-chaussée vitré un va-et-vient continuel, un bourdonnement incessant, comme celui de milliers d'abeilles dans une vigne vierge au moment de la floraison. C'était agréable, au premier abord, mais à la longue ça vous déprimait, parce que une foule pareille, c'est toujours inhumain, peu importe qu'elle soit composée d'hommes. Moi, ici, je me sentirais quand même un peu seule, s'il n'y avait pas l'U.E.C. C'est curieux qu'on ait besoin, pour exister, d'exister pour les autres, dans un petit groupe. Un comble ! Je suis en train de justifier les groupuscules ! » (Merle 122)

Similarly to many other student characters, Denise recognizes and is concerned with her loneliness, however, her coping mechanism is her membership and involvement in the l'U.E.C. This and other similar cases may be interpreted through the lens of the shifting relations between private and public, characteristic to a human space in the process of rapid urbanization. The «American-type» campus of Nanterre represents a particular unit, being constructed as a town inside a town («ville-dortoir» and «ville universitaire»). For many student characters, it is in this place where they gain their first experience of living separately from their families in a densely populated, yet anonymous and isolated place.

Lastly, the perspective of Abdelaziz represents a point of interest in the context of the anonymity of the human space of Nanterre. As France as a whole tends to be

depicted as the imagological Other through his focal point, the shantytown and the construction sites of Nanterre are not associated by him with any particular personal or historical reality. The majority of his associations tend to be derived from the comparison of Nanterre with his country of origin (Algeria), noting, that in France he almost never «sees life» due to his hard work and studies. He is often remembering his friend Djaffar, also an Algerian and a construction worker, who expressed the same emotional detachment towards France, that motivated him to apply enormous effort besides his occupation to learn French in order to assimilate. He often referred to the difficulties and the sense of loneliness caused by the anonymity of the French environment and spatial organization (e.g., the street names) to him as a foreigner: «A Clichy, Djaffar, il avait le courage, après l'usine, même en hiver, même très fatigué, de ressortir pour aller apprendre à lire et à écrire avec des Français. Il faisait un effort énorme, il me disait, tu vois, Abdelaziz, dans un pays moderne comme la France, quand tu sais pas lire, tu es un pauvre type, tu vois rien, tu sais rien, tu es seul, même le nom des rues tu sais pas ». (Merle 111) The transitive character of Nanterre's shantytown for Abdelaziz lies in his aspiration to become a student and leave it, as well as in the general precarity of the living conditions there. The anonymity of Nanterre for him lies in his initial lack of meaningful connections and mutual understanding with the other inhabitants of the shantytown and the prejudiced or paternalistic attitudes of the locals, with few exceptions.

Therefore, considering these main two factors, the expressions of supermodernity (excess of vacant space, «gigantism» of architectural forms,

overpopulation of both the Faculty and the shantytowns, the rapidity of the geographical and social change) and the subjective impression of a large part of the characters on Nanterre and particularly the Nanterre campus as an anonymous, impersonal zone of transit, the depiction of Nanterre human spaces in *Derrière la vitre* can be argued to meet the criteria of the non-place, in accordance with the theory and conceptual framework of Marc Augé.

4. *LIEUX DE MÉMOIRE* IN THE POLYPHONIC CONTEXT OF *DERRIÈRE LA VITRE*

In order to examine the hypothesis of this thesis, the aspect of the presence and even construction of the *lieux de mémoire* in the text of the novel ought to be touched upon. The concept of *lieu de mémoire* is closely connected with the notion of the acceleration of history in the modern era, indicated by Pierre Nora. (Nora 7) It would be rightly to note, that, placed into the conceptual framework of Augé, this tendency for the «increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear» may be considered a particular manifestation of the supermodernity due to the combination of the speediness of the process, derived from the spreading of the modern recording media, and the excess of the sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*), that replace «real environments of memory» (*milieux de mémoire*). (Nora 7) This concept is as well presents an interest in the polyphonic imagological context of the novel, when considered from the point of the theoretical framework of another French historian of the *Annales* school, Marc Ferro.

In his work *The Use & Abuse of History: Or How the Past Is Taught to Children* (1984), Ferro researches the question of the construction of a certain image of national and global history through the «uniform» presentations of past in the national educational systems, that essentially affects the formation of both the autostereotype and the heterostereotype of a group. The identities largely formed through this process, as Ferro states, are prone to «dissolve in an anonymous past» due to the loss of the direct human connection to one's history and its replacement with its artificial, distilled presentations in the form of the politically biased school textbooks, cinematic and literary incarnations. These media leave an individual or a group in a state of the lack of control of one's representation, while at the same time excessively construct the official commemorative images, that coexist and superimpose with the widespread national myth units, to which Nora refers as to the sites of memory. «Collective memory and official history ... confront each other in a real test of force...» (Ferro 7-8)

In *Derrière la vitre* as a polyphonic novel, multiple instances of the appearance of the educationally-formed sites of memory are observed, as the major part of the narrative emanates from the French Humanities students, who directly experience the influence of the French national educational system, and thus operate, often without much reflexion, with the references to certain historical realities. For example, while dressing in the morning in his Residence room, Ménestrel casually compares himself to the «three-quarter» portraits of the generals of the Napoleonic era, specifically to the Marshal Ney : « Quand il se fut coiffé, il plaça son visage de trois quarts, se

regarda de côté et pensa, j'ai l'air d'un général d'Empire, je ressemble au maréchal Ney ». (Merle 27)

Considering the revolutionary spirit of the students involved in the political groups, with the most radical of them gaining the name of *Enragés* («the Enraged»), the most frequently evoked are the historical references to the sites of memory of the French Revolution of 1789 and the 19th century European revolutionary movements, such as the Paris Commune of 1871. Omitted in the novel, for example, is the *Grappignole*, an accusatory song concerning the Dean Grappin and several professors of the Nanterre Faculty, including Henri Lefebvre, who supported and sympathized with the student movement. Composed by the Nanterre students not long before the events of the novel, in February 1968, it is based on the French folk song *La Carmagnole*, that denounced the king Louis XVI and was highly popular during the French Revolution. (Seidman 67) Other frequent references of note include the Narodniks movement, with the texts of the theorists of which some students are acquainted (e.g. Bakunin, derogatorily mentioned by Bouchute as one of the sources of the Faculty's *anars'* ideas), and the Russian Revolution, highly topical to the majority of the left-leaning students.

The conflict between textbook history and collective memory of the category of politically opinionated students is prominently shown by Merle in the scene of David and Brigitte offering their help to Abdelaziz to study for his exams. David is critical towards the French «outdated» educational system, that promotes, in his opinion, a biased view on the main actors of the French Revolution. He disagrees

with Brigitte, who remarks, that the textbook is a résumé, that can not contain all the details, and proceeds with the critique of the perpetuation of the *légende noire* of Robespierre, who, at the time, tended to be positively reevaluated as a historical figure, mostly by left-leaning or communist historians, such as Jean Massin.

David secoua la tête.

– Pas d'accord. Par exemple, il suffisait d'un mot pour expliquer pourquoi les Montagnards font arrêter les Girondins. Autrement, ça n'a pas de sens. [...] Et l'élève, lui, il reste sur l'impression que Danton et Desmoulins étaient de braves mecs au cœur d'or, et Robespierre, un type affreux qui se baignait dans la cruauté gratuite et qu'on a bien fait de guillotiner « *à son tour* ». Voilà, pourtant, comment on apprend l'histoire aux fils de prolos ! (Merle 291)

In the spatial aspect, the presence of references to the sites of memory in the character's inner associations is as prominent, as in their direct speech. The majority of them tends to appear on the sight of the Administration tower, as the tallest and the most symbolically charged building on campus. The first major association is the one to the general architectural realities of the Middle Ages, starting with the narrator's comparison of the tower to the dovecote of a medieval lord's castle. (Merle 51)

Another vivid comparison is made by the professor Beaujeu upon overhearing the students' critique of the Administration's abuse of power, incarnated in the position of the professors' conference hall on the top floor of the Administration tower. He denounces it as a mere «architectural fantasy», in the realization of which the professors themselves did not have a choice. While claiming that the most preferable situation of the conference hall, in his opinion, would be the opposite one, i.e. in the basement of the building, he presumed, that the students' accusations would then

rather have in their origin the association with the «caverns of Inquisition», remaining equally exaggerated. (Merle 304) Thus, certain concepts of the Medieval spatial organization and its underlying symbolic meanings are present in the mental landscapes of both the students and the professors, who often reference them and apply them to their contemporary spatial reality on the basis of their apparent similarity, thus making them the units of collective memory of this social group (the French humanities' academic circles of 1968). This allows to interpret these units as sites of memory.

Another category of the historical spatial references often touched upon by the characters of the novel in the context of their contemporary spatial surroundings is the ones related to the sites of the French Revolution. Notably, the Administration tower remains prevalent in these references. The most frequent association with the revolutionary imagery is the one with the Bastille. For example, Ménéstrel, while being highly skeptical towards the *Enragés'* plan of the occupation of the tower, transmitted to him by Bouchute, expresses his doubt in the sincerity of Bouchute's enthusiasm comparing this operation to the siege of the Bastille: « Brave type, Bouchute, mais il faut quand même pas qu'il me snobe avec son héroïsme révolutionnaire. L'occupation de la tour de Nanterre, quand la stra n'est pas là, avec une clef qui ouvre la petite porte de la galerie B, ce n'est quand même pas la prise de la Bastille. » (Merle 169) For his part, professor Beaujeu, while reporting on the social climate among the revolutionary students to the Dean Grappin, also operates with the references to the scenes of the French Revolution, depicted in the nationally-

and worldwide-famous historical paintings, such as the ones by Jacques-Louis David:

... je n'ai aucune sympathie pour les thèses qu'ils soutiennent, continua Beaujeu, mais j'ai été très frappé par leur sérieux. Visiblement ils sont en train de refaire le monde et de récrire l'histoire, bref, ils m'ont donné l'impression de mimer une des grandes scènes de la révolution française, la Nuit du 4 août, ou le Serment du Jeu de Paume... (Merle 356)

At the same time, Daniel Cohn-Bendit is referenced by him as « une sorte de Périclès déguisé en Danton », admitting through these symbolical comparisons his outstanding leading and oratorical qualities, while the overall situation retains Beaujeu's negative evaluation.

The series of the revolutionary spatial references continues with the one related to the Paris Commune of 1871, made by professor Fremincourt in the conversation with Josette Lachaud upon her informing him of the occupation of the tower. He does not appear to her to take the news seriously, claiming, that « il ne fait pas quand meme confondre un acte symbolique et un acte reel », as the students' actions do not, in fact, threaten the power structures of the « enfer capitaliste » outside the secluded island of the Nanterre campus. In support of his point he gives an example of the Commune :

Exemple : abattre la colonne Vendôme, comme l'a fait la Commune, c'était bien, en effet, une « fête » comme dit Lefebvre, c'est-à-dire un acte symbolique à la fois enfantin et inopportun qui a bien amusé ceux qui l'ont accompli, mais qui n'a pas fait le moindre mal à la bourgeoisie. Par contre, saisir l'or de la Banque de France, ce que la Commune, hélas, n'a pas fait, ça, voyez-vous, ça, c'était un acte révolutionnaire réel. (Merle 327)

In this passage, the students are paralleled with the Communards, while the

Administration tower is compared to the Vendôme column, a symbol of Napoleon's triumph resulting from his victory in the battle of Austerlitz. However, their actions are not perceived as potentially dangerous by the professor, who, nevertheless, admits their symbolic meaning to the *Enragés*.

Lastly, the most recent in relation to the time of the events of the novel historical spacial reference, brought up mostly by the radically opinionated students, is the one of the concentration camp. The Dean Grappin, in this paradigm, is framed by them as a «nazi». (Merle 356) In relation to the spatial organization, the Administrative tower is compared by the student speakers with the observation tower of a concentration camp (*mirador de camp de concentration*). (Merle 302, 304) While this comparison is made aloud by the participants of the occupation of the conference hall, it is mentioned earlier that day in the inner monologue of David Schultz (« ...l'immense baie vitrée du conseil des professeurs, chacun bien assis sur sa « chaire » et surveillant, comme du haut d'un mirador, les douze mille étudiants dociles, douze mille bêtes à parquer... »). (Merle 95) This invites a supposition, that this was a common rhetorical figure among the members of the political student groups, often repeated by them with the same phrasing.

In conclusion, the referential frameworks of both students and the professors in *Derrière la vitre* are affected by the common historical associations evoked by the surrounding spatial structure. The central part of the campus, the Administration tower, is the object most frequently and effortlessly associated with the historical sites of the similar symbolical function as the one prescribed to it by the inhabitants

of the campus. Thus, the sites of memory, being the units of the collective memory of a social group, are present in the novel and function as a common frame of reference for all the characters related to the French Humanities' education (the professors and the students), while providing one of the sources of their associations with the contemporary spatial and social reality of the « archipelago » of the Nanterre Faculty.

5. FROM NON-PLACE TO A SITE OF MEMORY: NANTERRE'S INCLUSION INTO THE FRENCH COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The main hypothesis of this research is that in the course of sociopolitical events featured in novel the newly built Nanterre Faculty of Letters, that can be interpreted as a *non-place* (in terms of Marc Augé), is gradually obtaining its significance to the national perception of French history and becomes a site of memory (*lieu de mémoire*, as introduced by Pierre Nora). In the previous paragraphs we have determined, that the campus in Nanterre, as depicted by Robert Merle, can be interpreted at first as a non-place, with its spatial characteristics transmitted to the reader through the prism of the several characters' focal points. The large number of references to historical realities in the dialogues and inner monologues has proven, that the associative series in the characters' collective and individual memory provoked by the nanterrois spatial background are fitting the definition of the sites of memory.

Does Nanterre as a human space and the cradle of the further revolutionary movement of the May 1968 become itself a site of memory? The geocritical method

applied to *Derrière la vitre* allows to presume, that in the course of the events of the day of the 22nd of March 1968, followed in the novel with the documentalistic precision, the human space of Nanterre, while keeping its ordinary character and the typical transitivity of a non-place, is, however, observed to be prescribed a symbolical meaning by the key actors of the occupation of the Administration tower. In geocritical terms, the space of Nanterre campus is open to accident, and thus dynamic, as the tower occupation is portrayed to be a spontaneous decision, made quite soon as a response to the detention of a fellow student by the police and expanding its meaning further in the course of the day. From an impersonal, standardized space of daily transit, it becomes a battleground of a future revolution, both for the «enraged» students and for the professors, who start to perceive and evaluate the space through the different lenses, than usual, that involve the attempts to apply the historical parallels to the space, that becomes a stage for the onset of the new student protest movement.

The final passages of the novel contain an attempt to place the contemporary events on campus into the series of the historical events, and thus, to give it a symbolical meaning, that it has been noted to be lacking from it earlier. This concluding inner monologue belongs to Denise Fargeot:

Je sais ce qu'il va me dire, pensa Denise, je connais le disque : « *Les conditions objectives d'une insurrection ne sont pas réunies.* » Je trouve la formule admirable ! Elle vous a un petit air savant et compétent, et elle justifie d'avance toutes les passivités. D'abord, quelles sont-elles, ces fameuses « *conditions objectives* » ? Et comment sait-on jamais qu'elles se

trouvent « réunies » ? Elles l'étaient, en France, en 89 ? En Russie, en 17 ? En Chine, en 34, pendant la Longue Marche ? En 57, dans la Sierra, avec Castro ? Question : et si on essayait de les créer, ces conditions, au lieu d'attendre qu'elles soient miraculeusement réunies ? Mais elle ne dit rien... (Merle 420-421)

In this excerpt, putting Nanterre on the 22nd of March 1968 on par with the different world revolutions can be interpreted as an attempt to transfer it from its existence as a non-place towards the occupation of a place in the collective historical memory by the association to the widely-known revolutions of the past. As Michael Seidman remarks,

Interest in the May events and their legacy are reminders of the grip of the revolutionary tradition on the French imagination. The Great Revolution's grand years—1789, 1792, 1794—were conceived as a radical break with the past, which became known as the *ancien régime*. [...] The “revolution” of 1968 was not potent enough to produce an officially recognized *tabula rasa*, but many of its participants and their followers retained the sense of starting from scratch that defines the revolutionary tradition. [...] ...many see 1968 as a revolution that profoundly altered personal destinies. The events of May and June—however ineffective politically—conserved the power to change individual lives. (Seidman 206-207)

Further events of spring and summer 1968 are not touched upon in the novel, as it focuses on the events of one specific day. However, the influence of the student protests to the reorganisation of the human space of the Nanterre Faculty are recorded as a historical fact. For example, the transition of the non-spatiality to the commemoration is noted in the further renaming of the academic buildings from the alphabetical markers to the names of the professors and the deans of the Faculty, with

the example of the Administration tower becoming renamed into the «Grappin» building from the «building B». With some of the students' demands met and the generation of soixante-huitards having made an effort to preserve the memory of these events in the academic, documentary and fictional sources, the human space of Nanterre has become more personalized and even idealized, which renders it eligible to fit the definition of the site of memory. The geocritical approach to the novel *Derrière la vitre*, as one of the earliest examples of the novelized transmission of the specifically Nanterre-centered part of the broad picture of the protests in France in 1968, has shown the potential for the construction of the mythologized and symbolically saturated picture of Nanterre in the collective memory of the witnesses of the events of the 22nd of March 1968, transferred to the further generations and particularly frequently brought up in and reevaluated and reinterpreted in various media in the light of their 50-year anniversary celebrated in 2018.

Conclusion

My research has shown that the spatial imagery of Nanterre in Robert Merle's novel *Derrière la vitre* (1970) is one of the essential factors in the transition between the perception of Nanterre as an anonymous non-place by the inhabitants of the two most overpopulated nanterrois human spaces — the campus and the shantytown — towards the first attempts to evaluate its chances of entering the collective memory as a site of memory.

In the first chapter, the novel has been introduced with regard to the context of the general trajectory of Robert Merle's literary oeuvre. An overview of the French historical and social context of the 1960s has been given in order to broaden the research's perspective. It has been specified, that, according to the author, the original project of the novel had been conceived before the events of 22 March 1968 took place, having for the main goal the outline of a panorama of everyday life at the Nanterre Faculty's campus. Therefore, the spatial imagery, as seen through the students' focal points, has remained one of the key components of the narrative. The excess of the architectural elements made of glass is thoroughly noted both by the omniscient narrator and the characters. It receives a second dimension as a leitmotiv and the extended metaphor of an invisible, yet undeniable social barrier between different groups and singular people on the overpopulated campus and beyond, highlighting the recurring feeling of solitude in the crowd, typical for the literary oeuvre of the periods of rapid urbanization (such as *la belle époque* in France etc.), that occurred in Nanterre in 1960s.

In that chapter, I also introduced the methodological and conceptual frameworks of the research in accordance with their relevance and utility to the aim of answering the research question. After the introduction of the elements of this thesis's conceptual framework, such as geocriticism, the concepts of non-place and the *lieu de mémoire*, I have proceeded to the next chapter consecrated to the practical application of these theoretical concepts to the Robert Merle's literary text.

In the second chapter, the multiple aspects of geocritical approach were applied to *Derrière la vitre* with the aim of obtaining support for my hypothesis, reflected in the research question. The analysis of the imagery of several human spaces of Nanterre represented in the novel, that include the general landscape of Nanterre, the shantytown of Rue de la Garenne and the multiple sites of the Faculty's campus, has revealed a general tendency to note the anonymity, precarity and «vagueness» of the nanterrois terrain and its various structures, as seen by the people, who are not locals, be it the Algerian immigrant workers or the students and professors of the Parisian Faculty. The vastness and gigantism of Nanterre is often opposed in the novel to the drastically limited private space both in the shantytown and in the various student spaces on campus. The temporal structure of the novel, that takes the form of a chronological hour-by-hour narrative of the events, has been determined to increase the effect of the simultaneous collective, yet parallel (co-)existence and mobility of the multitude of characters on campus and beyond, defined by the author through the term *simultanéisme*. Merle's Nanterre is depicted with geographical and demographical accuracy, and thus does not completely transcend into the imaginary

realm, but is given a certain imaginary dimension, while retaining its almost documentary authenticity.

The examination of the imagological aspect of the geocritical interpretation of the spatial imagery in the novel has supported the idea, that the social divide appears to be closely related to the spatial division of the Nanterre «archipelago»'s «sub-islands» (the shantytown, the Faculty, the Administration tower etc.) and is often associated with the architectural particularities (e.g., the dominance of glass), that gain metaphorical meanings through the interpretations of the characters of different sociocultural backgrounds and thus propagate the construction of the Other.

The application of Augé's theoretical concept of the non-place to the novel has supported and extended the previous conclusions by offering a view through the prism of supermodernity. The expressions of supermodernity (excess of vacant space, gigantism of architectural forms, overpopulation, the rapidity of the geographical and social change) and the subjective impression of a large part of the characters on Nanterre and particularly the Nanterre campus as an anonymous, impersonal zone of transit are established to be highly prominent in the text. The depiction of Nanterre's human spaces in *Derrière la vitre* can be argued to meet the criteria of the non-place, as it has been supposed in the hypothesis of this research.

Lastly, the examination of the presence of the historical sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) in the text and of the preconditions for Nanterre to enter this category of the French collective consciousness, according to the theory of Pierre Nora, has shown, that the elements of the spatial imagery of Nanterre's campus tend to evoke

the three main categories of French historical references (the Middle Ages, the French Revolution along with the revolutionary movements of the 19th century, and the concentration camps of the World War II). The most associatively charged structure appears to be the Administration tower of the Faculty. The sites of memory, being the units of the collective memory of a social group, are highly present in the novel and function as a common frame of reference for all the characters, whose human space is the campus, while providing one of the sources of their associations with the contemporary spatial and social reality of Nanterre.

To conclude, all of the previously discussed aspects of geocritical analysis of the spatial imagery of Nanterre in *Derrière la vitre* allow to answer the research question affirmatively. The undeniable influence of the literary transmission of the image of Nanterre's human spaces in Robert Merle's work allows to conclude on the presence of significant potential for the construction of a mythologized and symbolically saturated picture of Nanterre in the collective memory. Through the depiction of the course of one day's events of the student protest in Nanterre, the campus and its surroundings have transitioned from being perceived as an anonymous and excessive non-place to a potential site of memory of the social group of *soixante-huitards* and, beyond, through the other media, in the larger French collective memory.

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