



SITUATION MAP: JOLIETTE

[details]

A PROPHET OF DOOM

Everything's going to pot. Everything. Marseille was one of the best-preserved cities in France... but it's not France... Marseille is Piraeus, Marseille is Istanbul, Marseille is... it's a port, you see. It's not France. It's the universe. Marseille belongs to everyone. And that's what they are now destroying: all of it. Destroying it with the power of money. So everything's going to pot. Everything's going to pot. It started in the historic quarter... I was born there. I no longer recognise my own neighbourhood! And now they've started on Joliette, and then what...

But at some point you can't avoid renovating, can you?

To renovate is one thing, but the style! The style of it! If something's been lime-washed, you can't just plaster over it. That's the beginning of the end of a civilization. When they start re-plastering, re-plastering everything, filling in the holes, to make it pretty, to make it look good... everything's going to pot. I've nothing against the new tramways, nothing against the underground, I'm not opposed to a cable car if it's a cable car they want. But – preserve the character of a place! And what is it gives a city character? It's the little things... go to the Bosphorus, it's... it's all ruins, but they are still there! Go to New York: you have to see Harlem to understand New York! Paris without the Goutte d'Or wouldn't be Paris... and it's happening fast, so fast...

Do you live here?

No, no, I live...

Is this where you work?

No. I come to see my sister.

Do you often come to this bar?

I mean, what was Marseille originally? It was villages, it's an agglomeration of little villages. There are no suburbs here! There are housing estates but nothing you could really call suburbs. The Northern Districts are part of the city. Nothing like the Parisian suburbs, all cut off from everything. People's relationship to the land here, it's in their blood. And that's what they're in the process of destroying. It's happening fast, it's happening too fast, they've gone into turbo-overdrive and... places like this are going to disappear. There'll be sandwich shops and luxury boutiques... and that's official policy! It's planned! People believe it meets the demands of the century, but... it's not true. It's not true. It's money, my good friend, money is what's doing all this damage. Enormous damage. It's a change for the worse. Everything is being privatised. Twenty years from now, the police won't be employed by the State, there'll be a private police force. Insurance companies will have seized power...

Insurance companies?

Oh yes, we're heading for a world of insurance, whether we like it or not. For a start, the State will no longer have the means to fulfil its functions: let's not kid ourselves! The State will just be symbolic, public services will have disappeared... they're privatising here as if there was no tomorrow! It'll be the Post Office next... then to top it all, the police. And insurance companies will rule the world. And those who lack the means to survive, well... we're heading for a world of ghettos. Naturally, there'll be ghettos. Nobody will have wanted them, but ghettos will emerge quite naturally. Because there'll be people who can afford to protect themselves from others, and those that can't. It's an irreversible process; there's no turning back. Outside of a nuclear war... and, well, I wouldn't put it past them. A war, that would make everything pick up again, for a while... it's a question of mathematics. The world's going to the dogs, there's no other word for it. We're heading straight for the wall. Straight - for - the - wall. The world is going to the dogs. You see... we were talking about the neighbourhood... it's all connected!

Look, two years ago this district still had its docks and ancient warehouses and five years from now there'll be nothing around here but office blocks. Nothing but office blocks. Rents have rocketed and you can't find a place to live anymore. Half of the Rue de la République has been bought up by an American private equity fund... everything's going to pot, everything. And yet me, God knows, I'm a born optimist! But these developments, these developments... I can't say everything's fine because it's not true! Not true! And that's why, to be honest: we'll never see the end of it. They put us to sleep, they tranquilize us with fine speeches, they gift-wrap it with ribbons, and whoever's gullible enough falls for it... and there we are, up a creek without a paddle.



AT THE HAIRDRESSER'S

I wouldn't swap it for nothing. Sometimes I do a haircut and I say to myself, look, that's not bad at all! I do dye jobs: I like them! I like fashion, I like change, and what I like most of all is: to beautify people. They come in, they look a mess, and they leave looking great. And I love that. Know what I mean? I set them right! But hairdressing's always been the thing in our family. The girls, they were into hairdos, you see, and the blokes... they were more into the bar thing. My uncle had a bar right there, on Place de la Joliette: a goldmine! Chock-a-block around the clock, it was. There'd be the dockers on an early shift from four in the morning till 10 o'clock, then those who were on from ten till four, then the ones who were on from four till two in the morning! It never stopped! It was a port that never stopped moving. So it was sandwiches, meals, a quick drink... a quick drink, my arse! Once that started, it never stopped! Your health and mine too! Because in Marseille, see, when five or six of you go out together, everyone gets a round in, so until you've downed that seventh round... plus the eighth, of course, the one on the house. People spent their lives in there. All the bars around here were full: oh, were they full! Not a one of them was empty. Today, here, another example, there's another bar closing down, up the street. Where you can see all the banks, there...

CUSTOMER – This was the heart of Marseille!

HAIRDRESSER – ...it used to be all bars.

CUSTOMER – Then it got really run down...

HAIRDRESSER – When they laid off all the dockers. Because a lot closed down after that, that's why it turned quiet. And later still, it was like a morgue. And it got rough...

CUSTOMER – It had a terrible reputation. Even in the 80s there were no streetlights. I used to live on the Vieux Port and this place was off limits! We were scared of being attacked...

HAIRDRESSER – It was a wasteland. There was nothing. There were the rails, and the trains pulling in. All these glass-fronted buildings you see, there used to be trains there: trains arriving to unload their merchandise.

CUSTOMER – [*at the same time*] Their merchandise.

HAIRDRESSER – It was a poor district, here, very poor! We were all Italians, Corsicans, Spaniards, Portuguese... Tunisians... at times I can hardly believe that it's about to change. It's our district, and we're watching it disappear... but then when I see all these fine new buildings with their big glass fronts, it's modern, isn't it? It's the future...

CUSTOMER – It won't be friendly any more.

HAIRDRESSER – We don't know a soul these days...

CUSTOMER – [*at the same time*] But it's true that it's better.

HAIRDRESSER – It is better.

CUSTOMER – [*at the same time*] It is better.

HAIRDRESSER – Well, I'm happy. Business is good. Me, I...

CUSTOMER – Yes. Yes, because there are all these offices...

HAIRDRESSER – Me, I'm very happy, see. I know business for me can only get better. I've been here five years now, I found this shop when it was run-down, really old, I did it up, it used to be a newsagent's and... it was once a bar too, before it was a newsagent's. Because when I took that sign down from up there, there was "Bar des Amis" written underneath the one from the newsagent's. The bank next door, that used to be a bar too. There, opposite, we were told it was going to be demolished, there was going to be a hotel... and next to that is some sort of brothel: we don't know what exactly...

CUSTOMER – Tee-hee...

HAIRDRESSER – Call it what you like! That bar there, it's a...

CUSTOMER – Those women are always fighting.

HAIRDRESSER – Till two or three in the morning, that thing is open. It's the only thing around here we'd be happy to see you get rid of. Because, well, it gives the neighbourhood a bad name. It's the only thing... Don't be going there, mister, you'll get yourself raped, you will. I'm not joking! Go on, you'll see: it'll soon wipe the smile off your face!

ME – *I am going to go.*

HAIRDRESSER – What! You'll be glad about that, I tell you! You'll see then! Just watch out for your stuff, keep a tight hold on it... because you might get a chair thrown at you! Just last week they broke all the windows. See for yourself, the windows are all brand new. Just ask... wasn't there a fight here last week? It's like this, mister, there are folks that should be here and them that shouldn't. And we can't get her to leave, see! It seems they got up a petition and everything but there's no moving her. She's raving mad. She's aggressive, every time you see her she's running out after some bloke or other with a broom... for us, it's show time every week. We're treated to that once a week.

ME – *A little entertainment...*

HAIRDRESSER – Oh listen mister, when you see them pulling a knife on you and stuff like that, I for one don't find that funny. And it scares off my customers as well! Either you're a... a... an honest and respectable business, or you're drug dealers and... prostitutes and... it shouldn't be allowed. Have to put that sort back where they belong, and where they can keep to themselves. What are we supposed to make of that, right opposite? Do you want kids coming out of school seeing stuff like that? Well, I don't. I don't talk to that kind of woman, see mister. That's not the company I keep. But everyone on this street, all the shopkeepers, we all get along fine... but not with that.

ME – *And there was more of that, was there, back then, that kind of...?*

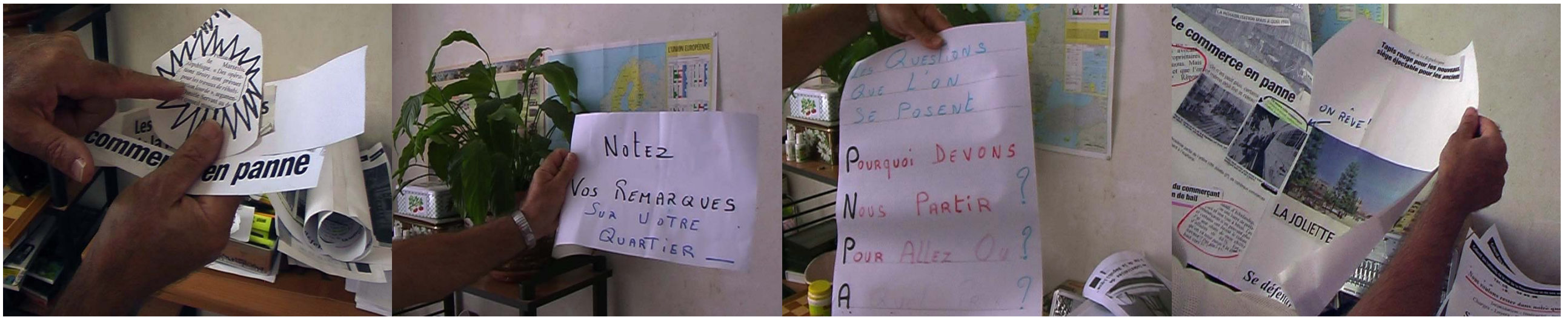
HAIRDRESSER – Yes. That's right. She's the only one left. Before, it used to be the Corsicans, ran the bars. They ran all the bars around here. Not like that piece of work... are you really going to go there?

ME – Yes.

HAIRDRESSER – You're off your rocker. I'm telling you, just be careful, hey, I'm not joking! I don't know if she's there – can you see her from there?

CUSTOMER –...

HAIRDRESSER – Hang on, what's the time? Three. She'll not have had a drink yet. If you go over a bit later... I don't know if she's there...



THE BILLPOSTER

Here you are in the very... in the den of... now the whole world will get to know where it all happens! This is where I cut and paste. I collect newspaper articles, cut them out, enlarge them... and make my collages like that... stick them together... it's my own little private cinema. And then on Saturday mornings I go for a little run, you see: I go and paste my collages in the Rue de la République.

These here are ready to go! This little collage, for example: "Red carpet for the newcomers, ejection seats for the rest". Look, this is the street as it is now. And it's supposed to end up looking... like that! "Operation re-shuffle is the plan", which meant they were supposed to re-locate tenants, do the places up, then return the tenants to their homes... except they never did. So I came up with "Operation Cash Register".

"We're not playing Monopoly"...

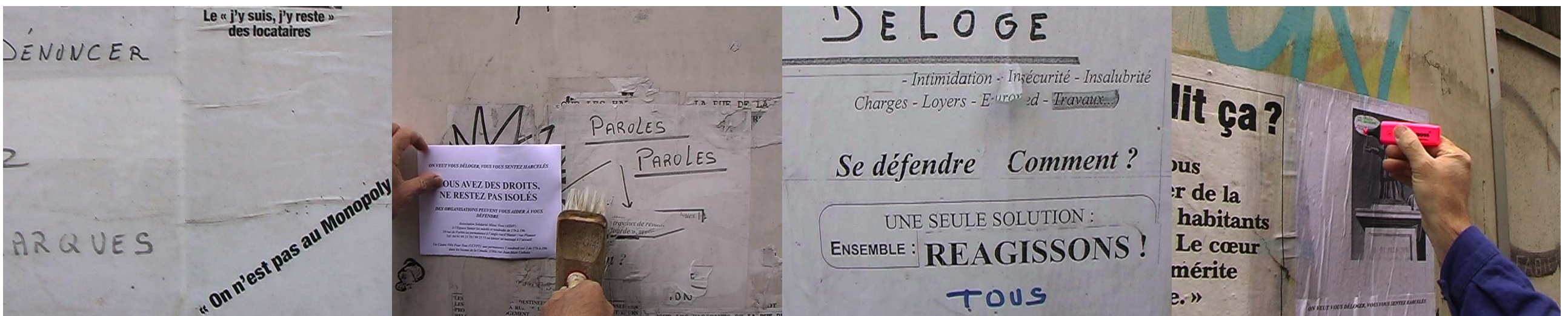
Oh, that one... the manager of Marseille République caught me red-handed once, pasting up that collage. I was right in front of their place, their office. He saw me pasting, he said, well... what's that supposed to mean, Monopoly? I said, come on, don't tell me you don't know what Monopoly is! I didn't know the bloke. Your stuff is good, he said, so good, you should paste one right on their shop-front window! Somehow I smelt a rat. I said,

oh no, I only do what's legal, I do! I'm not pasting things on people's windows. He said, who are you, anyway, and I said, that's none of your business. I live in this neighbourhood and I say what I think. And then he says: I am the general manager of Marseille République! And as fast as I could paste up my posters, he was tearing them down! The manager of Marseille République himself! The walls of the République belong to me, he said. These are *my* walls. You're not to paste posters on *my* walls. Well, I told him, I did: listen, mister... I've been in this district for *four* generations, so it seems to me these walls belong just as much to me as they do to you! I told him, they're not yours, these walls, they're ours! Because I've been here for... longer than you can begin to imagine.

So, we played that little game for a while. He has his fun tearing down my posters in broad daylight. And me, I keep pasting them up in broad daylight too.

I sometimes have a brainstorm, you see: "The questions we ask ourselves, why should we leave, to go where, and at what cost?" Sometimes I stick up a poster like this one too, "please write your comments here", and then I paste a blank sheet alongside it. We can communicate like that, without knowing one another. People write about what's happening to them. It's direct information.

You see, we - our association, I mean - never managed to discuss things with Marseille République. So I said to myself, in spite of that, we must let people know what's happening! So I thought, I'll go and paste it in the streets! And that's what I've been doing these past three years. I'm a bit... on my own, but it doesn't matter...



So what about your association, Solidarité Mieux Vivre... ?¹

That was about living together in the neighbourhood. The old people and the young ones together. We organised bingo nights and jumble sales... to create a community spirit, because we were a bit... everyone was isolated, you see. So we tried to get together, to... we're still trying, actually, to live together... but there are fewer and fewer people here! Some apartments have been empty for ten years and they are not being relet. They found a thousand ways to get people to leave. And then they bricked everything up. And it stayed that way. We didn't understand why, at first, because there were lots of people looking for an apartment or a shop to rent, plenty of them! But it was no go. And later on, we saw the operation really start rolling.



I ran a business myself, on the Rue de la République. A printer's, there, where you can see the estate agent's, the one run by Marseille République. And well, there you go: now I'm an errand-boy... I was lucky someone took me on... it's not easy to find a job when you're fifty-five. And I'd lost what it takes to work on a building site.

What we'd like to achieve with our association is also to explain to newcomers that there were people here before they moved in... people lived here... things happened to make those people leave... and what is going to happen in the years to come. They talk about flourishing businesses, flagship projects, big department stores, about... pleasure cruises, an Imperial Avenue... it all seems a bit extravagant to me, compared with the entire life of this neighbourhood, because that life still exists, in spite of everything. I don't know if the people who came here to invest really know what they've walked into.

Because this district has never been anything but a working class district. There have been lots of businesses here, lots of warehouses... where fruit was delivered, dates, dried fruits... there were forges, rope manufacturers for the ships, ball-bearings, jute sacks for the peanuts... we used to go looking for fruit, tangerines and bananas... you could go down on the wharves, down onto the port, as far as Estaque it was all open and the size of it was breathtaking!

¹ *Solidarity for a Better Life*

As kids, we'd gather planks and crates and build dens, and invent our own playgrounds. Nowadays you can't even get in there; it's all fenced off. That puts a brake on things, for sure. We're seeing all that disappear. We used to go fishing... there were still cows... it doesn't seem possible now but we used to go and buy fresh milk, as if we were living in the countryside! Over by Saint Mauront, it was still open countryside. Now it's a motorway. There were little streets, we'd take short cuts to get to school, the streets were just paths with streams running down them, there were trees... fig-trees, see, we'd go and pick figs... there were lots of little patches of wasteland, you see!

We had hideouts in all the foundries... we had bows and arrows, we had stones! We had go-carts, all you needed was a plank, a wooden cleat from the shipyard and some ball-bearings: we had everything right on hand, and so we'd have go-cart races, we'd ride down... we had a few accidents, of course. Because there's the hospital there, on Rue Hozier...

Yes, right at the bottom of the hill!

Lucky for us! Because every Thursday there'd be one of us got hurt all the same. So, the stuff young kids get up to now on the streets, I can understand them. We were the same. I wasn't a gang leader myself, but I often got into fights. I did the craziest things, I see that now... I wouldn't recognise myself these days! Because I'm... I explain everything... I see old guys the age of ninety and they say to me, do you remember what you used to do to us? And it's true, we'd like the kids to know that we were just like them, on the streets, but also that they realise what the neighbourhood was like, not so very long ago. We could hang out on some wasteland and make a bonfire... because a lot of places had been bombed during the war, and up until the 60s

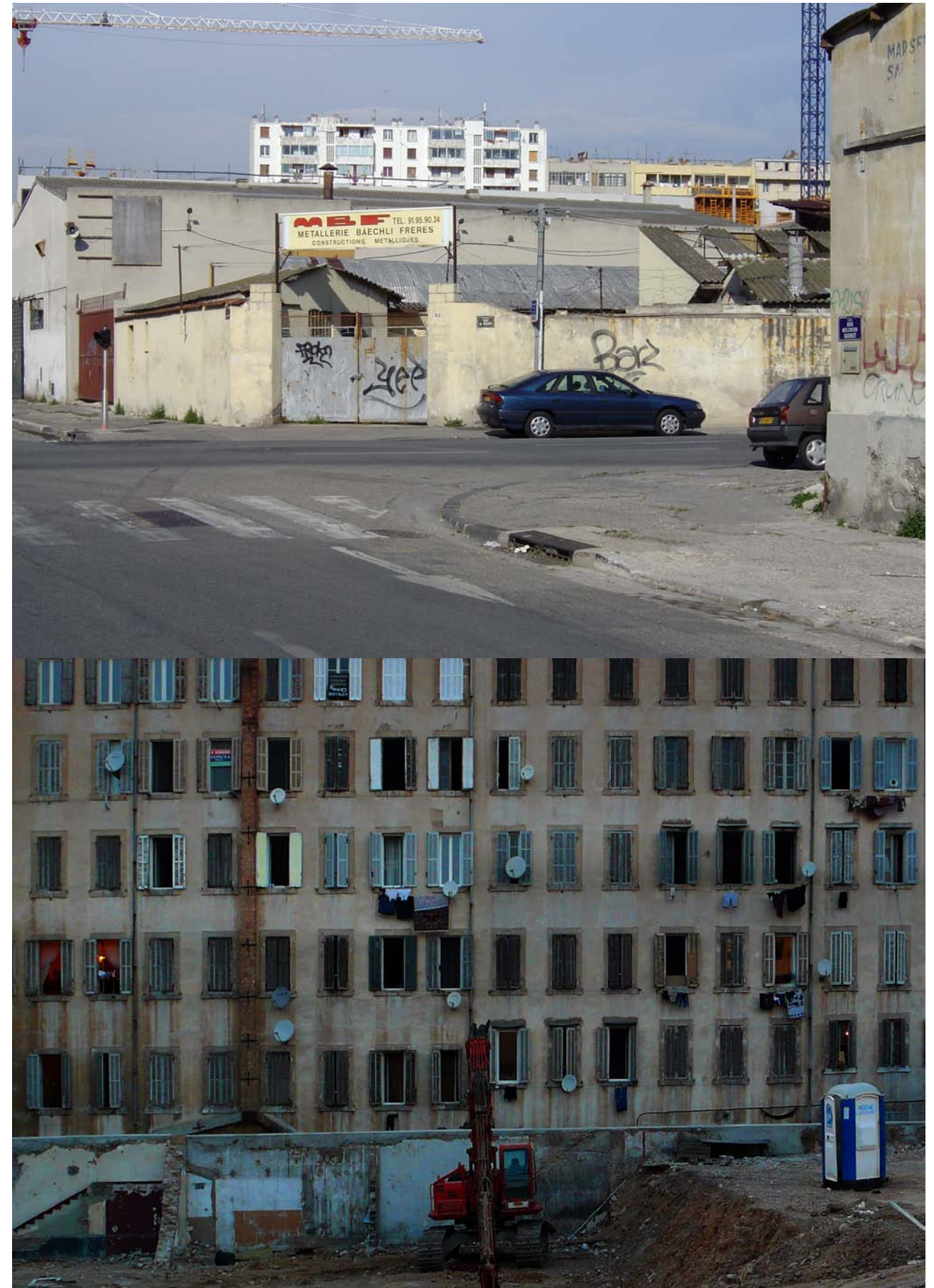
or so, it was pretty much deserted. It was still wasteland. We had our little spots where we could meet. Everyone had his own patch: each neighbourhood. There were clans. Tribes. We used to go and fight the next district...

The terrible thing is, the Rue Pierre Albrand, where I used to live: there was the top end and the bottom end of the street. And we were sworn enemies. We did not mix. And the Rue Pierre Albrand is short! My mother used to say to me: I don't want to see you at the bottom end of the street! The top end was said to be rich... not that I was rich. Ha! But the ones from the bottom end used to say, you're off up the rich, hey? And right down at the bottom was a bit of fenced-off land: it was a shantytown, a real slum... the casbah. Then there were the gypsies at Salengro, there were the Neapolitans, there were the Corsicans... a lot of Corsican seamen...

And where's your family from?

My father was a Spanish Republican. He arrived in France in 1940, as a refugee. He worked laying tracks over by Perpignan, then as a stonemason. He died young. I was eleven years old when my father died. So my mother had to go and clean for other people. We were left to our own devices. That's why I was always on the streets. I used to come home from school with my brother and my sister, we were on our own to do our homework... but there was always a neighbour who'd knock and check that everything was all right... people stuck together... we'd never go hungry. When I was in the street at eight o'clock of an evening, someone would ask me, have you not had any supper? No, I'd say, I'm waiting for my mother to come home. Listen, you come upstairs, eat a plate of soup and then we'll see about your mum!

We were in and out of people's homes... the doors were always open. Everyone's place was a home from home. People were outside all day long. There was no television like there is today! People would bring out chairs in the evenings... the Neapolitans would play the mandolin... in June, there's what we call St. Jean's Eve, there'd be orchestras, local musicians... we'd make a big fire, there; we'd pile up some palettes, and whatever else would burn. It was not... very dangerous. It's not something that could still be done today, I agree... well. I can try to understand... what with all the cars... but all the same, when I was still sixteen, or eighteen even, we always had a thing about the St. Jean's Eve bonfire. Of course we got in trouble with the cops, because fires weren't allowed anymore. But I could never stop thinking about it. I could never quite get it into my head that we couldn't make our fire on St. Jean's Eve anymore. But it was no longer possible.





Plan de situation: Joliette

As the most detailed map of a given area, a 'situation map' focuses attention on a little fragment of the world, to document whatever occupies its surface, but also to indicate that which is invisible on the surface: borders, private lots and properties, the power relations that structure space.

Since 2004, I have devoted most of my time to a series of 'nearly-documentary' projects that combine the physical exploration of a given topography with personal testimonies to lives that unfold within it. Ultimately taking shape as a slide show, performance lecture, book, film or exhibition, these 'plans de situation' (situation maps) aim to trace subjective geographies of a fragmented world.

Our attempts to inhabit this world, to locate ourselves in it, to find a path, a direction to head in... the joy of guiding oneself as well as that of getting lost: these are some of the motifs that underpin my research.

A long documentary film that is still in progress, *Plan de situation #6: Joliette* is based on a commission from the local FRAC (Regional Contemporary Art Fund) and aims to follow the evolution of a city block in the heart of the new financial district that is presently emerging around the Place de la Joliette in Marseille.

The conflict between the public development corporation Euroméditerranée and the inhabitants it has expropriated, as well as the (peripheral) role played in that game, more or less willingly, by the artistic institutions, is too vast a subject to be addressed here.

That is why I limited myself to transcribing three (slightly condensed) recordings that form a sort of peripheral constellation around the central hub of the conflict.

The first text is the spontaneous profession of faith of an unknown personage encountered in one of the two bars on the block. If I my memory serves me well, this contemporary Cassandra was named Sami and had been working for UNESCO. I was never to meet that man again. I appreciate the way he links the fate of the district to that of the entire universe.

The second seems to me to eloquently sum up the paradoxical mentality engendered by urban redevelopment: glorification of the now legendary history of the former port district, alongside ferocious slander of its last remaining traces. Let it be said that I was never able to verify any of the allegations here levelled against the (Algerian) owner of the neighbouring bar, a perfectly peaceful location. I have taken the liberty of publishing this text without the consent of the persons involved, and thus prefer that they remain anonymous.

The third voice is that of Vincent Abad, now a friend of mine. We met thanks to Martine Derain, whose contribution to this present volume will put a clearer perspective on this story of a street kid who became a solitary activist brandishing his makeshift resistance.

As for the images – they too, peripheral in relation to the city block around which this work revolves – I only feel the need to mention that the banner on the left, "They are investing; so are we" is the work of the squat, La Razzia.

My sincere thanks to all those I met and to the *Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur*.

Till Roeskens