



***ARTHUR  
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***QUATRE  
VINGT  
SIX***

## *QUATRE VINGT SIX*

Growing up in the Northwest part of the Paris region, one of my earliest, and strongest urban memories was with my parents as we drove on the A86 highway. Every time we got on the fly-over to cross the Seine river in Villeneuve-la-Garenne, I used to watch the thin stretch of the Île Saint-Denis pass by underneath, to then be greeted by the sight of the imposing Tour Pleyel of Saint-Denis, adorned by its unforgettable rotating Siemens sign. Brushing past the futuristic, and miserably empty, tower, whether on the way home or leaving for a day off, evoked an unmistakable feeling of belonging, while dreaming wide awake. It was a sign of the things to come, or a welcome back sort of feeling.

It is a weird coincidence that many years later I found myself studying photography a few minutes away from that same tower and highway. Without giving it too much thought, I had adapted to my new life of daily commute from Paris (where I was now living for good after a few years spent in and out of Delhi) to Saint-Denis.

Growing up in and around Paris, one's transportation of choice would rather be the Metro or the Train than the car, thanks to the quality of the public transportation network around the region. It wasn't until recently that I started to get some understanding of the road and highways going around the city, as I increasingly found myself having to drive around. Before that my relationship to highways and roads amounted to little more than those childhood and teenage memories.

Needless to say that the A86 was, like in real life, more akin to background noise in my subconscious and my surroundings, than a daily experience.





*The A86 and Saint-Denis from the top of the Tour Pleyel, September 2019*

Through a series of coincidences, and the start of my walks around the Northern part of Paris for my *Plaine de France* project, I did get closer to the highway from around 2018, but I only learnt about the full scope of the A86 a year later when I started researching about its history.

The A86 is the second ring road circling around Paris, within a 2 to 7 km distance to the Boulevard Périphérique that marks the physical and mental boundaries of a city stuck within its 19th Century perimeter. Whereas the Périphérique was built in the Zone, a 250 meter wide glacis area around the defensive wall of the city, the A86 was built in, over and under the existing suburban fabric of the neighboring cities of Paris, cutting through space in a brutal manner.

While it was designed and planned in the 1960s, it took four decades for it to reach its completion in 2011. Various oppositions, especially in the affluent towns of the Southwest of the region, slowed down the process. It gave the 77 km long highway a very diverse architectural and infrastructural style, ranging from brutalism to a yet-to-be-named contemporary style.

I finally set out to begin to document the landscapes and the architecture of the A86 in January 2021. I began my journey in Saint-Denis, the current geographical epicenter of my life, and headed West, to go back on my steps through the North of the Hauts-de-Seine, where I grew up. I have so far covered 17 km, all on foot and going back and forth at times, and reached Rueil-Malmaison, where the A86 goes underground for a 10km long tunnel designed to mitigate the nuisances of the highway.

Although I have only covered a small portion of the total length, I have already been blown away by the personality and style of the infrastructure in the sections I have visited. The sight of such a diversity of landscapes, from high-density residential, to office spaces, industrial and logistical activities, all linked over a few kilometers by this concrete ribbon, says a lot about the intricate nature of the geography of the Paris region.

As I realized that the white and grey skies of Winter and Autumn would be paramount to conveying the harsh beauty of the landscapes and massive architecture of the A86, I have put the project on hold until the end of the year. I hope to finish my journey by around 2023.







SAINT-DENIS

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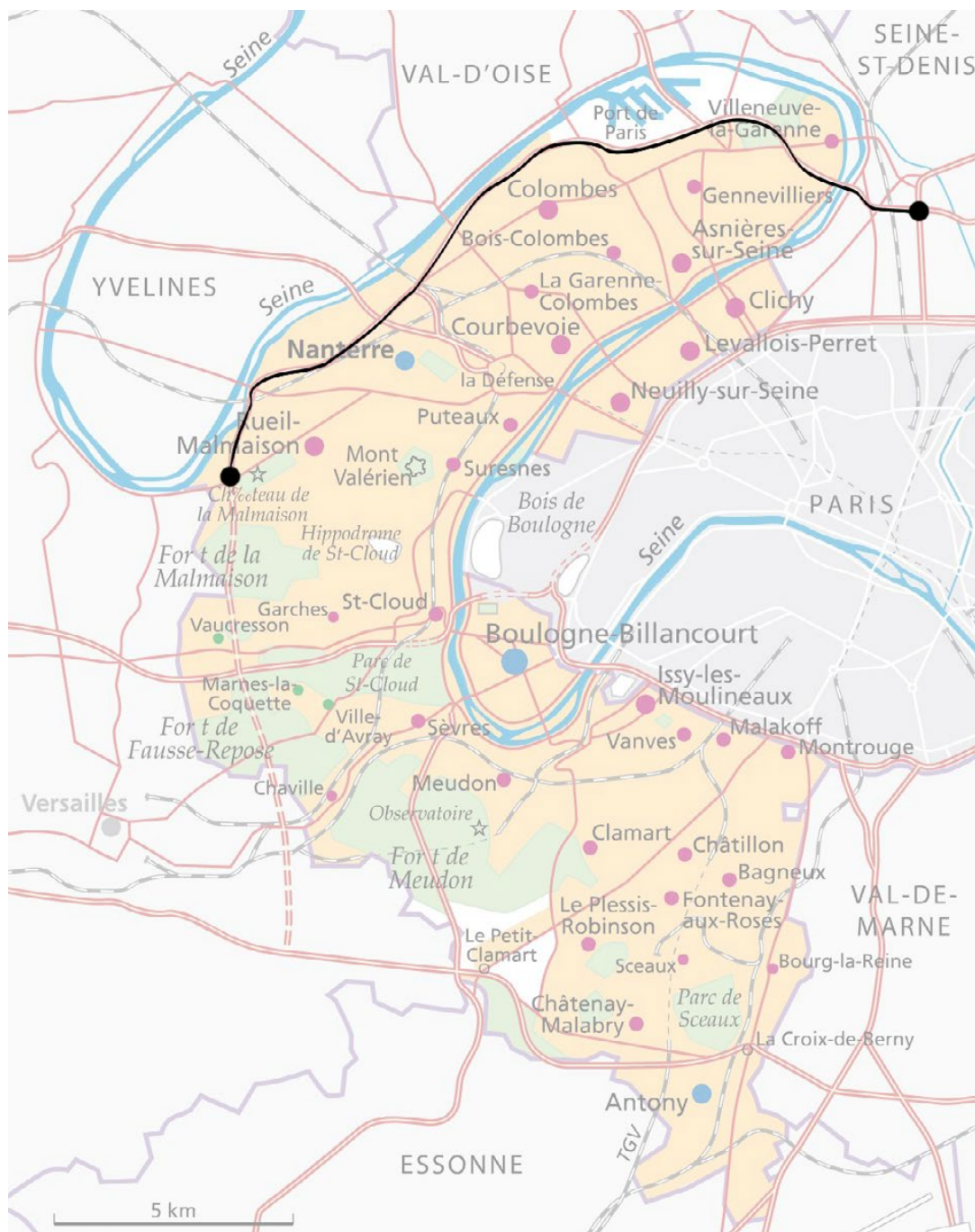
BOULEVARD  
PÉRIPHÉRIQUE

RUEIL-  
MALMAISON

PARIS

AEG





*The section covered between January and May 2021, from Saint-Denis to Rueil-Malmaison.*



*Saint-Denis, April 2021*





*Saint-Denis, April 2021*





*Saint-Denis, April 2021*



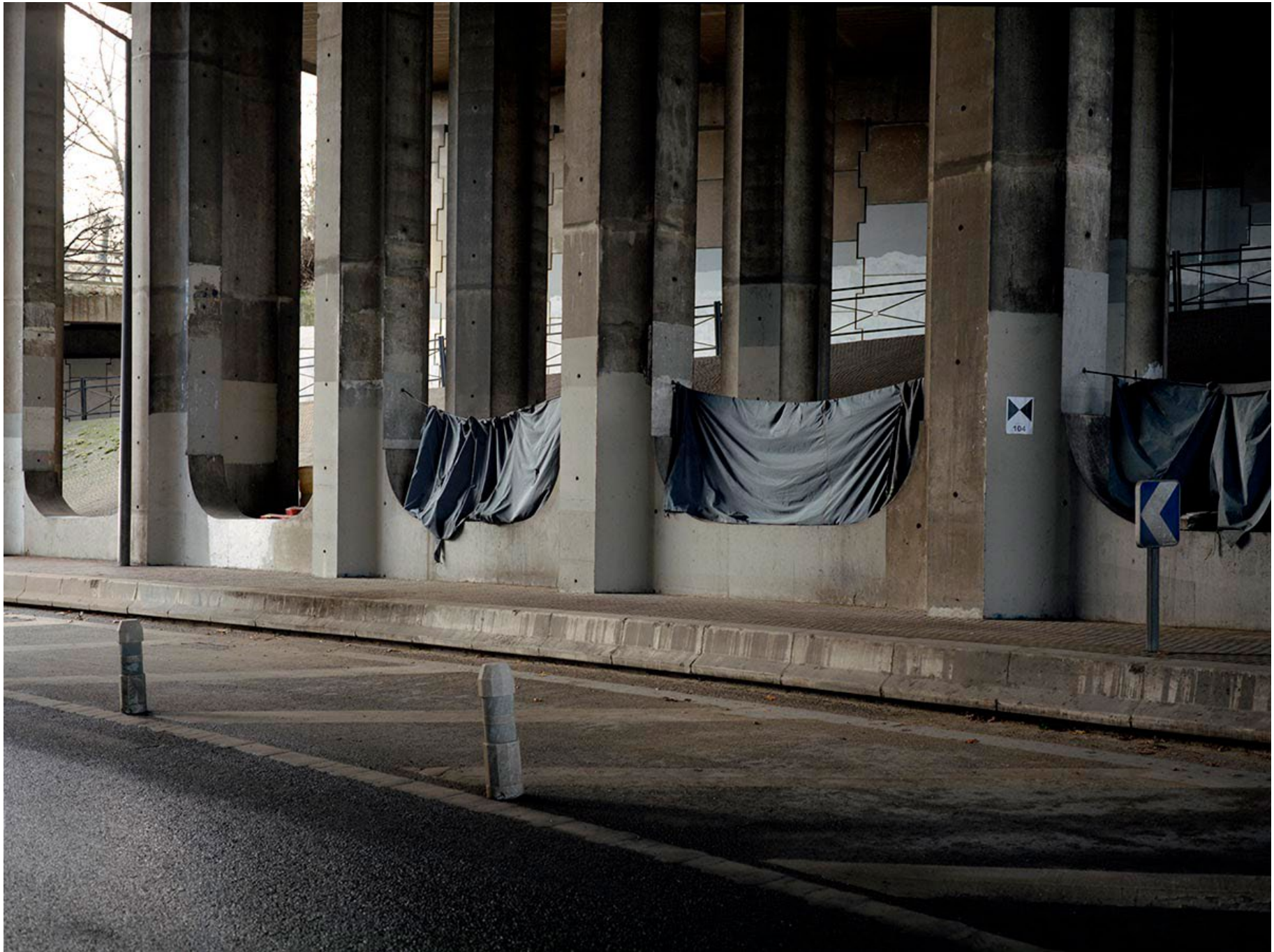


*The Tour Pleyel in Saint-Denis, January 2021*





*Saint-Denis, April 2021*



*Saint-Denis, January 2021*







*The Seine from l'Île-Saint-Denis, January 2021*





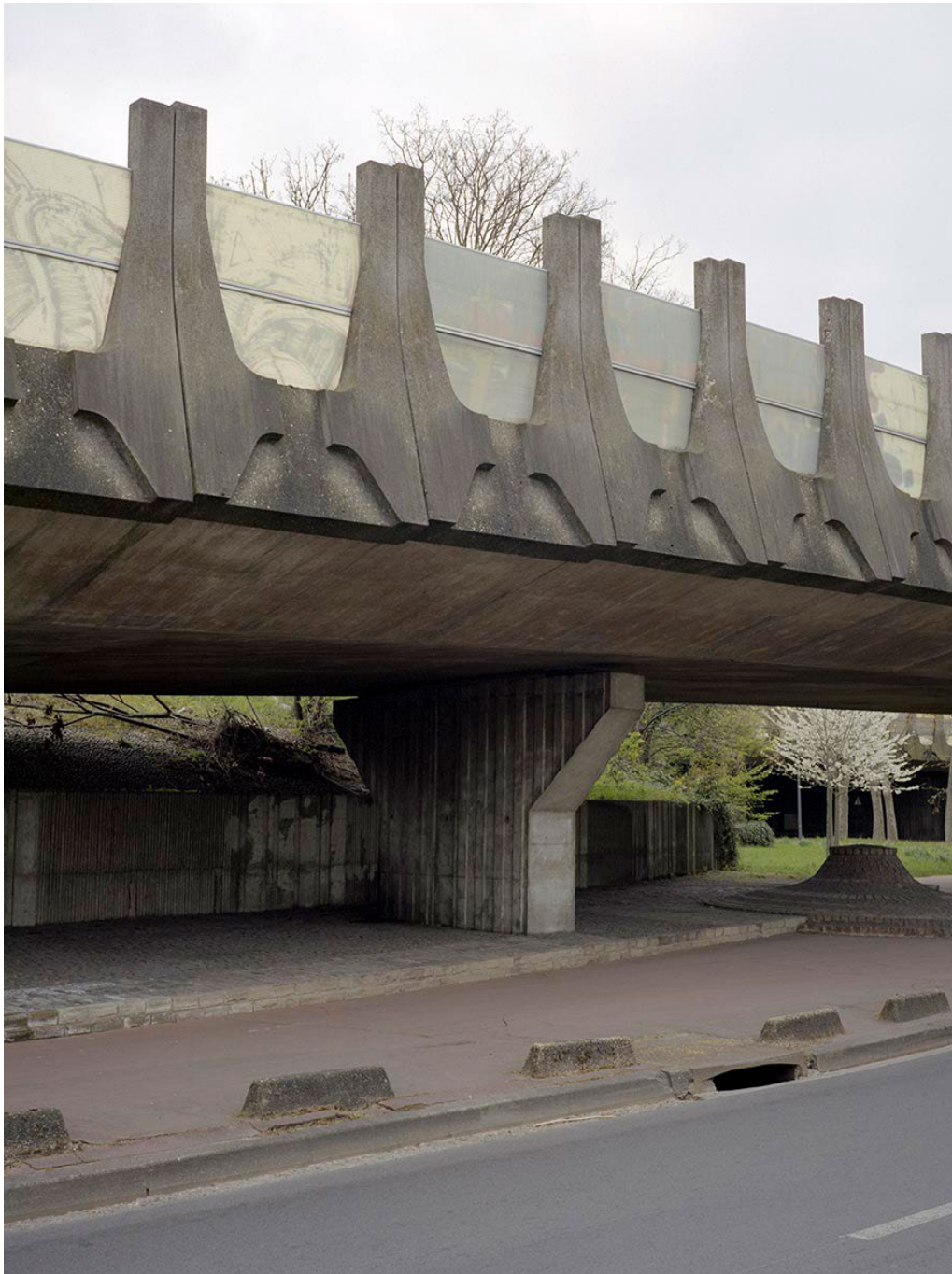


*Villeneuve-la-Garenne, March 2021*





Villeneuve-la-Garenne, March 2021



*Villeneuve-la-Garenne, April 2021*







*Villeneuve-la-Garenne, March 2021*







*Villeneuve-la-Garenne, March 2021*





Villeneuve-la-Garenne, January 2021



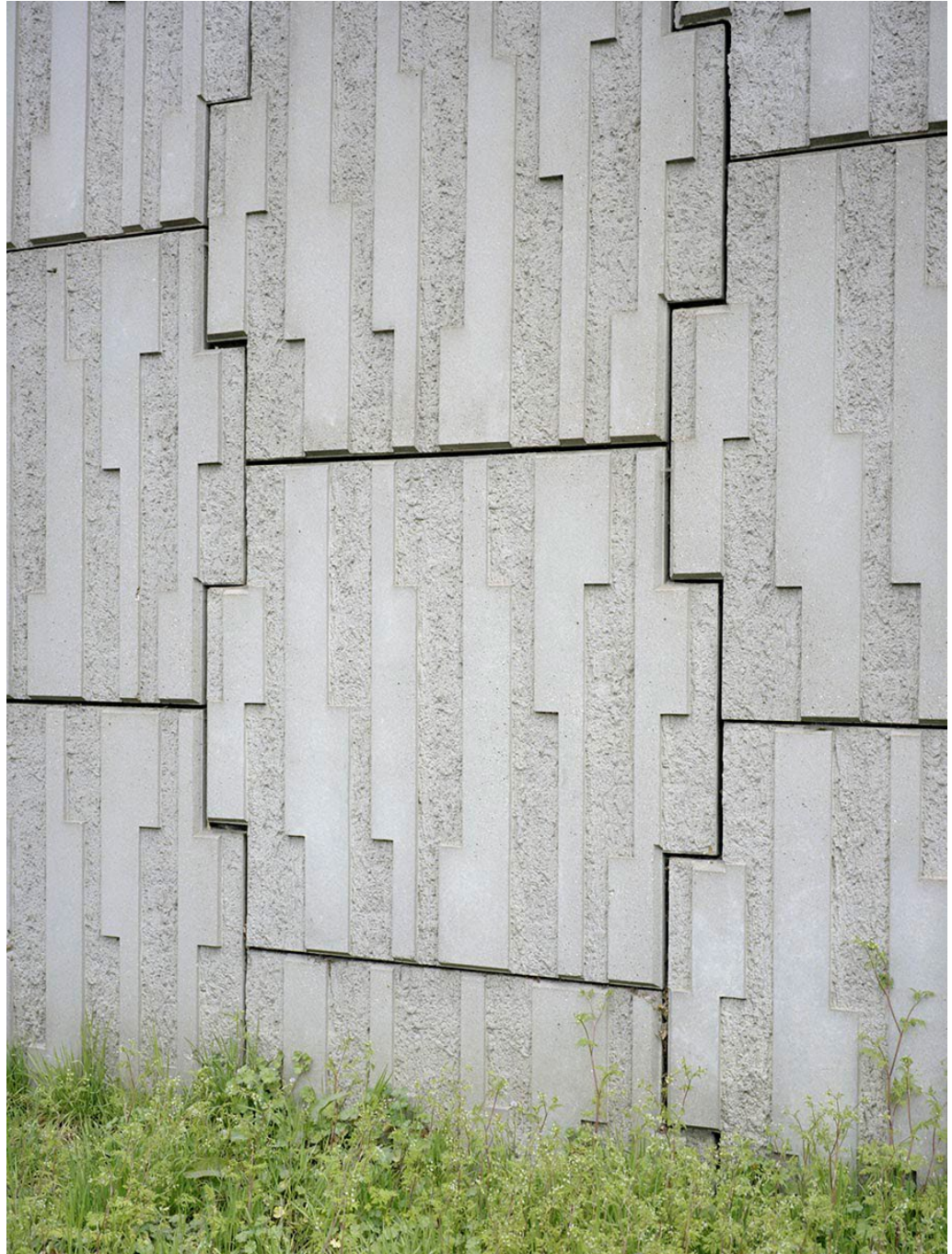


Villeneuve-la-Garenne, March 2021



*Villeneuve-la-Garenne, March 2021*







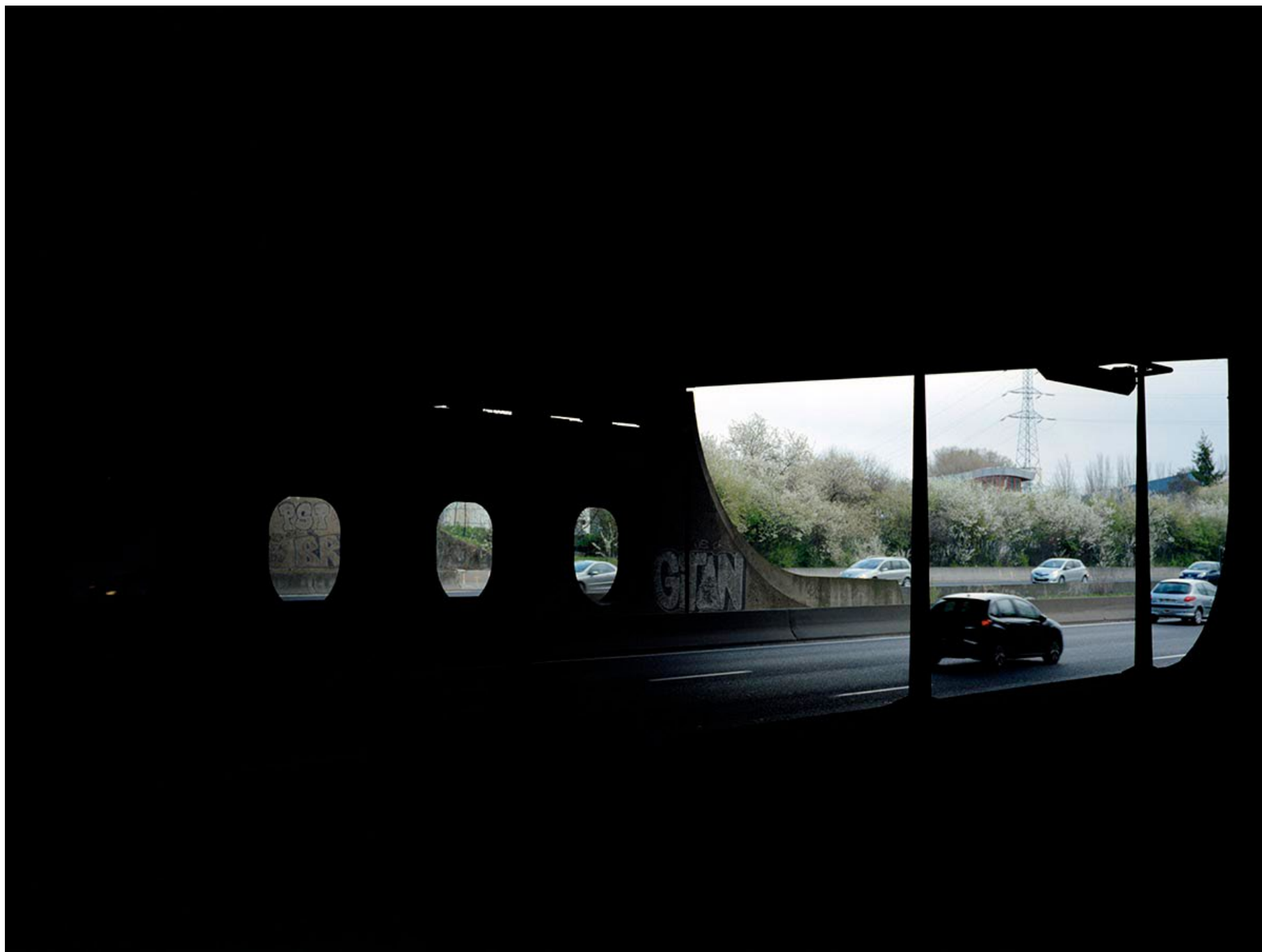
*Villeneuve-la-Garenne, March 2021*





*Villeneuve-la-Garenne, March 2021*





Villeneuve-la-Garenne, March 2021





*Gennevilliers, March 2021*





Gennevilliers, March 2021





Gennevilliers, March 2021





*Gennevilliers, March 2021*





*Gennevilliers, March 2021*





Gennevilliers, March 2021





*Gennevilliers, March 2021*





Gennevilliers, March 2021





Gennevilliers, March 2021





*Gennevilliers, March 2021*





*Colombes seen from Gennevilliers, March 2021*





Asnières-sur-Seine, March 2021













Colombes, March 2021





*Colombes, March 2021*





*Colombes, March 2021*





Colombes, March 2021





Colombes, March 2021





Colombes, March 2021









Colombes, March 2021





Colombes, March 2021













Colombes, March 2021





Colombes, March 2021





Colombes, March 2021





*Colombes, March 2021*





Colombes, March 2021





Colombes, March 2021





Colombes, March 2021





*A makeshift sign, Colombes, March 2021*





*Colombes, March 2021*





*A sex worker's mattress, Colombes, March 2021*









*Nanterre, March 2021*





Nanterre, March 2021





Nanterre, March 2021





Nanterre, March 2021





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Nanterre, March 2021





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Nanterre, March 2021









Nanterre, March 2021





*Rueil-Malmaison, April 2021*





*Rueil-Malmaison, May 2021*









*Rueil-Malmaison, April 2021*





Rueil-Malmaison, May 2021





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*Rueil-Malmaison, May 2021*









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Rueil-Malmaison, May 2021









Rueil-Malmaison, May 2021













Rueil-Malmaison, May 2021





*Rueil-Malmaison, May 2021*





*Rueil-Malmaison, May 2021*



