

DISPATCHES FROM SECOND EMPIRE PARIS:
WALTER BENJAMIN, MICHEL FOUCAULT, AND URBAN MODERNITY

by

GRANT DUCKWORTH

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Department of

Geography

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date

Oct 16 1988

Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the socio-spatial transformations which occurred in metropolitan Paris during the Second Empire (1852-1870). Although the reign of Napoleon III only lasted seventeen years, it constitutes an important threshold in the history of France and the French capital. This was the age of imperialism, industrialism, commercialism, and science; a time when the emperor deliberately set out to modernize the country, its economy, and its cities. At the center of this aggressive modernization scheme was Paris. For decades, critics from all walks of life had been calling out for massive urban reforms. The chilling spectacle of political rebellion, growing concerns about the threat of contamination, mounting congestion, and urban decay, and the rise of mass consumerism were the primary forces behind the "strategic beautification" of Paris. The responsibility of modernizing the capital was delegated to Georges-Eugene Haussmann. Between his appointment in 1853 and his unceremonious departure in 1870, Haussmann turned the rabbit-warren network of filthy medieval corridors into an elaborate panorama of architectural splendours and magnificent boulevards. I argue that Haussmann's civic improvement scheme should be remembered as a grand utopian experiment which produced its own share of failures.

The historical philosophies of the Jewish intellectual Walter Benjamin and the French academic Michel Foucault inform much of the discussion. Both Benjamin and Foucault resided and worked in Paris but at different times and under completely different circumstances. For Benjamin, nineteenth-century Paris was a dreamworld of phantasmagoria, a City of Mirrors, and a labyrinth of reflecting images. Foucault, who

never wrote about Paris specifically, was concerned with an entirely different set of questions. According to him, the major socio-spatial changes of the previous century were representative of institutionally sanctioned strategies of surveillance, discipline, normalization. Like Haussmann, the experience of living in the French capital had a profound effect on Benjamin's and Foucault's geographical imaginations. I argue that in order to understand Benjamin's and Foucault's ruminations on nineteenth-century notions of space, power, and, knowledge, it is important to first place those arguments in the context of their personal experiences, the urban geographies through which they moved, and the times that they belonged to. Thus, Paris is not simply an object of historical analysis, it is also a context for comparing and contrasting the intellectual thought of Benjamin and Foucault.

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Introduction

Modernity is bound up with the question of the mask.¹

Paris, the City of Light, is a veritable charivari of pleasures after night-fall; the visitor must only beware of not regretting the effects of a too-eager readiness to yield to the siren calls of its temptations and intoxications.²

Modernity has to stand under the sign of suicide, which sets its seal under a heroic will that makes no concessions to opposing attitudes.³

On Thursday December 2, 1852 – the anniversary of Austerlitz and the coup d'état of the previous year – Louis Napoleon, renamed as Napoleon III, entered Paris as prince-president of the Second Empire. The inaugural festivities began at precisely 10:00 a.m. with a public swearing-in ceremony and a 101-gun salute in front of the Hotel de Ville. Wearing the uniform of the général-en-chef and the *grand cordon* of the Légion d'Honneur, Napoleon III was then escorted by a military guard through the Bois de Boulogne and to the Arch de Triomphe where he was greeted by the Seine prefect and the commander of the Paris garrison. From there the procession made its way along the Champs-Élysées, circled the place de la Concorde, rode up the axis of the Tuilleries gardens where the prince-president dismounted, was received by another 101-gun salute,

¹ Beatrice Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. (1996) Cambridge: MIT Press. p. 23.

² *Paris Partout! A Guide for the English and American Traveller in 1869*. Quoted in Rupert Christiansen, *Tales of the New Babylon: Paris 1869-1875* (1994) London: Sinclair-Stevenson, p. 1.

³ Charles Baudelaire, *A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (1973) trans., Harry Zohn, London: NLB, p. 75.

and entered the Pavillion de l'Horloge for a banquet with the minister of interior Persigny.

It appeared to many Parisians that more than half a century of massive street riots and violent blood-baths had suddenly come to an end and that a new revolutionary era of unprecedented economic growth and political stability was about to begin. In the weeks and months following the inaugural ceremonies, Louis Napoleon laid the foundation for the political edifice that would remain in place for the next two decades. He extinguished parliamentary and liberal institutions, abolished freedom of expression and public meetings, introduced a new constitution, made plans for an expanded bureaucracy, and sketched a draft of his ambitious urban renewal project. With the phantom of revolutionary destitution and destruction hovering over them, many Parisians invested heavily in the Imperial "cult of law and order." That did not mean however, that the Emperor's authority was absolute. The balance of power pivoted around a weak coalition of peasants and urban capitalists who aligned themselves in opposition to the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the clergy (a coalition that would realign itself on more than one occasion). To maintain support for the new regime, Napoleon III orchestrated a number of theatrical spectacles. Court was established at the Louvres Tuileries, the edifying role of baroque and neo-classical facades were used to dazzle tourists and urban residents, department stores dominated entire city blocks, and the central design of the metropolis was organized around an endless series of *mis en scenes*.

But there was much more to the Second Empire than pomp and ceremony. The new emperor also had to contend with the neglect of previous governments. Decades of

uncontrolled population growth and overcrowding had led to an enormous amount of social unrest and political instability. Conservative and socialist reformers agreed that if the catastrophic events of 1830 and 1848 were going to be avoided, the state was going to have to become much more aggressive in its approach to civic affairs. As a result, Paris became the site of the most comprehensive and ambitious urban redevelopment plan ever conceived. For a decade and a half, the Emperor rebuilt entire sections of the city while he beat his political opponents into submission. However, Bonaparte's love-affair with Paris the "seductress" and his infatuation with the public spectacle of Imperial power rendered him ineffectual against the agitated masses which, by the end of the 1860s, gathered regularly to vent their frustrations in public meeting halls through out the city.

The most interesting of these meetings, bizarre even for Parisian standards, were those held in the underground catacombs. On any given night between November 1869 and May 1870, crowds of nearly 4,000 in total found their way to the underground passages along paths that were lit for them by paper lanterns. Once inside, they continued down the long dark galleries until they arrived at the makeshift platform. It was customary for the proceedings to begin at 8:00 p.m., but not before the organizers had staged a *trompe l'oeil* of their own. To distract the watchful "eye" of government authorities and to avoid the penalties that were handed out for "unlawful" gatherings, organizers used titles like "Grandeur and Decadence of the Crinoline in France" and "The Art of Raising Rabbits and Getting 300 Francs" to disguise the political purpose of their meeting. In the subterranean passages, well-turned phrases like "*Vive la République!*" were like sparks that would ignite the flames of revolutionary insurrection. A negative

mirror image to the grandiloquence of Napoleon III's street "threatre," these subversive tactics were proof that "the Empire's obsession with the law was forcing it to fight shadows."⁴

Why Paris?

More than just the capital city of France, Paris was as Benjamin puts it, "the capital of the nineteenth century." Like London, Madrid, Rome, and Vienna, Second Empire Paris was a city where the monumental forces of historical change entered on a limited scale. Endowed with a richly textured social and physical topography, the capital enchanted individuals from all walks of life; intellectuals, writers, artists, scientists, and politicians. But Paris was not merely something to be consumed, it was also a model for urban development schemes in France (Lyons, Marseilles) and Western Europe (Vienna, Madrid). However, not everyone was charmed by Paris; Wagner, Mozart, Bernini, and Tolstoy found it uninviting. Voltaire who was appalled at the site of Gothic clutter, wanted certain portions of the city leveled so that its majestic architecture could be seen more easily. With the rise to power of Napoleon III, the famous philosopher would get his wish. In a matter of decades Paris changed from a medieval fortress into an modern metropolitan city.

A number of interesting paradoxes reside at the center of this historic transformation process. As the capital modernized, past traditions were selectively

⁴ Alain Faure, "The Public Meeting Movement in Paris From 1868 to 1870," pp. 181-234 in Adrian Rifkin

incorporated into newly created commercial and social institutions; as the city expanded horizontally the state became much more integrated and centralized. For the majority of the working poor, living conditions and income levels declined while industrial production levels and real estate values soared. As the capital extended its reach over the rest of the French nation, the social fabric of metropolitan Paris became unraveled. While many of these historic shifts and alterations start in the first part of the century, it is not until the third quarter of the nineteenth-century that they become really significant. That a majority of these transformations coincide with the rise of the Second Empire is not a coincidence. As I will demonstrate, many of the political, economic, and social changes commonly associated with the modernization of Paris were purposely accelerated to service Napoleon III's urban renewal agenda. Concentrating on the socio-spatial transformations instituted by Napoleon III and his chief architect Eugène-Georges Haussmann, I argue that the modernization phenomenon coheres around the spectacle of popular amusement and the surveillant technologies used to discipline and normalize the urban masses.

Why Benjamin? Why Foucault?

In recent decades the study and critique of Benjamin and Foucault has developed into a growth industry. But despite the enormous appeal of Benjamin and Foucault, an extensive comparative analysis of their work has yet to materialize. Another reason for a comparative examination of this kind derives from the fact that Foucault knew of

and Roger Thomas eds., *Voices of the People: The Social life of "La Sociale" at the End of the Second Empire* (1988) trans. John Moore, London: Routledge.

Benjamin's writing. In fact, we know from the second volume of *La Volonté de savoir* (1985) (*The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, 1985) that Foucault respected Benjamin's role as a critic of European modernity. It is impossible to gauge the impact of Benjamin's thought on Foucault's research (assuming there is any) but I am much more interested in conducting a comparative analysis of their theoretical perspectives on space, power, and knowledge. I admit that Foucault's theoretical connection with Second Empire Paris is much more difficult to articulate than Benjamin's. With the exception of a few taped interviews, Foucault's comments on metropolitan Paris were kept to a minimum. However, there have been some interesting applications of the Foucauldian methodology to nineteenth-century Paris. In *French Modern: Norms and Form of the Social Environment* (1989), Paul Rabinow makes excellent use of Foucault's analytical perspective to study, as he puts it, "the planned city as a regulator of modern society."⁵ The trouble I have with Rabinow's book (and discourse analysis more generally), is the manner in which social life is reduced and flattened to the surface of the text. The city I am interested in is not reducible to a single theoretical interpretation. By juxtaposing Benjamin's materialist anthropology with Foucault's discourse analysis, I will not synthesize their ideas into a more encompassing meta-theory. Instead, I want to preserve (and at times exaggerate) the tensions connecting Benjamin and Foucault because I think this is by far the most effective way of working through the historical, political, and cultural transformations which are characteristic of the nineteenth-century.

⁵ Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (1989) Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press., p.12.

A third reason for using Benjamin and Foucault to interrogate the material and social landscapes of the French capital is that both philosophers took up residence in the city. Benjamin arrived in Paris for the first time in 1926. Just a year after Andre Breton's publication of the *Surrealist Manifesto*, Benjamin's rendezvous with the French capital was precipitated by his "fall" from the bourgeois circle of Weimar intellectuals.⁶ Paris offered Benjamin a temporary reprieve from the devastating economic conditions in Germany and an opportunity to engage with the core of cosmopolitan intellectuals, writers, and artists who had become the pioneers of twentieth century avant-garde thought. Like a theatre of unforeseen encounters, Paris splintered many of Benjamin's previously held views about urban life. "Paris," he states in his autobiographical essay "Berlin Chronicle" (1933), "taught me the art of straying; it fulfilled a dream that had shown its first traces in the labyrinths on the blotting pages of my school exercise books." It was a "maze not only of paths but also of tunnels. I cannot think of the underworld of the Metro and the North-South line opening their hundreds of shafts all over the city, without recalling my endless *flâneries*."⁷ An assiduous traveler of Europe's intellectual and metropolitan topography, Benjamin never grew tired of his pursuit for philosophical and experiential thresholds. "One only knows a spot once one has experienced it in as many dimensions as possible...Otherwise it will quite unexpectedly cross your path three

⁶ After a six month self-imposed exile on the Italian island of Capri, Benjamin returned to Frankfurt to defend his doctoral dissertation (Habilitation) only to have its acceptance denied. Without any viable financial prospects for him in Germany, Benjamin left for Paris and stayed for six months. He would return after Hitler stormed to power in 1933.

⁷ Benjamin, *Reflections*, (1978) New York: Schocken Books. p. 9.

or four times before you are prepared to discover it.”⁸ Benjamin’s endless flâneries always seemed to return him to Paris – the city of dreaming.

The date of Foucault’s arrival to Paris is 1945, less than a year after the departure of the German occupation forces. Like Benjamin, Foucault crossed over an ontological threshold after completing the sixty mile journey from the provincial town of Poitiers to the cosmopolitan city of Paris. However, the young “provincial’s” point of entry into the metropolitan labyrinth was very different than Benjamin’s. Moreover, Foucault experienced Paris as a gay male not as an exiled German Jew. His first impressions of the city were shaped from inside the corridors of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, one of the most prestigious *grandes écoles* in France. As a *normalien*, Foucault’s daily movements were timed according to a demanding study regime. At night, he escaped the confinement of the residential school Foucault to visit the gay bars and cafes. Sometimes the guilt he suffered as a result of his “clandestine” affairs was so intense, that he fell into a “suicidal spiral.” But these bouts of insecurity and *self*-destructive behavior did not last long. With the publication of *Folie et déraison: histoire de la folie* (1961) (*Madness and Civilization*, 1965), he not only secured a position with the French college system he had become something of a celebrity often sharing the same spotlight as Jean-Paul Sartre. By the 1970s, Foucault’s stature as a respected public figure was unquestioned. Paris was his for the taking.

⁸ Benjamin, “Moscow Diary” p. 306. Cited in Gary Smith, *Walter Benjamin* (1987) Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press. p. 25.

Thus the Paris that unfolded in front of Foucault was very different than the one covered by Benjamin in his countless *flâneries*. While Benjamin strolled along the city's streets and frequented its various cafes as a *displaced* Jew, Foucault related to the city first as a "tortured adolescent" and then as a successful French academic and public figure. In my estimation, the effect that these bio-geo-graphical "fragments" had on their research can not be exaggerated. They impacted not only how Benjamin and Foucault moved through the landscape of twentieth-century Paris, but more importantly, how they viewed the social and material spaces of the nineteenth-century.

In the first chapter, I look at these bio-geo-graphical fragments in more detail. By exploring the metropolitan experience of Weimar Berlin and post-WWII Paris that filtered into the work of Benjamin and Foucault, I am trying to situate their ideas not only in terms of historical time but also in terms of (urban) space. The purpose of the second chapter is to identify the momentous demographic, economic, technical, and material transformations which multiplied in Paris around the middle of the century. Instead of trying to "frame" the capital city as a clearly defined geographical or sociological entity, I view Paris through a montage of discontinuous and fragmented "snapshots." The third chapter deals more specifically with the politics of *haussmannization*. This is where I used Benjamin's "dialectics of seeing" and Foucault's "art of seeing" to reflect upon the spirals and pleasures of power residing at the heart of Haussmann's public works project. In the fourth and final chapter, I investigate the unanticipated consequences of the massive civic improvements. My primary objective here is to point out that in addition to being a model for modern urban planning, the haussmannized city was also a utopian

experiment which produced its own share of failures and defeats. I use the examples of artisanal workshops, luxury brothels, and public meeting halls, not only as a means of demonstrating that there were a number of geographic sites where authoritarian urbanism had little or no impact, but also as an opportunity to step outside the epistemological boundaries of Benjamin's and Foucault's critical thought and to brush their historical philosophies against the grain.

Labyrinths

Traversing the Weimar Berlin Zeitgeist and the Post-War Parisian Milieu

*As soon as we begin to find our bearings, the landscape vanishes at a stroke, like the façade of a house as we enter it. It has not yet gained preponderance through a constant exploration that has become habit. Once we begin to find our way about, that earliest picture can never be restored.*⁹

*Chronos is the time of becoming and new beginnings. Piece by piece, Chronos swallows the things to which it gives birth and which it causes to be reborn in its own time. The monstrous and lawless becoming – the endless devouring of each instant, the swallowing up of the totality of life, the scattering of its limbs – is linked to the exactitude of re-beginning. Becoming leads into this great, interior labyrinth, a labyrinth no different in nature from the monster it contains.*¹⁰

As noted in the introduction, I am relying on the historical philosophy of Benjamin and Foucault to get me back to Second Empire Paris. Of course, Benjamin – a German-Jewish intellectual and free-lance writer – and Foucault – a gay academic who lectured to capacity audiences at the Collège de France – journeyed back to the spectacular and disciplinary landscapes of the nineteenth-century along alternate routes, traversed their epistemico-geographical limits at different points, and arrived at dissimilar conclusions about the process of spatial ordering. Nevertheless, there are several

⁹ Walter Benjamin, "One-Way Street," in Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926* (1996) Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, p. 468.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (1977) trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. New York: Cornell University Press, p. 193.

moments and places in which their respective genealogies overlap (and at times collide) with one another making a comparative analysis of this kind not only possible but, given their contributions to critical social theory, necessary.

The Bibliothèque Nationale (1855) in Paris is such a place. In this institutional archive we find a place where their personal odysseys and intellectual forays disembark and return on a repeated basis. In *Body-and Image-Space* (1996), Sigrid Weigel conjures

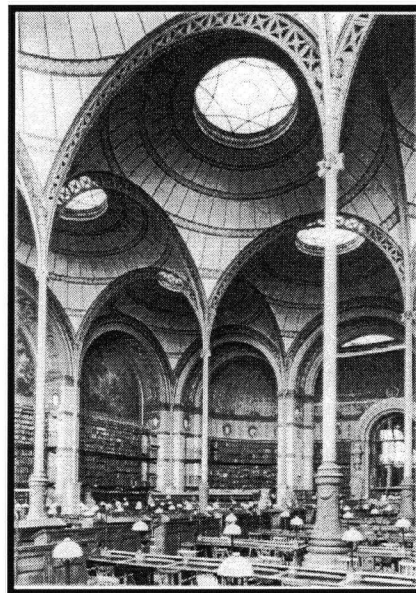


Figure 1.0: *La Bibliothèque Nationale*. Source: S. Buck-Morss (1989) p. 128.

up a bewitching image of what a chance encounter between Benjamin and Foucault might have looked like had their visits to the library “not been decades apart.”¹¹ For me, this bio-geo-graphical “fragment” is as enchanting as it is disappointing.

¹¹ Sigrid Weigel, *Body-and Image-Space: Re-reading Walter Benjamin* (1996) London: Routledge, p. 36. An earlier and much more engaging attempt to work with, and through, the ideas of Benjamin and Foucault

On the one hand, this imaginary meeting represents a rare attempt to work *with* rather than simply to think *about* the theories of Benjamin and Foucault. Weigel summons the reader to pause for a moment and to imagine the passionate debates, the *rapproachments*, and the extraordinary insights which may (or may not) have emanated

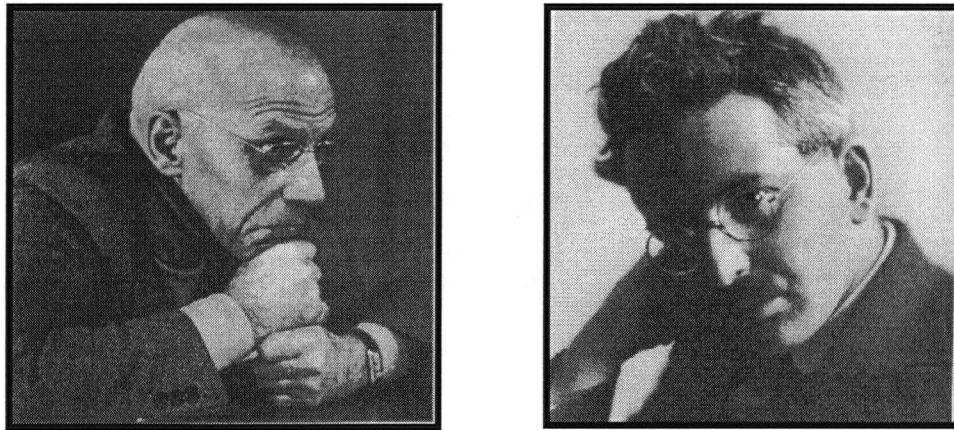


Figure 1.1 Michel Foucault and Walter Benjamin. Source: S. Weigel (1996) p. 49.

from those *engagements*.¹² On the other hand, had Weigel invited her readers to contemplate an image of Benjamin seated in the library's prestigious reading room with his melancholy gaze directed towards the glass ceiling¹³ or the figure of Foucault filing through one of the card indexes,¹⁴ a much more imaginative discussion would have

is Giuliana Bruno's essay, "Spectatorial Embodiments: Anatomies of the Visible and the Female Bodyscape," *Camera Obscura* (1992) Vol. 28, pp. 239-263.

¹² On page eleven of *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Uses of Pleasure* (1987), Foucault indicates that an encounter did take place. It remains to be seen if there is more than Benjamin's ideas on aesthetics which were able to penetrate Foucault's thinking. My suspicion is that the answer to this riddle is hiding from us somewhere in the biographical details of George Batailles or Pierre Kossowski. Both were friends of Benjamin and Foucault.

¹³ In Berlin, this image would be reversed. When at the Staatsbibliothek, Benjamin's eyes were drawn not to the ceiling but to the glass covered tables.

¹⁴ A similar reversal could also be applied to Foucault who continued to work in the Bibliothèque Nationale when abroad. In Tunis for instance, Foucault's visits to the archive were timed so the afternoons could be spent on the beaches of the Mediterranean.

ensued. The portrait of the two bibliophiles seated behind a mountain of books, while interesting, does not entice the viewer to think about the capacity of chance encounters, unexpected findings, and personal re-beginnings to interrupt, disturb, and redirect the trajectory of historians as they move through (historical) time and space.

By juxtaposing Benjamin and Foucault in this manner, I am not trying to create the impression that the optics of their historical perspectives pointed in completely separate directions. Benjamin and Foucault, albeit in their own unique ways, were historians of material culture who eschewed the positivist and reductivist ontology of historical discourse. Materialist predilections did for their theoretical armatures what weight-bearing walls do for architectural space, they supplied volume and depth. To the self-styled and relatively late convert Benjamin, architectural achievements such as the cathedral-like interior of Henri Labrouste's monumental memory-site possessed the power of enchantment. Iron ribs, glass ceilings, and edifying facades were not merely perceived as structural elements adhering to a larger functional program, they were seen as cultural hieroglyphs which, when read allegorically, had an overwhelming capacity to transform mental perception. These ruminations followed elliptical paths which intersect at various points with Foucault's historical sensibilities. Not only did Foucault share Benjamin's desire to recover plural and local histories from the "tyranny of historicism," much of his personal and intellectual life was dedicated to the emancipation of subjugated knowledges. But that is essentially where the similarities start to level off and where the differences between them begin to accumulate. The French academic may have viewed the Bibliothèque Nationale as a place to recover the historic "truth" about madness,

reason, disease, criminal behavior, and sexual perversity, but for him their “secrets” lay buried in “forgotten” documents and manuscripts which were catalogued and stored in one of the archive’s subterranean chambers, not in the physical architecture of the institution.

The mental and physical trajectories of these enigmatic figures become even more interesting when their personal histories are taken into account. Pierre Missac intimates in *Walter Benjamin's Passages* (1995) that the order and simplicity that the card catalogue symbolized remained antithetical to Benjamin’s exiled existence and therefore, presented a serious challenge in the daily work habits of the Jewish émigré.¹⁵ Even by his own admission, Benjamin never developed much of an “aptitude for practical life.” As someone who preferred to work with a fountain pen – and who became distraught over the loss of this piece of nostalgia – Benjamin easily fits the profile of a man who remained out of out-of-step with much of the twentieth century.¹⁶ At the same time, we can never be entirely sure whether to interpret this incongruity as a sign of his “impotence” (reminiscent of the pain and suffering that Charles Baudelaire experienced in the streets of Haussmann’s Paris) or a manifestation of a conscious desire (modeled after Bertolt Brecht) to resist the “storm of progress” which compelled the Jewish intellectual to seek out a mystical *Heimat* in the book stacks of the Bibliothèque

¹⁵ Pierre Missac, *Walter Benjamin's Passages* (1995) Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, p. 79.

¹⁶ This was a condition that Benjamin realized early in life. Walking the streets in the company of his mother, Benjamin always remained half a step behind her. "My habit of seeming slower," he states, "more maladroit, more stupid than I am, had its origin in such walks, and has the great attendant danger of making me think myself, quicker, more dexterous, and shrewder than I am." *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1978) New York: Harcourt Brace Javonovich, p. 4.

Nationale.¹⁷ Much of the ambiguity derives from the fact that like Foucault, Benjamin had a mind which wandered endlessly.

True, for successful excavations a plan is needed. Yet no less indispensable is the cautious probing of the spade in the dark loam, and it is to cheat oneself of the richest prize to preserve as a record merely the inventory of one's discoveries, and not this dark joy of the place of the finding itself. Fruitless searching is as much a part of this as succeeding, and consequently remembrance must not proceed in the manner of a narrative or still less that of a report, but must, in the strictest epic and rhapsodic manner, assay its spade in ever-new places, and in the old ones delve to ever-deeper layers.¹⁸

There is a child-like and undisciplined quality to Benjamin's historical imaginary which escapes Foucault's archaeology of epistemic ruptures, discursive reversals, and sliding signifiers as well as his genealogy of institutional practices. Inspired by the written works of Bataille, Kossowski, Borges, Sade, Mallarmé, Roussel, and Robbe-Grillet, Foucault experimented with a variety of subject-positions (mostly in the "literary" period between 1962 and 1966) as a means of undermining the hegemonic status of the author. During one interview of this period, Foucault spoke of a willingness to "find strange and similar in what surrounds us; a certain restlessness to break up the familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervor to grasp what is happening and what passes."¹⁹ While this may have been true for Foucault the avant garde intellectual and literary critic,

¹⁷ The Jewish concept of *Heimat* does not translate into English very well. A very crude interpretation of the term would be a "homeland" or a "sense of belonging." Anat Feinberg maintains that much of the ambiguity of the term has to do with the question of geographic and historical context. This is particularly important in the case of Benjamin the intellectual nomad who felt most "at home" when surrounded by the private collections of his library. See Benjamin's essay "Unpacking My Library" in *Illuminations*. For more on the concept of *Heimat*; Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (1990) Berkeley: University of California Press; Anat Feinberg "Abiding in a Haunted Land: The Issue of Heimat in Contemporary German-Jewish Writing," *New German Critique* (1997) No. 70, pp. 161-181.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 26.

Foucault the historian of "systems of thought" was much more "at home" in the neo-structuralist school of Dumezil, Althusser, Bachelard, Canguilhem, and Lacan. The inscription recorded on the back cover of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1971) reveals that "fruitless searching" had little purchase on Foucault's inventory of nineteenth-century epistemology. In contrast to Benjamin who never tired of re-positioning *himself* and his work (and himself *in* his work) in relation to the intellectual terrains of Weimar Berlin and Third Republic Paris, Foucault's thoughts and actions were governed primarily by a desire to penetrate (and to a lesser extent dominate) the intellectual fraternity of post-war philosophers and historians. The contrast between the former's status as an "outsider" (*Fremde*) and the latter's freedom of mobility "inside" the regulatory and disciplinary regimes of the French academy (as a *normalien*),²⁰ becomes all too apparent when these two historians of social history are viewed in terms of their respective social histories. Thus, Benjamin's and Foucault's connection to the Bibliothèque Nationale should not be studied from an archimedian point but from a perspective which is sensitive to the way in which their own movements in time and space (and through historical time and space) are timed to the dissonant rhythms of personal experience, intellectual pursuits, and historic circumstances.

Even without tracing the disparate movements of Benjamin and Foucault through the spaces of the archive, an observer can not escape the fact that the library is composed

¹⁹ Sylvestry Lotringer, *Foucault Live*, (1989) New York: Semiotext(e) p. 198.

²⁰ It is important not to exaggerate these contrasting images. Foucault may have made a remarkable transformation from a tortured and suicidal adolescent to a celebrated public figure - one who was almost selected as the director of the Bibliothèque Nationale - but according to Didier Eribon, there is at least one

of much more than the spatial arrangement of card catalogues, book stacks, serialized call numbers, and authors. The library is a labyrinth and like all maze-like structures, it is without clearly defined endings and beginnings. The archive is a place where the divisions between text and geography dissolve and where recollections of a half-forgotten past mingle with visions of an unrealized future. If it is true that the library exceeds “itself” via countless discursive and non-discursive passages, then it is also true that it is penetrated and informed by an even larger labyrinth – the city. Where the two intersect is the place where the mystery of the library opens up to the rhapsodic flow of street traffic, images reflecting in store-front windows, ascending and descending stairwells, the whistle of a departing train, the ring of an incoming telephone call, the smell of antique stores, the solitude of a book store, and the memories buried in cemeteries and tombstones.

The cities which concerns me here are Weimar Berlin and Fourth Republic Paris. But this discussion is not about Berlin and Paris *per se*. Neither Benjamin nor Foucault were all that interested in identifying the enigmatic center of labyrinthine spaces (be they material or immaterial). Instead of an inventory of specific architectural sites, Benjamin and Foucault busied themselves by excavating the critical points of passage and the networks of subterranean relations embroiled in the production of “other” (utopian and heterotopian) spaces. In what follows, I will not attempt to “map” out the “center” of these capital cities. I am much more interested in developing a critical awareness about

occasion when his sexual orientation prevented him from advancing his professional career. Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (1991) trans. Betsy Wing, Cambridge, M.A: Harvard University Press, p. 133.

how the intellectual, cultural, and urban geographies of Berlin and Paris penetrate and inform the spatial imaginaries of Benjamin and Foucault.

Weimar Berlin
From the Ridiculous to the Sublime...and Back Again

*When we think of Weimar, we think of The Threepenny Opera, the Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, The Magic Mountain, the Bauhaus, Marlene Detrich.*²¹

*It appears as if this city has control of the magical means of eradicating all memories. It is present-day and, moreover, it makes it a point of honor of being absolutely present-day. Whoever stays for any length of time in Berlin hardly knows in the end where he actually came from. His existence is not like a line but a series of points; it is everyday like the newspapers that are thrown away...Only in Berlin are the transformations of the past so radically stripped from memory. Many experience precisely this life from headline to headline as exciting; partly because they profit from the fact that their earlier existence vanishes in its movement of disappearing, partly because they believe they are living twice as much when they live purely in the present.*²²

*In the streets of Berlin, one is often struck by the momentary insight that someday all this will suddenly burst apart.*²³

“In those early years,” recalls Benjamin in his autobiographical essay “Berliner Chronik” (Berlin Chronicle, 1932), “I got to know the “town” as a theatre of

²¹ Peter Gay: *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (1968) New York: Harper and Row, preface.

²² David Frisby, “Deciphering the Hieroglyphics of Weimar Berlin: Siegfried Kracauer,” in Charles W. Haxthausen and Heidrun Suhr eds. *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis* (1996) New York: Harper and Row, p. 157.

²³ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (1995) Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, p. 327.

purchases."²⁴ Proceeding along the path cut for him by his father's wealth, Benjamin experienced Berlin no differently than most "assimilated" German-Jews for whom the concrete facades of the department stores and the railway stations, the movie theatres and the market halle, reflected the Wilhelmine dream of permanence and stability.



Figure 1.2: *Linden Street* (1923). Source: Berlin website.

As the nineteenth century marched its way into the twentieth century and as new forms of life accumulated inside the German capital, Benjamin's urban promenades began to follow the rhythms and patterns of an entirely different space-time economy. The more he allowed himself to wander in the tantalizing sphere of unexpected encounters, unrestrained by the all-too-familiar world of compliant consumption, the more that Berlin presented itself as a petrified and primordial landscape.

Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance – nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest –

²⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 40.

*that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, sign-boards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its center.*²⁵

In this town-turned-metropolis (*Weltstadt*), streets trafficked in the radical free-play of ideas, images, and corporeal pleasures as much as they hastened the movement of urban masses. Recognizing that detached philosophical contemplation and binary oppositions – substance and subject, past and present, madness and reason – had little purchase on the transitivity of the metropolitan experience, Benjamin abandoned all efforts to see things “as they really were,” and embraced an intuitive, less regimented, mode of reflection. Attached to each copy of his written works there should be a label which reads: Warning! The power of imagination is all that is required to destroy narrowly-defined categories of cultural history and individual experience, to identify traces of the absolute in material artifacts, and to imagine each epoch as a threshold pregnant with unforeseen possibilities.

Berlin Curios

Weimar Berlin evinced a ruthless modernity unsurpassed even by “world” cities like New York, London, and Paris. Visitors to the metropolis are overcome by a curious mixture of astonishment and bewilderment. Berlin modernity is such that a remarkable array of cultural accents and social contradictions seen from a distance become even more pronounced at close range. Even *Deutsche Chansons* (1900) reads more like a medical diagnosis than a travel guide.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

*The contemporary city dweller has vaudville nerves; he seldom has the capacity of following great dramatic continuities, of tuning his senses to the same sound for three hours. He desires diversity – Varieté.*²⁶

The source of the enigma? Relentless cultural dynamism and industrial growth assures that the stable ground of civic identity is thoroughly plowed over the moment that anyone lays a claim to it. The primary occupation among Berliners? The relentless pursuit of novel experiences – an expensive enterprise financed by the sale of historic traditions and antique memorabilia. The seller cares little about recouperating the original investment because market values of the past have all been corrupted by the inflationary pressures of the present.

The Golden Twenties

Much of the sociological literature espousing a critical perspective on the Weimar period dwelled on the debilitating psycho-social effects of metropolitan life. George Simmel, whose work left a profound impression on the urban studies of Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Ernst Bloch, reported that the “metropolitan consumer ultimately felt at home amid a fragmented multiplicity of objects and styles in both the aesthetic and the commercial spheres, which increasingly overlapped.”²⁷ Julius Langbehn was struck by the “spiritual emptiness” which pervaded Berlin and Friedrich Lienhard railed against the absence of *Heimatkunst* (native art). Friedrich Schlegelmilch, a mission inspector,

²⁶ Ernst von Wolzogen (1900) Cited in Peter Jelavich, “Modernity, Civic Identity, and Metropolitan Entertainment: Vaudville, Cabaret, and Revue in Berlin, 1900-1933,” In Charles W. Haxthausen and Heidrun Suhr eds. *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis* (1996) New York: Harper and Row, p. 98.

²⁷ George Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1978) trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, Boston, p.474.

noted “a lack of a feeling of decency of moral obligation, in the swamp of big-city life.”²⁸ On the whole, Kulturkritiks were alarmed by the rapid influx of *Fremde* (outsiders) to the Prussian-German capital and the negative social, economic, and political developments attributed to accelerated urbanization. Estimated at one million in 1877, the population surged to two million in 1905 and to four million in 1920. Between 1920 and 1928, that figure increased by another 450,000.²⁹

Liberal and conservative reformers agreed the problems of substandard housing, poverty, and general urban blight threatened to pull the city apart. In 1929, the *Rote Fahne*, the newspaper of the KDP, reported that 70,743 people were residing in cellars, 44,311 lived in garret chambers, and another 27,317 inhabited what were defined as stalls. The number of those without in-door plumbing was estimated at 109,921.³⁰ Concerning the question as to why the everyday life of working-class neighbourhoods concentrated in the streets, the pubs, and the local *Rummelplatz*,³¹ reformer Victor Noack answered with this dire observation.

Berlin apartment buildings! These apartments are dark, made small by overcrowding and filled with the roar of children's cries. They are the source of these breath-robbing things: kitchen smells, vapors from washing clothes, oven and tobacco smoke, gassy secretions. A

²⁸ Friedrich Schlegelmilch, *Grobstadnot und -hilfe* (1909) Berlin, p. 4-5. In Andrew Lees, “Berlin and Urban Modernity in German Discourse, 1845-1945,” *Journal of Urban History* (1991) Vol. 17, No. 2, p.162.

²⁹ Heidrun Suhr, “Fremde in Berlin: The Outsider’s View From the Inside,” p. 222, 223.

³⁰ Aber der sozialdemokratische Magistrat macht eine “Festspielwoche,” *Die Rote Fahne*, April 6, 1929. Cited in Richard Bodek, “The Not-So-Golden Twenties: Everyday Life and Communist Agitprop in Weimar-Era Berlin,” *Journal of Social History* (1996) Vol. 30, p. 58.

³¹ The *Rummels* provided inexpensive entertainment such as sideshows, boxing matches, cabarets, barkers, and amusement rides. Communist film director Erwin Piscator based his *Roter Rummel Revue*, a political theatre, on the working-class attractions.

*mixture of kitchen, room, and toilet haze is damned between the rising walls, which are indeed like a chimney. It weighs heavily over the couple of square meters in the dark deepness which is attractively called a courtyard and will gradually be forced out through the opening high up on the roof's ridges. And, even so, windows are opened onto this shaft like asthmatic mouths.*³²

The urban dweller seeking healthier and more sanitary conditions outside fared no better. Choking pollution from the coal-powered factories discolored everything in its path. Even the mundane act of blowing one's nose served as a visible reminder of just how poisoned the air had become. Working class neighbourhoods were also teeming with unemployed workers, disabled war veterans, youth gangs and criminal organizations.³³ "The people," wrote dramatist Carl Zuckmayer, "were irritated and bad-tempered, the streets dirty and full of crippled beggars, soldiers blinded in the war or with their legs shot off, while men and women in elegant shoes or booties walked hurriedly past."³⁴ To Oswald Spengler, culturally divided and socially stratified Berlin was a living nightmare. "The human being who has been shaped spiritually by the countryside is captured by his own creation, the city, possessed, and made into its creature, its tool, and eventually its sacrifice."³⁵

³² Victor Noack, *Wohnungsnot und Mieterelend. Ein Erbstück des alten Sadt* (1918) Berlin, p. 8. Cited in Richard Bodek, "The Not-So-Golden Twenties: Everyday Life and Communist Agitprop in Weimar-Era Berlin," p. 59.

³³ By 1931, the number of unemployed in Germany surpassed the five million mark. In 1932, 636,000 were living in Berlin. Giles Macdonogh, *Berlin* (1997) London: Sinclair-Stevenson, p. 195.

³⁴ Cited in Ronald Taylor, *Berlin and its Culture: A Historical Portrait* (1997) New Haven, Yale University Press, p. 211.

³⁵ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes; Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, (1918-1922) Munich, Vol. 2, pp. 101-131. Cited in Andrew Lees, "Berlin and Modern Urbanity in German Discourse, 1845-1945," p. 173.

L'art Industriel

What appeared to the right-wing *Kulturkritik* as a city besieged by civil disorder, soup kitchens, alienation, filth, and mediocrity, was to a small handful of writers, artists, and industrialists, a city with a long complex cultural tradition, a place which cultivated independent intellectual thought and bohemian artistic expression, and, where immigrants from all over Europe mixed in comfortably with the German populous. Defenders like Paul Lindenburg proclaimed that turn-of-the-century Berlin could take great pride in its “entrepreneurial spirit” and its “restless search for new heights.” Oberbürgermeister Adolf Wermuth boasted “the threads of great enterprises come together; commerce and industry, science and technology have procured for themselves in Berlin vital centers, from which they incessantly exert their influence throughout the rest of the world.”³⁶ A growing number of professional organizations, social institutions, rising wages, high literacy rates, as well as a long list of municipal initiatives (hospitals, parks, markets, sewage and waterworks, airports, and housing projects designed by Bruno and Max Taut) were cited in defense of Berlin’s dynamic nature and cosmopolitan character. Although a formal urban planning strategy was rather late in coming,³⁷ that did not stand in the way of a great number of architectural accomplishments. One of the most celebrated architects of this period was Peter Behrens. An academic who published his ideas in a variety of

³⁶ Adolf Wermuth, “Berlin arbeitet,” *Der Kunstfreund* (1915) Vol. 2, Berlin, p. 97. In Andrew Lees, “Berlin and Modern Urbanity in German Discourse, 1845-1945,” p. 166.

³⁷ The development of a comprehensive urban plan was not realized until 1920. In the absence of a centralized planning organization, the civic administration of Berlin was divided among several independent and small bodies. Health was the responsibility of the *Gesundheitskollegium*, schools were run by a *Provinzialschulkollegium*, buildings were managed by the *Ministeriell Miltar –und Bau-kommission*, and religion was left to the *Oberconsistorium*. The communities which mushroomed around Berlin pursued their own agendas and drafted their own policies. That changed when a total of eight towns, fifty-nine rural

respected journals, a member of the *Deutsche Werkbund* until 1907, and the *Allgemeine Elektricitäts-Gesellschaft* (AEG), believed that architecture epitomized the moral, spiritual, and cultural achievements of modern civilization. A constructive synthesis of art and technology, Behrens' projects were monumental and always worked towards as he stated, "a single goal: to the strength (*Mächt*) of the German land, which will be recognized by the fact that a rich material life has been ennobled by a spiritually refined form."³⁸

A View From Paris

Shortly after Parisian Charles Baudelaire first published his lyrical musings on the beauty of an ephemeral present, elements of the Berlin avant garde began their own meditations on the "changeability, the nervous rhythms, and the impressionism of city life." Fascinated by the dimensions of experience which opened up to the urban masses, these aesthetes developed an acute sensitivity to the accidental, spontaneous, and rhapsodic impulses whose lifetime could be measured in the time-frame of a fleeting glance. Static space, concrete structures, and linear forms were virtually dissolved. Railroad stations, arcades, and iron bridges suddenly appeared weightless and two-dimensional. Daily events collapsed into a kaleidoscopic array of shifting colors, interpenetrating shapes, and dispersed particles of light. In August Endell's impressionistic manifesto *Die Schönheit der großen Stadt* (*The Beauty of the Metropolis*,

councils, and twenty-seven estates were amalgamated into *Großberlin* (Greater Berlin). See Anthony Read and David Fischer, *Berlin: The Biography of a City* (1994) London: Hutchinson, chapter five.

1908), a crucial text in the formation of the Berlin metropolitan aesthetic, the corporeality of the moving crowd becomes indistinguishable from one of Monet's scenic tableaux.

All the people are free from each other; now they move toward each other in dense groupings; now these are gaps; the articulation of the space is always changing. Pedestrians interpenetrate, conceal each other, detach themselves again and walk freely, each emphasizing, articulating, his share of space. The space between them thus becomes a palpable, vast living entity, which becomes all the more remarkable when the sun bestows upon the each pedestrian an accompanying shadow of the rain spreads a glistening, unstable reflection at this feet.³⁹

Even the reality of human suffering and social injustice are telescoped through the lens of French impressionism. "How exquisite the sickly color's of the city's children often are; how their features have, sometimes precisely because of need and privation, an austere beauty. Even depravity, insolence can possess beauty, power, and even greatness."⁴⁰

Cabaret of Dissent

Satirical gestures, subversive scores, and an intense dissatisfaction with serious (bourgeois) forms of cultural expression were front and center in the theatrics and poetics of Dada. Although Dadaists artists and writers were united in their political opposition to bourgeois social order and rationalism, their techniques and practices varied tremendously. In the absence of a clearly defined center of activity, the "movement" incorporated a number of different influences; Expressionism, Bolshevism, Cubism, and

³⁸ Peter Behrens, *Elektrotechnische Zeitschrift*, (1910) Vol. 31, p. 555. In Stanford Anderson, "Modern Architecture and Industry: Peter Behrens and the Cultural Policy of Historical Determinism," *Oppositions* (1977) Vol. 11, p. 63.

Futurism. Hugo Ball, founder of the Zurich-based Cabaret Voltaire (1915), explained that the “Dadaist loves the extraordinary, the absurd, even. He knows that life asserts itself in contradictions and that his age, more than any preceding it, aims at the destruction of all generous impulses.”⁴¹

By experimenting with the medium of collage and montage – the weapons used in the assault on the status quo – the avant-garde movement formulated an aesthetic standard frequently referred to as *anti-art* or *irrationalism*. In “Dada Manifesto” (1918), Tristan Tzara remarked the “new painter creates a world, the elements of which are also its implements, a sober, definite work without argument. The new artists protests: he no longer paints (symbolic and illusionist reproduction) but creates – directly in stone, wood, iron, tin, boulders – locomotive organisms capable of being turned all directions by the limpid mind of momentary sensation.”⁴² To Richard Hulsenbeck the “word Dada symbolizes the most primitive relation to the reality of the environment, with Dadaism a new reality comes into its own. Life appears as a simultaneous muddle of noises, colors and spriritual rhythms, which is taken unmodified into Dadaist art, with all the sensational screams and fevers of its reckless everyday psyche and with all its brutal reality.”⁴³ The anarchist sentiments of Expressionism were particularly intense in Berlin Dada and the Novembergruppe. However, by the time of the Spartacist uprising (1919),

³⁹ August Endell, *Die Schonheit der groben Stadt* (1908) Stuttgart.pp. 67-68. In Andrew Lees, “Berlin and Modern Urbanity In German Discourse, 1845-1945,” p. 115.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 54.

⁴¹ Hugo ball, “Flucht aus der Zeit” (Flight From Time), Cited in Robert motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets* (1927).

⁴² Tristan Tzara, “Dada Manifesto 1918,” In Robert Motherwell ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets*.

⁴³ Richard Hulsenbeck, “First German Dada Manifesto,” In Richard Hulsenbeck ed. *Dada Almanach*.

the subversive tenor of Otto Dix, George Grosz, John Heartfield, and Schlichter was beginning to recede behind the technically-mediated sobriety of "Die neue Sachlichkeit."

Untamed Wilderness

Resisting the trend towards "New Objectivity" sweeping across Berlin, Munich, Dessau, and Frankfurt, was the Expressionist painter Ludwig Kirchner. Because of a preoccupation with distorted forms, bodies, and spaces, his urban scenes are frequently referred to by art critics and historians as depictions of a "dehumanized landscape" or a "lonely wasteland," linking him to the Simmolean tradition of sociological inquiry. Lost in these interpretations is an appreciation for Kirchner's Dionysian fascination with the dislocations and fluctuations of modernization. Aroused by the aura of unmediated experience and "repulsed by the pervasive artificiality" and "constructed normalcy" of bourgeois art (inherited from French Impressionism), Kirchner looked for artistic inspiration in "coarse entertainments" and the vitalist rhythms which pulsed in metropolitan streets, cafes, and nightclubs. "The modern light of the cities in combination with the movement of the streets continually gives me new stimuli. It spreads a new beauty out across the world, one which does not live in details." Whereas Simmel and his disciples believed that the constant hyperstimulation of the sensory organs produced corrosive psychological effects, Kirchner's urban vision is more reminiscent of Italian Futurists Filippo Marinetti and Umberto Boccioni. He also departs from the orthodoxy of Expressionist painting; Meider's apocalyptic scenarios, Max Beckmen's representations of the metropolis as Hell, and the hyper-insanity of George Grosz's social chaos. In Kirchner's urban vision, the proliferation of primordial instincts and carnal pleasures

(prostitution is a favourite theme) does not signify a collapse of social and moral order but the mimetic creation of a new “inner freedom” and spiritual awakening. “From movement comes the intensified feeling for life that is the origin of the work of art. A body in movement shows me many different aspects, these fuse within me to a unified form, to an inner image.”⁴⁴

Spirit of the Machine

Increased social mobility, changing urban forms, and radical spatial perspectives were also vividly expressed in the decorative arts (weaving, lithographs, furniture, and interior fixtures) and architectural designs of the Bauhaus school. Of all the avant-garde movements which supplied form and content to the Weimar experience, the Bauhaus (and its instructors: Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, Gerhard Marcks, Oskar Schlemmer, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and Joseph Albers) is one of the most portentous symbols of Berlin’s utopian and cosmopolitan fervor. By combining the minimalist style and experimental attitude of Russian Constructivism, the mechanical determinism of Italian Futurists, as well as the precision and exactness of Le Corbusier’s technorationalism, the Bauhaus established itself as one of the premier institutions of international design. “I see,” said one of the institute’s students, “the Bauhaus as something bigger than it really is, Picasso, Jacobi, Chaplin, Eiffel, Freud, Stravinsky, Edison, etc. all really belong to the Bauhaus. Bauhaus is a progressive intellectual direction, an attitude of mind that could well be termed religion.”⁴⁵ Homes and

⁴⁴ Ernst Ludwig Kirchner 1880-1938 (1979) Berlin: Exhibition Catalogue, Nationalgalerie, p. 97.

⁴⁵ John Willett, *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety 1917-1933* (1996) New York: Da Capo Press, p. 120.

apartments did not merely provide shelter and protection from inclement weather conditions, they were “machines for living” and “cathedrals to socialism” – the perfect synthesis of art, technology, and organic life. “A house,” argued headmaster Walter Gropius, “is a technical-industrial organism, whose unity is composed organically from a number of separate functions. Building means shaping the different processes of living. Most individuals have the same living requirements.”⁴⁶

Instructors and students at the Bauhaus worked side by side. Most of the work was collaborative so that the talents and contributions of each individual could be maximized. It was this spirit of experimentation and cooperation which defined the school until 1925, when Gropius moved it to Dessau from Weimar. At that time, much of its “expressionistic” zeal was sacrificed to the secular religion of “Zweckmässigkeit und Sachlichkeit” (purposefulness and utility).

The dominant spirit of our epoch is already recognizable although its form is not yet clearly defined. The old dualistic world-concept which envisaged the ego in opposition to the universe is rapidly losing ground. In its place is rising, the idea of a universal unity, in which all opposing forces exist in a state of absolute balance. This dawning recognition of the essential oneness of all things and their appearances endows creative effort with a fundamental inner meaning. No longer can anything exist in isolation. We perceive every form as the embodiment of an idea, every piece of work as a manifestation of our innermost selves. Only work which is the product of inner compulsion can have spiritual meaning. Mechanized work is lifeless, proper only to a lifeless machine. So long, however, as machine-economy remains an end in itself rather than a means of freeing the intellect from the burden of mechanical labour, the

⁴⁶ John Willet, p. 121.

*individual will remain enslaved and society will remain disordered. The solution depends on a change in the individual's attitude toward his work, not on the betterment of his outward circumstances, and the acceptance of this new principle is of decisive importance for a new creative work.*⁴⁷

In the post-revolutionary, post-inflationary period the Bauhausian "civilizing mission" was deployed through building societies in Prussia, Hesse, and Hamburg. Between 1925 and 1929, these building societies constructed 63,924 new dwellings.⁴⁸ Each housing unit was a perfect expression of the anti-individualistic and neo-functionalist "cult of Technik," and yet, there was also something decidedly Lutheran about the manner in which form was consciously subordinated to spirit.

Inferno

Whereas in England and France where the transition from an authoritarian regime to a multi-party system proceeded at a pace that was appropriate for the formation of a parliamentary *habitus*, in Germany, political institutions developed quite rapidly while the political culture lagged far behind. For the most part, this was a generation schooled in the idealist ethics and aesthetics of German Kultur. "Education," according Modris Eksteins, "as a social concept was superceded by Bildung, or self-cultivation, which involved the nurturing of the spirit rather than of the social being. Military prowess born of geographical necessity gave way to Macht, or might, which was accorded a purity of being beyond conscience and stricture. And the state, as the instrument of public welfare,

⁴⁷ Walter Gropius and Ise Gropius, "The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus," In *Bauhaus: 1919-1928* (1938) trans. Herbert Bayer, New York: Museum of Modern Art.

was replaced by der Staat, the idealized embodiment of the *salus populi*.⁴⁹ To a growing number of middle and upper class Berliners who preferred to see the world as a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total art work) and in terms of the stark contrasts of a Brücke woodcut, the day to day affairs of government and politics constituted not only a source of considerable boredom, they were antithetical to the search for spirituality, authenticity, and freedom. Consequently, “when the democratic Weimar Constitution opened the door to real politics, the Germans stood at the door gaping, like peasants bidden to a palace, hardly knowing how to conduct themselves.”⁵⁰ In the absence of solid parliamentary traditions such as public debate, a willingness to negotiate, and a respect for compromise, the Weimar political culture degenerated into a series of murderous affairs and vaudevillian episodes; it seemed that nothing could prevent the Republic from collapsing “like a house of cards on fire.”

Vanishing Point

Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Kant may have enlightened German youth about the fascinating world of philosophy, history, and art, but it was the war experience which taught them about the brutal realities of the modern world. In his essay “One-Way Street” (1928), Benjamin lamented about the human sacrifice that this entailed. “In the nights of annihilation of the last war, the frame of mankind was shaken by a feeling that resembled the bliss of the epileptic. And the revolts that followed it were the first attempts of

⁴⁸ Only 36,898 homes were built by private firms. Concentrated in Prussia, Hesse, and Hamburg, the building societies were financed with a 15% tax on rents. John Willett, *ibid.*, p. 125.

⁴⁹ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 76.

⁵⁰ Peter Gay, *Weimar Germany*, p. 72.

mankind to bring the new body under its control.”⁵¹ Convinced about the prospects of a short war and a victorious return, young German soldiers left for the front with masochistic enthusiasm. It is not hard to imagine that amidst the pageantry and celebration of young men being paraded off to the war, – only the military is capable of orchestrating such a spectacle – more than a few soldiers feeling as if they were about to be blessed by the hand of Zarathustra himself. After the war, however, many of them would return with limbs missing and egos shattered. Some would struggle to make sense of the tragedy by turning to the Napoleonic cynicism of *Mein Kampf* (1925); Hitler’s treatise on self-forgetting and historical “fate.”⁵² Others would simply turn inward and quietly withdraw from society; tortured by the memories of the grey and desolate landscapes described in Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1925). For the Germans who stayed home and managed to avoid the tragic drama of the battlefield, the allied powers metted out a different kind of suffering – the humiliating conditions of the Versailles Treaty.

Stunned and traumatized by the deafening sound of exploding shells, the horrifying images of dismembered bodies, and the unforgettable smell of death and physical decay, survivors were slow to respond to the catastrophe they had just encountered. After struggling to gain a sense of perspective, what became clear was that all hopes for a normalized existence had to be abandoned. The post-war social and

⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, “One-Way Street,” in Marcus Bullock and W. Jennings eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926* (1996) Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, p. 487.

psychological condition of Weimar Berlin became a confused mass of shattered dreams (*Gemeinschaft*), invisible enemies (*Fremde*), and retreating borders (*Amerikanismus*).⁵³ Life was as absurd as it was surreal. Modris Eksteins posits that “what was true of the soldier was true with somewhat less immediacy and poignancy of civilians. The crowded nightclubs, the frenzied dancing, alcoholism, and suicide, the obsession with flight, with moving pictures and with film stars evinced on a popular level these same tendencies a drift toward irrationalism”⁵⁴ Dada artist George Grosz evinced the same sentiments in his autobiography.

*We were like sailing boats in the wind, with white, black, red sails. Some boats had streamers on which you could see three stroke of lightening, or a hammer and sickle, or a swastika on a steel helmet-from a distance, all these symbols looked familiar. We did not have much control over the boats and had to maneuver assiduously...The storm raged endlessly but we sailed off; we did not understand its melodies for our hearing had been blunted from so much “listen here for a minute.” We only knew that a wind was blowing from the east and another from the west - and that the storm blew over the entire globe.*⁵⁵

As the distance separating the “war” front and the “home” front began to dissolve, life in Berlin seemed to swirl around without any sense of purpose or direction. Unable to make

⁵² In Hitler’s estimation the war was lost on two fronts; the home front and the battlefield. “Unfortunately, the military defeat of the German people is not an undeserved catastrophe but a well-earned disciplining of an eternal retribution. We have more than deserved this defeat.” Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1925), p. 250.

⁵³ The Dawes Plan may have provided much needed financial support to the German economy but it also opened the door to American popular culture. As sales of Henry Ford’s autobiography approached the 200,000 mark, Universal Studios and MGM were preparing to rescue the fledgling German film company UFA. Of course the corollary to the infusion of American culture (at least to right-wing conservatives) was the threat of Bolshevik revolution. Their paranoia was based in part on the important contribution of the Russian instructors who had infiltrated the Bauhaus school and the popular success of films such as Eisenstein’s *The Battleship Potemkin* (1926).

⁵⁴ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 293.

⁵⁵ George Grosz, *Ein kleines Ja und ein grosses Nein* (1923) p. 143. Cited in Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1987) p. 418.

objective sense of the post-war experience, avant garde artists and writers gave into cynicism and despair.

The New Realism

Three serial murder trials dominating the headlines of Berlin newspapers for the first half of the 1920s did more to validate the moral hysteria of right-wing extremists than any of the academic-oriented *Kultur-Zivilization* debates preceding them.⁵⁶ In each case, graphic depictions of the sexual murders (*Lustmord*) were accompanied by comprehensive psychological profiles of the accused. Even more disturbing than the brutal methods used to end the lives of the seventy-four victims, was the public appearance of normalcy and decency that the accused had maintained over the period of time that the homicidal acts were being carried out. Ironically, the more that the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the *Berliner Illustrierte*, and the *Frankfurter Zeitung* newspapers probed into the sordid details of each murder – driven by profit motive and a “will to know” – the less confident metropolitan readers became in their ability to differentiate between normal conduct and pathological impulses, irrational fears and real dangers, invisible predators and visible threats.

⁵⁶ Fritz Haarmann, Wilhelm Grossmann, were both executed after very brief trials while Karl Denke hanged himself after he was officially charged with one of the murders. Most of the victims were women, children, and young homosexuals. The nature of the crimes were so violent that the public petitioned for

The line separating reality and fiction quickly faded as every scrap of ripped clothing, each weapon, and all the dismembered body parts were carefully inventoried and, with the aid of forensic science, meticulously pieced back together in a sequence of horrific events closely resembling the nightmarish fantasies of Artur Dinter's novel *Die Sunde wider das Blut* (*Sin against Blood*, 1919) and Friedrich Murnau's film *Nosferatu* (1922). Bewilderment turned to fear and the avant garde fetish of aestheticized landscapes, following a complex series of discursive slippages (*Gleichschaltung*) which collapsed the boundaries between femininity, sexual perversions, homosexuality, prostitution, criminal behavior, disease, and Jewish ethnicity, degenerated into an obsession with the pathological condition of the social body (*Völkskorper*). The specter of "Spenglerian pessimism," which until then had been confined to a relative few number of demoralized war veterans and disenchanted youth on the margins of Berlin culture, now infected the entire Weimar zeitgeist. Detection, the most effective defense against the spread of pestilence and social unrest, brought together all the surveillant disciplines – military force, medicine, intelligence services, and law enforcement – in a formidable line of defense. The inflationary forces of 1923 and the economic depression of 1929 robbed Jewish families of their life savings but the extreme paranoia and romantic obsession with a purified homeland stripped them of their humanity and dignity. Those who could flee the country did. "In the spring of 1933 Paris became the provisional capital of Berlin. For some it was not exile but a homecoming."

immediate justice. See "Crime, Contagion, and Containment," in Mari Tartar *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (1995) Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Walter Benjamin's Linguistic Anthropology

Benjamin never tired of experimenting with his literary style and revising the “oeuvre” of his historical philosophy. That is what makes it so difficult to analyze all of the facets of his theory of representation. There is perhaps no better place to begin this part of the discussion than with his influential essay “On the Mimetic Faculty.” In a mimetic understanding of the world, the entire cosmos is seen to be intimately connected to reading, writing, and personal experience. Rejecting the subject-object dualism of instrumentalist thinking, Benjamin presupposes that written and spoken forms of communication always reveal more than was consciously intended. “Graphology,” he explains, “has taught us to recognize in handwriting images that the unconscious of the writer conceals in it.”⁵⁷ According to his linguistic anthropology, the expressive character of language is valued as a unique portal into the world which escapes conventional forms of representation. “As soon as man makes use of language to create a living relationship to himself or to his fellows, language is no longer merely an instrument, no longer a means, but a manifestation, a revelation of our most inmost being and the psychological ties that bind us to ourselves and our fellows.”⁵⁸ In the same manner that a graphologist uses handwriting analysis to acquire knowledge about the inner characteristics of an individual, Benjamin explores the magical properties of language to rescue the unconscious associations residing within society as a whole.

⁵⁷ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 335.

⁵⁸ Benjamin, “Probleme der Sprachsoziologie,” p. 480. Cited in Gunter Gerbauer and Christopher Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture, Art, Society* (1992) Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 274.

In "Berlin Chronicle" (1932), a literary reconstruction of his childhood years in the fashionable district of West Berlin, Benjamin exhibits the mimetic processes by which the author and the environment begin to approximate each other. Rejecting the conventional form of autobiographical reporting, Benjamin "chronicles" his childhood experiences (afternoon excursions in the Tiergarten, the "prison-world" of the Kaiser Friedrich School, the *sur*-reality of his Aunt Lehmann's apartment, and the bohemian culture of the Princess Café) in a montage of word-images. The unorthodox format that Benjamin employs is analogous to the solitary archaeologist who keeps returning to the same site looking for palpable evidence. "He who seeks to approach his own past must conduct himself like a man digging...Fruitless searching is as much a part of this as succeeding, and consequently remembrance must not proceed in the manner of a narrative or still less that of a report, but must, in the strictest epic and rhapsodic manner, assay its spade in ever-new places, and in the old ones delve into ever-deeper layers."⁵⁹

Benjamin is not satisfied simply describing his past as a detached observer, he strives to articulate something about the embodiment of his childhood experiences and the materiality of the urban spaces of which he was most familiar. In the place of a chronology of events, dates, and names, Benjamin offers a richly textured account of the architectonic patterns which mold experience and shape perception. A counterpoint to the disinterested and disembodied style of writing characteristic of twentieth-century journalism, academic manuscripts, and scientific reports, Benjamin's "life-history" embraces an "artisan form of communication" in which "traces of the storyteller cling to

⁵⁹ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 26.

the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.”⁶⁰ By weaving both context and content into the *image-space* of his recollections, Benjamin is not simply providing a much more vivid and detailed account of his earliest encounters with the city, he is working towards a preliminary understanding of what Rilke calls his “topographical consciousness” – a theme which undergoes several incarnations in his mature writing. When viewed through “the fan of memory,” Berlin splinters into an amalgam of streets and names, neighbourhoods and apartments, winter gardens and promenades, mentors and nursemaids. The net result is an image of the city which is never static and never fully completely illuminated.

Allegory is another literary device Benjamin used to articulate the imbrication of imagined space and lived space, concrete space and corporeal space. Like the mimetic aspect of language, the allegorical form says much more than is originally intended. “Allegory’s analytical capacity” Benjamin states, “concerns the possibility of seeing the opposing forces within a concrete, seemingly unambiguous phenomenon.”⁶¹ Whereas symbolic, romantic and idealist forms of expression strive for stable, material, and transcendental perfection, allegorical interpretation aims for transfiguration, falsification, and destruction. In this mode of thought, miscellaneous items, images, and ideas from the past and present are randomly juxtaposed against each other to form antipodal relationships. Rather than organic wholeness and the synchronic, the allegorical form

⁶⁰ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, pp. 91-92.

⁶¹ Benjamin, in Bolz and Reijen, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 35.

plays with discontinuous representations and the diachronic. "Allegory is established most lastingly at the point where transience and eternity most clearly adjoin."⁶²

For Benjamin, nothing was better suited to the allegorical mode of interpretation than the metropolitan city. A composite of the most heterogeneous elements and oppositional forces, the metropolitan landscape was seen by Benjamin as one of the most complete historical records available. In the monumental archive of the city, everything from wall posters, world fairs, department stores, grand avenues, photographs, to the latest fashions could be "read" in the same fashion that astrologers interpreted the alignment of stars and archaeologists decoded ancient hieroglyphics. But it would be wrong to conclude from this that he was only seeking a description of historical events. What Benjamin really hoped to acquire in his allegorization of nineteenth-century urbanism was a greater understanding about the relationship between technically-mediated forms of perception and the organization of modern experience. However, the problem was that in the world of mechanical reproduction, the "true countenance of things" is revealed only in fleeting and fragmentary images. With only fleeting or partial glimpses of the complete "picture" at his disposal, Benjamin trained himself to identify the "hidden" significance of everyday phenomenon. "To someone looking through piles of old letters, a stamp that has long been out of circulation on a torn envelope often says more than a reading of dozens of pages...The pursuer of postmarks must like a detective, possess information on the most notorious post offices, like an archaeologist the art of

⁶² Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 147.

reconstructing the torsos of the most foreign place-names, and like a cabbalist an inventory of dates for an entire century.”⁶³

Not only did his intimate knowledge of allegorical forms allow Benjamin to visualize the material world in an incredibly interesting way, it sharpened his eyes to see the most “devalued” and “banal” expressions of the phenomenal world charged with revolutionary meaning. With the publication of *One Way Street* (1928), Benjamin’s theory of representation/knowledge makes a dramatic departure from the purely metaphysical and esoteric concerns of the Weimar academic circles. Completely disillusioned with the literary world of German idealism, Benjamin would turn his back on the insular world of *belles lettres* and begin to query the technical mediation of knowledge. “True literary activity,” he states, “cannot aspire to take place within a literary framework; this is rather, the habitual expression of its sterility. Significant literary effectiveness can come into being only in a strict alternation between action and writing; it must nurture the inconspicuous forms that fit its influence in active communities better than does the pretentious, universal gesture of the book - in leaflets, brochures, articles, and placards. Only this prompt language shows itself actively equal to the moment.”⁶⁴

Much of Benjamin’s mature writings were influenced by the urban *flâneuries* and militant avant-gardism of the Surrealists. In *One Way Street*, traces of André Breton’s

⁶³ Benjamin, “One Way Street,” Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings 1913-1926* (1996) Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press. p. 478.

Nadja and Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* can be detected on every page. About the latter Benjamin once stated "I could not read more than a few words of it before my heartbeat got so strong that I had to put the book down."⁶⁵ What Benjamin found so captivating is the manner in which the narratives of both texts skate back and forth between imaginary and concrete realities. "Surrealism," states Benjamin:

*can boast an extraordinary discovery. It was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the "outmoded," in the first iron constructions, the first factory building, the earliest photos, the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution – no one can have a more exact conception of it than these authors. No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution – not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects – can suddenly turn over into revolutionary nihilism.*⁶⁶

In the surrealist experience, certain objects and places entice the individual to decode their "sur-reality" in the same manner that dreams do. When examined in this way, the entire topography of the everyday world becomes a conduit for "extraordinary discoveries." Thus in the revolutionary praxis of the surrealist imaginary, the idea of the dream hastens the annulment of "external" reality and the emergence of a latent or unrealized reality. But the appeal of surrealism was not limited to the mere discovery of unconscious fantasies. Surrealism and its importation of Freud's psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams allowed Benjamin to transcend what he perceives to be the

⁶⁴ *ibid.* p. 444.

⁶⁵ Benjamin, Letter to Theodor Adorno, May 31, 1935. Cited in Susan Buck-Morss *Walter Benjamin and the Dialectics of Seeing* (1989) p. 33.

⁶⁶ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 181-82.

theoretical limitations of orthodox Marxist theory. In Benjamin's estimation, Marxism was that it failed to take note of the nonmaterial conditions which also figure in the base-superstructure model. By employing a surrealist-materialist interpretation of social transformation, Benjamin not only evades the teleological assumptions of vulgar Marxism, he radicalizes Marxist discourse.

In Benjamin's enigmatic conception of reality, the sacred realm permeates every aspect of phenomenal life. The task of the philosopher, he maintains, is to "redeem" the "outmoded" objects of the everyday by making their relationship to the noumenal or transpersonal sphere comprehensible. However, the illumination of this trans-historical connection has been made exceedingly difficult with the accelerated liquidation of concrete structures and the proliferation of abstracted communication. In the profaned world of instrumental language, "primeval acquaintances" with the cosmic universe are supplanted by a medium of knowing in which language is reduced to the mere exchange of information. In this degraded condition reality becomes distorted and the social fabric of experience (*Erlebnis*) becomes completely fragmented.

Printing, having found in the book a refuge in which to lead an autonomous existence, is pitilessly dragged out onto the street by advertisements and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos. This is the hard schooling of its new form. If centuries ago it began gradually to lie down, passing from the upright inscription to the manuscript resting on sloping desks before finally taking to bed in the printed book, it now begins just as slowly to rise again from the ground. The newspaper is read more in the vertical than in the horizontal plane, while film and advertisement force the printed word entirely into the dictatorial perpendicular. And before a child of our time finds his way clear to

*opening a book, his eyes have been exposed to such a blizzard of changing, colorful, conflicting letters that the chances of his penetrating the archaic stillness of the book are slight. Locust swarms of print, which already eclipse the sun of what is taken for intellect for city dwellers, will grow thicker and thicker with each succeeding year.*⁶⁷

Benjamin's primary objective is the recovery of the "unfamiliar" relationship between things and a view of the world which precedes habitual activity. In the place of an ordered and systematic approach, Benjamin substitutes a rather idiosyncratic methodology in which chance and unpredictability "frame" his tactile understand of urban "texts."

*Not to find one's way in a city may well be interesting and banal. It requires ignorance - nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city - as one loses in a forest - that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboards and street names, passer-bys, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its center.*⁶⁸

Out of the randomness and unsystematic movement through space Benjamin discovers a new array of experiences and a hidden geography. In his enigmatic "reading" of urban "texts," Benjamin eschews the subject-object distinction imbued in instrumentalist and positivist thought, overcomes the division between inner-life and the outer-world, and transcends the episodic events of daily life. Furthermore, he demonstrates that language is more than an instrument or a tool, it "is the medium of past experience, as the ground is the medium in which dead cities lie interred."⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *ibid.* p. 77-78.

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p. 8-9.

⁶⁹ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 25-26.

Post-Histoire Paris, Aménagement, and Philosophical Anti-humanism

And anyone who wasn't in France in those days cannot understand what it means to be hungry for consumer goods from nylon stockings to automobiles – to buy a car back then you had to get a purchase permit and then wait a year...it's very simple: in 1946 in France there was literally nothing.⁷⁰

A New France, a new Society is rising up from the ruins of the occupation; the best of its efforts is magnificent, but the problems are staggering. In France, the issue of the conflict or the adaptation between communism and western democracy appears its most acute form. France is its battlefield or laboratory.⁷¹

Before tending the garden one must tend to the heart of the house. In France the heart is the Paris region.⁷²

When nineteen year old Michel Foucault stepped off the train which delivered him to metropolitan Paris in 1945 – less than a year after the departure of the German occupation forces – he crossed over the ambiguous threshold dividing the pre-modern and the modern life-worlds. Compared to the provincial setting of Poitiers (a town which would not be out of place in one of Balzac's novels), Paris (the commercial, cultural, and political center of a declining empire) was as alien to Foucault as the Eiffel Tower is to the metropolitan skyline. Before too long however, the psycho-social distinctions

⁷⁰ Francois Giroud, *I Give You My Word* (1990) trans, Richard Seaver. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, p. 108.

⁷¹ B. Mason, *Fondations américaines et sciences sociales en France: 1920-1960* (1985) Ph. D. Thesis Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, p. 103. Cited in Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (1996) Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, p. 186.

⁷² Prime Minister Michel Debré to Paul Delouvrier, the Délégué Général for the District of the Paris Region. Cited in H.V. Savitch, *Post-Industrial Cities: Politics and Planning in New York, Paris, and London* (1988) New York: Princeton University Press, p. 100.

between Foucault and Paris diminished considerably. In approximately the same time that it took for the “tortured and suicidal adolescent” to transform himself into a *normalien* and then a celebrated professor of the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieures, Parisian civic planners executed the most ambitious redevelopment campaign since the Second Empire.

Reconstructions: Paris on the "Outside" of History

*Construction presupposes deconstruction.*⁷³

For much of the 1950s and 1960s, Paris was mired in existentialist angst and collective guilt. Memories of the humiliating military defeat and the traumatic experience of the German occupation, mounting revelations about the Vichy government's complicity in the murder of 75,000 to 95,000 French Jews, the mass exodus of Parisian artists and writers to the United States and the decline of French cultural hegemony, and the threat of nuclear annihilation, were like open wounds on the collective psyche. The society which supplied the western world with many of its crowning achievements – the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the scientific accomplishments of Pasteur and Bichat, the artistic genius of Cézanne and Duchamp, the literary greatness of Zola, Hugo, Mallarmé, and Sartre – deliberated whether or not the philosophical motives and universal ideals of the French civilization simply masked its barbarism.

In an abrupt historical turn, France severed its romantic and nostalgic connections to the past and replaced them with the techno-structures of an aggressive state-led modernization. France even abandoned, albeit reluctantly, its mania for territorial acquisitions and the fetish of “oriental” pleasures. After two debilitating military defeats, the first suffered at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and the second in Algiers in 1968, and the anti-Gaullist revolts of May 1968, the French colonial apparatus was quickly dismantled. Apart from textbooks on history and historic novels, all that remained of the colonial imaginary were the personal memoirs of retired colonial officials, an assortment of cultural artifacts on display in various galleries and museums, and a handful of historic events kept “alive” in civic monuments.

But as Kristen Ross points out in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (1996), century-long traditions – particularly ones used in the construction of national identities – are never completely expunged from the historical imaginary. In a transformative process reminiscent of Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (1925), the controlling technologies deployed in North Africa and Vietnam (Indochine) simply altered their form when they reassembled inside the French capital. While the work of Kafka does not figure prominently in Ross’s analysis of *post-histoire* Paris, I find it impossible to think about the economic, political, and cultural gyrations discussed in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* without reflecting upon the allegorical

⁷³ Walter Benjamin, “N: The Theory of Knowledge, The Theory of Progress.” In Smith ed. Walter Benjamin, p. 60.

figure of Gregor Samsa. In addition to a sudden and irreversible transfiguration, Kafka's parable shares with the post-war condition of the Parisian urban-dweller, the sensation of collapsing "ego" boundaries, the imprisoning effects of concrete and social space, and the estrangement one encounters when affective attachments to familiar surroundings are severed. Of course there are limits to what Kafka's exegesis on modernity has to offer with respect to the modernization of post-war Paris, but when the (re)production of metropolitan space is examined in terms of what Henri Lefebvre and the Situationists theorize as the "colonization of the everyday," Kafka's insights become even more germane. Lefebvre and the Situationists, along with a heterogeneous collection of critics including Jean Paul Sartre, Guy Debord, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jacques Tati, were absolutely appalled by the encroachment of totalitarian bureaucratic regimes on daily life. They condemned state-led modernization and urban development as an aphrodisiac of the technocratic elite who were determined to propel France out of the *après guerre* period and into a technologically-perfected future.

Despite the utopian rhetoric and the spectacular interventions outlined in the *Plan d'Aménagement et d'Organisation Général de la Région Parisienne* (1952) and Paul Delouvrier's *Schéma Directeur* (1965), the urban renovations lacked originality. Bearing an uncanny resemblance to the spatial reorderings of the Second Empire, Delouvrier's *plan-masse* emphasized the creation of *centres restructurateurs* (satellite settlements) to alleviate the social malaise (tuberculosis, crime, pollution) created by the conditions of overcrowding and to satisfy the labour demands of the industrial economy, the destruction of neighbourhoods identified as hotbeds of leftist opposition, the construction

of access corridors (Métro, bus routes, highways) to accelerate the mass movement of goods and consumers in and out of the urban core, the renovation of monuments, buildings, and other urban amenities reputed to have symbolic and historic meaning, and finally, the aesthetic embellishment of urban quarters to satisfy the consumer tastes and habits of the new *cadres supérieurs* (professional middle class).

Paris is not the only twentieth-century metropolitan city to undergo an extensive reconfiguration of its territorial and social boundaries. The urban reforms conducted in New York and London were equally aggressive; the erasure of social contradictions and the demolition of old buildings were pursued just as vigorously.

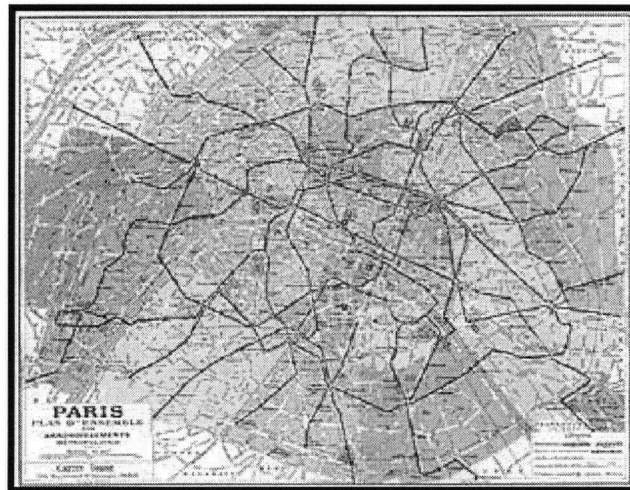


Figure 1.3: *Paris* (1960) Source: Paris Postcards website.

While capital investments in public housing were far greater in Paris, development in all three cities incorporated state and private capital investments. By acceding much of the responsibility of urban renovations to private developers, civic planners in the French capital consented to an escalation of property values, a significant

reduction of comfortable and cheap accommodation, and a territorially divided social geography. Between the time that Foucault published his doctoral dissertation *Maladie mentale et personnalite* (1954) and *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (1975), Paris lost 24% of its architectural structures⁷⁴ and 550,000 of its inhabitants (equivalent to the population of Lyons).⁷⁵

The *displaced* and dispossessed (manual labourers and recent immigrants from North Africa, Vietnam, China, Italy, and Spain) had few alternatives outside the suburbs – where the bulk of industrial production and public housing (*grands ensembles*) facilities were relocating. “Scientific” studies which concluded that urban congestion (spatially concentrated in neighbourhoods like Montparnasse, Italie, Belleville, and Bercy) contributed disproportionately to the city’s social malaise, were used to legitimize the *épurations* (purifications). With the exception of Les Halles, the demolition of the *îlots insalubres* (unhealthy quarters) were rarely challenged. The reasons were simple. A mobile labour force was needed to revitalize French industry and the population was anticipated to increase by an additional two or three million. Aesthetic considerations were also a priority. Parisians, especially the new cultural “mandarins,” did not want their city polluted by heavy industry or by *pieds noir*.⁷⁶ In addition to the erasure of provincial, artisanal, and foreign “excesses” from the metropolitan core, the *épurations* warranted

⁷⁴ Norma Evenson, *Paris: A Century of Change, 1878-1978* (1979) New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 309.

⁷⁵ Claude Eveno and Pascale de Mezzamat, eds., *Paris perdu: Quarante ans de bouleversements de la ville* (1991) Paris: Editions Carré, p. 159. Cited in Kristen Ross *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Spatial Reordering of France* (1996) Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, p. 151.

the use of residential segregation and de-industrialization to consolidate the suburban archipelago into a unified geographical and political entity. By wedding the environmental determinism of the nineteenth-century to the (post)industrial logic of twentieth-century capitalism, Delouvrier (an ex-colonial official from Morocco) effectively *re-engineered* the Saint Simonian perspective on social engineering.

Idols of the Marketplace

Only a thoughtless observer would deny that there are correspondences between the world of modern technology and the archaic symbol-world of mythology.⁷⁷

In 1946, Paris had nothing. Parisians held on to the tenets of Catholic perspectivalism and Vichy provincialism as if they were prehistoric relics which had been salvaged from a soon-to-be-forgotten past. A decade and a half later (roughly the same time that it took for the Weimar zeitgeist to expire), French modernization was advancing at an accelerated pace and the near total conversion to the cult of consumer happiness was incontestable. The New Covenant promised to reconcile the will of the individual with the national interest, to mitigate income disparities and local differences via "indifferent" market forces and bureaucratic systems, and to redeem the country's moral shortcomings and historical failures through material acquisitions.

⁷⁶ Between 1954 and 1968, the number of Algerians living in France increased from 211,675 to 473,812. Marianne Amar and Pierre Milza, *L'immigration en France* (1990) Paris: Armand Colin, p. 42. Cited in Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p. 153.

⁷⁷ Walter Benjamin, "N: The Theory of Knowledge, the Theory of Progress," In Smith ed. *Walter Benjamin*, p. 49.

Membership in the secular faith was not automatic. One's inclusion in the modern world was contingent on a series of personal obediences and public rituals. Women confirmed their place in the social *habitus* by displaying a functional (quasi-scientific) knowledge of household appliances (refrigerators, coffee grinders, washing machines and dryers). Through the performance of a variety of domestic dramas (cleaning, child rearing, and food preparation) house-wives and mothers learned to equate the limits of the domestic sphere with the boundaries of their own identities. Men, at least those who



Figure 1.4: *His... And Hers*. Source: K. Ross (1996) p. 25.

could afford to, learned to recognize themselves in the metallic surfaces of the automobile. Affordably priced and aggressively marketed, vehicles like the C4V and the Citron quickly became the most visible symbols of mature modernization. When Foucault's movements in time and space were still governed by the rhythms of provincial life, there were no more than 500,000 automobiles in the streets of Paris.

By 1965, this figure had increased four-fold. Georges Pompidou, who was equally at home in de Gaulle's cabinet as he was in the world of real-estate speculation, quipped "Paris must adapt itself to the automobile. We must renounce an outmoded aesthetic." Given the inverse relation between burgeoning automobile purchases and sluggish traffic flows (the number of Parisian streets only increased by ten percent), we can safely rule out daily transportation needs as the primary catalyst for the automobile's growing popularity. Social mobility is a much better explanation for its mass appeal. In the ritualistic performance of the daily commute, *jeune cadres* placed physical distance between themselves and the suffocating spaces of domestic interiors and symbolic distance between the timeless world of erotic pleasures and the time-honoured traditions of patriarchal inheritances. When driven at dangerous speeds, the automobile unleashed entirely new psycho-motor sensations. French motorization and the dream of technocratic perfection may have derived from the scientific optimism inherent in American Fordist production methods, but the sensation (speed, power, and freedom) and aesthetics (polished surfaces, clean lines) of driving had more to do with the imaginary celluloid-world of Hollywood cult figure James Dean.

Much like a prism, the image of the automobile allows the angular views of state-led modernization to be studied at close range. It embodies the rapid turn-over time of flexible exchange relations, exemplifies the expansionary and conflationary forces of urban planning, engenders male and female identity differences, and constitutes a metaphor for the rapid acceleration of mechanically reproduced images and collective

perceptions. Benjamin adduced that as a result of scientific advances in reproductive technologies like photography and film, aspects of urban life which had been “invisible” to the naked eye were suddenly brought into high resolution. While Benjamin’s insights into the revolutionary impact of reproductive technologies are remarkably accurate but Parisian cinema and film brought much more into focus than he could have anticipated. “The covers of the first issues of *Elle* used American models whose bodies bore no traces of the hardships of war; early French television advertisements for home appliances were filmed in American kitchens.”⁷⁸ When projected onto the silver screen of metropolitan cinemas, these images showed their imperfections and their artificial qualities. Regardless of how much Parisians invested emotionally in the aura of urban modernity, the compensatory function of consumer durables were unable to conceal the fact that French industrialization had succeeded on the backs of an immigrant labour force, that emancipation from tradition-bound structures of patriarchy and parochial thinking had simply opened the way to economically-enforced compliance and disciplinary work-schedules, and, that the redemptive promise of modernization was really nothing more than the self-styled narcissism of a new cultural elite. Indeed, Paris had risen phoenix-like from the ruins of its military defeat and embarrassing occupation but only to be re-colonized by the conformist logic of American consumer capitalism and the spectacle of mass culture.

⁷⁸ Kristen Ross, *Fast Cars Clean Bodies* (1996) p. 148.

Deconstructions: Flâneures on the "Inside" of the Parisian Intellectual Field

Just as in the nineteenth-century when photo-journalism replaced romanticism, collective petitions started to outnumber *hommes de lettres*, and skepticism turned to conservatism, in the post-war period, the technical language and quantitative reasoning of the social sciences displaced the classical humanities. Although philosophy continued to be the "royal road" of intellectual inquiry, the publication of *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) by Lévi-Strauss effectively closed off the discursive routes leading to Sartrean phenomenology and existential humanism as it opened the way to Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusserian Marxism, and de Saussurian semiology. The structuralist anthropology of Lévi-Strauss appealed to French intellectuals who had become disenchanted with the subject-centered philosophy of metaphysical humanism and its ties to Eurocentrism, liberalism, and patriarchy. Judged by Foucault, Lacan, Saussure, and Deleuze to be the foundational principle of knowledge, language was the ultimate leveler which enabled structuralists to maneuver across disciplinary boundaries and to speak across numerous discourses with the voice of authority. Thus the C4V was for the increasingly mobile middle class what structuralist thought was for the post-Sartrean intellectual nobility; a mark of social distinction and a vehicle to accelerate their *flâneur*-like engagements.

Despite its wide spread success among the "inner circle" of French academics, structuralist thought did have its detractors. Lefebvre, one of the paradigm's most outspoken critics, railed against what was in many respects the philosophical equivalent to the *épurations* carried out by civic planners. "Structuralism is the discourse that accords

an absolute primacy to science when people are more and more oppressed in the name of science; it wants to persuade them that they are nothing." In Steven Smith's estimation, philosophical anti-humanism "amounts to a denial of the role of individual will or agency in history. Since to be an agent means to be capable of framing intentional aims and projects by the light of an independent intelligence, to eliminate agency is to eliminate man and any teleological conception of human nature. The elimination of any substantive ground for free action constitutes the core of the doctrine of scientific structuralism."⁷⁹ Architects of the post-Sartrean, post-*histoire* paradigm delivered a fatal blow to the correspondence theory of knowledge by announcing the symbolic death of "man." After deconstructing the myth of *self*-mastery residing at the heart of metaphysical humanism, structuralists erected their own teleological framework in the center of French intellectual thought.



Figure 1.5: *Collège de France*: Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

⁷⁹ Steven B. Smith, *Reading Althusser: An Essay on Structuralist Marxism* (1984) Ithica: Cornell University Press, p. 200.

By eliminating human agency, will, and consciousness from the French sociological imaginary, structuralists relegated social contradictions and philosophical paradoxes to history's dustbin. The relationship between the individual and society, theory and reality, thought and action – questions around which Weber, Marx, and Durkheim constructed their entire philosophy – were suddenly reducible to the informal constraints of language.

That the re-invention of Foucault coincided with the socio-spatial reordering and intellectual transformations of Paris is far from coincidental. Foucault's passage into the post-war Parisian milieu was timed perfectly with the consolidation of French politics, culture, and intellectual life by a generation of technocrats and *jeune cadres* who were determined to put the *après-guerre* period behind them and propel the country into late twentieth-century modernity. Like Alain Touraine and Pierre Bourdieu, Foucault's ascension into the ranks of the Parisian intellectual nobility commenced with his acceptance into the most prestigious institute of the French educational system – the École Normales Supérieures (ENS). In order to qualify for a Republican education at the ENS, candidates had to perform extremely well in their written and oral examinations. The ordeal would not end before countless hours of study, a demanding course-schedule, and numerous sacrifices were made. Foucault's pedagogical experience was especially difficult. Although raised in a bourgeois family (his father was a medical doctor), Foucault's sexual orientation and his provincial background made him an "outsider." Dormitory life was for him what life in Algiers was for Meursault, the bachelor in Albert Camus' *L'Etranger* (1942), alienating. Biographer James Miller argues very convincingly

that the years Foucault spent as an itinerant on the "margins" of French academia were crucial to his overall intellectual and personal development. Despite its sensationalistic treatment of Foucault's *self*-destructive and suicidal episodes, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (1993) is relevant to my own investigation in two ways. First, Miller's examination of the difficult time the "provincial" had adjusting to student-life at the ENS provokes us to think seriously about the way personal experience infiltrates Foucault's obsession with disciplinary and normalizing forms of power. Second, Miller's biography provides us with an opportunity to make some interesting comparisons between Foucault's *passage* into the normative realm of French academia and Benjamin's exodus from the metropolitan *habitus* of Berlin and Paris.

These space-time trajectories are significantly more complex and uneven than the ones mapped out at the beginning of the chapter. I am interested in the disparate pathways Benjamin and Foucault followed outside the institutional space of the archive for what they reveal about the relationship between identity, history, and the formation of what Derek Gregory designates as the geographical imaginary. One does not have to look too hard, or for very long, before it becomes evident that passage ways which opened up to Foucault were effectively closed off to Benjamin. Equally apparent is the fact that much of Foucault's success was contingent on his complicity with the structures of power which he was busily deconstructing. According to Kelly, this seemingly paradoxical standpoint was actually part of the French academic norm.

It is almost a constitutive characteristic of intellectuals, certainly in the French tradition, to be cast in an oppositional role with respect to the state, criticizing the

*power of the state at the same time as seeking to wield influence over its policies and institutions.*⁸⁰

Foucault was a master at leveling criticism at institutional structures in order to bolster his credibility as an avant garde intellectual. Although Foucault certainly came into conflict with those who judged his homosexual lifestyle as just another bourgeois vice,⁸¹ the French intellectual enjoyed the freedom to take a position in a Gaullist ministry as a member of the *Eight-Man Commission* on educational reforms, to lecture in front of Algerian students about Manet's Impressionistic landscapes and Nietzschean philosophy, or to rally in the streets of Paris defending the human rights of students, prisoners, and Vietnamese immigrants.

Quite the opposite was true of Benjamin. Landing an entry-level posting at the Frankfurt University or anywhere else in Weimar Germany was extraordinarily difficult because of discriminatory policies which were designed to keep *Fremde* out of academia. An even greater obstacle was the fact that Benjamin viewed the doctoral dissertation more as a sociological experiment than a crucial step in the advancement of his career. In his biography on the Jewish intellectual, Momme Brodersen contends that Benjamin's radical interpretations of German romantic poetry and his refusal to conform to an academic style of writing, presented a serious challenge to the conventions of the institution and a serious threat to the personalities authorized to assess the merits of his *Habilitation*. With the exception of Gustav Wyneken, the mentor from his adolescent

⁸⁰ Michael Kelly, "French Intellectuals and Zhdanovism," *French Cultural Studies* (1997) Vol. 8, p. 26.

⁸¹ Foucault's sexual orientation prevented him from acquiring a position at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Seves. Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (1991) trans. Betsy Wing. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, p. 133.

years, Benjamin never compromised his integrity as an independent scholar.⁸² Although the bohemian intellectual lifestyle offered certain advantages and freedoms, they were more than offset by the displacement and marginalization that “outsiders” had to endure. Whether inside or outside the institutional space of the archive, before or after the failed *Habilitation*, Benjamin’s space-time trajectories were always nomadic. Berlin, Marseilles, Naples, Moscow, and Paris did not line up for him in the same way that Paris, Uppsala, Warsaw, Hamburg, Tunis, and Teheran did for the French “Turk.” Each time the Jewish intellectual changed residences, journeyed to a new holiday retreat, or pursued a different line of philosophical inquiry, it almost seemed that the catastrophic winds of history were gathering more momentum and were preparing for that final push that would force Benjamin to take another step in the direction of Portbou.⁸³ Foucault, on the other hand, moved along in a much more confident and calculating manner. Every encounter, political appointment, and academic posting followed a path leading back to the hallowed corridors of the ENS – the inner sanctum of the New Jerusalem.

An Archaeology of Foucault's Critical Thought

Like Benjamin, Foucault is intrigued by the triangulation of language, vision, and modern forms of knowledge. As well, Foucault is committed to the development of a critical awareness about the historical and cultural conditions which govern modern thought. Foucault’s theory of knowledge also intersects with Benjamin’s linguistic

⁸² An excerpt taken from a 1928 publication of his dissertation reads; “*The Origin of German Tragic Drama* marks an end for me - I would not have it be a beginning for any money in the world...” Momme Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin: A Biography* (1996) trans. Malcolm L. Green and Ingrida Ligers (1996) London: Verso, pp. 146-147.

anthropology in his exposé on the lost similitude. Here Foucault describes the transitional process whereby the kinship between words and things disintegrates and language ruptures into discourse and literature. Ever since the demise of the pre-Classical era “in which the seen and the read, the visible and the expressible, were endlessly interwoven,”⁸⁴ written forms of communication have been subsumed by a system of signs.

*The world is covered with signs that must be deciphered, and those signs, which reveal resemblances and affinities, are themselves no more than forms of similitude. To know must therefore be to interpret: to find a way from the visible mark to that which is being said by it and which, without that mark, would lie like unspoken speech, dormant with things.*⁸⁵

In contrast to Benjamin, Foucault shares no interest in restoring the utopian possibilities of language or returning to what he describes as a “transcendental narcissism.”⁸⁶ Relinquishing all romantic and nostalgic connections with the mimetic continuum of knowledge, Foucault “excavates” the “epistemological field” which opened following the demise of classical thought.⁸⁷ What he unearths is an anonymous system of rules and practices governing the formation, the re-formation, and the dissemination of the modern *episteme*.

Foucault’s archeological methodology rejects the evolutionary presupposition that knowledge accumulates in a continuous and orderly fashion. It is his contention that the

⁸³ The Spanish town where Benjamin committed suicide in 1940.

⁸⁴ Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970) New York: p. 43.

⁸⁵ *ibid.* p.32.

⁸⁶ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 203.

⁸⁷ The period of French classicism comes to a close at the end of the sixteenth century. It is marked by the transformation from a tertiary to a binary organization of language. The dualism of Descartes’ philosophical meditations is emblematic of this paradigmatic shift.

configurations and reconfigurations of knowledge are discontinuous, sudden, and abrupt.

The unpredictability of modern thought is rooted in the fluidity of language.

One says gladly that nothing else today interests us but language and that it has become the universal object. We must not make a mistake there; this sovereignty is the provisional, equivocal, precarious sovereignty of a tribe in migration. Of course we are interested in language: yet it's not that we have finally entered into its possession, but rather that it escapes us more than ever before. Its boundaries have collapsed and its calm universe has entered into fusion; and if we are submerged it is not so much through its intemporal vigor as through the movement today of its wave. ⁸⁸

However, we should not interpret this to mean that the modern *episteme* has been entirely divested of pattern, coherence, and continuity. Despite what the postmodernists may wish to think, Foucault is not a relativist thinker. Although his archeological “excavations” start with the presupposition that the formation of historical knowledge is always contingent, Foucault maintains that there is an organizational matrix around which the modern *episteme* coheres. More importantly, the *episteme* sets the conditions according to which society structures linguistic forms of expression, scientific reflection, and collective perception. “In any culture, there is only ever one *episteme* which defines the conditions of possibility of all theoretical knowledge at a given moment.”⁸⁹ Less interested in the architecture of thought *per se* than the empirical and historical conditions which govern and limit the configurations of modern thought, Foucault directed his attention to the ordering processes in which meaning, perception, and reason become intelligible.

⁸⁸ Sylvestry Lotinger, *Foucault Live* (1989) p. 27.

⁸⁹ Foucault, *The Order of Things* (1970) p. 179.

Whereas Benjamin seeks to identify and retrieve the utopian possibilities buried within language, Foucault limits his analysis to the critique of epistemological thought. The centerpiece of his critical philosophy is the humanist idea of the subject. Foucault eschews the humanist idea that historical objects and human beings are imbued with essential qualities and characteristics which are often concealed by the veil of ideology and myth. For Foucault, to submit to the humanist dogma is to fall into what he calls an “anthropological sleep.” This is most evident in the discourse of history (what the French refer to as the “human sciences”). As long as the human sciences (psychology, sociology, the history of ideas, semiology) continue dreaming about the recovery of a time when the known and the unknown, the represented and the unrepresented become reconciled, the *contents* and the *contexts* of modern thought will forever be confused. The beauty of the archaeological method is that it first places the mobility of language in detention, illuminates the “silent” historical and relational conditions governing the formation of modern discourses, and then makes those relations intelligible by mapping them out in space and time. In addition to being contingent on a particular set of historical, economic, and social circumstances, discursively manufactured “truths” have no necessary connection to those which precede them.

According to Foucault’s anti-foundationalist view, the social formation of the historical subject is always “framed” by a set of intercommunicating discourses. Like myths and ideologies, a discourse “makes it possible for all subjects who have been socialized under its authority to speak and act together; in which case we can suppose that

each discourse *always* has an order, but not necessarily that there is a *single* order for all discourses.”⁹⁰ Instead of a uniform and universal structure it is better to speak of an ensemble of interconnecting patterns and recursive processes. In Foucault’s analytic of modern discourses, the emphasis is always on “the individuation of different series, which are juxtaposed with one another, which succeed, overlap and criss-cross without it being able to reduce them to a linear schema.”⁹¹ The challenge was how to map-out the spatial dynamics of numerous discourses existing adjacent to and folding over one another.

By the 1970s, Foucault had turned away from the history of epistemological thought to examine the *field of usage* in which modern discourses come into existence. In his genealogical writings (*Discipline and Punish, The History of Sexuality*), Foucault embarks on an intellectual odyssey through the institutions (hospitals, clinics, asylums, schools, and prisons) which have dominated the production of knowledge systems. Here the focus is on the institutional practices invested with the authority of legitimating certain “truths” (madness, illness, delinquency, abnormality) and the processes by which these “truths” are inscribed on the human body. However, when examined genealogically “self-evident” principles are divested of their ontological status and are then recognizable as malleable “facts” born out of the *productivity* of knowledge systems.

*The imaginary resides between the book and the lamp.
The fantastic is no longer a property of the heart, nor is
it found among the incongruities of nature; it evolves
from the accuracy of knowledge, and its treasures lie*

⁹⁰ Manfred Frank, “On Foucault’s Concept of Discourse,” p. 105.

⁹¹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. p. 16.

*dormant in documents. Dreams are no longer summoned with closed eyes, but in reading; and a true image is now a product of learning; it derives from words spoken in the past, exact recessions, the amassing of minute facts, monuments reduced to infinitesimal fragments, and the reproductions of reproductions....The imaginary is not formed in opposition to reality as its denial or compensation; it grows among signs, from books to book, in the interstice of repetitions and commentaries; it is born and takes shape in the interval between books. It is the phenomenon of the library.*⁹²

Whereas Benjamin's archival work begins with an examination of "profane" objects and spaces (street signs, newspapers, billboards, and wall posters) and achieves completion only when they have been reconstructed in the form of an *image-based* text, Foucault's exegesis travels in the opposite direction. His theory of representation starts with the *imaginary* space which "resides between the book and the lamp." From there, Foucault charts the pathways and procedures by which "the accuracy of knowledge" is materialized in the space of everyday life. Firmly committed to the idea that the known and the unknown, the perceived and the unperceived, the true and the untrue are discursively constructed and *that these discourses always precede subjective experience*, Foucault maintains that our sense of the world is contained within an epistemic spiral. From this perspective, it is assumed that language constitutes a trap in which the "way out goes deeper into an empty labyrinthine space, empty because it loses itself there. When language rejoins itself, it is shown that the same, not here, but other and elsewhere. And this game can always begin again."⁹³ Consequently, it becomes pointless to search for originating sources residing at the base of modern thought. In the absence of cardinal

⁹² Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977) pp. 90-91.

⁹³ *ibid.* p, 23.

doctrines all we are left with are reproductions of reproductions and interpretations of interpretations. As a genealogist, Foucault saw that his task was to determine:

*on what basis knowledge and theory became possible;
within what space of order knowledge was constituted,
on the basis of what historical a priori, and in the
element of positivity, ideas could appear, sciences could
be established, experiences could be reflected in
philosophies...only, perhaps, to dissolve and vanish soon
afterward.⁹⁴*

Among these “spaces of constructed visibility,” what becomes visible epistemologically may recede from view as quickly as it is brought into focus. Thus there are no statistical guarantees or foundational principles underlying the “epistemological space” of the human sciences, only contingent relations. Understanding this is crucial because it is only when the conditions governing the possibility of knowledge and perception are formally identified that we can begin to critique and even deconstruct the architecture of historical and epistemological “truths” which impact our daily lives.

At first the similarities in the historical philosophy of Foucault, a French intellectual who lectured to capacity audiences at the Collège de France, and Benjamin, an independent intellectual and free-lance writer who was forced into exile following the rise of National Socialism, may be difficult to detect. But there are in fact a number of interesting correspondences between their written work. Both philosophers identified the nineteenth-century as an important threshold in the history of western intellectual thought. Benjamin and Foucault were also fascinated by the proliferation of heterogeneous discourses which transformed perceptions about social and material space.

However, each philosopher worked his way back into the conceptual and material spaces of the nineteenth-century using very different interpretive schemas. The end result was two decidedly different “readings” of these historic transformations. One of the most intriguing aspects of Benjamin’s and Foucault’s written work is the manner in which they can be used to “probe” the complex interplay of space, power and knowledge as they are manifested in a massively reconfiguration of the public sphere.

⁹⁴ Foucault, *The Order of Things* (1970) p. xxii.

Babel of Façades

*It's Paris. It's a big city, you can't see it all from here.*⁹⁵

*In every quarter, at every level, Paris rises astonishingly anew. The sentimental antiquarian may mourn the loss of the old Paris and its romantic past; the strict moralist may deplore the glory accorded to Mammon throughout; but others must justly rejoice at the triumph of modern science and hygiene.*⁹⁶

*And no face is surrealistic in the same degree as the face of a city.*⁹⁷

Nineteenth-century Paris was, and is still, an enigma. As suggested by the comments above, its “true” identity remained safely ensconced behind an impressive array of architectural facades, its arterial network of gas-lit streets, railways, and sewers, and by an ineffable orgy of visual and exotic sensations. Much too large to be comfortably surveyed on foot and way too heterogeneous to be comprehensively documented by artistic, literary, sociological, or any other forms of representation, *la vie de Paris* evaded even the most discriminating eye. This was a revolutionary age, an era when familiar notions of space and place were being rapidly eclipsed by extended spheres of sociability, the logistics of mass transit and long distance communication, and the circulatory network of international finance, and when the *longue durée* of time-honoured

⁹⁵ Nicolas Restif de la Bretonne, *Monsieur Nicolas, ou le coeur humaine dévoile*, vol. 6. (1959). p. 185. Cited in David Jordan, *Transforming Paris* (1995) p. 17.

⁹⁶ *Paris Partout! A Guide for the English and American Traveller* (1869) p. 11. In Rupert Christiansen, *Tales of the New Babylon: Paris 1869-1875*, (1994) p. 11

⁹⁷ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 182.

traditions gave way to and the industrial rhythms of the factory floor, the life-cycle of the latest consumer trends, and the fleeting moment of the snap-shot.

However, that did not deter journalists, artists, scholars, poets, play-writes, and urban reformers (progressive and conservative) from attempting to bring the bric-a-brac of metropolitan life into full relief. The spectacle of unprecedented material, demographic, economic, and symbolic transformations combined with the knowledge that the pace of modernization was bound to accelerate, generated an enormous amount of nostalgia for the intimate and familiar life-world that was quickly receding into the past at the same time it created a powerful desire to savour the novel experiences, visual delights, and new freedoms arriving from the future. Much like the colonial expeditions which traveled great distances to “foreign” and “dangerous” lands, these urban explorers set out to map and chronicle the new social types, temporal registers, and spatial forms proliferating within the modern city.

What I find most interesting about this historic period is not simply the architectural treasures that were constructed, the countless movements of urban masses which paraded up and down the newly built streets, or the charivari of perceptions, temptations, and pleasures cultivated through mass advertising, newspaper articles, wall posters, and photographs, but the manner which many of these socio-spatial transformations were *deliberately* set in motion by an urgent desire to modernize the French capital. I am also intrigued by the fact that while many of these changes may appear to be spatially discontinuous and totally unrelated to each other, a closer

inspection reveals that there is a definite parallel between the traffic of consumer goods, bodies, and vehicles in the streets and the commerce of literary and visual images.

This chapter is intended to be viewed like a series photographic snapshots which have been organized around three thematic markers – *geography, pictures, and text*. The architecture of this discussion is designed to communicate something about the fragmentary, contingent, provisional, and ambiguous nature of the Parisian life-world. The first group of images explores the epidemic of the building craze and changes to the built environment which take place around the middle of the century. The second part of the discussion concerns the hypertrophy of visual intoxications and kaleidoscopic gyrations reverberating through *la vie de Paris*. The final part of the chapter investigates the desperate desire to arrest, chronicle, and define modern life and make it intelligible once again.

1. Geography

Nouveau Paris

*This new Paris will never have a past and it will lose the past of the old Paris – all trace of it has already vanished for a man of thirty.*⁹⁸

The second and third quarters of the nineteenth-century make up one of the most decisive periods in the long historic development of Paris because it was precise at this point in time that the French capital was transformed from a walled-in medieval city into

a burgeoning commercial and industrial metropolis. In contrast to “old” Paris, with its

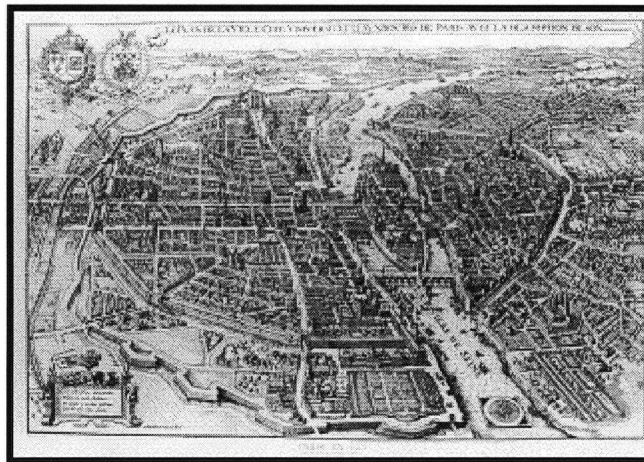


Figure 2.1: *Paris* (1615). Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

tangled web of narrow streets bordered on either side by a heterogeneous mix of overcrowded tenements, local taverns, workshops, Gothic cathedrals, and Baroque palaces, the *Nouveau Paris* which emerged in the previous century was dominated by rectilinear thoroughfares, ornate and uniform neo-classical facades, as well as controlled sight lines.

Although the “evolutionary” development of Paris has a long and complicated history dating back to Vitruvius, it is at this historic juncture that urban planning passes over the threshold separating the “holistic” approach that was instituted during the Second Empire from the self-styled “artisanal” approach of individual monarchs. David Pinkney explains that the novelty of the *haussmannized* city arises out of the fact that “[p]arts of cities, even entire new cities like Versailles, Karlsruhe, or Saint Petersburg,

⁹⁸ Louis Veuillot (1867) In Rupert Christiansen *Tales of the New Babylon* (1994) p. 114.

had been planned and built, but no one before had attempted to refashion an entire old city.” A gigantic monument to the triumphant spirit of European modernity, Paris was the first metropolitan environment to be perceived as a single, organic, and administrative system “whose showy splendor rises from the contrasting rubble of a town in ruins.”⁹⁹

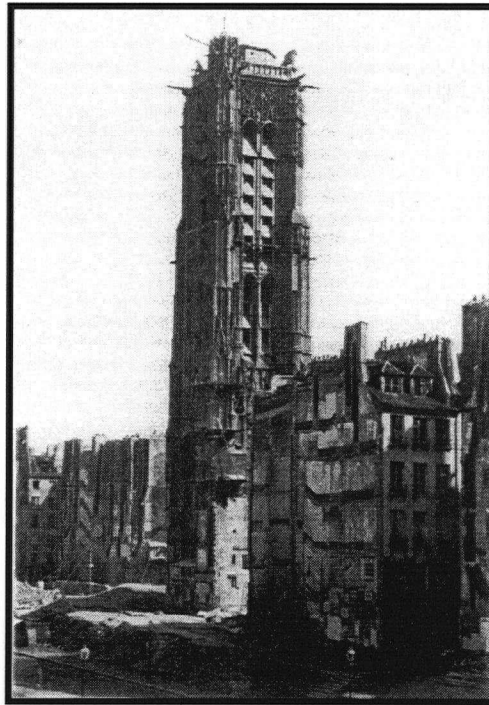


Figure 2.2: *Rue St. Jacques* (1853). Source: S. Rice (1998) p. 34.

Though it is tempting to telescope in on the most spectacular modifications made to the built environment, we should never allow ourselves to lose sight of the fact that the “formal concept of linking major architectural units by grand avenues, of superimposing a simplex of monumental proportions over a complex of smaller units, has baroque precedents.”¹⁰⁰ Parisian metropolitan space did not simply undergo a series of random alterations, it was rebuilt in accordance with enduring urban patterns, a new techno-

⁹⁹ Shelley Rice, *Parisian Views* (1997) Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, p. 34.

aesthetic vocabulary, and a modern economy of Imperial order. Thus, the transformative process which gripped the French capital really involved two interpenetrating and overlapping progressions – the systematic destruction of historic landscapes and the inheritance and extension of historic forms. The demolitions unleashed in the historic center of the city may have been brutal and the architectural accomplishments associated with the Second Empire were unprecedented both in terms of their enormous scale and their colossal size, but these facts can not be permitted to overshadow another truism – traces of “old” Paris remained deeply embedded in *Nouveau Paris* “like the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.”¹⁰¹

In addition to a handful of architectural treasures still standing on either side of the Emperor’s magnificent tree-lined boulevards, the past also left its unmistakable



Figure 2.3: *Knife Grinder*. Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

signature on Parisian street life; among the social types and urban characters – flower girls, water carriers, organ grinders, lamp-lighters, booksellers, and acrobats – which conducted their business on the busy sidewalks. It was an era when vagabonds, hustlers, prostitutes, lazzaroni, gamblers, ragpickers, tinkers, discharged soldiers, and other *roués*

¹⁰⁰ Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (1986) New Haven: p. 4.

with questionable means of subsistence inhabited the same neighbourhoods, frequented the same cafés, and even shared the same apartment buildings as *les commerçants* and displaced merchants who would later form the *Syndicat général* and the *League syndicale*. As Zola once put it, the streets of Paris constituted “a world of intermediaries.”¹⁰²

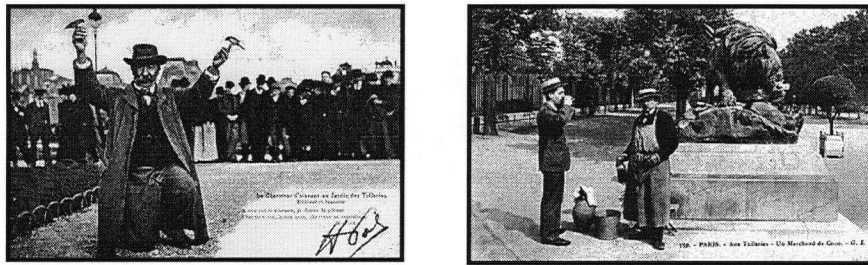


Figure 2.4: *Bird Charmer and Coc Merchant*. Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

The noises and the smells of the circulating crowd, the onrush of aesthetic pleasures and erotic images, the bohemian figures, the carnivalesque atmosphere of the exhibitions, theatres, and fairs, the latest fashions and civic monuments, communicating technologies and architectural achievements, all stood as referents to the *perpetuum mobile* of urban modernity. With the burgeoning numbers of denizens came a complex array of visual sensations and subjective experiences. Witnessing all of this Charles Baudelaire was compelled to write: “The pleasure of being in a crowd is a mysterious expression of delight in the multiplication of number. Number is all, and in all. Number is within the individual. Intoxication is a number.”¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 92.

¹⁰² Emile Zola, *Pot-Bouille* (1931) Paris: Fasquelle. p. 216.

¹⁰³ Charles Baudelaire, “Flowers of Evil,” Cited in Christopher Asendorf, *The Batteries of Life: On the History of Things and Their Perception in Modernity* (1993) Berkeley: University of California Press.p.64.

After London, the French capital was the largest metropolitan center in Europe. Between 1785 and 1800, the Parisian population swelled from 547,000 to 1,170,000.¹⁰⁴ Census figures indicate that between 1851 and 1881, the population of Paris nearly doubled again from 1,500,000 to just over 2,000,000.¹⁰⁵



Figure 2.5: *Morning Traffic*. Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

Equally impressive was the population surge that was experienced among urban and proto-urban centers in the rest of the country.¹⁰⁶ Between 1851 and 1881, rural population levels decreased by an average of 71,000 per month.¹⁰⁷ In roughly the same period, the population of France increased from 36,000,000 to 38,500,000. Much of the increased has been attributed to an upsurge in migration that nearly doubled the number

¹⁰⁴ David Jordan, *Transforming Paris* (1995) p. 95.

¹⁰⁵ Leonardo Benevolo, *A History of Modern Architecture, vol. 1* (1992) Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, p. 198.

¹⁰⁶ Paris was not the only city undergoing a profound demographic transformation. In the same period, the population of Lyon increased from 234,000 to 376,000, Marseille's population increased from 198,000 to

of foreign residents from 380,000 in 1851 to 740,000 in 1872.¹⁰⁸ It is estimated that by 1866 as much as 61% of the Parisian metropolitan population originated from outside the capital.¹⁰⁹ The migrants which flooded Paris came from all regions of France and brought with them a diverse range of linguistic dialects, local customs, political ideologies, artisanal and manufacturing skills, social identities, and personal experiences. As Cochin states, “common place of birth, neighbourliness, trade, daily encounters in the exercise of rights, and discharges of obligations, little by little transformed each *arrondissement* into a small civil and industrial province.”¹¹⁰

A variety of factors contributed to the rapid urbanization of French society. Foremost among them was the magnetic pull of the economic opportunities that the Emperor’s public works campaign had to offer. Unskilled workers found new employment in the great work yards – railway construction, land clearance, road building, as well as mines, quarries, and factories in the suburban districts – while skilled artisans such as cabinet makers, bronze workers, glass blowers, and stone masons benefitted from the Prince-President’s *embellissements*. In total, about 300,000 full-time labour positions were created.¹¹¹ Through the 1860s, roughly one-fifth of the labour force was employed in

360,000, and the population of Bordeaux increased from 131,000 to 221,000. Peter McPhee, *A Social History of France 1780-1880*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Charle, *Social History of France in the Nineteenth-Century* (1994) Oxford: Berg, p. 64.

¹⁰⁸ Brison, D. Gooch, *The Regime of Napoleon III* (1969) p. 62.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 198.

¹¹⁰ Cochin, p. 83-84.

¹¹¹ However, the number of those employed in labour positions was decreasing relative to those in commercial related occupations. In 1856, 11.80% of the workforce were employed in commercial occupations and 60% in industry related positions. By 1886, those figures had changed to 29.17% and 44.46% respectively. Louis Chevalier, *La formation de la population* (1965) p. 74-78.

the building industry.¹¹² In his determination to make Paris the symbolic, political, and the economic center of France, Louis Napoleon demolished and then rebuilt entire sections of the city. The demolitions started in the overcrowded *faubourgs* heavily concentrated in the heart of “old” Paris.

*Down there in the Halles quarter, they have cut Paris in four. Yes, the great crossroads of Paris, as they say. They're cleaning the area around the Louvre and the Hôtel de Ville. When the first network is finished, then the great dance will begin. The second network will pierce the city everywhere and connect the faubourgs to the first network. The city's truncated sections will suffer the pangs of death in plaster...One cut here, one cut there, cuts everywhere. Paris slashed by sabre-cuts, with its veins open...*¹¹³

The graphic depiction of Paris as a physically battered and blood-stained corpse was intended to convey something about the sense of foreboding and despair which swept over many Parisian writers, poets, and journalists who witnessed the brutal “incisions” that were made into the social fabric of historic Paris.

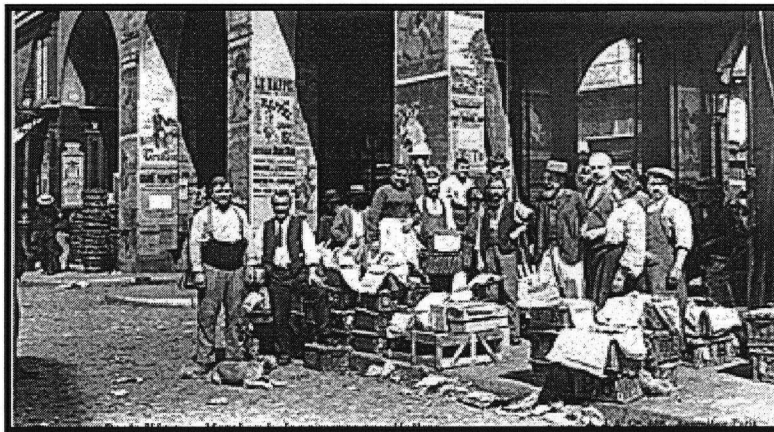


Figure 2.6: *Les Halles (Central Market)*. Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

¹¹² *ibid.* p. 99.

The following passage taken from the journal of the Goncourts is another example of just how morally upsetting these displacements were.

Our Paris, the Paris where we were born, the Paris of the way of life of 1830 to 1848, is passing away. Its passing is not material but moral. Social life is going through a great evolution, which is beginning. I see women, children, households, families in this cafe. The interior is passing away. Life turns back to become public. The club for those who on high, the cafe for those below, that is what society and the people are come to. All of this makes me feel, in this country so dear to my heart, like a traveler. I am a stranger to what is coming, to what is, as I am to these new boulevards, which no longer smack of the world of Balzac, which smack of London, some Babylon of the future.

Of course the optics through which the Emperor saw these developments was completely antithetical to those of Zola and the Goncourts. Louis Napoleon had very little, if any, nostalgic attachment to the concrete landscapes being raised to the ground – recognized only as a mosaic of images stored in the collective memory of those who inhabited them – and he harboured no reservations about the systematic destruction of medieval quarters and architectural treasures which enabled urban dwellers to feel firmly placed in the life-worlds preceding them. The Paris that resonated in his mind's eye was one of gas-lit streets and interiors, evening police patrols, bus shelters, street furniture, public promenades, manicured hedges, a new opera house, clean water, sewage, and ventilated tenements for the working classes, and a capital free of insurrection. The imprint that Louis Napoleon he left behind on the concrete surfaces of the urban habitat was not that of the artisan who possessed an intimate working knowledge of his craft, his tools, and

¹¹³ Emile Zola, *La Cureé*, (1969) p. 123.

the lives of those he came into contact with. His was the stamp of a sovereign ruler, the signature of bourgeois capitalist, and the mark of a faceless bureaucrat.

Belle Epoque or Malaise du Temps?

As the French capital, it was important for civic authorities that Paris be endowed with an unrivalled physical splendor. Architect Louis Combes once stated that the symbolism of architecture gives a “magnificence to our cities which astonishes the enlightened traveler, which elevates his soul, and, from his first view of the city, which teaches him about the genius and the grandeur of the people he is visiting.”¹¹⁴ As urban “texts,” architectural structures embody “the major points of a nation’s history, of its civilization, its tastes, its mores, its character, its sensibility, its ideas, and even opinions.”¹¹⁵ The nineteenth-century represented a historic threshold when the marvels of science, the miracles of engineering technology, the creative possibilities of art were combined in numerous ways to create a dream world of exotic tastes and pleasures.

*The café was dazzling. Even the gas burned with all the
ador of a debut and lighted with all its might the
blinding whiteness of the walls, the expanse of mirrors,
the cold cornices and moldings, fat-cheeked pages
dragged along by hounds on leash, laughing ladies with
falcons on their wrists, nymphs and goddesses bearing
their heads on piles of fruit, pates, and game, Hebes and
Ganymedes holding out little amphoras of syrups or
parti-colored ices: all history and all mythology
pandering to gluttony.*¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Richard Etlin, *Symbolic Space: French Enlightenment Architecture and its Legacy* (1994) Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 2.

¹¹⁵ Nicolas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth Century France* (1990). p. 19.

¹¹⁶ Charles Baudelaire, “Eyes of the Poor” (1864) p. 33.

Paris was famous not only for its visual splendor but also for the miserable social conditions of the working poor. The contradictory image of extreme poverty existing along side of magnificent displays of wealth was so striking that it became a common practice to speak of two antithetical cities instead of a socially homogeneous and integrated urban habitat. The danger that this presented was not lost on Michel Chevalier.

There was a chasm between the bourgeois on the one side and...the worker on the other. The bourgeois feels nothing in common between himself and the proletarian, commonly regarded as a rented machine to be used and paid for only for the length of time that one needs it. Similarly, for a great number of proletarians, the bourgeois is an enemy whose superiority they accept for the sole reason that he is a stronger...Today there are two warring natures: the bourgeois nature and the proletarian nature.¹¹⁷

Although the language that Louis Lazare used to describe the social segregation of Paris had none of the apocalyptic undertones of Chevalier's, the contrasts were just as prevalent.

We have sewn rags onto the purple robe of the queen; we have built within Paris two cities, quite different and hostile: the city of luxury, surrounded, besieged by the city of misery...You have to put temptation and covetousness side by side.¹¹⁸

Historically, architects and urban planners have did their best to ameliorate the blight and the filth from metropolitan vistas and to replace them with salubrious and splendid sight lines. But in the decades before the Second Empire, urban planning consisted of little more than *les embellissements de certains quartiers*. Consequently, population densities

¹¹⁷ Michel Chevalier, In Brison D. Gooch, *The Regime of Napoleon III* (1969) p. 118.

reached levels that were completely unmanageable. By mid-century, more than a third of the city's inhabitants were squeezed into the Right Bank, an area only twice the size of New York's Central Park.¹¹⁹ Without any comprehensive planning regulations that could prevent the overcrowding of tenement buildings, all available space was filled in. In the absence of streets sufficient to handle the enormous volumes of pedestrian and commercial traffic, movement in and around the city slowed to a minimum. Access to Les Halles (the central market) was almost impossible while public services such as hospitals, police, sewers, education, commerce, and transportation were virtually inoperative. This made it impossible to adequately respond to the 1832 cholera epidemic which claimed 20,000 lives.¹²⁰ The epidemic haunted Paris again from 1847-49 as living conditions continued to decline. Another 19,000 lives were lost in the final year alone.¹²¹

One did not need the trained eye of an urban planner or hygienist to see that there was a definite geography to the spread of the epidemic. For the most part, affluent districts such as the Chausée d'Antin, the Bourse, and the Tuileries escaped the devastating effects of the disease while the city's impoverished population suffered tremendously.¹²² The misery created by the spread of cholera and other infectious diseases intensified what were already intolerable conditions. Infant mortality, for instance, was on the increase. In 1859, the number of infant deaths rose from 144 per thousand in 1845 to

¹¹⁸ Louis Lazare, Cited in T.J. Clark ed. *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (1984) New Jersey: Princeton University Press. P. 29.

¹¹⁹ David Jordan, *Transforming Paris* (1995) p. 96.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 96.

¹²¹ Heath Massey Schenker, "Parks and Politics During the Second Empire," *Landscape Journal* (1995) Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 203.

a record high of 215. In 1871, that figure grew again to 228 deaths per thousand live births. Still births which stood at 33,000 per year at the end of the July Monarchy, escalated to 48,000 by the end of the Second Empire.¹²³ These sorrowful conditions are immortalized in the words of Alfred de Musset:

*What sadness in these tortuous streets where everyone walks painfully...where thousands of anonymous persons rub elbows, this sewer where only bodies are a part of society (souls remain isolated), and where there are only prostitutes who hold out their hands as you pass! Corrupt yourself, corrupt yourself! Stop suffering! This is what cries out to men, what is written on their walls with coal, on the pavement with mud, on bloodied faces.*¹²⁴

Although public officials knew that the situation called for serious reforms, a lack of initiative and long term planning, insufficient capital resources, and working-class resistance ensured that they were never formally implemented. Even the appointment of the comte de Rambuteau to the Seine prefecture in 1833 – a man possessing powerful aspirations to restore the city's social, economic, and aesthetic balance – had only a marginal impact on the spatial ordering of Paris. It is difficult to know for sure what interfered with Rambuteau's objectives more, a limited supply of financial reserves (much was spent to cover the cost of war and revolution), the defensive fortifications which encircled the city, or a planning philosophy which remained too dependent on the Plan des artistes of 1793.¹²⁵ Whatever the reasons, the initiatives taken by Rambuteau, as well as the architectural accomplishments of even the most powerful monarchs preceding

¹²² Francois Delaporte, *Disease and Civilization: The Cholera in Paris, 1832* (1986) Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press. p. 58.

¹²³ Brison D. Gooch, *The Regime of Napoleon III* (1969) Chicago: Rand McNally, p. 60.

¹²⁴ Alfred de Musset, *La Confession d'un enfant du siecle*, pp. 58-59.

him, remain overshadowed by the mammoth urban redevelopment campaign instituted by Napoleon III and his chief engineer Eugène-Georges Haussmann.

New Babylon

*What are we losing, o ye gods, if not everything? It is no longer Athens but Babylon! No longer a city but a station! It is no longer the capital of France but of all Europe, a marvel unequalled, a universe, I grant you. But after all it is not Paris because there are no Parisians here.*¹²⁵

The monetary investments that Louis Napoleon commissioned at the start of the Second Empire were unprecedented in Europe's history. By devoting incredibly large sums of state capital to key economic sectors, the Emperor revolutionized traditional business practices, multiplied both the incentives and opportunities for wealth accumulation, and radicalized the value placed on money and other liquid assets. Uninterrupted economic prosperity was, in his estimation, the most appropriate means of ensuring social progress. Full employment, affordable food prices, and mass consumption were the principle features of his Saint-Simonian prescription for national unification and political stability. We get a glimpse of Louis Napoleon's economic policy in the following excerpt from a letter written to the Minister of State.

To stimulate industrial production, [industry] must be granted special, low-interest capital loans that will enable it to upgrade its plant. One of the greatest services to be rendered to the country is to facilitate the transport of vital raw materials for agriculture and

¹²⁵ One of the major limitations of the plan was that it failed to include the railway into its overall schema. As well, no stipulations were made to widen roads and to improve circulation in the city.

¹²⁶ V. Sardou, *Maison Neuve* (Vaudville, 4-12; 1866) Act I, Scene XII. Quoted in Leonardo Benevelo, *A History of Modern Architecture* (1992) vol. 1. MIT Press.p. 135.

*industry. In order to achieve this, the Minister of Public Works shall expedite as promptly as possible the construction of communication routes such as canals, roads, and railways whose chief purpose will be to bring coal and fertilizers to places where they are needed for production*¹²⁷

The Emperor's supporters were most confident that his modernization strategy could restore the reputation and grandeur that the country enjoyed during the reign of Louis IX and bolster its standing as a major competitor in the international capitalist economy. Initially, it seemed likely that both objectives would be realized.

The rate at which France modernized its industries was astonishing. Whether it was the cotton mills in Rouen or Alsace, silk-weavers in Lyons, or one of the Cail shipyards in Paris, factories across the country were increasing their productivity and diversifying their production runs. Big banks like the *Crédit Mobilier* and *Société Generale* were busy establishing new branches in metropolitan centers and factory towns, expanding their investments in joint-stock companies, property speculation, and the transportation sector.¹²⁸ Large businesses, driven by the need to become more competitive both domestically and internationally, developed a whole new set of strategies – mergers, takeovers, and combines – to consolidate their economic power. Even the smaller workshops which conducted most of their business through the local bourgeois merchants and had little interaction outside the artisan enclave, were actively experimenting with more technical production devises like mechanical looms, carding machines and self-

¹²⁷ Brison D. Gooch, *The Reign of Napoleon III* (1969) p. 62.

acting jennies. All these factors combined to create a huge upswing in economic and speculative activity. The share of capital formation in national income rose from 17.5% to 20.5%, an achievement which very few regimes were able to duplicate. For this reason, historians and urban geographers have become accustomed to associating the Second Empire with the onset of French industrialization.

*The bourgeois suddenly ceased to be afraid of large figures, long-term plans and the financial obligations these entailed. Stirred by the joy of creating no less than by the desire for gain, consumed by an intense speculative fever, it plunged into business with the near certainty, after the troubled years, of being able to count on tomorrow, and even the day after tomorrow. The entrepreneurial spirit of capitalism rushed headlong into the field of action.*¹²⁹

The significance of the railway in all of this can not be overstated. Louis Napoleon's decision to make railway construction a priority in his designs for French modernization, reconfigured the economic geography of the entire country and elevated the capital's symbolic, political, and cultural supremacy in the nation state. If Napoleon III's colossal public works initiative was the gravitational force which pulled migrant workers and their families into Paris and the *banlieux*, then the railway lines were the transmitters in that magnetic induction. In the booms of 1853-6 and 1860-64, the city filled with the massive influx of labour-seeking immigrants as the tentacles of the metropolitan economy were stretching out into the neighbouring suburbs and rural periphery.¹³⁰ In less than a decade,

¹²⁸ The capital investments administered by the Société Générale increased from 100 million francs in 1851 to 2.5 milliards in 1870 and the total sums managed by the Crédit Mobilier rose to 1.5 milliards in the same period. Christopher Charle, *Social History of France in the Nineteenth Century* (1994) Oxford: Berg, p. 79.

¹²⁹ Brison, D. Gooch, *The Reign of Napoleon III*, (1969) p. 70-71.

¹³⁰ Rising levels of coal, iron, and steel production, capital investments from British financiers, and the free trade agreements of the 1860s were all directly connected to the railway expansion. Peter McPhee, *A Social History of France*, (1992) p. 198.

Paris was connected to all the major towns and villages by a cast-iron network covering more than 16,000 kilometers (only 3,248 kilometers of tracks were in use before the Second Empire). Once in operation, the lines gave the Emperor unimpeded access to all points within the French borders. Local food shortages vanished, political uprisings were easily suppressed, and geographically isolated regions were now surveyed and categorized – reconfigured as an assortment of place-names on the two-dimensional plane of a cartographic map.

The ingenious plan to connect the boulevards and the railway lines in a single arterial network made it possible to coordinate and to supervise the movement of an increasingly mobile urban and extra-urban mass. In 1869, the Gare Saint-Lazare transported 62% of all railway traffic in and out of Paris. It is no wonder that one observer described the railway station as “a funnel sucking up travelers from France’s entire North-west and then discharging them into *Au Printemps* department store.”¹³¹ Parisians now traveled three times more than in the past and the volume of merchandise traffic doubled that of industrial goods.¹³² Tourists, rural farmers, migrant workers, and provincial nobles were expertly channeled into Paris along predetermined routes and to the disciplinary rhythms of industrial time-tables. On the subject of the technical miracles that were now materializing before him, the prefect Haussmann boasted, the “plan of public works accorded the new railway termini the place they deserved in Paris’ new

¹³¹ *Printania*, p. 14. Cited in Peter McPhee *A Social History of France* (1992) p. 121.

¹³² Brison D. Gooch, *The Reign of Napoleon III* (1969) p. 87.

doors, as entrance-ways for France, indeed for the entire world into the capital city.”¹³³ Instead of the medieval ramparts, Gothic cathedrals, and baroque palaces, the symbol of modern Paris was now the locomotive. An icon to the Promethean conquest of nature, time and geography, the railway was instrumental in the establishment of redefined territorial, economic, social, and experiential limits. As the doors to Paris opened and its streets, shops, factories, and tenements bursting with activity, a labyrinth of elaborate spectacles, urban dramas, vernacular discourses, and subjective experiences was beginning to form within its borders.

Suburban Industrialization

Quite different were the alterations being made to the built environment just outside the commercial and residential core of Paris. Whereas the capital investments made inside the capital were risky and speculative in nature, in the neighbouring suburbs, investment was being funneled into large-scale industrial production. Although moderate relative to the levels reached during the Second Empire, industrial production in the first half of the nineteenth-century reached a remarkable degree of specialization and spatial concentration. The geographical expansion and industrialization of the metropolitan arena is depicted in a 1853 Fontainebleau train guide:

Certainly the outskirts of Paris are charming on all sides, but generally you cannot reach their charms all at once: usually it is necessary to cross a tedious plain scattered with factories, without shade, without greenery, where the flowery hedgerows are replaced by

¹³³ Prefecture du département de la Seine, *Commission d'extension de Paris, Aperçu historique*, vol. 1, p. 114. Quoted in Peter McPhee *A Social History of France* (1992) p. 134.

*plaster walls of a pinky-grey colour and tainted by all kinds of unhealthy effluvia and noxious smells.*¹³⁴

With the advent of large-scale industrial forms of production in suburban regions like Irvy, Choisy, and Vitry, the traditional manufacturing base of the *petits bourgeois* (shopkeepers and artisans) and the domestic structure of the household economy diminished in number and in kind. In those areas where the forces of mechanization were particularly intense, the socio-spatial changeover was more pronounced. For instance, in Limoges the average number of employees per factory expanded from twenty-seven to one hundred and fourteen.¹³⁵

The most profound developments occurred in places where industrial forms of production had been securely entrenched. Mulhouse and Le Creusot are of the most famous examples of suburban industrialization. Inspired by a “paternalistic liberalism” and a Saint-Simonian commitment to social experimentation, the industrial towns of Mulhouse and Le Creusot were laboratories for modern urbanism and planning. The factory at Le Creusot was the larger of the two – 9,500 workers operated 160 coke ovens, dozens of forges and production workshops which covered an area of 125 hectares – but both stood as huge monuments to a planning philosophy where everything from the layout of the streets, the aesthetics of architectural structures, the configuration of the workers’ housing, and even the building materials were governed by the functionalist ideology of efficiency, standardization, and profitability. However, despite the expanding scale of order and control that was being imposed on these industrial settlements, worker

¹³⁴ Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature* (1990) p. 91.

resistance was not extinguished. In fact, as the percentage of working class men and women being forced into the industrial apparatus of rigid work schedules and factory discipline multiplied, so too, did the intensity of worker resistance. At the same time workers' bodies were being synchronized to modern production systems, their minds were opening up to the ideals of a revolutionary praxis.¹³⁶ In 1869, worker hostility exploded in a series of strikes that ended only after the Minister of the Interior had sent in 3,000 troops. In the short term, they proved that "social technology aimed at forcing discipline and morality on workers was, by itself, inadequate to the task of ensuring social peace."¹³⁷ In the long term, the strikes ensured that the "social question" remained in the forefront of municipal and national politics.

Cultural Capital

*A fragment of the world, with everything converging upon it and circulating through it the way traffic circulated around the Etoile, Paris in the nineteenth century was more a passage than a place.*¹³⁸

In the period before the Second Empire, the most significant changes to the urban core were ones initiated *by* and *for* private interests. The first wave of private investments arrived in the 1820s. A second surge of capital investments followed in the 1830s and 1840s. Concentrated in five zones to the north, northwest, and south of the old center and restricted to a few moderately sized apartments, streets, theatres, restaurants, cafes, luxury

¹³⁵ Peter McPhee, *A Social History of France* (1992) p.210.

¹³⁶ According to Peter McPhee, the working class consciousness was firmly entrenched even before the mass migrations to Paris. Some of the most intense struggles were waged in the rural regions.

¹³⁷ Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (1989) Chicago: MIT Press, p. 103.

¹³⁸ Shelly Rice, *Parisian Views* (1997) Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, p. 61.

boutiques, and some small urban *hôtels*, the investments were speculative and short-lived. Caught in between the established traditions of the aristocracy and the uncultivated tastes of the working class, the *haute bourgeoisie* quickly adopted an aesthetic regime which legitimated their hegemonic status.

Walter Benjamin maintains that in the bourgeois world of international capitalism, images from the past were constantly being called up and granted a “new” life in the form of the commodity fetish. By “quoting” history in this manner, bourgeois culture actively *re-fashioned* it and made the past its own. In its modified form, history is degraded and commodified, distorted, and mythologized.

*The illusion of novelty is reflected, like one mirror in another, in the illusion of perpetual sameness. The product of this reflection is the phantasmagoria of “cultural history,” in which the bourgeoisie savors its false consciousness to the last.*¹³⁹

In the image-sphere of the commodity economy, even material landscapes are reduced to mere “texts” inscribed by the signature of authoritarian power. Under Napoleon III, the “institutions of the secular and clerical dominance of the bourgeoisie were to find their apotheosis in a framework of streets.”¹⁴⁰ Buttressed by the force of military power and validated by the wealth-generating capacity of the economy, the aura of bourgeois amusement distracts public attention away from the growing impoverishment of the city and the social tensions manufactured in the machine of industrial capitalism. However, the real estate market collapsed before the more grandiose projects had an opportunity to

¹³⁹ *ibid.* p. 158.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 159.

get off the ground. In some quarters rents decreased by half while vacancy rates were as high one-sixth,¹⁴¹ a solid indication of the volatile market forces which had gripped Paris.

The materialist geographer David Harvey contends that the mid-century depression in Parisian real estate values is a reflection of the contradictory nature of capitalism – a condition which Marx defined as the “crisis of accumulation.” According to the materialist perspective, the survival of the capitalist economy is entirely dependent on its ability to extract profits from the systematic exploitation of land, labour, and raw materials. This engenders an incredibly competitive environment in which the interests of individual capitalists come into conflict with those of their competitors and those of collective society. Driven by the “law of accumulation,” capitalists will direct their money into ventures which provide the greatest return on their initial investment. In Paris industrial activity was for the most part limited to small-scale operations and artisanal enterprises so many investors turned to property speculation. Property was a secure form of investment because housing provision had not kept pace with the exploding population increase. Before the collapse of the market, investors could expect a return of about seven percent.¹⁴² But there was a limit to what natural market conditions were able to sustain. As soon as the supply of residential and commercial space began to surpass consumer demand, property market collapsed and so did investor confidence.

¹⁴¹ David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (1985) Oxford: Blackwell. p. 83.

¹⁴² *ibid.* p. 83.

The cyclical rhythms of “accumulation” and “crisis” are what the Prince-President tried to ameliorate with his massive civic improvement scheme. He blamed much of the erratic market forces at play in Parisian real estate values on the privatism and conservatism of property speculators. To minimize the volatility of capital investments in the built environment, Louis Napoleon guaranteed the interest on securities sold by developers and transportation corporations (ie. Compagnie Generale Transatlantique) and he authorized the use of “productive expenditures” or debt financing, to pay for some of the building projects. In most instances, development companies were contracted by the Seine prefect to carry out the large-scale demolition of urban *quartiers* but when private developers could not be enticed to accept responsibility for the reconstruction projects, the state simply appropriated territories deemed necessary for the Emperor’s *embellissements*.¹⁴³

Like the previous round of speculative investments, the building boom of the Second Empire produced spectacular results. Everyday dilapidated tenements in the slum districts were transformed into architectural masterpieces, graveyards and prisons were relocated to the urban periphery and replaced by majestic monuments to commerce, civility, and progress. Between 1852 and 1870, the value of property sales skyrocketed from 2.5 billion to 6 billion francs.¹⁴⁴ Apartment rents doubled in the same period.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Quite often private developers could not afford to undertake the building contracts. Because the state paid for the redevelopment project only after its completion, the developer was forced to absorb all the costs of the construction. In effect, private interests were floating the government short-term loans. This severely limited the number of contractors able to carry out the renewal projects.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 93.

¹⁴⁵ Cited in TJ Clarke, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (1984) New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 45.

Consequently, a sizable portion of commercial and retail stores were faced with bankruptcy while others were simply swallowed up by larger, more competitive, enterprises. Many of the businesses not forced into retirement survived because the proprietors relocating them from the “traditional” markets of the Left Bank to the new commercial district near the avenue de l’Opera. “Old” Paris was barely recognizable.

*A craze for building reigns like an epidemic: the tide of houses rises as we look, overflowing the barrières, invading the banlieue and making its first assault on the outworks of the city’s fortifications. Can we stop this fever, this mania for piling stone on stone?*¹⁴⁶

In the physiognomy of the new consumer industry, “business and pleasure, speculation and consumption went hand in hand. There was no rigid distinction between the economic domain of work and the cultural domain of leisure.”¹⁴⁷ Before too long, the epidemic had spread to the Bourse (stock market), gambling halls, and to overseas markets.

*The speculative fever became almost hysterical; people chased after shares or the promise of shares; people queued at the doors of banks and brokers of all kinds...From workers and servants to grands seigneurs one thought dominated all, to get hold of shares. It was madness, delirium. The ladies were particularly noticeable for their bold schemes and intrigues. In shops, in salons, in the foyer of the theatre, at the ball, everywhere and at all times, it was the only thing talked about.*¹⁴⁸

Even among the less affluent bourgeois, money continued to be a primary occupation. They had worked long and hard for their comfortable lifestyle and were averse to

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁷ Nicolas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature*. (1990) p. 23.

¹⁴⁸ Matt Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (1996) London: Oxford, p. 32.

anything – war, economic stagnation, political corruption, and insurgency – which threatened to undermine their social standing.

The profits of property speculation, together with the modern pastime of spectacular consumption, were not only the primary forces in the gentrification of Paris, they were the impetus behind the formation of new structures of experience and cognition. Bourgeois audiences did not attend public events or move through metropolitan space without developing an ability to decode culturally specific meanings in the decorative details of urban surfaces and an aptitude for recognizing particular name brands, fashion styles, and physical gestures as distinctive marks of social class. Parisians did not simply gaze *at* metropolitan sites in a haphazard and undisciplined fashion, they learned to view themselves, their city, and the world *from* a privileged social space – as a member of a class-specific social constituency. Moreover, to become an active participant in the bourgeois realm of looking, observing, and perceiving, one had to willingly subject oneself to the metropolitan gaze.

*Glass and iron, even though up-to-date and impressive did not alone suffice to create a shopping environment. Fantasy and bright lights, color and display created the charged atmosphere that in turn generated high turnover. The department store transformed itself into a gigantic theatre; the double, curving staircases in the main gallery of Au Bon Marché recalled the Grand Stairway at the new Opera. Customers who paraded up and down were at once actors and spectators in a fabulous drama.*¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Peter McPhee, *A Social History of France 1780-1880* (1992) London: Routledge. p. 132.

Of course, the actors in this public performance were not equal participants. These roles were scripted by gender as much as they were by social class. I doubt very much that a wife of a provincial notary would have engrossed herself in these *tableau vivants* to the same degree as the “fashionable” women “on display” in one the luxury boutiques or a *lorrette* (prostitute) in one of the *maisons de tolérances*. It is also unlikely that an American tourist could have anticipated any of Charles Baudelaire’s critical insights or would have possessed the requisite cultural knowledge to “read” the space of the auction houses, art galleries, or salons with the same precision as one of the Impressionists. On the other hand, members of the emergent social aristocracy probably did see Paris as a series of rotating set designs.

2. Pictures

*What you saw was relative to your position in time and space. It was no longer possible to imagine everything converging on the human eye as the vanishing point of infinity.*¹⁵⁰

For many centuries, western societies have valued vision as a privileged form of knowing. By the nineteenth-century, the desire to give representational form to all facets of metropolitan life derived from the bourgeoisie *fascination* and *fear* of the urban crowd. The impetus to study the phenomenon of urban life was also driven by the development optical devices such as the Faraday wheel, the phenakistiscope, the zootrope, the

¹⁵⁰ Peter Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (1972) London: Penguin Books, p. 18.

diorama, the panorama, the kaleidoscope, and photography.¹⁵¹ In addition to the growing taste for visual modes of consumption, the pervasive preoccupation with optic technologies reflected the heightened optimism of scientific rationalism. When combined with the empiricism of science, the fetish for the visual display of urban phenomenon helped to initiate a unique scopic regime. As historian Martin Jay states:

*The new fascination with modes of seeing and the enigmas of visual experience evident in a wide variety of fields may well betoken a paradigm shift in the cultural imaginary of our age.*¹⁵²

Of all the visual technologies conceived in the last century, photography (and cinema) is perhaps the best example of the paradigm shift mentioned by Jay. Invented in 1839, the camera bridged scientific objectivity and aesthetic pleasure. Susan Sontag explains argues that photographic “seeing meant an aptitude for discovering beauty in what everybody sees but neglects as too ordinary. Photographers were supposed to do more than see the world as it is, including its already acclaimed marvels; they were to create interest, by new visual decisions.”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ For a description and discussion of each see Jonathan Crary, “Techniques of the Observer,” *October* 45 (1987).

¹⁵² Martin Jay, *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* (1996) London: Routledge, p. 3.

¹⁵³ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (1973) New York: Pantheon, p. 89.

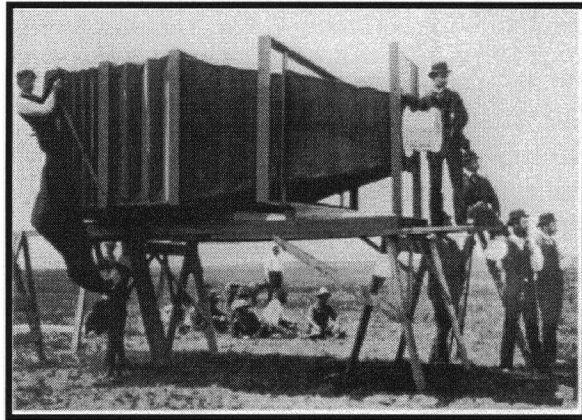


Figure 2.7: *Monumental Vistas*. Source: B. Colomina (1996) p. 47.

The camera apotheosized everyday life while making it immediately knowable and transparent. Because of the semblance of “neutrality” and “objectivity” represented in the photographic image, many perceived the camera to be the perfect tool to “capture” the minute details of everyday life. Within three decades of its inception, “photography was being used for police filing, war reporting, military reconnaissance, pornography, encyclopedic documentation, family albums, postcards, anthropological records, sentimental moralizing, inquisitive probing, aesthetic effects, news reporting and formal portraiture.”¹⁵⁴

Like Haussmann, these image-makers knew that they were breaking new “ground” in the mental topography of Parisian residents. By exploiting the technical possibilities of the camera and the circulatory network of consumer capitalism, photographers such as Daguerre, Nadar, Bayard, Le Secq, and Le Gray converted the three-dimensional space of urban life into two-dimensional visual images. The fact that

¹⁵⁴ Peter Berger, *On Looking* (1980) New York: Pantheon. p. 48.

the proliferation of photographic images (and other mechanically reproduced images such as wall posters, billboards, postcards, street signs, sandwich-boards) coincides with Napoleon III's strategic beautification strategy is not coincidental. The Parisian metropolitan culture of the 1850s and 1860s struggled to (re)define itself and its world not only on the basis of a rationally ordered and embellished urban landscape but also through the systematic distribution of mechanically reproduced images. According to Shelly Rice, the "modern urban environment and the modern image-form came of age hand-in-hand."¹⁵⁵

Like the brick, mortar, steel, and glass used in the physical reconstruction of the French capital, representational images were the raw "materials" from which modern conceptions of Paris were mentally constituted. "Early French photography" argues Rice, "is a universe of bits and pieces; strung together, all of these various images shimmering as they do with layers of time and light create a constantly shifting collage whose interrelationships form a network as complicated as Haussmann's arteries of streets."¹⁵⁶ At once historical documents which preserve traces of the past in the forever-changing present, photographic images also assert themselves as *pre*-visions of the future. In Le Secq's *Album Berger* (1853) for instance, Paris appears to be caught in the midst of an incredible time warp. With each photograph, the viewer engages with the systematic destruction of a by-gone era and the rapid emergence of a distinctly modern urban environment.

¹⁵⁵ Shelly Rice, *Parisian Views* (1997) Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press. p. 37.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.* p. 17.

As the desire to document, chronicle, and visually map the physiognomy of the modern experience intensified, the voyeuristic and penetrating gaze of photography was also replicated in other representational genres. For instance, in the written works of Balzac, Zola, Baudelaire, and Flaubert, the streets of Paris became metaphorically transformed into a public stage upon which life's drama was enacted. The Impressionists were also fascinated by the "experience of great cities" and the aesthetic possibilities discovered in



Figure 2.8: *Organ Grinder*. Source: S. Rice (1998) p. 45.

the urban crowd. It was around this time that Renoir, Monet, and Pissaro were beginning to experiment with multi-frame perspectives and the rhythmic variation of dark and light colors. According to Anthony Sutcliffe, there was much more to their work than merely

the formation of a new aesthetic expression. He maintains that the Impressionists were striving to "achieve a scientific, objective observation of society and the environment."¹⁵⁷

3. Text

*If the social machine manufactures representations, it also manufactures itself from representations - the latter operative at once as means, matter, and condition of society.*¹⁵⁸

*The image of a city has to be found in the interplay between physical appearance and mental construct.*¹⁵⁹

The thirst for referential accuracy was also evident in panoramic literature. A virtual encyclopedia of contemporary ideas, events, and unusual phenomenon, panoramic texts such as *Le Diable à Paris, Paris et les Parisiens* (1845-1846) and *Le Prisme, encyclopedie morale du XIXe siècle* (1841-1850) sutured the panoramic perspective of anthropology with journalistic reporting. The introduction to *Paris, ou le livre des cent-et-uns* (1831) reads:

*The plan of this book is very simple. Modern Paris will parade by; we will show it as it is, undecided, capricious, angry, impatient, poor, bored, still thirsting for art and emotions but moved only with difficulty, often absurd, sometimes sublime.*¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Anthony Sutcliffe, "The Impressionists and Haussmann's Paris," *French Cultural Studies* (1995) vol. 6, p. 97.

¹⁵⁸ Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," in Teresa de Laurentis, *The Cinematic Apparatus* (1985) New York: St. Martin's Press. p. 121.

¹⁵⁹ Richard Etlin, *Symbolic Space: French Enlightenment Architecture and its Legacy* (1994) Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ *Paris, ou le livre des cent-et-un* (1831) Paris: Ladvocat. vol. 1, p. vi. Quoted in Margaret Cohen, "Panoramic Literature and the Invention of Everyday Genres," in Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz ed. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (1995) Los Angeles: University of California Press. p. 228-229.

The texture of everyday life amassed greater density as the motive to display the diversity of social life intensified. Not only did panoramic literature offer a means by which the details of daily life could be classified and organized, it remained faithful to the photographic principles of “transparency” and “objectivity.” But rather than a more unobstructed view of the physical world and a more complete understanding of the everyday sphere, the inspiration to record the complexity of daily life resulted in an certain degree of epistemological certainty and cultural unease. For example, the general mood reflected in Jules Janin’s *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1853) is not one of confidence and intellectual “mastery” but of resignation and despair.

*The more French society found itself divided, the more the study of moeurs became difficult. This great republic was cut up in so many small republics, each one of which has its laws, its customs [usages], its jargons, its heroes, its political opinions in the absence of religious beliefs, its ambitions, its short-comings and its loves...Now, how could the same moralist, the same writer of moeurs penetrate in all these far-away regions when he knows neither the roads, nor the language, nor the customs? How could the same man understand all these strange dialects, all these languages that are so diverse?*¹⁶¹

Reflected in this comment is that modern forms of communication do not function from a fixed position “outside” the material and social spaces which are to be represented. Instead of an “extra-linguistic” existence, representational forms inhabit a position “inside” the world they represent. Complicating matters was the fact that metropolitan life was beginning to be filtered through a multiplicity of representational forms and discourses. David Harvey argues that it was in 1848 when “the idea that there was only

one mode of representation began to break down.”¹⁶² Given that one’s image of Paris often depended on the referential parameters (ideology, discourse, media) that one adopted, the combined effect of the fragmentation and proliferation of representational genres was nothing less than profound. According to Christopher Pendergast the desire of the individual to “establish himself [sic] as a center of authority within a discursive hierarchy is seriously compromised by a process of fluctuation in which the meanings and values of words appear to change from one context to another.”¹⁶³ T.J. Clark offers a different explanation. He states that “we might say of these writers that they want the city to have a shape – a logic and a uniformity – and therefore construct one form the signs they have, however sparse and unsystematic. They see or sense a process and want it finished, for then the terms in which one might oppose it will at least be clear.”¹⁶⁴ It is the second perspective that I would like to investigate. But instead of the artistic community, I will examine the logic and uniformity that conservative social reformers imposed on the signs and images circulating in Paris.

Conservative Reformers and the Social Question

While Impressionist artists and writers like Janin were intrigued by the contradictions and distortions manufactured in the streets, cafes, and markets of Paris, this was not the case among the pioneers of sociology; Vicomte Louis de Bonald (1754-1840), Comte Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), and Auguste Comte (1798-1857).

¹⁶¹ Janin, *Les Francais peints par eux-memes*, Quoted in Margaret Cohen, “Panoramic Literature and the Invention of Everyday Genres,” p. 233.

¹⁶² David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) Cambridge: Blackwell. p. 27.

Among these urban explorers and the generation of positivist thinkers they would inspire, there was nothing extraordinary or remarkable about the *conditions de vie* observable in the streets and *faubourgs* of Paris. Conservative reformers the phenomenon of the urban crowd comprised of ragpickers, prostitutes, cardsharks, musicians, and vagrants, constituted a moral and social threat to the established political order. Constituting what Anne McClintock describes as an “anachronistic space,”¹⁶⁵ the working-class habitat signified the breakdown of laissez-faire capitalism, the vacuity of liberal-individual philosophy, and a temporal regression within European modernity. In their attempts to explain the exponential growth of working-class hovels and social tensions, conservative reformers fell back on a Social Darwinian interpretation. Rather than the Impressionistic vocabulary of painting and writing, conservative reformers and planners communicated in the abstracted language of probability curves and statistical regularities. In a rather exhaustive examination of birth and death certificates, marriage statistics, and criminal records, Adolphe Quetelet discovered that behind the image of social heterogeneity was an entirely different reality; one in which the fabric of social life had clearly identifiable patterns which were pieced together with mathematical precision. “The average man, instead of representing the type of the beautiful and the good in relation to his own period, would represent the type of the beautiful and the good absolutely in the most general sense.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Christopher Predergast, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert* (1986) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 108.

¹⁶⁴ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (1984). p. 33.

¹⁶⁵ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (1996) London: Routledge. p. 40.

¹⁶⁶ Adolphe Quetelet, *Recherches sur le penchant au crime* (1833) Brussels: Hayez. vol. 2, p. 274. Quoted in Paul Rabinow, *French Modern*, p. 65.

While coded in the language of scientific “objectivity” and “universal reason,” the positivist logic of conservative reformist discourse functioned as a tool for the bourgeois control of the public sphere.



Figure 2.9: *Slaughter House*. Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

Following the cholera epidemic of 1832, moral and medical considerations defined the parameters of the “social question.” Saint-Simonian Victor Considerant remarked that the city was “a great manufactory of putrifaction in which poverty, plague, and disease labor in concert, and air and sunlight barley enter. Paris is a foul hole where plants wilt and perish and four out of seven children die within a year.”¹⁶⁷ Paris may have been the commercial center of France, but to the middle-class the *faubourgs* were an untamed urban “wilderness” which, like the colonies, had to be disciplined and civilized. The Catholic Church reinforced this view positing that the epidemic was God’s punishment for the moral improprieties committed by wayward individuals. “Impiety had erected its fortress in the city, the object of universal admiration; it seemed to have risen as one person against the Lord. From here blasphemous and impious doctrines were carried forth

¹⁶⁷ Cited in Anne-Louise Shapiro, *Housing the Poor in Paris 1850-1902* (1985) New York: Madison. p. 6.

to all the nations of the earth and like a wind of fire shriveled the seeds of faith in countless hearts.”¹⁶⁸

Even metropolitan writers like Victor Hugo and Eugene Sue did not escape the panic and paranoia that the “discovery” of this moral sickness generated. One of the most passionate writers of the time, Michel Chevalier cried:

*The people of Paris were not made to serve as fodder for the cholera of Asia and to die like slaves in pain and terror. What good are all its hospitals, its doctors, its science, and its public administration? The city is a city of palaces and hovels: a few splendid quarters with colonnades and huge gardens closed to the man in work clothes and in the center of this sumptuous enclosure, a sewer of narrow streets and dark unhealthy buildings, as dank as dungeons, where those who toil come to catch their breath in fetid air.*¹⁶⁹

Thus, increasingly the streets were seen as a cauldron of misery and discontent, a series of interconnecting corridors filled with the stench and the filth spewing from open sewers, a factory of political and social unrest, a spider-web of riotous neighbourhoods, and a bordello of moral dangers and contagious perversions. It became easy then to “read” the working class districts of Paris in terms that were antithetical to the Darwinian narrative of progress and civility. According to Foucault, the prevailing uneasiness about these “primitive” zones signifies a general:

fear of a dark space, of a screen of obscurity obstructing the clear visibility of things, of people and of truths. It

¹⁶⁸ A. Metral, *Description naturelle, morale et politique du cholera-morbus a Paris* (1833) Paris. p. 112. Quoted in Francois Delaport, *Disease and Civilization* (1986) p. 60.

¹⁶⁹ Michel Chevalier, *Societe des amis du peuple: de la civilization* (1832) pp.2-6. Quoted in Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (1989) Chicago: Chicago University Press.

*became imperative to dissolve the elements of darkness that blocked the light, demolish all of society's somber spaces, those dark rooms where arbitrary political rule fomented, as well as the whims of a monarch, religious superstitions, tyrants' and priests' plots, illusions of ignorance and epidemics. From even before the Revolution, castles, hospitals, charnel houses, prisons and convents gave rise to a sometimes over-valued distrust or hatred; it was felt that the new political and moral order could not be instituted until such places were abolished. During the period of the Revolution, Gothic novels developed a whole fanciful account of the high protective walls, darkness, the hide-outs and dungeons that shield, in a significant complicity, robbers and aristocrats, monks and traitors...Now these imaginary spaces are like the negative of the transparency and visibility that the new order hoped to establish.*¹⁷⁰

But fear and distrust were not the only factors governing the perceptions of health officials and magistrates. Hygienists and doctors for instance, believed that if the social body was susceptible to infection and contagion then it must also be responsive to corrective "treatment." The prevailing philosophy among medical practitioners was that preventative "treatments" were the most effective way to reduce the threat of contagion. "Education, when it comes to that segment of the populace whose vice and poverty are due in part ignorance, will foster not only higher moral standards but also more regular habits, habits more in conformity with the requirements of public health."¹⁷¹

While public health officials worried about the pestilence and degradation which inflicted the social body, they continued to dream about a city "enlivened" and

¹⁷⁰ Sylvestry Lotringer, *Foucault Live* (1989) p. 230-231.

¹⁷¹ Benoiston de Chateauneuf, *Rapport sur la marché et les effets du cholera-morbus dans Paris* (1834) Paris. p. 204. Cited in Francois Delaporte, *Disease and Civilization*. p. 61.

“regenerated” by proper dietary, hygienic, and reproductive practices. In this way social space was conjoined with medical space.

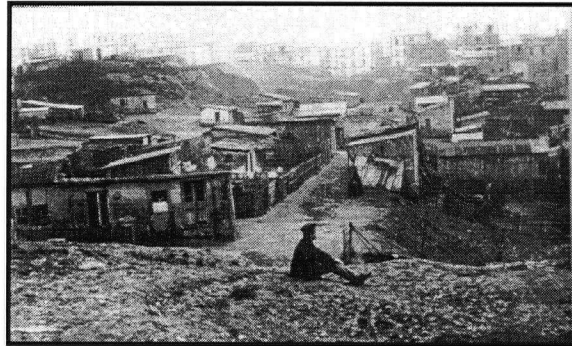


Figure 2.10: *Shanty Town*. Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

“One began to conceive of a generalized presence of doctors whose intersecting gazes form a network and exercise at every point in space, and at every moment in time, a constant, mobile, differentiated supervision.”¹⁷² Commissions comprised of municipal officials and physicians were established to study urban life and to prescribe laws for the “protection” and “welfare” of society. All forty-eight *arrondissements* were mapped out with the details of streets, neighbourhoods, and individual buildings clearly marked. Census data on neighbourhood and building density levels, occupational types, rentier-owner ratios, age and sex of household occupants, and employment statistics was also collected. Information from the commission reports were then massaged until two images of the Parisian social body emerged; one hostile and pathological, the other civilized and urbane. Furthermore, a battery of optical technologies, pedagogical practices, municipal

¹⁷² Foucault, *Naissance de la Clinique* (1963) Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. trans., *The Birth of the Clinic: an Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1973) New York: Vintage. p. 31.

ordinances, and architectural standards were enlisted to “police” the boundaries between the two.

Spectacular City

*To live in a glass house is a revolutionary virtue par excellence.*¹⁷³

For Benjamin, the brilliance of the nineteenth-century radiates most intensely in the dreamworld of the arcades. The subject of his (incomplete) surrealist-materialist manifesto, *Das Passagen-Werk*, Benjamin marveled at the Paris arcades because their “wealth of mirrors which extended spaces as if magically and made more difficult orientation, whilst at the same time giving them the ambiguous twinkle of Nirvana.”¹⁷⁴ Built in the early decades of the nineteenth century when property and financial speculation had skyrocketed, the arcades were something of an anomaly in Parisian architectural history. Overlooked by the prestigious Prix de Rome and ignored by nineteenth-century textbooks on architecture, the “original temples to commodity capitalism” garnished a substantial amount of attention in illustrated journals, travelogues, and architectural magazines distributed throughout Europe and North America. On the topic of the arcades an *Illustrated Guide to Paris* states:

These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble walled passages cut through whole blocks of houses, whose owners have combined in this speculation. On either side of the passages, which draw their light from above, run the most elegant shops,

¹⁷³ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 180.

¹⁷⁴ Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*. p. 286.

*so that an arcade of this kind is a city, a world in miniature.*¹⁷⁵

A collaborative effort shared by architects and engineers, the *passages* combined the artistic elements of neo-classical design with the functionality of glass and iron technology. The arcades' dual nature is also reflected in the fact that they are at once shop and passageway, dream-house and market. To enter into the *passages* was to cross over a space/time threshold and confront the "outmoded" styles of the most recent past. "The Passages lie in the great cities like caves containing the fossils of an *ur*-animal presumed extinct: the consumers from the pre-imperial epoch of capitalism, the last dinosaurs of Europe."¹⁷⁶

In addition to inverting the linear flow of historical time, the arcades reversed the relationship between "interior" and "exterior" space. Disguised as an *extérieur* sphere but functionally an *intérieur* sphere, the arcades permitted the passer-by to depart the street without necessarily feeling that s/he had entered into an interior realm. (while inclimate conditions and the urban poor were physically excluded). However, when read symbolically, the passage becomes quite magical. For in this process of interiorization the individual abandons the predictability and the monotony of the rational world and crosses over into a dream-like state. In this altered state of consciousness, the exhibitionary display of fashionable commodities assumes the mythical qualities of an enchanted wilderness. The allure of the commodity display was most powerful at grand openings. For example, at the arcades on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées:

¹⁷⁵ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 146-147.

people groaned as they pressed together to cross over the sandstone thresholds and pass along mirrored walls; they viewed artificial rain falling on the copper innards of the latest automobiles as proof of the quality of the material, observed gears oscillating in oil, and read on black placards in street letters the prices of leathered goods, gramophone records, and embroidered kimonos. In the diffused light that came from above, they glided over tiled floors. While here a new passageway was prepared for fashionable Paris, one of the oldest arcades in the city disappeared, the Passage de L'Opera, swallowed up when construction of the Boulevard Haussman broke through it. As was true of this remarkable covered walkway until recently, several arcades still today, in their stark and gloomy corners, preserve history-become space. Outmoded forms maintain themselves in these interior rooms and the commodity display has an indistinct, multiple meaning.¹⁷⁷

These passages were more than simply commercial markets. They were the secular equivalent to religious cathedrals. Adorned with transepts, aisles, and luminous galleries, it appeared to Benjamin that “the dream-house of the arcade rediscovers itself in the church.”¹⁷⁸ But the deities inhabiting the sacred architecture of the arcades were just as ephemeral and transparent as the light which penetrated their glass canopies.

For Benjamin, architecture is like language in that it is imbued with an expressive and a functional character. Learning to “read” the symbolic architecture of the arcades is like learning a new language; not the dead and abstract language of instrumentalist thought but the organic and living language of an *surrealist-materialist* mode of

¹⁷⁶ Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, V. p. 670.

¹⁷⁷ Benjamin, *Passagen* (1927) V, p. 1041.

¹⁷⁸ Benjamin, *Das Passagen-werk* L[2,4]. Cited in Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (1996) Cambridge: Polity Press. p. 126.

interpretation. From this perspective, excavating the vernacular of the arcades is similar to sifting through the sedimentary layers of a dream.

*For in the dream too, the rhythm of perception and experience is so transformed that everything - even the most apparently most neutral element - thrusts itself towards us, affects us. In order to understand the arcades in their fundament, we sink them into the deepest layers of dreaming, we speak of them as if they thrust themselves towards us.*¹⁷⁹

The image of the dream is a wish image. It conceals the unrealized promise of a utopian imaginary. For the same reason that we revisit our dreams in order to release the secrets of our unconscious, Benjamin explores the symbolic imagery of the arcades for what they might tell us about the repressed desires of the collective unconscious. But the dream image is not a dialectical image. The dream image only suggests that embryonic, anticipatory, and unrealized expectations exist in consumer society.

*Ambiguity is the pictorial image of dialectics, the law of dialectics seen at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image therefore a dream image. Such an image is presented by the pure commodity: as fetish. Such an image are the arcades, which are both house and stars. Such an image is the prostitute, who is salewoman and wares in one.*¹⁸⁰

By the time of Benjamin's arrival in 1926, the Parisian arcades were in a state of ruin and their alluring power had ebbed from them. Most arcades were constructed at a time when business was gravitating towards larger systems of organization to meet the changing

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.* p. 274.

¹⁸⁰ Benjamin, *Reflection*, p. 157.

levels of consumer demand. Rendered obsolete by the birth of the department store¹⁸¹ which sacrificed profit margin for volume sales, the *passages* passed into extinction without much notice. But this is precisely what attracted Benjamin to them. “That the Passages are what they are here for us, is due to the fact that they are no longer.”¹⁸² Having lost their auratic qualities, the “glass houses” could now be seen as collective



Figure 2.11: *Passage Choiseul*. Source: S. Buck-Morss (1991) p. 4.

dream houses. Substituting a dialectical for a historical interpretation of the arcades, Benjamin sets out to rescue “the residues of the dreamworld.” For buried within these residues are the utopian possibilities of a philosophical awakening. “The realization of dream elements in waking is the textbook example of dialectical thinking. For this reason dialectical thinking is the organ of historical awakening. Each epoch not only dreams the

¹⁸¹ Few arcades were built in Paris after the 1830 insurrection and the fall of the July monarchy. Given that most arcades were constructed after 1820, this is a prime example of the impermanence that they symbolized.

¹⁸² Benjamin, *Das Passagen Werk* V[D,3]. Cited in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p. 159.

next, but also, in dreaming, strives toward the moment of waking.”¹⁸³ In this altered state of consciousness, the rhythm of perception and experience are recalibrated until the dream of industrial capitalism is recognized as a dream.

Carceral City

*The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately... Visibility is a trap.*¹⁸⁴

In contradistinction to Benjamin’s materialist anthropology, Foucault’s archaeological methodology examines the proliferation and the dissemination of surveillant technologies. Whereas Benjamin’s *dialectics of seeing* interrogates the visual economy of the *trompe l’oeil*, Foucault’s *art of seeing* examines the *eye of power* deployed in the daily exercise of control. Informing Foucault’s analytics of power is Jeremy’s Bentham’s model prison, the panopticon. Fantastic as it was utopian, the “inspection house” was Bentham’s solution to the prison debate¹⁸⁵ and the problem of social control. Although very few panopticon-style prisons were actually built, the model prison embodied the “the dream of disciplinary perfection.”¹⁸⁶

Overturing the organizing principle of dungeons whereby inmates were confined in complete darkness, Bentham’s laboratory of social control operates like it is a “transparent building.” What makes the prison apparatus so “transparent,” is the illuminating technology used to discipline and normalize human conduct. Form and

¹⁸³ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 162.

¹⁸⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 200.

function are combined in the perfection of this illuminating power. Structurally, the panopticon consists of a central observing tower that is encircled by the vertical and horizontal massing of individual cells. Both the tower and the prison cells are pierced by windows. Each cell had two windows, one in front the other at the back, through which light can enter. The tower on the other hand, is equipped with blinds which conceals the identity of the guards and the timing of the visual inspections. The use of back lighting illuminates the activity of each inmate. Aware of this, the prisoner monitors his own conduct and thus, internalizes the observing gaze deployed from the tower. Foucault asserts that the phylactic power of the panoptic apparatus “would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. A central point would be both the source of light illuminating everything, and a locus of convergence for everything that must be known; a perfect eye that nothing would escape and a center towards which all gazes would be turned.”¹⁸⁷

Whereas the arcades typify the public display of bourgeois capitalism, the penitentiary embodies a much more subtle form of power. According to Foucault, it “is a machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference. Consequently, it does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine.”¹⁸⁸ The spatial organization of the prison, the axial sight lines, and the “invisibility” of the surveillant apparatus signified an automated and disembodied form of

¹⁸⁵ Bentham believed that the panopticon would alleviate the overcrowded and brutal conditions of prisons which were of concern to socialist reformers and that it offered a practical alternative to the practice of deportation favoured by conservative reformers.

¹⁸⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1979) p. 207.

power. Because it is a machine requiring very little in the way of resources, the risk of human error and fatigue is reduced to a minimum while “productivity levels” are raised to a maximum. But the generalizability of its functions as is what really makes Bentham’s panopticon such a formidable instrument of social control. The uninterrupted transfer of disciplinary codes and examination practices between institutions generates a universal form of communication. In the absence of “external” referents, the panoptic mechanism functions as a single disciplinary continuum, an enclosed and undifferentiated space, a “power without an exterior.”¹⁸⁹

The Marxian hypothesis that power is spatially concentrated in the hands of the dominant class has little purchase on Foucault’s critique of modernity. Although Foucault freely acknowledges the influence that Marx had on his own thought,¹⁹⁰ he dismisses the idea that power remains concentrated in the state and that it works through the prism of ideology. Also rejected is the existence of revolutionary class consciousness. In the panoptic mode of operation, the “crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities.”¹⁹¹ In this “political economy of detail,” even the

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.* p. 173.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.* p. 202.

¹⁸⁹ Francois Ewald, “A Power Without an Exterior” in *ed.* p. 169.

¹⁹⁰ “I often quote concepts, texts and phrases from Marx, but without feeling obliged to add the authenticating label of a footnote with a laudatory phrase to accompany the quotation...It is impossible at the present time to write history without using a range of concepts directly or indirectly linked to Marx’s thought and situating oneself within a horizon of thought which has been defined and described by Marx. One might even wonder what difference there could be between being a historian and being a Marxist. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (1980) New York: Pantheon. pp. 52-53.

¹⁹¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 201.

“smallest fragments of life and of the body” are woven together in ever more complex and spatially diffuse networks of power.

*Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the other hand, it turns it into an “aptitude,” a “capacity,” which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.*¹⁹²

Both material and discursive, the panoptic mechanism inhabits architectural space but is not spatially limited or contained. The multiplication of its circuits ensures that the panoptic apparatus transcends the physical limitations of geography as it imposes its own spatial geometry. With no possibility of escaping the carceral mechanism, material space is effectively de-materialized and homogenized. “With the birth of these new technologies and these new economic processes one sees the birth of a new sort of thinking about space that’s no longer modeled upon the police state of the urbanization of the territory, but that it extends far beyond the limits of urbanism and architecture.”¹⁹³ Thus, architecture in the Foucauldian sense is not merely a matter of structural form but the formation and the structuring of disciplinary and normalizing practices. It is for this reason that Foucault asks, “[i]s it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² *ibid.* p. 138.

¹⁹³ Sylvestry Lotringer, *Foucault Live*, p. 338.

¹⁹⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. p. 228.

The Spirals and Pleasures of Power

*Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare, humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination.*¹⁹⁵

*There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another.*¹⁹⁶

The stamp of sovereign power has repeatedly marked the physiognomy of Paris. Even when “read” today, the individual “signatures” of Gaulish monarchs, Roman emperors, Christian regents, and Medieval kings are quite impressive. However, it was only after the triumphant *coup d’etat* of 1851 that the inscription of power was extended beyond individual buildings or *quartiers*. For the most part, French monarchs were reluctant to redevelop large sections of the city because it was in the architectural structures of the past that they traced their lineage and legitimacy to the throne. Historic monuments also gave concrete expression to the pre-modern sense of *being* in the world. The leveling of monumental structures would not only have destroyed the *residence habituelle* of sovereign authority, it would have severed the temporal continuum linking

¹⁹⁵ Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, (1977) Cornell University Press: New York, p. 151.

¹⁹⁶ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 256.

the past with the present. With the ascendancy of Napoleon III, a radically different geopolitical imaginary was imposed on the city. Engineers and bureaucrats, not monarchs, would command the day to day administration of Paris. Strategic *embellissements* and disciplinary technologies would determine the socio-spatial (re)configuration of the city.

Foucault tells us that history “teaches us how to laugh at the solemnities of origin.”¹⁹⁷ Yet many historians are convinced (or so it seems) that the monumental changes which swept through metropolitan Paris in the nineteenth century have their origins in the heroic gestures of Eugène-Georges Haussmann. Although the Seine prefect (1853-1870) wielded an unprecedented amount of political power as the capital’s urban planner (magnified by the fact that he enjoyed direct access to Napoleon III), the metamorphosis of Second Empire Paris did not begin nor did it end with his tenure at the Hôtel de Ville. It is my contention that rather than the monumental achievements of a single historical figure, the “strategic beautification” of Paris needs to be conceptualized as a series of interconnecting political events and overlapping discourses, the product of human agency and enduring social structures, and finally, new power relations arising out of past traditions. While there can be no dispute that under Haussmann’s autocratic leadership the social, material, and aesthetic transformation of Second Empire Paris intensified to a feverish pace, the foundation for *Nouveau Paris* was already in place prior to his ascendancy to power. Thus, equally important as Haussmann the individual, are the material and historical conditions imbricated in the *haussmannization* of Paris. By describing how it was that the “old” city was transformed into a disciplined, moralized,

and spectacular landscape, I make the case that Haussmann's *eviscerations* into the working-class strongholds attests to the interconnection of historical timing, urban geography, and personal experience.

Private Obsessions/Public Confessions

Eugène-Georges Haussmann was hand-picked by Napoleon III's to manage the ambitious project. By the time of his arrival to the capital, Haussmann's ideas about the function, design, and character of cities were already well-formed. Many of the prefect's urban conceptions are outlined in his personal memoirs. Composed several years after his removal from the prefecture, Haussmann's memoirs are significant not because they comprise a personalized (and a somewhat fanciful) account of the impression he made on Paris, but because of what they reveal about the impression the city left on Haussmann. The following recollection provides a great deal of insight into Haussmann's personal relationship with Paris.

I used to cross the Chaussee d'Antin and after some detours reach the rue Montmartre and the porte St. Eustache; I crossed the square of Les Halles, not then covered, amid the red umbrellas of the fishmongers; then the rue des Lavandiers, rue St. Honore, and the rue St. Denis. The Place du Chatelet was a shabby part in those days...I crossed the old pont au Change...then I skirted the old Palais de Justice, with the shameful mass of low cabarets that used to dishonor the Cite on my left...continuing on my way by the pont St. Michel, I had to cross the miserable little square where, like a sewer, the waters flowed out of the rue de la Harpe, the rue de la Hachette, the rue St. Andre des Artes and the rue de

¹⁹⁷ Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977) p. 143.

*l'Hirondelle, where at the end appeared the sign of
Chardin the perfumer, like a false note.*¹⁹⁸

As a child Haussmann contracted a serious lung infection which necessitated his evacuation from Paris. While he overcame his illness and eventually returned to Paris to study at the Lycee Henry IV, the Sorbonne, and the College de France, the prefect never fully recovered from his childhood malaise. According to David P. Jordan, the tortuous memories which haunted Haussmann had a direct effect on the intensity with which he carried out his destructive campaign.

*Where he was less emotionally engaged, less obsessive
by the need to cleanse and aerate, when he could look
coolly at his ways and not recall the revolutions of his
youth, Haussmann's work was more successful, less
ruthless.*¹⁹⁹

In addition to enlightening historians about the import of the personal in the political, the memoirs are instructive because they tell us a great deal about the *geographical extension* of the visual apparatus. Among the arsenal of weapons used in the brutal *eventrement* of the old *quartiers*, it was the "all-seeing" power of the observing gaze which reigned supreme. Unrelenting in the performance of its supervisory and discriminating functions, the scopic regime institutionalized during the Haussmann epoch illuminated the *conditions de vie*, reduced them to their elementary components, and then reassembled them under the banner of progress, civility, and rationality.

¹⁹⁸ David Jordan, *Transforming Paris* (1995) p. 200.

The Signature of Abstract Power

To the dispassionate eye of Haussmann the bureaucrat, the reconfiguration of Paris was less a social question than a technical one. Beauty resided in the logic of the straight line and the transparency of the balance sheet rather than in the painted canvas of Manet's *Olympia*. While his understanding of the politics of state-building was impressive, the prefect's knowledge of Paris neighbourhoods was very poor. Except for those few occasions when he was seen in attendance at the ceremonial unveiling of a historic monument or escorting a foreign dignitary, Haussmann rarely ventured into Paris. He preferred to study the capital from the *interieure* of his office. But it was not through an open window of the Hôtel de Ville which Haussmann's discriminating gaze was cast. The Paris which was illuminated in his mind's-eye was two-dimensional and hung on the wall behind his desk. This map Haussmann claims,

*behind the easy chair in my office, formed an enormous screen where I could, at any minute, merely by turning around, locate a detail, check on certain indications, and recognize the topographical correlations between the arrondissements and neighbourhoods of Paris. Very often I experienced fruitful meditations studying this exact plan.*²⁰⁰

While Haussman's plans may not have started with a blank sheet of paper, he did all that he could to abstract Paris and to reduce it to the flat surface of the printed page. The logic which frames this *field of usage* stems from the desire to possess an "immediate" and "exact" form of knowledge and a firm belief in the aura of scientific "objectivity." However, the visual "detachment" that Haussmann strives to achieve as a bureaucrat is

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 201.

²⁰⁰ Haussmann, *Memoires*, vol. 3. p. 15. Cited in Jordan, *Transforming Paris* (1996) p. 173.

undermined by his personal relationship to Paris. In Haussmann's *way of seeing* Paris, the "remoteness" of the disembodied observer mixes with the subjective experiences buried within his childhood memories. While there can be no doubt that his is a "constructed visibility," it is one which straddles the threshold of personal memories and detached observation, the *intérieur* of his office and the *extérieur* of metropolitan space, the discursive realm of the medical and social sciences and the auratic sphere of aesthetic pleasures.

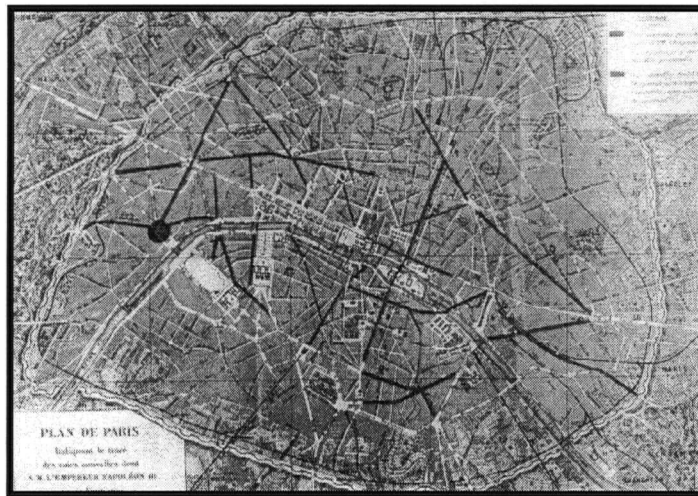


Figure 3.1: *Plan of 1857.* Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

Haussmann's twelve-year tenure as the prefect of Bordeaux also had an enormous effect on his planning philosophy. The capital for southwestern France, Bordeaux was punctuated by the marquis de Tourny's vision of urban modernization. Tourny combined the most profound elements of the classical French city; axial street pattern, ornate architectural design and uniform facades with the most recent principles of urban planning design; communication, circulation, regularity, and salubrity. It was this urban model that Haussmann would import into Paris. However, the originality and

uniqueness of Haussmann's achievements extended beyond the mere imitation of Tourny's holistic vision. Tourny may have been one of the first administrators to institute the principles of modern urban planning on a grand scale but his urban conception lacked innovative financial schemes, massive demolitions, and large-scale appropriations of private property.

Much like the emperor, Haussmann was firmly committed to the Saint-Simonian principles of social engineering and believed that an authoritarian bureaucracy was the most effective instrument to implement the positivist philosophy. As the chief architect and mayor of Paris, he enjoyed an unprecedented amount of decision-making authority. Haussmann used this power to impose his own pedestrian tastes on the urban landscape and to intimidate and manipulate his political opponents. Extremely suspicious of elected assemblies such as the *Corps Législatif* and the *Conseil Municipal*, the prefect ignored and snubbed elected representatives whenever possible. To ensure that his political and planning objectives would not be compromised, Haussmann dismissed officials appointed by the previous administration and replaced them with his own. Because of his close connection with the emperor, the prefect circumvented the administrative hierarchy with impunity.²⁰¹ In 1858, he undermined the political authority of the democratic institutions with the creation of the *Caisse des Travaux de la Ville de Paris*. With the establishment of the central bank, the prefect controlled the financing, the design, and the

²⁰¹ On October 10, 1859, Napoleon III granted Haussmann absolute control of the streets by making him the overseer of lighting, cleaning, public transportation, the markets, administrative services, bakeries, the sewers, and municipal provisions. But by 1865, the cost of Haussmann's ambitious renovations had

execution of the urban renovation scheme. The prefect passed a number of *arrêtés* regulating everything from building elevation and street width to the use of construction materials. So formidable was his administrative power that a single stroke of his pen was all that was needed to raise entire blocks to the ground and to relocate neighbourhoods to the periphery of the city. In the Ile de la Cité alone, fifteen thousand residents were evicted in order to make room for the Hôtel Dieu, the Caserne de la Cité, and the

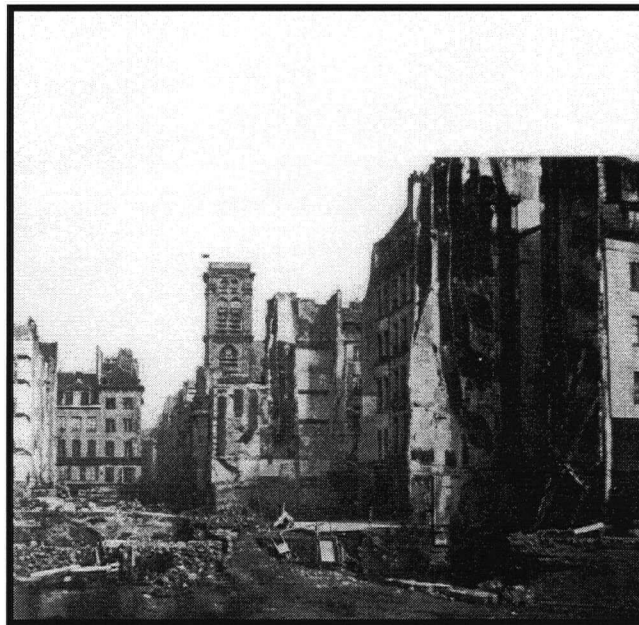


Figure 3.2: *Rue St. Martin* (1853) Source: S. Rice (1998) p. 54.

Tribunal de Commerce. Another one hundred and seventy-two houses were destroyed to extricate the Palais-Royal.²⁰²

become so large that many were beginning to question the viability of the redevelopment plan. France did not retire the debt until 1970.

²⁰² Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (1986) New Haven: Yale University Press. p. 50.

In Haussmann's Paris, historic monuments and architectural structures lost their individuality as they were functionally integrated into a much larger urban ensemble. Those which escaped the path of demolition – Notre Dame, le Invalides, la Louvre – were often reduced to museum pieces and divested of their former grandeur and meaning “Architecture,” the prefect wrote, “is nothing more than administration.”²⁰³ Paris was seen not as a collection of social communities and local neighbourhoods but an amalgamation of administrative problems, technical challenges, and political directives. The city was not differentiated on the basis of local history or custom, it was subdivided into distinct municipal districts – *arrondissements*.²⁰⁴

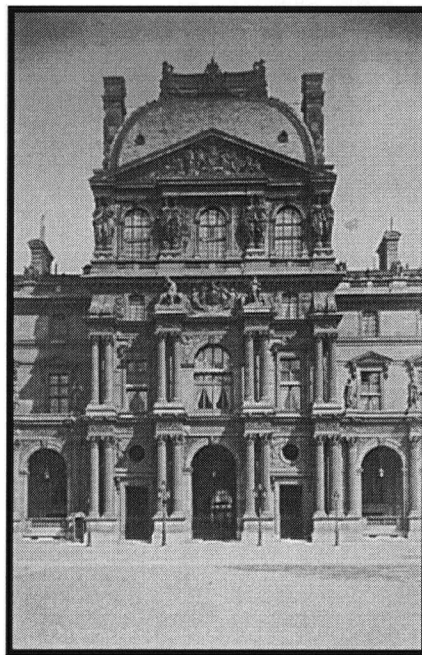


Figure 3.3: *La Louvre*. Source; Paris Postcards website, 1998.

²⁰³ David Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, p. 159.

²⁰⁴ When Haussmann annexed the banlieue surrounding Paris in 1859, the number of *arrondissements* increased from twelve to twenty.

In his novel *La Curée* (1931), Zola shows how the panoramic perspective deployed from the Hôtel de Ville is replicated in the coach ride of Renée and Maxime as they ride along one of the grand thoroughfares.

While gliding along in their carriage, they observed, amicably, the endless, broad, grey bands of sidewalks with their benches, multi-colored advertising kiosks, scrawny trees. This bright channel, stretching, growing ever narrower and ending in a square of blueing emptiness, all the way to the horizon; the uninterrupted double row of the great stores...the flowing masses of people, the noise of their footsteps and intermingling voices, slowly filled the two women with unconditional, unadulterated joy, with an impression of the excellence of this street life...They drove on and on, and it seemed to them that the carriage was rolling over carpets stretching along this straight and endless highroad that had been expressly constructed to save them from the sight of the small dark streets. Each boulevard became a hallway in their own house. The gaiety of sunlight smiled at out of the new housefronts, made the windowpanes light up, rebounded from the awnings of the stores and cafes, warmed the asphalt under the busy footsteps of the crowd.²⁰⁵

Linked by the strategic placement of the boulevards, the *arrondissements* functioned as nodal points within a magnificent planning ensemble. The basic pattern of Haussmann's monumental experiment included the east-west avenues bordering the Siene river, the rue de Rivoli, and the boulevard Saint-Germain; the north-south axis of the boulevards de Strasbourg, de Sebastopol, du Palais, and Saint-Michel where it intersects the rue de Rivoli at the place du Chatelet; the new Opéra, and the Prince Eugene squares bounded by the Right Bank boulevards. As well, the rues de Rouen, Lafayette, and the boulevard

²⁰⁵ Emile Zola, *La Curée* (n.d.) p. 145.

du Nord were linked up with the railway lines which criss-crossed the entire nation.²⁰⁶ But more than its monumental scale, it is the speed by which modernization of Paris proceeded which is so impressive. Between 1853 and 1870, Paris gained 4,500 acres of parks, 63 kilometers of sewers, 95 kilometers of roads, 95,000 trees, 19,000 gas jets, and lost 4,349 houses.²⁰⁷ By 1869, over 30 million train passengers were passing through the city annually.²⁰⁸

Prior to Haussmann's arrival to the Seine prefect, integrating the various districts of the city into a comprehensive planning matrix proved to be an impossible task. In the absence of political stability, a centralized bureaucracy, procedures for mapping space like like the cadastral survey method, economic conditions which encouraged property speculation, and the political will to co-ordinate the various municipal departments into a single organizational framework, urban planners were powerless to execute modifications which were more than piecemeal and cosmetic in nature. Consequently, Haussmann's immediate predecessors – Rambuteau, Persigny, and Berger – exist as little more than footnotes in the history of Paris despite the fact they inaugurated many of the civic improvements completed during the Second Empire. However, absent from their character was Haussmann's arrogance, enthusiasm, conviction, and his determination to

²⁰⁶ Despite the heavy burden of export taxes and rising rents, a few industries could not afford to vacate because of their dependence on the metropolitan economy. The Cail workshops in the XV arrondissement and the Say sugar factory, La Ville slaughterhouse, and the Potin food processing plant in the XIX arrondissement, are a few examples of the industrial "zones" which continued to exist.

²⁰⁷ David Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, p. 262.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.* p. 207.

turn dreams (no matter how ambitious or brutal) into concrete reality.²⁰⁹ Berger for instance, was “one way or another only someone else’s instrument in the designing” of the metropolitan cityscape and content to “do as he was told, to balance and satisfy conflicting demands, to be practical and thus *municipal*.”²¹⁰ By clearing away the tangled web of medieval streets Haussmann opened the city to light and air and made room for Napoleon III’s grand boulevards. In addition to stimulating the efficient movement of commercial goods and services, the great enormous length and width of the *grands avenues* gave the military unrestrained access to the rebellious eastern districts. The axial symmetry of the streets also serviced the long firing line of the canon.

The Power of Benjamin’s Dialectics of Seeing

*From this epoch stem the arcades and interiors, the exhibitions and panoramas. They are the residues of a dream world.*²¹¹

In Benjamin’s critical exegesis of Second Empire Paris, the “beauty” of Haussmann’s monumental facades and the “brilliance” of the commodity form come to represent the vacuous state of metropolitan culture and the atrophied condition of subjective experience. The diminution of meaningful experience can be detected in the fragmented and episodic movements of the individual. “Moving through this traffic involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous intersections,

²⁰⁹ The question of whether or not they were necessarily brutal is a matter of debate. While most historians are critical of the violent nature of the urban renewal operation, Benevelo argues that Haussmann’s accomplishments were rather conservative and that they were taken far enough.

²¹⁰ David Van Zanten, *Building Paris: Architectural Institutions and the Transformation of the French Capital 1830-1870*. (1994), New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 226.

²¹¹ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 162.

nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like energy from a battery.”²¹²

Overcome by the shock waves generated by the nervous flow of pedestrian and commercial traffic, the city dweller proceeds from one point to the next not in a continuous and disciplined fashion but in a procession of electrified gyrations. The intensity of these shock experiences is directly proportional to the size of the crowd.

*The greater the share of shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience (Erfahrung), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one's life (Erlebnis). Perhaps the special achievement of shock defense may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents.*²¹³

The sensory overload experienced in the street leads to the emotional withdrawal of the individual. To survive the constant bombardment of “outwardly-direct forms of communication” discharged from newspapers, streets signs, wall posters, museums, mirrored reflections, and billboards, the individual learns to filter out much of the hyper-sensory stimuli but at the expense of a dulled consciousness. Completely devoid of substance, the actions of the city dweller correspond to those of the worker for whom every movement, every gesture, and every expression are dictated by the relentless pace of the machine.

The manipulation of the worker at the machine has no connection with the preceding operation for the very reason that it is its exact repetition. Since each

²¹² Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 174.

²¹³ *ibid.*, p. 163.

*operation at the machine is just as screened off from the one that preceded it.*²¹⁴

The shock-experience (*Erlebnis*) encountered by the individual in the street, like the Sisyphean tasks performed by the worker, are dehumanizing and alienating. In killing the ability to experience *experience*, urban modernity transforms organic matter into an empty shell – life becomes a succession of little deaths.

Once hollowed out by the debilitating logic of capitalism, the real needs of the individual are subsumed by the artificial needs and satisfactions of the market. The production of these “wishful fantasies” and the ideological distortion they service cohere around a contradictory set of impulses. On the one hand, these “wish-images” attest to the fact that “the collective seeks to preserve and to transfigure the inchoateness of the social product and the deficiencies in the social system of production.” On the other hand, they “manifest an emphatic striving for dissociation with the outmoded - which means...with the most recent past.”²¹⁵ Although elusive, they can be “mastered” if viewed dialectically.

*The trick by which this world of images is mastered - it is more proper to speak of a trick than a method - consists in the substitution of political for a historical view of the past.*²¹⁶

By examining the urban physiognomy through the kaleidoscopic lens of a materialist dialectics, the archaic and the modern, the mythical and the material, the sacred and the profane, as well as the “interior” and the “exterior” realms of the urban landscape, crystalize into entirely different constellations with each political “turn” of the past.

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 177.

²¹⁵ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 148.

Under sustained examination, the illusion of law and order, permanence and stability, fades from view. What emerges in their place is a much more complex and dynamic geographical imaginary.

*The most hidden aspect of the great cities: this historical object of the new metropolis with its uniform streets and incalculable row of houses was realised the architecture dreamed of by the ancients: the labyrinth. Man of the crowd. The drive which makes the major cities into labyrinths. Completion in the covered passageways of the arcades.*²¹⁷

The arcades affirm that behind even the most rational plans for control over the environment, resides an unreconciled desire for “primeval acquaintances” with the world. Just as the hand-written signature intimates information about the individual, inscriptions in the material landscape can be decoded to reveal their “hidden” clues.

As the hidden secrets of the Parisian metropolis emerge ever so slowly from its subterranean depths, its topography changes from one steeped in the fantastic into one littered with the debris of historical decay. Corresponding with the ruination of personal experience is the physical decay of mythic architecture. “We begin to recognize the monuments as ruins even before they have crumbled.”²¹⁸ In the monuments of industrial capitalism Benjamin sees history unfolding not as a progression of triumphant events but as a procession of near-catastrophies. The nihilistic fervor which animates Benjamin’s theory of historical time registers most vividly in his “Thesis on the Philosophy of

²¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 182.

²¹⁷ Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, p. 1007.

²¹⁸ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 162.

History” (1940). Benjamin uses the apocalyptic image of Paul Klee’s winged-apparition to warn of the dangers of a stubborn faith in historical progress.

*A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.*²¹⁹

In this enigmatic reversal of historical time, Benjamin compels us to contemplate not the achievements nor the accomplishments of European modernity but its failures and defeats.



Figure 3.4: *Accident at the Montparnasse Station.* Source: B. Colomina (1996) p. 49.

Klee’s angel, the suffering hero of urban modernity, reminds us that history is far from being played out or completely written. By sifting through the fragments left behind by

the *storm that we call progress*, Benjamin is able to piece together a rather unique picture of history; one in which the spirals and pleasures of the commodity economy twist and turn in a web of deceit, alienation, and concealed relations of power.

An Imperial Aesthetic

As Haussmann pressed on with the rationalization of urban space, he successfully overturned the pre-revolutionary aesthetic which subordinated the street to ecclesiastic and monarchical monuments. In Second Empire Paris, the street made to stand on its own while the edifice of architectural structures is reduced to a mere cultural artifice. By exploiting the structural possibilities of new building materials such as ferroconcrete, iron, and glass, architects from the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* and engineers from the *Ecole Polytechnique* expedited a revolutionary aesthetic vocabulary. Examples of this experimental style of architecture include Les Halles (1853), Au Bon Marche (1876), the Gare Saint-Lazare (1867), and le Galerie des Machines which was unveiled at the 1867 World Exhibition (all of which anticipated the monumental achievements of the Eiffel Tower, 1895). Giedion asserts that the “introduction of iron into architecture signifies the change from craftsmanship to industrial building production.”²²⁰ The weight-bearing capacity of metal girders eliminated lateral thrust, increased vertical dimensions, and abolished the need for heavy columns. Monuments to Promethean industrialism, these architectural structures turned concrete walls into “transparent glass skins.”²²¹

²¹⁹ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 257-258.

²²⁰ Siegfried Giedion, *Building In France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete* (1965) p. 101.

Transparency, anonymity, and transience were not the only characteristics of Second Empire architecture. In addition to a series of technological innovations and engineering achievements, the nineteenth century was also a time of nostalgic misgivings, cultural tensions, political instability, and as previously discussed, representational uncertainty. With the demise of the monarchy, a hole opened up in the cultural imaginary of metropolitan Paris. The ascending bourgeois aspired to conceal this cultural vacuum with a hybrid of “old” and “new” architectural styles.

*Stone skins hung on iron skeletons made possible the characteristic building of Haussmannization, which structures were made to appear from a pre-industrial age.*²²²

Instead of a clearly defined ideological program, the cavalier juxtaposition of pre-capitalist and modern architectural referents was often criticized as a pitiful reminder of the cultural atrophy which enveloped Paris. The disorienting effects induced by this “contaminating air of eclecticism”²²³ were impossible to ignore. As one distressed observer commented; “we see the same architect building here a Renaissance church, there a Romanesque one, yet elsewhere a town-hall in the Louis XIV style and a Gothic temple; another in the same district builds a Louis XV house, a Louis XIII barracks and a fine neo-Grecian lawcourt.”²²⁴ In the place of order and regularity, it seemed that Haussmann had inserted symbolic anarchy into the metropolitan environment.

²²¹ *ibid.* p. 101.

²²² David Jordan, *Transforming Paris* (1996) p. 162-163.

²²³ Siegfried Giedion, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete* (1995) Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities. p. 99.

²²⁴ L. Avray, quoted in Leonardo Benevelo, *History of Modern Architecture*, (1992) vol. 1. Chicago: MIT Press., p. 90.

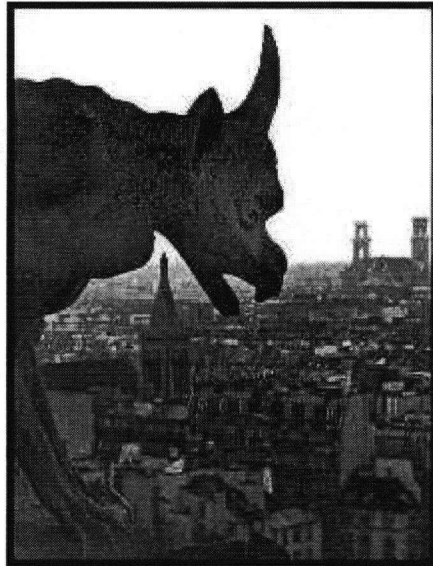


Figure 3.5: *Gothic Perspectives*. Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

For many, the eclectic organization of baroque, gothic, neo-classical, and industrial architectural styles was representative of a cultural impasse which extended beyond mere appearances. In Benjamin's opinion, the collective alienation generated by the contradictory arrangement of referents from the past drove metropolitan society to seek emotional fulfillment in superficial attractions. "Novelty," argues Benjamin,

*is a quality independent of the intrinsic value of the commodity. It is the origin of the illusion inseparable from the images produced by the collective unconscious. It is the quintessence of false consciousness, whose indefatigable agent is fashion. The illusion of novelty is reflected, like one mirror in another, in the illusion of perpetual sameness.*²²⁵

The leitmotif of the mirror corresponds to the production of myth, illusion, and a distorted social reality. In the capitalistic reproduction of space, the metropolitan sphere is radically transformed into the Marxist idea of the commodity fetish. "Streets, before their

²²⁵ Benjamin, *Reflections* p. 158.

completion, were draped in canvas and unveiled like monuments. Haussmann's efficiency is integrated with Napoleonic idealism."²²⁶ But the idealism of Napoleon III's imperial aesthetic did not begin and end in the streets. The most extravagant display of authoritarian urbanism was achieved in Garnier's Opera house (1874).

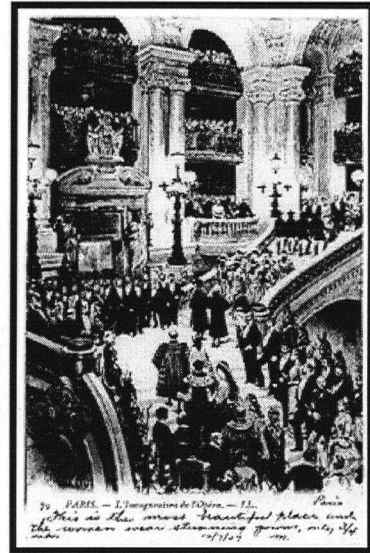
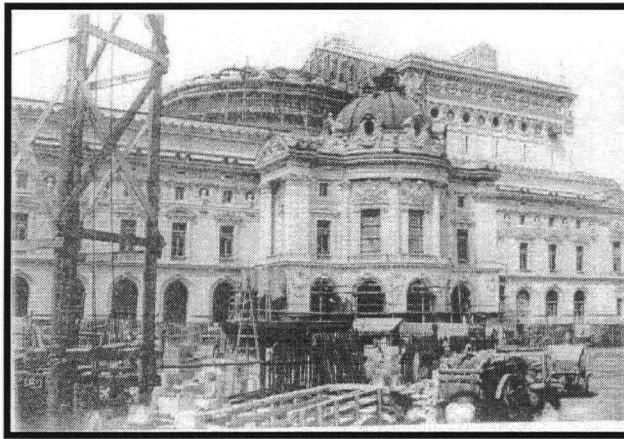


Figure 3.6: *Paris Opera (Exterior and Interior)* Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

An anchor for the entire Parisian cultural and entertainment scene, the Opera cost thirty-three million francs and took fourteen years to build.²²⁷ More visible than the imperial palace, Garnier's magnificent structure was the symbolic equivalent to the railroad; a monumental expression of heroic modernism. Benjamin quipped that with the Opera "Paris reaffirms itself as the capital of luxury and fashion: Offenbach sets the rhythm of Parisian life. The operetta is the ironic utopia of the capital's lasting rule."²²⁸

²²⁶ *ibid.* p. 159.

²²⁷ David Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, p. 278.

²²⁸ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 153.

In the same vicinity of the Opera were the department stores. Even though the *grand magasins* were not conceived in the prefect's urban plans, Au Bon Marché, Au Louvre, the Galeries Lafayette, and the Printemps dominated the Parisian architectural landscape. More than their monumental size – each occupied a complete city block – it was the role they played in the gentrification and sanitation of Paris which makes the department stores such a crucial institution in the haussmannization of Paris. In addition to promoting the intra-urban flow of the latest fashions and “discriminating” tastes, the department stores stimulated the habitual life of the streets. “The mass” Benjamin writes, “wipes out all traces of the individual: it is the newest refuge of the outlaw – Finally, in the labyrinth of the city, the mass is the newest and most impenetrable labyrinth.”²²⁹ As showcases for the latest mass-produced goods, the department stores also tied (and subordinated) the industrial activity of the suburbs to the commercial districts of the metropolis. Benjamin frequently refers to the intoxicating and magnetic pull of the department stores when describing the narcotic of appearances and illusion enveloping metroplitan life. However, I think Benjamin is much too preoccupied with the *trompe l'oeil* that is being serviced by the strategic *embellissements* of urban tableaux. Donald J. Olsen posits that large-scale renovation schemes are “deliberate artistic creations intended not merely to give pleasure, but to contain ideas, inculcate values, and serve as tangible expressions of thought and morality.”²³⁰ “Blinded” to the fact that Haussmann's passion for rectilinear architectural facades and symmetrical street patterns stems from motivations which are not limited to the enrapture of urban dwellers, Benjamin

²²⁹ Benjamin, *Briefe* (1978) p. 751. Cited in Bolz and Reijen. p. 62.

²³⁰ Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (1986) new Haven. p. 4.

exaggerates the extent to which the capitalist ideology is responsible for the haussmannization phenomenon.

Foucault's Art of Seeing

*The panopticon functions as a laboratory of power..it constructs for a time what is both a counter-city and the perfect society.*²³¹

In contrast to Benjamin, Foucault defines power not in terms of "types of consciousness, modes of perception and forms of ideology, but tactics and strategies."²³² He argues that with the passing of the *ancien régime* in the eighteenth century, so too, did the spectacle of power. Dramaturgical expressions of power in which the body is publicly inscribed by the mark of sovereign authority, are limited to occasional displays of force. Thus in this kind of political regime, power is rather limited and spatially discontinuous.

*I think it could be said that the power mechanisms at work even in an administrative monarchy as developed as it was in France, were full of holes; it was a global system, but erratic and uneven with little hold on details, that either exercised its controls over established groups or resorted to the method of exemplary intervention (as is clear in the fiscal system or criminal justice), and therefore had a low "resolution" as they say in photography.*²³³

That theatrical displays of power are inherently unproductive is graphically depicted in the opening passages of *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison* (1975) (*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1979). In this account of the brutal torture, dismemberment, and death of Damians the regicide, Foucault is not merely confronting

²³¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 204-205

²³² Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) p. 77.

the reader with the horror of public executions, he is identifying the gross inefficiencies which accompany theatrical displays of power. In addition to a considerable amount of resources including several executioners, a team of horses, and a variety of instruments of torture, the public execution of a single man required the employment of these resources from dawn until dusk.²³⁴

The horrific details of Damien's death also represent the moment when Foucault's analysis moves away from *le théâtre de la peine et le chastisement* to examine more effective forms of punishment. According to Foucault, the threshold of modernity is marked by the passage from the spectacle of power to the deployment of discipline.

*We are much less Greek than we believe. We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism. The importance, in historical mythology, of the Napoleonic character derives from the fact that it is at the point of junction of the monarchical, ritual exercise of sovereignty and the hierarchical, permanent exercise of indefinite discipline.*²³⁵

No longer the possession of a sovereign authority, power manages to elude representation by escaping behind a wall of ambiguous *power relations*. "Power," posits Foucault, "is tolerable only on the condition that it is able to mask itself."²³⁶ What this "absence" constitutes is not a diminution of the scale, effectiveness, or the intensity of power but the reverse. For coinciding with the increasing anonymity of power is a rise in the geographic

²³³ Sylvestry Lotringer, *Foucault Live*, p. 230.

²³⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979) New York: Vintage. p. 4.

²³⁵ *ibid.* p. 33.

²³⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (1978) New York: Vintage. p. 86.

distribution of power. Foucault's theory of power deviates from Benjamin's in that it identifies techniques of discipline and normalization, not the spectacular display of force; a positive and not a negative conception of power, as the defining features of European modernity.

While Benjamin's focus is on the commodity economy, Foucault directs his attention towards the strictures of power inscribed on the *body* and on the *social body*. In Foucault's critique of modernity, it is not the "false consciousness" of metropolitan culture which comes under attack but the techniques of control which multiply and intensify in a political economy of "pleasure and power." In *Histoire de la sexualité: La Volonte de savior* (1976) (*The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, 1978) Foucault argues that modern forms of power:

set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace. There was undoubtedly an increase in effectiveness and an extension of the domain controlled; but also a sensualization of power and a gain of pleasure. This produced a twofold effect: an emotion rewarded the overseeing of control and carried it further...The pleasure discovered fed back to the power that encircled it...Power operated as a mechanism of attraction; it drew out those peculiarities over which it kept watch. Pleasure spread to the power that harried it; power anchored the pleasure it uncovered.²³⁷

Power in this sense is not spectacular but organic. Furthermore, as power extends its reach over larger territories it does so through a dual process of concealment and

²³⁷ *ibid.* p. 44-45.

disclosure. Concealing itself behind the “objective” gaze of the medical sciences, power discloses the “truth” about the body in an exhibitionary-like fashion. In this kind of exhibitionary complex the body is inscribed with the “perversions” and “abnormalities” which mark a deviation from the heterosexual norms of (bourgeois) society. After having being sufficiently identified and inventoried, corrective measures are then introduced thereby, initiating an even more intense cycle of disclosure and revelation. Thus, the “abnormalities” are both the product *of* and the justification *for* greater control, manipulation, and regimentation.

While many of the technologies used in the administration of bodies are not unique to the modern period, what is peculiar is their deployment to service a host of moral and ethical investments in the *social body*. No longer the function to make “divinity and might manifest,” modern political thought privileges a “government rationality” – a program “whereby everything would be controlled to the point of self-sustenance, without the need of intervention.”²³⁸ Two anatomico-political processes, the *secularization* and the *sexualization* of society constitute the redefined the art of governing. While the former process involves a series of knowledge-practices which discipline bodies, the latter process includes a variety of moral pedagogical strategies that normalize individual behavior.

More penetrating and exacting than disciplinary technologies, the moral-pedagogical strategies deployed in the normalization of human behavior illuminate the

body's fantasies, desires, and pleasures. Contesting the repressive hypothesis (which posits that sexual instincts were effectively repressed by Victorian puritanism), Foucault postulates that the nineteenth-century witnessed a proliferation in the measurement, examination, and observation of sexuality and the excitement that it generated.

*What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadowy existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploring it as the secret.*²³⁹

A refinement of the Christian pastoral (which advocated the spiritual cleansing of the soul through the confession of the body's sinful pleasures), the "confessional sciences" were directed towards the production of the truth about the "dangers" of immoral and deviant sexual behavior. Using a series of moral-scientific processes capable of penetrating the secret realm of corporeal pleasures and desires, the moral architecture of *sex* and *sexuality* effectively medicalized, criminalized, and pathologized human conduct. The architects of this new socio-spatial imaginary were the engineers, doctors, educators, and managers who had a vested interest in the illumination of the shadowy areas of society. In concert with a series of developments in communication, electricity, and railway transportation these "technicians of space" instituted a geopolitical imaginary that allowed spatial bodies to become quantified, regulated, and homogenized with increasing frequency.

Cordon Sanitaire

Inlaid with the theatrical propensities of Napoleon III's imperial aesthetic was a visual mode intimately tied to the medicalization of metropolitan space. Whereas the

²³⁸ *ibid.* p. 241.

visual logic of the *mise en scène* and the *trompe l'oeil* is central to dramaturgical expressions of power, the visual economy of the medical “gaze” services a form of power more difficult to detect. As previously discussed, surveillant modes of power/knowning are difficult to detect because they cannot be traced to single source nor localized in space. And yet, because it enjoys an incredible degree of mobility the observing “eye” of medical science is simultaneously all-seeing and all-knowing. In the conflation of medical space and social space – a process which accelerates after 1832 – conventional perceptions of the metropolitan landscape are radicalized; streets, cemeteries, tenements were discursively (re)constructed in accordance with the logic of the *cordon sanitaire*. Haussmann’s architectural incursions into the impenetrable maze of the working class quarters are the physical manifestation of a medical discourse in which hygiene, vision, and morality interpenetrate. But more importantly, the boulevards help to further “illuminate” the social malaise which physicians and hygienists “discovered” in the faubourgs.

Not only do the *grand avenues* segregate the city into zones of disease and salubrity, they function both as “prevention” and “cure” for the contagion of political and social disorder. Haussmann’s medico-military eviscerations belonged to a cultural imaginary in which the urban poor were likened to festering sores; visible signs that something was terribly wrong “inside” the *social body*. Foucault asserts that the detection of the social body was “one of the greatest discoveries of the late eighteenth-century.”²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 64.

²⁴⁰ Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (1984) p. 242.

A coterie of private and public health initiatives were launched to protect the general population from the sickness and death. By the Second Empire, this had evolved into a bio-power; a “medico-administrative” matrix comprised of hospitals, clinics, philanthropic organizations, the Royal Society of Medicine (1776), individual examinations, and record-keeping procedures. Haussmann’s compulsion to illuminate and map the contours of the metropolitan physiognomy stems from the regulatory and interventionist mandate prescribed by the medico-administrative complex.

I felt, from that moment on, firmly in the saddle, ready to embark upon the conquest of the old Paris, with an army that was starting to have faith in its leader, and whose support, ever more certain, allowed me to begin tearing open the neighbourhoods of this city center with its tangled streets, almost impassable to traffic; its cramped squalid, unhealthy dwellings that were, for the most part, nothing but hotbeds of sickness and disease, and a disgrace to a nation such as France.²⁴¹

However, in performing the spectacular surgery on the “diseased” *quartiers* of the city, the prefect was not simply decontaminating (*assainir*) Paris he was relieving the ailments of the entire French nation. Paris was not simply the largest population center in the country, it was the nerve-center for the Bonapartist Empire. Thus, it was mandatory that the metropolis undergo the most intensive medico-political operation in European history.

The medical configuration of metropolitan space was not limited to the streets and working-class neighbourhoods. Sizable modifications to Parisian parks and sewers also figured prominently in the modernization of Paris. Doubling as an example of

²⁴¹ E.G. Haussmann, *Memoires*, 2:257. Quoted in Vaheed Ramazani, “Writing in Pain: Baudelaire, Benjamin, Haussmann,” *Boundary 2* (1996) vol. 23, no. 2. p. 215.

Haussmann's engineering talents and his propensity for unrepentant extravagance, the parks and sewers illustrate how the manipulation of public appearances and the deployment of controlling technologies were actively combined in the formation of an authoritarian urbanism.

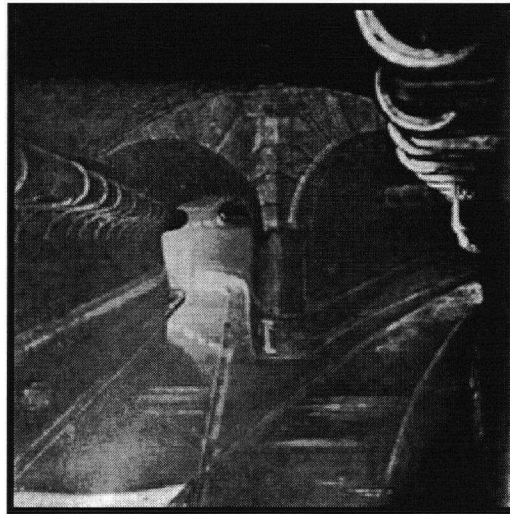


Figure 3.7: *The Paris Sewers*. Source: F. Nadar (1861).

Unlike the spectacular *embellishments* instituted above ground, the improvements made to the sewers did not involve the large-scale appropriation of private property, take advantage of the latest engineering technology, or necessitate the massive displacement and resettlement of the working poor. As a result, the decision to construct a new sewer system received unanimous support. Like the boulevards, the sewers were envisioned by Haussmann as the orifices and arteries of the social body.

The underground galleries, organs of the large city, would function like those of the human body. Pure and fresh water, light, and heat would circulate beneath the urban skin like the diverse fluids whose movement and maintenance support life. Secretions would take place mysteriously and would maintain public health without

*troubling the good order of the city and without spoiling
its exterior beauty.*²⁴²

Although the water requirements for the entire city could have been supplied by steam pumps that were already in use, the prefect expended an exorbitant amount of capital to extend the Roman system of aqueducts. Haussmann's desire to preserve the ancient technology is interesting given his appetite for destruction. Not surprising however, is the manner by which the prefect exploited subterranean Paris as yet another showcase for the heroic modernism of the Second Empire. In 1867, the sewer system was opened to public tours. Even foreign dignitaries such as Alexander II were escorted through the mysterious labyrinth hidden beneath the city. Imitating the broad sidewalks and park pathways above ground, the walkways located in the bowels of the city were so well maintained that "a lady might walk along them from the Louvre to the Place de la Concorde without fear of bespattering her dainty skirts."²⁴³

As was true of the sewers, the parks were an indispensable tool for the Second Empire's propaganda machine. Neither the sewers nor the parks existed on their own as both were intricately woven into the spectacle of surveillance orchestrated at the Hôtel de Ville. Recalling the picturesque landscapes of Louis XIV's Versailles palace, London's Hyde Park, and the gardens of Italian Renaissance, the aesthetic geometry of Parisian parks captivated and intoxicated onlookers. Meticulous attention was even given to the most "insignificant" of details. All of the amenities of the park – benches gates, garden

²⁴² Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen; Realities and Representations* (1991) Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press. p. 23.

²⁴³ Cited in Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen*. p. 41.



Figure 3.8: *The Bois de Boulogne* (1857) Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

sheds, fences, and entrances – played a role in the construction of artfully crafted sight lines and the (re)production of botanical tapestries. The Bois de Boulogne (1858) was the first park to be renovated. It is estimated that about 14,352,000 francs were invested to transform the site from a natural setting into a 2,000 acre stylized landscape adorned with serpentine lakes, reconstructed rivers, artificial waterfalls, fountains, a race track, and 25,000 meters of labyrinthine pathways.²⁴⁴

In this precedent-setting union of technology and nature, the Bois de Boulogne became the model for future parks; the Bois de Vincennes (1863), the Parc Montsouris (1878), and the Buttes-Chaumont (1867). As extravagant as any of the metropolitan spectacles played out at the department stores or the world exhibitions, the social drama of the parks was, as Zola explains, saturated with the “air of adorable falsity.” In his novel *Nana*, the artificiality of the drama is announced with the arrival of park visitors.

The carriages arrived by the Porte de la Cascade, in an interminable, compact line. There was the large omnibus, the Pauline, which left from the boulevard des Italiens, filled with its fifty passengers, which pulled up to the right of the stands. Then came the dog carts, the Victorias, the landaus with their superb mechanisms mixed in with the sad hackney coaches pulled by nags; and the four-in-hands led by their quartet of horses, and the mail coaches, with their drivers atop and inside the servants guarding the baskets of champagne, and the flies whose enormous wheels were a marvel of steel work, and light tandems as elegant as parts of a watch, which moved to the accompaniment of bells.²⁴⁵

As public arenas in which the technological “mastery” of nature is displayed, parks and sewers valorized the political and cultural accomplishments of the Second Empire. To critics, the classically sculptured setting of the park echoed the monotonous display of neo-classical architectural facades lining the boulevards. As well, the parks were seen as another example of Haussmann’s fiscal irresponsibility and his pedestrian tastes.

In the critical imaginary of Benjamin, the parks along with the department stores, Garnier’s Opéra, the arcades, and the boulevards, appear as archetypal landscapes of consumption. By probing the enigmatic sphere of archetypal phenomenon, Benjamin comes to understand how organic nature is transformed into the reified image of the commodity fetish.

The quality that pertains to the commodity as its fetish-nature is part of the commodity-producing society itself, not as it is in itself but as it always imagines and understands itself to be when it abstracts itself from the fact it produces commodities. The image of itself that it

²⁴⁴ Heath Massey Schenker, “Parks and Politics During the Second Empire in Paris,” p. 218.

²⁴⁵ Emile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, “Lettres Parisiennes,” vol. 14. (1970) Paris: Cercle du livres précieux. p. 1379. Cited in Heath Schenker. p. 23.

*produces, and habitually labels as its culture, corresponds to the concept of phantasmagoria.*²⁴⁶

In the ideological realm of mass consumerism, the totalitarian strategies used to exploit the productive forces of labour are obscured while the imperial fantasy of domination and control is paraded as culture. "The community of nations tries to divest individuals of everything that prevents them from completely merging into a mass of consumers."²⁴⁷ As social life is subsumed by the logic of commercial exchange humanity is divested of its critical faculties and the metropolitan sphere is segregated into two zones; one of neglect and the other of privilege. However, it would be incorrect to assume that the socio-spatial divide institutionalized during the Second Empire remained free of ambiguity and uncertainty. While bourgeois society may have harnessed the imperialistic forces of capitalism to its own advantage, those same forces would also work against the political and social order they tried to impose. Rather than containing the *misère morale* of *nomades* and *declassés* accumulating in the unlit corridors of the old city, Haussmann's redevelopment scheme scattered the poor all over Paris and consequently, made them much more visible.

*Paris was seen as a map where moral and social meanings were read into the contrasting quarters of the capital. Yet, despite the efforts of hygienists and planners, these spaces were never kept wholly apart. In the minds of metropolitans, diseased and dangerous Paris was always threatening to invade their habitat, to infiltrate their field of vision.*²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, V 50. Cited in Norbert Bolz and Willem Van Reijen, *Walter Benjamin* (1996) New Jersey: Humanities Press. p. 37.

²⁴⁷ Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, V 469. Cited in Bolz and Reijen. p. 61.

²⁴⁸ Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature*, (1990) p. 66.

Thus an incredible irony resides at the center of the haussmannization phenomenon. Instead of managing, regulating, and controlling the onset of urban blight, urban renewal magnified the threat (both perceived and real) of social unrest and political anarchy. In many ways, Haussmann did not resolve the problem of the “social question” as much as he tried to conceal it behind the facades of monumental structures and mask it with the spectacle of popular amusement. The prefect launched an aggressive slum-clearing campaign in the old part of the city but he failed to take measures that would ensure that new slums were not built in their place. While developers had to adhere to strict by-laws regulating the height and design of street facades, they were free to build poorly constructed and overcrowded tenements behind them. According to one estimate, there were “no fewer than 269 alleys, courtyards, dwelling houses, and shantytowns constructed without any municipal control whatsoever.”²⁴⁹ As well, the uprising of the Communards in 1870 and the suburban revolts in Milhouse and Le Creusot the year before, attests to the fact that the moral and political order of the Second Empire Paris remained more illusionary than real. It is for this reason that Benjamin concludes; the “Paris fire [of 1870] is the fitting conclusion to Haussmann’s work of destruction.”²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (1989) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 145.

²⁵⁰ Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 161.

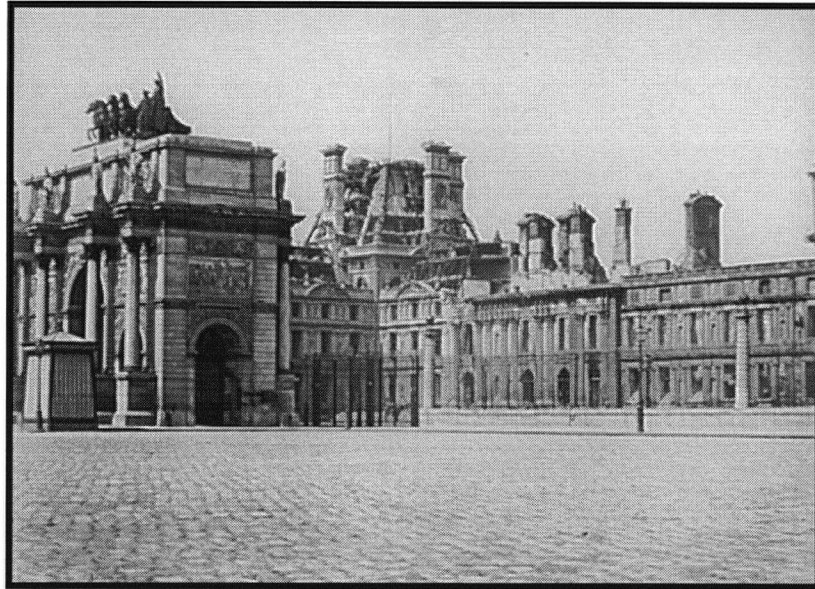


Figure 3.9: *La Louvre* (1871) Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.



Figure 3.10: *Hotel de Ville* (1871) Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

Fugitive Paris

Working Class Insurgency, Prostitution, and Public Meetings

*Finally reaching the platform, the surprised eye is able to grasp Paris. From the summit of the Tour, it appears, not neat, classified, methodological, as in a guide, not readable, as in a map, but confused, tangled, inextricable, the superimposition of twenty cities, the amalgam of one hundred worlds which chance in turn brings together or separates.*²⁵¹

*Ordering is a performance context: social, technical, material, temporal and spatial, and this context is not fixed but open to infinite and uncertain consequences.*²⁵²

During the first decade of the Second Empire, it seemed that a monarch's appetite for pageantry and ceremony and a Machiavellian approach to domestic affairs were all that Napoleon III needed to maintain sovereign power over a European nation with one of the fastest growing economies and largest standing armies. In the 1860s, Louis Napoleon's personal and political fortune took a sharp turn for the worst. His wife, Eugenie, an aggressive and opinionated woman who once used the term "imbecile" to describe her husband, habitually interfered with the internal affairs of the state. Gout, arthritis, hemorrhoids, neuralgia, and gall stones, more "visible" signs of the Emperor's "impotence," left him physically incapacitated for extended periods of time. Like the Emperor, the health of the Empire was rapidly deteriorating. France stumbled when it

²⁵¹ *Paris au hasard*. Quoted in Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (1993) Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 83-84.

²⁵² Kevin Hetherington, *Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (1996) London: Routledge, p. 35.

tried to transform Algeria into an Arabic protectorate, lost its nerve in Italy and Mexico, and then proceeded to walk blindly along a path of self-destruction as it prepared for battle with its all-mighty neighbour, Prussia.

The Second Empire was also losing ground on the domestic front. Prominent industrialists and speculators who had grown nervous over rumours about another European war, started funneling their investments to more secure markets. Antiquarians and scholars concerned with the frenetic pace of Haussmann's demolitions – which by then, had cut through some middle class *quartiers* – openly expressed their opposition to the urban reforms. The delayed promise of liberalization alienated imperial-loyalists without moderating the cynicism of frustrated republicans. To them, Napoleon III's nascent liberalism was nothing more than window dressing designed to conceal the political machinations of a desperate despot. Finally, oppositional parties capitalized on his disinterest in parliamentary democracy to advance their own political agendas. In the elections of 1863, Louis-Napoleon achieved a landslide victory with 5,308,000 votes compared to 1,954,000 votes for the opposition. The gap narrowed considerably six years later when votes in favour of the regime dropped to 4,438,000 votes and those against increased to 3,355,000.²⁵³ Aggravating the situation was a recessionary economic climate that was fuelled by acute cotton shortages, the capital drain of the Pereires financial empire, and the poor 1867 harvest. Political dissidents quickly capitalized on the country's declining economic performance. As a result of the causal connection they

²⁵³ Rupert Christiansen, *Tales of the New Babylon: Paris, 1869-1875* (1994) London: Sinclair-Stevenson, p. 118.

drew between Napoleon III's "caesaro-socialism" and the Empire's economic misfortunes, public opinion turned against the state.

In Paris, the jewel of the Imperial crown, a wave of insurgency and social activism swept through the very streets, plazas, and courtyards that were designed to monitor, regulate, and discourage public insurgency. Within months after the passage of the law on Coalition (1864) – which repealed the 1791 statute prohibiting public assembly and freedom of expression – thousands of bronzeworkers, ironworkers, bookbinders, glass cutters, and metal workers launched city-wide strikes. Freemasons, feminists, clerics, and many other groups too numerous to inventory here, took advantage of the relaxed political atmosphere to forge multiple alliances with various social "clubs," clandestine organizations, and trade unions. While it is customary in the academic literature to treat these revolutionary developments as if they belonged to a homogeneous working-class movement, I am not going to invoke the Marxian proletarian thesis here. Instead of a panoramic and totalizing view of Parisian oppositional politics, I will telescope in on three instances of insurrectionist fervour – artisanal workers in the historic center of the city, prostitution and the proliferation of luxury *maisons de tolérances*, and the rise of public meetings – in order to gain a better sense of the socio-spatial play at work within the Imperial order of things.

I stated in the introduction that my intention was not simply to work with Benjamin and Foucault but to "brush" their historical geographies "against the grain" and to identify the epistemological, theoretical, and spatial limitations of their critical

imaginaries. Most of my discussion up to this point has focussed on a critical usage of Benjamin and Foucault. In this chapter, more emphasis will be placed on the latter objective. Artisan neighbourhoods, luxury brothels, and the public meeting halls are excellent places to search for gaps and weaknesses in their respective theories because like the arcades and Bentham's panopticon, they constitute primary points of passage in the development of alternative forms of sociability. There is however one major difference, and this is important, these cultural spaces do not produce docile bodies or depoliticized consumers. They are the principle training grounds for what Roger Gould has termed "insurgent identities."²⁵⁴

Each of the following case studies have been selected not because they are representative of life on the "fringes" of Second Empire Paris but because they are occasions in which the entire metropolis reveals itself to be an amalgam of converging and separating life-worlds. They draw our attention to the fact that behind the Paris of weekend promenades, horse races, and public exhibitions, and lurking in the shadows of Napoleon III's colossal architectural monuments and Imperial vistas, is a subterranean and elusive Paris. Because these bohemian, subversive, and mutable cultural spaces exist in close proximity to the bourgeois sphere of social reproduction, it is worth taking a closer look at some of the unintended and uncertain consequences of Haussmannization. A second reason why I am so interested in exploring the performative nature of these

²⁵⁴ Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities; Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (1995) Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 13.

revolutionary movements in greater depth is because they invite us to think about *multiple modes of social ordering* and not just the *process of social ordering*.

The Production of Working-Class Dissent

Despite everything that Haussmann accomplished in seventeen years as the chief architect and engineer of Parisian streets, parks, and sewers, he was never able to prevent the development of new and more revolutionary forms of sociability. The escalation of a disciplined and highly effective working-class militancy is the first of three instances of fugitive cultural forms that will be examined in this chapter. One of the keys to understanding how the workers were able to sustain an organized politics of resistance in such a repressive historic period, lies in the persistence of artisanal industries in and around the historic center of Paris. In 1871, a full year after Haussmann's unceremonious departure from the Hotel de Ville, more than 50% of leather workers were still concentrated in the 5th and 13th *arrondissements* – a scenario remarkably similar to the demographic picture of the 17th century. Roughly 31% percent of the manufacturers who produced luxury items such as umbrellas, furniture, and artificial flowers resided in the 3rd district.²⁵⁵ Bronze makers were also spatially concentrated with 37.5% in the 11th *arrondissement* and another 25% in the third.²⁵⁶

In contrast to the sizable portion of small *ateliers* such as carpenters, joiners, machinists, shoe-makers and unskilled labourers who were forced to find employment in

²⁵⁵ Roger Gould, *Insurgent Identities*, pp. 106-107.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 109.

one of the large suburban industrial complexes, producers of luxury goods continued to exercise a strong presence on the shop floor. Uniform wages, the length of the work day, management policies, subcontracting, and the appointment of apprentices, were all subject to their approval. Instead of the unrelenting Leviathan which according to Marx, exhausted the energy reserves of working-class bodies and reduced them to mere appendages of fuel-powered machines, artisans in face-to-face industries (relatively inexpensive to operate, labour-intensive, and averaging ten to fifteen workers) were able to insulate themselves from the worst excesses of capitalist modes of production.



Figure 4.1: *Face-to-face Industries*. Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

Given that so much of their autonomy derived from their ability to craft luxury items out of raw materials using hand as well as steam-powered tools, skilled artisans looked upon mechanization not with suspicion and fear but with optimism and self-assurance. Stone masons, bronze sculptors, and gold and silver smiths viewed the trend towards technical innovation as an opportunity to improve and refine skills that were already specialized and economically valuable. The real threat as they perceived it, was not mechanization *per se* but profit-driven and large-scale production systems designed

for cheap, inelegant, and mass consumer goods – the kind of economic development that the French frequently associated with the English model of industrialization.

Patrons of French manufacturing, whose habits and tastes were often the reflection of favourable reviews written in various trade journals, exhibition brochures,



Figure 4.2: *Porcelain Painters*. Source: Paris Postcards website, 1998.

and periodicals, were enchanted by its rich legacy of artistic traditions. Lavishly decorated surfaces, hand-painted figurines, and hand-crafted parts were regarded by consumers and critics alike as markers of wealth and refined taste. While modest in comparison to the extravagant tastes of the aristocracy, the bourgeois penchant for ornamentation was expressed with far greater regularity and displayed at venues where attendance figures were much higher – universal exhibitions, arcades, salons, cafes, and restaurants. However, the "democratization" of consumer tastes did not necessarily translate into affordability. The new social elite were opposed to the notion of affordability for two reasons. First, the production of cheap manufactured goods was considered to be an unnecessary concession to the unruly masses which rebelled against the state in 1848. Second, ownership of a Fourdinois buffet, a Rudolphi bracelet, or a

Froment-Meurice dressing table, was a sign of social prestige and distinction. An extension of that designation to working-class men and women would automatically imply that the existing social structure was less than satisfactory.

To art critic Constance Aubert, bourgeois luxury was above all a domesticated luxury. Bourgeois “esoteric knowledge” was typically “well enclosed by good door curtains, by cushions of silk, and by double draperies that hermetically seal the windows. There may be only a paper wall covering, but a good rug is underfoot; people sit in excellent small seats without roughness, where the body abandons itself and rests. A profusion of fabric adorns the windows, covers the mantel, hides the woodwork. Dry wood, cold marble, disappear under velvet or tapestry.”²⁵⁷ While the trend towards economic specialization and the bourgeois cultivation of socially refined tastes account for the increased production of value-added goods as well as the enduring presence of face-to-face industries, they are of little use in understanding the persistence of artisanal social networks. The factory may have been the locus of working-class militancy, but it was in the neighbourhoods, the center of informal social relations, where the “raw material” of everyday life was molded into territorially divided and socially accepted, working-class identities. There was more to being a stone mason or a glass blower than the years of training and “scientific” knowledge required to transform blocks of granite and heaps of sand into the finished products exported to cities across Europe and North America. Membership in a particular trade usually implied residency in a specific

neighbourhood or *quartier*, it meant that you walked to work along the same route taken by the other ten or fifteen artisans in your shop, and at the end of the work-day or shift, that you reassembled in the local wine store or cabaret. Outside France, there are only a few social historians and urban geographers, Benjamin and Foucault included, who have ever given much serious thought to the role of local drinking establishments in the development of Parisian politics. This is quite unfortunate because:

*The cabaret was much more to urban workers than a place to go to have a drink. They would read the newspaper there, borrow writing materials, play cards. Some employers would even go there to pay their workers; conversely, the marchand de vin might act as a banker, keeping deposits and performing simple transactions...And logically, this is where the chambers syndicales had their headquarters...continuing the tradition strike committees had always followed.*²⁵⁸

Various clandestine associations and *sociétés des secours mutuels* (mutual aid societies) helped to fortify the integrity of artisan identities. Like the *metiers jurés* (master's guilds) of previous eras, these fraternal organizations were integral to the sense of community, pride, and purpose which separated skilled artisans from unskilled labourers. The associations offered financial assistance for medical and funeral expenses and a few even had pension plans.

That these localized societies existed as spiritual communities and not simply as functional units within a larger constellation of capitalist relations, is yet another aspect

²⁵⁷ Constance Aubert, *L'Illustration*, 12 July 1851, p. 27. In Whitney Walton: *France at the Crystal Palace: Bourgeois Taste and Artisan Manufacture in the Nineteenth Century* (1992) Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 36.

of the Parisian industrial landscape that economic historians have repeatedly overlooked. By spirituality, I do not mean the overtly intellectual and esoteric convictions espoused by Walter Gropius and other members of the Weimar Bauhaus movement. These were "imagined communities"²⁵⁹ that were sustained by adhering to a panoply of inherited traditions, sacred rituals, and incantations. Devotion to the chosen patron saint was another common feature of the worker associations. In the same way that the ascending social elites enlisted fashion and interior design to educate the consuming public on the virtues of cultivating discriminating and intelligent tastes, mutual aid societies employed the religious mystique of saints and rituals to inculcate worker solidarity, compliance, and group discipline.

Thus, artisanal organizations and the trade loyalty they fostered are somewhat of a conundrum. Benefactors of Napoleon III's grand designs and the bourgeois fetish for conspicuous consumption, Parisian artisans exploited their economic clout to exercise greater influence over the decisions made on the shop floor while they used antiquated traditions to insulate themselves from the identity-destroying structures of international capitalism. In short, the artisanal culture of the Second Empire survived for two reasons. First, Haussmannization helped to preserve the industrial geography of artisanal shops and small factories which employed the skilled workers. Second, the participatory and

²⁵⁸ Maurice Agulhon, Francoise Choay, Maurice Crubelheir, Yves Leguin, and Marcel Roncayolo, *Histoire de la France urbaine* (1983) Vol. 4. La ville et l'age industriel. Paris: Editions du Seuil, p. 528. In Roger Gould, *Insurgent Identities* (1995) p. 110.

²⁵⁹ The term is taken from Benedict Anderson's book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) London: Verso Editions.

disciplined class-struggle which the artisans were able to mobilize offered a great deal of protection from the rationalizing and disciplinary forces of modern capitalism.

Paris the Seductress

Beware!

*The Flower girls at the bals publics, cafés chantants, and outside the theatres, as well as the wily advances of well-dressed and spoken women. The uncouth boldness of the street-walker will strike the visitor with immediate amazement and distaste: but how could one expect that under a lady-like appearance and language the Parisian gay woman hides the evil designs of a fallen angel, and laughs inwardly at the gullibility of her victim?*²⁶⁰

Prostitution, like other forms of criminal behavior, represented a subterranean society of insurgency, excess, and disorder. Street-walkers, courtesans, and *femmes galantes*, were to the bourgeois cult of domesticity what con artists, swindlers, and petty thieves were to the institution of private property. Social historians and urban geographers interested in the life of the prostitute will be disappointed when they learn that it is a milieu which remains impenetrable and unfathomable. Women who worked in the sex trade industry did not “confess” their “sins” in diaries, journals, or private correspondences. There are no traces of their personal lives lying dormant in the Bibliothèque Nationale just waiting to be rescued by contemporary historians. Almost everything that is known about the social milieu of nineteenth-century prostitution is based on the testimonies and reports of those who believed it was their rightful duty to suppress and control sexual venality.

In keeping with the authoritarian paternalism of the time, virtually of the “classical” studies on the Parisian sex trade exaggerated the prostitute’s proclivity for alcohol, dancing, gambling, expensive tastes, and “frivolous” indulgences such as flowers, cards, and lotto. Temperamental, lazy, and indecisive, young women and girls who had “fallen” into the trap of sexual venality were also thought to suffer from extreme restlessness. Some authorities argued that this explained why prostitutes seemed predisposed to change their residences so often. Others were more interested in the environmental conditions which “corrupted” these women in their childhood and which caused them to behave in ways that were completely antithetical to the “accepted” norms of Parisian society. Ignoble family origins, intense poverty, and a variety of social vices were the most common explanations cited. This may have been true for the women who plied their trade in the filthy lavatories and brothels in and around the Ile de la Cité, but it was not the case for all prostitutes.

*A bored lady of the manor, a misunderstood bourgeoisie,
a failed would-be actress, a peasant girl who had lost
her innocence – she he is all these things...She is the
eternally unsolved riddle that intrigues and terrifies
him.*²⁶¹

Prostitution was a social anomaly. It defied social-scientific rationalizations and positivistic typologies. In contrast to male artisans, Parisian sex workers did not all originate from a particular neighbourhood nor did they come from a single social class.

²⁶⁰ *Paris Partout! A Travel Guide for the English and American Traveler* (1869) p. 14. In Christiansen, *Paris: New Tales of the New Babylon, 1869-1875* (1994) p. 14.

²⁶¹ Alain Corbin, *Women For Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850* (1990) Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, p. 135.

Consistent with everything else in the City of Mirrors, their physical appearance were deceiving. Telling the difference between a *lorrette* and a young widow was sometimes very difficult.

One thing that medical professionals and social reformers were certain of was the threat presented by the encroachment of syphilis and other venereal diseases. "Of all the diseases that can affect mankind through contagion, and which have the most serious repercussions on society, there is none more serious, more dangerous, and more to be feared than syphilis."²⁶² The Parisian "economy of pleasure" brought many different kinds of people together both figuratively and literally. Fearful of the moral, social, and economic risks emanating from the expanding circulation of intimate contacts, municipal planners, health officials, and the police tried imposing greater regulations and restrictions on the movement of prostitutes. The chief architect of the regulationist system was Parent-Duchâtelet, an engineer who enjoyed great notariety for the work he had done on the sewers. In his view, prostitutes were not beyond redemption. The fact that they seemed unable to assimilate the bourgeois norms of respectability and virtuous behavior into their feminine psyche was no fault of their own. Parent-Duchâtelet maintained that the sexual aggressiveness that prostitutes displayed was a sign of their immaturity; a condition that could be reversed with the right combination of self-discipline and moral instruction. He believed that the path to rehabilitation started and ended with the enclosed milieu of the prison-hospital. The supervisory apparatus of the penitentiary was there to instill order and economy where none had existed before. Opposed to the moral education

prescribed by religious reformers (a daily regime of knitting and prayer), Parent-Duchâtelet claimed that prostitutes, being lustful creatures, could be expected to repent only after their excessive energies had been purged through vigorous exercise. He postulated that after a day of long walks in the country or on treadmills, sleep and nothing else, is all that would happen in their beds.

Complimenting the carceral system of the prison, or so the regulationists thought, were the *maisons de tolérance*. Although the regulationists accepted the fact that sexual venality was too deeply entrenched in Parisian culture to be legislated out of existence, they believed that some carnal appetites and practices were decidedly more offensive than others. Regulationists remained confident that the more extreme libidinal impulses could

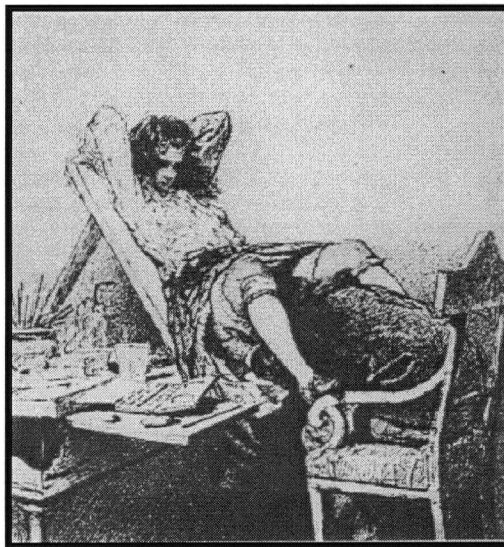


Figure 4.3: *Michael von Zichy* (1850) Source: P. Sloterdijk (1987) p. 351.

²⁶² *ibid.*, p. 5, #17.

be moderated and even extinguished. But the plan to domesticate the “economy of pleasure” was an abysmal failure. Prostitutes actively resisted the cold and calculated advances of state regulation by refusing their bodies to be perused, palpated, and probed by medical examiners. Coupled with this was the fact that the *tolérances* proved to be less than ideal laboratories for observation and supervision. The authorities could install a *madame de la maisons* in every brothel, remove all the locks from the bedroom doors, and they could even make use of arbitrary raids as a form of *coitus interruptus*, but the passion for policing prostitution remained unfulfilled.

Ironically, efforts to contain the city’s libidinal economy were also compromised by political pressure that was being exerted by feminists and property developers – the most vocal critics of the sex trade industry. Feminists, viscerally opposed to the commodification of women’s bodies as well as the degrading and unsanitary conditions of the brothels, and speculators, concerned that the brothels were deflating property values in the historic center, advocated the destruction of the “seminal sewers.” Haussmann’s *relèvements*, which destroyed most of brothels in the Ile de la Cité and the area around the Louvre, delivered another great blow to the regulationist system. Their number continued to decline even after the fall of the Second Empire. In 1873 there were one hundred and twenty-five brothels in Paris. By 1897, only twelve were still standing.²⁶³ Even when combined, these contributing factors pale in comparison to the single most important reason for the failure of the regulationist system – the sexual appetite among Parisian males was much more robust and their perversions more

diversified. As the appeal of the “seminal sewers” started to wane, thereby helping to reduce their numbers, new forms of prostitution were already proliferating in the unregulated establishments – brothels disguised as fashion boutiques, wine shops, and other small businesses. Alternative sexual services could also be procured from the independent prostitutes who frequented the city’s cafés, theatres, restaurants, the Opera, and brasseries.

Competition from the unregulated brothels and self-employed prostitutes was all the incentive that the *tolérances* required to begin experimenting with more elaborate and more refined forms of eroticism. International tourist attractions like the *exhibitions universale* and the prospect of a more cosmopolitan clientel, compelled some brothel-keepers to renovate their premises. A few of the more entrepreneurial proprietors, inspired by Napoleon III’s imperial aesthetic, transformed their “sanitary establishments” into opulent temples of perversion.

*A Swiss rock with a marvelous grotto and rustic staircase is one of the curiosities and one of the mysteries of the establishment. The grand staircase is monumental. There are mirrors everywhere, on all the walls and all the ceilings; there are soft, very thick carpets everywhere and in every room; there are hangings everywhere; dazzling electric lights everywhere; and everywhere perfumes in this temple of love, the priestesses of which are naked.*²⁶⁴

Mirrors supplied the luxury *tolérances* with an extended and more intense visual economy but not for the purposes of surveillance and regulation. The interior spaces of

²⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁶⁴ *ibid.* p. 123.

these panoptic palaces were not designed according to the supervisory “dream of disciplinary perfection” but the sensual logic of disciplining and punishing. Tableaux vivants involving couples, lesbians, and hermaphrodites were front and center in the rapidly expanding economy of pleasure. Aphrodisiacs, group sex, folatio, analingus, and homosexuality were made available to the more adventurous clients. In this totally unregulated and unbridled sexual milieu, even bestiality was fashionable. Innovation, experimentation, and specialization, the same forces that were behind many of the changes in the face-to-face industries, were now responsible for turning the *tolérances* into laboratories where entirely new sexual practices and perversions were cultivated. What started as an attempt to delimit the moral physical boundaries of undomesticated intercourse, actually fostered an exponential increase in the production of new sexual freedoms, norms, and attitudes.

Public Meetings

*In the meantime we must keep these meetings going, because they are the people's school. The people need to learn. There are some who would be only too happy to stop these meetings. We must not give in unless we are forced to, and that will take some doing.*²⁶⁵

By the end of the 1860s it was becoming clear to everyone that urban landscape was not the only thing to undergo a dramatic transformation. According to Sudhir Haz, “this period should be seen as a defining moment for the principles of good citizenship

²⁶⁵ Alain Faure, “The Public Meeting Movement in Paris from 1868 to 1870.” In Adrian Rifkin and Roger Thomas ed., *Voices of the People: The Social Life of “La Sociale” at the End of the Second Empire* (1988) London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 181.

which were subsequently proclaimed by the elites of the Third Republic in the 1870s and 1880s.” He identifies the emergence of municipal republicanism, a movement led by republican and liberal elites who wanted to redefine the concept of citizenship without undermining the sanctity of bourgeois hegemony, as the most important legacy of this historic era. Their prescription for social and political order called for a systematic devolution of institutional and bureaucratic powers – an idea that received widespread support in academic texts, independent journals, political pamphlets, and conferences. Absent in Haz analysis is a consideration of the insurrectionist fervour that was growing in response to, and in spite of, the aggressive cultural crusade launched by the bourgeois social elite. For the most part, the “dangerous classes” ignored abstract debates and philosophical discussions nor were they willing to comply with the republican virtues of the “good life” – liberal individualism, parliamentary democracy, rationalism, tolerance, and public-spiritedness. State propaganda and conciliatory gestures such as Napoleon III’s decision to repeal the 1791 statute only confirmed their convictions about the need for a complete overhaul of the existing social and political order.

The Second Empire was seen by its opponents to be the worst violator of the same civil liberties and freedoms that it professed to uphold and protect. Arbitrary seizure of personal property and imprisonment were still in use as methods of controlling and intimidating its opponents and Article 291 of the Napoleonic Code, which required any meeting in excess of twenty people to register with municipal authorities, was still in effect. The prevailing view among the ruling elite was that social clubs, trade associations, and unauthorized public meetings of any kind, presented a threat to the

Imperial order. Fearing a repeat of the rebellious activity which stormed through Paris in 1848 and 1851, state authorities drafted legislation which included prison sentences of up to two years and fines as much as 1,000 francs for those who violated the laws. The penalties were automatically doubled for second offenders.²⁶⁶ But the limits of state repression did not end there. Officials were dispatched to monitor and to record the minutes of every meeting. If the official judged that any of the guidelines had been violated then the meeting could be closed and the crowd dispersed. Between the months of January and June 1869, a total of twenty-two convictions totaling 84.5 months of internment and 6,575 francs in fines were delivered to 39 individuals.²⁶⁷ Pro-Empire newspapers intensified the concerns of the state and the propertied classes with articles which inaccurately portrayed the purpose of the meetings. For example, August Vitu once wrote in *Pays* that topics such as atheism, regicide, organized murder, the abolition of the nuclear family and the destruction of private property were popular at these meetings. To some readers it seemed as if another 1793 was in the making.

Like the artisan enclaves, public meetings were not evenly distributed in the capital. In contrast to the trade associations that were spatially concentrated in the historic center, public meetings were more prevalent along the margins of the metropolis. Out of a total of 933 meetings organized between July 1869 and May 1870, 517 or 55.3% were held in either the suburbs or the periphery of Paris while 416 or 44.6% were located in the

²⁶⁶ Alain, Faure, p. 184.

²⁶⁷ Alian Faure, p. 200.

city center.²⁶⁸ The geographic distribution of the meetings were influenced by the demographic shifts which occurred in the second half of the nineteenth-century. Dance halls and wine stores were the two types of premises most preferred by organizers. Other kinds of venues, *cafés-concerts*, theatres, and circuses, were used for smaller gatherings. Organizers could never accumulate enough capital to purchase a hall of their own and so meetings were always held in rented space. The expense of securing rented premises was another determining factor in the spatial arrangement of public assemblies. Rents varied according to location and the size of the venue. For instance, a spacious *bal* on the boulevard de Clichy rented for about 80 francs per evening whereas the Grand Salon Poissoniere located on the boulevard de la Chapelle went for 200 francs. The price of admission ranged from 25 to 50 centimes.²⁶⁹

Parliamentary democracy, as they understood it, was an illusion and a detour from the true path of revolutionary action. Laurier warned of the betrayal awaiting those who were still willing to place their trust in bourgeois democracy. "I am a liberal democrat and they say I'm a parliamentarian, but I can remember that it was under a parliamentarian regime that the assassins of freedom brandished their bayonets."²⁷⁰ Also common were Proudhonist and Marxist expressions like: "Property is theft...It's even more than that, it's murder, it's an ever increasing disgrace."²⁷¹ Whereas liberals and republicans campaigned for a decentralized political system, socialist and communist speakers

²⁶⁸ Alain Faure, p. 218.

²⁶⁹ Alain Faure, p. 209.

²⁷⁰ Laurier, October 30, 1869 rue de Crimee. In Alain Dalotel and Jean-Claude Freiermuth, "Socialism and Revolution," p. 242.

summoned their audiences to revolt and prepare for the "revolutionary day of reckoning." In 1867, a representative from one of the worker councils which attended the world exhibition stated: "In the opinion of the Paris section of the IWMA [International Woodworker's and Metalworker's Association] we should respect the law as far as possible until such time we feel strong enough to break it."²⁷² According to most militant *habitués*, republican, parliamentary, Catholic, and colonial institutions were relics of a dying past and therefore deserved to be put to rest. Likewise, there could be no turning back to the "space-time" of previous revolutions. The political and social ramifications of 1848 constituted a watershed in Parisian history, a vanishing point on the horizon of the collective memory. As one speaker put it: "They shot us in '48...Let us forget the shootings, but not the people who ordered them."²⁷³

Returning to the revolutionary covenant of 1848 would have been, as Marx argued, a farcical attempt to relive a dream. Their mission was to "glorify new struggles rather than parody old ones, to amplify the present task in the imagination, not to take flight from achieving it in reality, to rediscover the spirit of revolution, not to make its ghost walk about again."²⁷⁴

It's all got to change; everything on the top must be moved to the bottom; and may everything at the bottom move to the top, so high at the top that no hand can be raised against it. ²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ Alain Dalotel and Jean-Claude Freiermuth, p. 249.

²⁷² *ibid.*, p.237.

²⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 241.

²⁷⁴ Karl Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1913) Chicago: C.H. Kerr, p. 116.

²⁷⁵ Alain Dalotel and Jean-Claude Freiermuth, p. 262.

Marxist, Proudhonist, socialist, communist, and anarchists all agreed that for social equality, in its true form, was to become reality then the entire social and political system had to be completely dismantled and rebuilt. Benjamin hypothesized that every "epoch dreams the next" and that the present is impregnated with the messianic charge through which, the unsatisfied aspirations of previous generations can be redeemed. However, the phantasmagoria of a revolutionary proletarian thesis was not about to overturn nearly two decades of Haussmannization. Militant protesters could burn much of Paris and mobilize a social force powerful enough to topple an Imperial regime. But to exercise control over the city, that would require a political struggle of a very different nature.

Despite the revolutionary content of the speeches and the incitement to overtake the existing political regime, the state authorities did not take full advantage of the powers available to them. Fines, incarceration, and closures deterred neither the organizers nor the proprietors of the meeting halls. Even though the meetings were constantly monitored by civic officials and police officers, the scopic regime of disciplinary power, which according to Foucault, was the dominant organizing principle of modernity, failed as it had in the luxury brothels.

All our societies are outside the law. They only exist because the administration tolerates them. But this tolerance has become such a habit, and is now so deeply engrained in people's behavior that it would be impossible for the administration to reverse it. We claim to enjoy the natural right of association. For our General Assembly meetings we simply inform the prefect of police at least twenty-four hours before hand. He sends a policeman along who makes his report, but that doesn't stop us saying whatever we want to say. Our

*doors are open to everyone, if we so wish it, or closed to outsiders if we so desire, its entirely up to us.*²⁷⁶

The failure of the regulatory system and the surveillant apparatus that was instituted inside the public meeting halls leads me to two conclusions. First, there are geographic limits to disciplinary forms of power. The success of the meetings was largely due to the fact that they were held in peripheral districts where the resources of the state were over extended. From here, the meeting halls “were like a series of isolated socialist fortresses encircling the center of Paris.”²⁷⁷

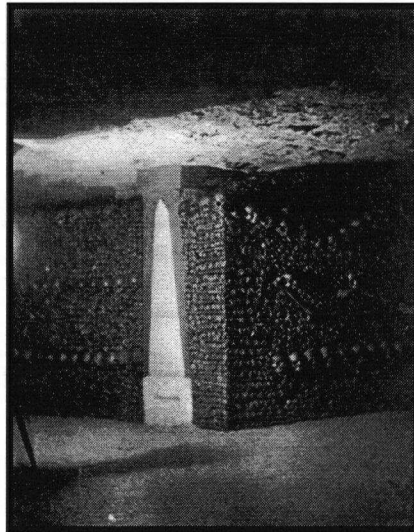


Figure 4.4: *Paris Catacombs*. Source: F. Nadar (1861).

Second, it would appear as though the surveillant technologies that Foucault examined in great detail worked extremely well in some institutional settings but were absolute failures in others.

²⁷⁶ Alain Faure, p. 196.

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 231.

Foucault accurately describes the finer channels through which modern forms of power are diffused but he exaggerates the ease by which power accumulates and is extended across space. While I support Foucault's claim that the nineteenth-century marks the "birth of a new sort of thinking about space," I dispute the assertion that modern forms of power can be fully explained with the panopticon. By privileging Bentham's "inspection house" in the way that he does, Foucault disregards the precarious terms upon which political power was exercised and he overdetermines the normalizing force of disciplinary power. As I see it, the problem with Foucault's theory of power is that it is based almost entirely on the official discourses which circulated in government documents and manuscripts. Consequently, his understanding of nineteenth-century power relations is less than comprehensive. Had he expanded his critical analysis beyond the confined spaces of a select number of pedagogical, medical, and carceral institutions and studied the vernacular discourses of worker's reports, street posters, postcards, panoramic literature, and travel guides, a more complicated geography of sociability and a more ambiguous geometry of power relations would have surfaced on the printed pages of *Discipline and Punish* and the *History of Sexuality*. I am certainly not the only one to arrive at these conclusions. Historian Martin Jay, echoing an earlier statement made by French social theorist de Certeau, states:

*Foucault may have focussed so insistently on the dangers of panopticonism that he remained blind to the other micropractices of everyday life the subvert its power.*²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: Occularcentricism and the Decline of French Theory in the Twentieth Century* (1996) London: Routledge, p. 415.

It is interesting that although Benjamin discussed the necessity of proceeding “radically, never consistently, when it comes to the most important things” and emphasized the importance of a complete “immersion in the most minute details of subject matter,” he had absolutely nothing to say about the formation of participatory identities within artisan neighbourhoods, luxury brothels, and the meeting halls. While it might not be entirely fair to critique Benjamin for these oversights, particularly since his *magnum opus* on nineteenth-century Paris was never completed, it is correct to argue that his redemptive critique, concerned much more with poetics than politics, was based on a rather rudimentary understanding of the micropractices of everyday life.

Benjamin is to be commended for radicalizing our perceptions of “homogeneous” time and “empty” space but those “small victories” have to be weighed against the concrete realities which are either obscured or ignored in his metaphysical meditations on authentic versus inauthentic experience, the industrial rhythms of capitalist modes of production, and the phantasmagoria of bourgeois interiors. Leo Bersani²⁷⁹ is much more troubled than I am about the “Messianic light” which Benjamin detects radiating from everything that is degraded, outmoded, or profane, however I do agree with Irving Wolfarth²⁸⁰ that by privileging a religious history over and above the “fallen” history of nineteenth-century city dwellers, Benjamin is guilty of an aestheticization of politics - a criticism that he leveled at nineteenth-century bourgeois culture and twentieth-century

²⁷⁹ He is also completely wrong in stating that nothing Benjamin says makes any sense. Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (1990) Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, pp. 48-63.

Fascism. As a consequence, I am left feeling much more ambivalent about Benjamin's critical exegesis than I was when I started this project. Some of the most tantalizing aspects of his intellectual theory - eschatology, lost correspondences, Adamic being, prelapsarian knowledge, and authentic origins - are also the most difficult to comprehend from a pragmatic point of view. His penchant to discuss everything exclusively in theological terms at the expense of a sober analysis of revolutionary politics and dissident behavior. If Foucault is guilty of becoming too preoccupied with order-building initiatives then Benjamin's shortcoming is that he allows his metaphysical meditations to obscure concrete reality.

²⁸⁰ Irving Wohlfarth, "No-Man's-Land: On Walter Benjamin's Destructive Character." In Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne eds., *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience* (1994)

Conclusion

The study of Second Empire Paris is interesting for a number of reasons. Foremost among them was the ambitious attempt to physically remodel and to socially engineer a metropolis of several million inhabitants. The Prince-President Louis Napoleon replaced the rabbit-warren circuitry of cramped, filthy, unlit, and disease-ridden streets with a labyrinthine network of tree-lined avenues, railway lines, investment capital, ornate architectural facades, spacious and manicured parks, an assortment of entertainment venues, and a subterranean world of sewers, gas lines, and aqueducts. In less than two decades, much of the medieval core of historic Paris was systematically demolished, rebuilt, and reordered. What existed before as a conglomeration of riotous neighbourhoods, a pathological landscape of immense poverty, delinquency, and licentiousness, and an archipelago of economic enclaves, was quickly transformed into an elaborate showcase where the latest monuments to capital, progress, and civility were placed on display.

The new French capital was unique in that it was the first time that all aspects of metropolitan life and every sector of the material landscape were functionally integrated into a hierarchically structured administrative system. Two strategies were used to succeed where other plans had failed before. First, the state institutionalized a credit system based on debt financing. Louis Napoleon sanctioned Haussmann's use of "productive expenditures" because he feared that increased taxation would only incite the

urban populous to revolt. There was nothing new about the second strategy that was implemented. Land appropriation schemes were drafted back in the 1840s to make way for the railway construction booms of the 1850s and 1860s. Territories that were declared vital to the health of the national economy or those that were considered to be a threat to the social body, automatically became possessions of the state.

The right to seize private property might have been the most important legal entitlement endowed to the office of the Seine Prefect and there can be no question that under Haussmann the powers of the state expanded several fold. But as I discussed, modern forms of power are not restricted to the spectacle of an Imperial parade, the deployment of military force, or in the exercise of legal jurisprudence – even though it is impossible to engage in a discussion of modern power relations without them. Power resides in a multiplicity of of geographic sites. It arises out of the myriad of economic transactions, state subsidies, discursive relays, modes of production, and disciplinary regimes which accelerated at an unprecedented rate in the second, and especially the third quarter, of the previous century. Although it is impossible to inventory and to map each instance, every site, and all the components involved in the formation of modern power relations, it is feasible to identify some of the obligatory points of passage through which power is channeled, accumulated, deployed, challenged, and reversed.

In my examination of Second Empire Paris and the territorial rearrangements produced by the *haussmannization* process, I telescoped in on a few urban settings where the signature of power was most legible. The list of sites examined is not by any means

comprehensive. My primary objective was to investigate the transformative process which occurred around the middle of the nineteenth-century and to illustrate how the reconfiguration of the Parisian metropolitan landscape can be used to enhance our understanding European modernity. There are countless places to explore the haussmannized city and there are just as many points of entry into the discursive terrain of modernity. I elected to have Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault as my guides into the Second Empire because they offer unique theoretical viewpoints on the relationship between space, power, and knowledge. Also, both intellectuals were equally committed to unraveling the spirals and pleasures of power which they believed were responsible for the diminution of human experience.

When viewed through the optics of Benjamin's dialectical reasoning, Paris takes on the appearance of a majestic dreamworld – a phantasmagoria of mythical images which resonate most intensely in the arcades. Within the glass-covered and artistically decorated architectural structures, the Jewish intellectual saw the past and present, public space and private space, material space and imagined space, intersect to the point where it made almost no sense to speak of physical boundaries. Foucault was also sensitive to the spatial play at work in the modern life-world. However, the kind of questions that interested him contrasted sharply with those which inspired Benjamin. As a consequence, the type of research he conducted, the archival materials he surveyed, and the kinds of places which Foucault visited in his mind's eye, were quite inconsistent with those explored by Benjamin. As I discussed consistently throughout the thesis, one of the major differences between them has to do with the fact that to Foucault's way of thinking, the

society of the spectacle does not exist. I maintain that this is historically inaccurate. One can not even begin to contemplate Paris, the haussmannized city, and modern urban planning without due consideration of how myth, illusion, and deception has figured into the development of the built landscape and how they frame our perceptions of the urban environment.

It was also my intention to demonstrate that the dissimilarities between Benjamin and Foucault are more than methodological. Intellectual training, historical timing, and personal experience, are all factors which have shaped their respective geographical imaginations. While the academic community has constructed an elaborate discourse on Benjamin and Foucault, in much of the work that has been published, the work of the Jewish and French intellectual has been completely divorced from the life-worlds that they inhabited. I hope that by situating their intellectual thought within the places from which Benjamin and Foucault composed their enigmatic philosophies, I have shed some light on the not-too-distant past which flickered before Benjamin's melancholy eyes like shadows dancing on the walls of a candle-lit room and the "dream of disciplinary perfection" which revealed itself to Foucault with incredible, and at times, unbelievable clarity.

I also argued that there are limits to how far we can travel with Benjamin and Foucault. One of the reasons why I decided to use Benjamin and Foucault in a comparative manner was to identify the weaknesses and shortcomings of their critique of modernity. In chapter four, my intention was to illuminate some of the unintended

consequences of *haussmanization* and to explore some of the places which escaped the discriminating eye of Benjamin and Foucault. This is essentially a continuation of the discussion I set up in chapter two. That is where I used a series of interconnecting “snapshots” to create a mosaic of the metropolitan social milieu and where I tried to impress upon the reader that Paris has many “faces.” Thus, the purpose of the final chapter is brush the ideas of Benjamin and Foucault against the grain and to that the socio-spatial transformations that were deliberately set in motion during the nineteenth-century were considerably more complex and more complicated than either of them had imagined.

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