

# Remaking Urban Space

## Baron Haussmann and the Rebuilding of Paris, 1851-1870

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The Paris that the modern visitor enjoys today - the Paris of broad boulevards and monumental vistas - is essentially the city that was transformed in one intense, centrally-planned campaign of rebuilding during the Second Empire (1852-1871), with some projects being completed in the early years of the Third Republic (1871-1940).

There is a vision of Paris that dominates our perception of the capital today, and that is the alluring image of the refurbished city as it appeared in the last decades of the 19th century, recorded by a generation of painters who became enamoured of the new perspectives of urban space. We have inherited literally hundreds of images which convey their sense of excitement, of a new ease and sophistication, generated by the new urban spaces. Camille Pissarro's *Le Boulevard Montmartre* (1897, National Gallery of Victoria), for example, seeks to express the dynamic, varied, fast-moving quality of modern life by means of the reduction of solid forms into the briefest notation in dabs of paint. Gustave Caillebotte's *Rainy Day in Paris* (1877, Art Institute of Chicago) uses a smooth, compact paint surface to evoke the sheeny appearance of the new streets on a rainy day. The artist depicts bourgeois strollers who no longer share this suburb with all ranks of society: the new apartment buildings behind them are expensive, and the working people of Paris could no longer afford to live here.

The new Paris also attracted the attention of many artists who were not



George Haussmann,  
the engineer from the provinces

Impressionists, and who recorded different aspects of the city: Jean Béraud, for example, was a sophisticated, rather slick, chronicler of fashionable society, and used a highly polished style to record his interest in the new social possibilities of public space.

These charming images show us, then, the Paris that was created by the Second Empire, but they do not show us the Paris of the Second Empire. The Paris of Napoleon III, the modern metropolis celebrated by Charles Baudelaire and by Edouard Manet, was a quite different city, an urban space convulsed by the most elemental transformation. For most of the Second Empire, the city resembled a vast construction site, wherein whole suburbs were demolished, new horizons were opened up, and new types of urban dwellings were erected.

The impulse to remake Paris on this vast scale came from the emperor, Napoleon III, himself. Surviving images

of his personal study in the Tuileries Palace show that it was dominated by a large master plan of Paris, across which he had drawn the broad outlines of his proposed rebuilding, emphasising new roads and boulevards. It may seem surprising that a man who had spent most of his life in exile, and who consequently did not know Paris very well - he had to ask his way to the *Place des Vosges* when he first returned<sup>1</sup> - should conceive such a bold plan to remodel the city; paradoxically, this is probably why he could do so, because anybody more familiar with the city would have been daunted by the dense accretion of some 2,000 years of urban history.

Napoleon III's grand vision required the services of a capable engineer who had the boldness and the flair to translate the plan into reality. The existing Prefect of Paris, Berger, proved to be too cautious, and too half-hearted, and was dismissed in 1853. The emperor then made a choice that would prove to be inspired: he chose a young, but not completely unknown, engineer from the provinces, George Haussmann, and elevated him to the powerful position of Prefect of the Seine District. There was an element of political reward here: Haussmann had been an early supporter of Louis-Napoleon prior to and during his *coup d'état* (2nd December 1851), and had already been promoted to Prefect, or imperial administrator, in the department of the Gironde; he was also entrusted with the role of "Special Commissioner to the Government", with the delicate mission of winning over the royalist city of Bordeaux to the new regime.<sup>2</sup>

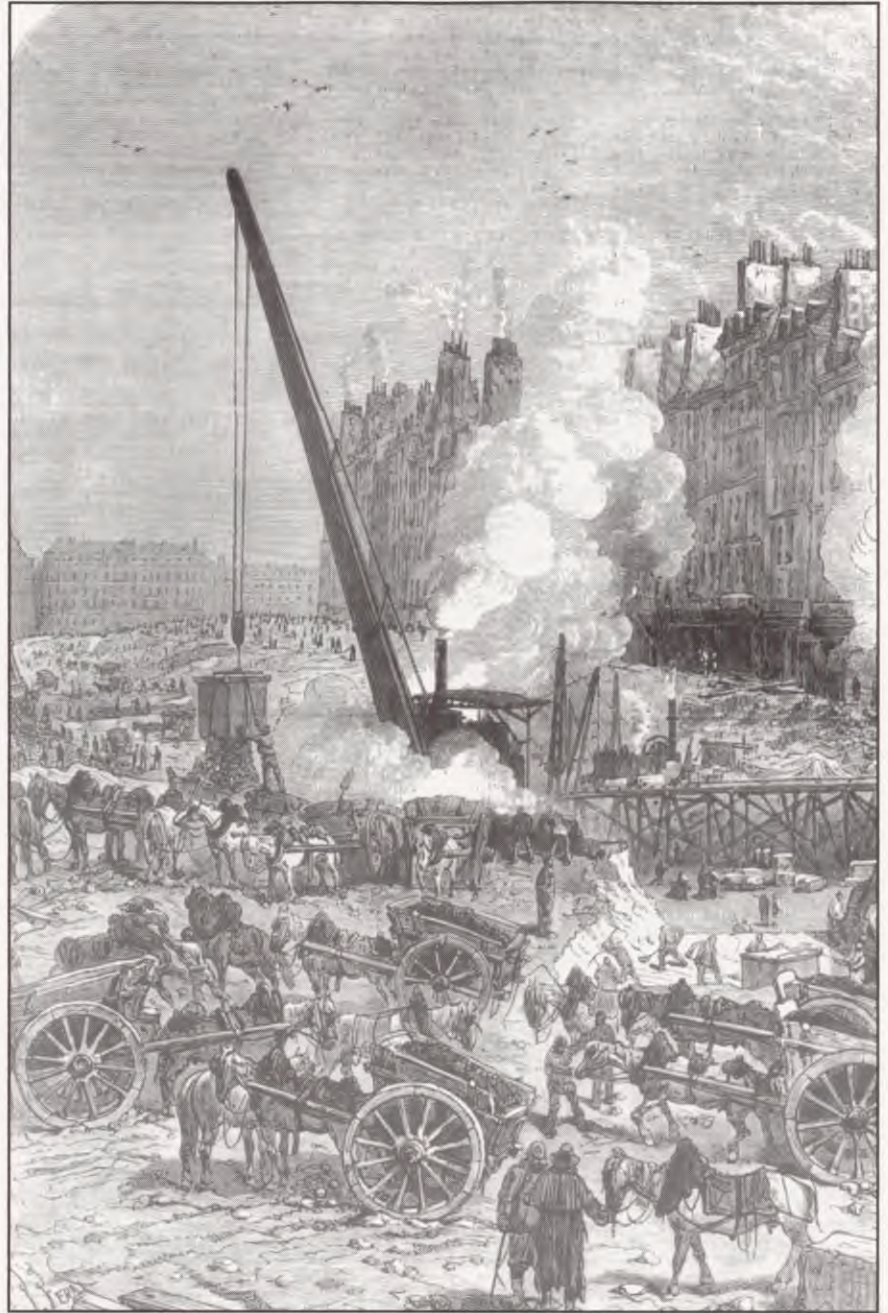
## The Monumental Plan

The task that Napoleon III and Haussmann took on was, quite literally, gargantuan in scale. Both were, of course, familiar with monumental planning: Napoleon III had studied precedents such as the *Campidoglio* in late Renaissance Rome, and had seen urban developments such as the *Place des Vosges* in Paris, constructed during the 17th century by King Henri IV. He had also been intrigued by the distinctive French tradition of "utopian" urban planning, in which architects such as Ledoux and Boullé created ideal cities on paper.<sup>3</sup> A great deal of actual urban renovation proved, however, to be unitary: it involved single monuments or monumental ensembles. It was one thing to clear a space in the fabric of a congested city and to erect a single splendid monument, but it was another to reorder the fabric of the whole city, so that single monuments could be placed in relation to each other along lines of communication and of visual access.

Planning a city retrospectively, after it has developed, is a bold undertaking. A city such as Paris presented particular problems: it was not only a large city, with three times the population density of London, but was also a very compact city, because the basic unit of settlement was the apartment building.<sup>4</sup> Even relatively modest clearances of land would involve the displacement of large numbers of people. Two of the earliest cuttings, the Boulevard Sebastopol and the extension of the Rue de Rivoli, for example, involved the loss of some 40 streets, the demolition of 2,000 dwellings, and the displacement of 25,000 people.<sup>5</sup>

It is the work of the graphic artists of the period that best captures the extent of the alteration to the urban fabric. Maxime Lalanne's *Demolition for the Rue des Ecoles* (1865, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), for example, depicts the dense, compact mass of apartment buildings, virtual warrens of hundreds of small dwellings, and the extent of the swathe being cut through them.

In simple terms of the physical mass of material to be moved, the project was



Demolition for the Avenue de l'Opéra, by Férat

enormous. Graphic artists recorded their sense of awe at the scale of the earth moving projects: Férat's *Demolition for the Avenue de l'Opéra* gives us some idea of the size of the earth-moving equipment, and of the tons of debris and soil being carted away. It also reminds us of one of the most persistent memories of the Parisians who lived through the upheaval: they recalled that they seemed to be living with the smell of dust permanently in their nostrils. The work continued day and night: the engi-

neers used a new technology, electric lighting, to floodlight whole sites so that the project could continue. The cutting of some boulevards required the removal not only of the suburb that lay in their path, but occasionally of landforms: the Boulevard de l'Opéra, for example, necessitated the lowering of the terrain by several metres, in order to create the desired vista up to the Opera building at the end.

This then was the fundamental transformation of the fabric of the city,

and hence of the fabric of people's everyday lives. It must have done considerable violence to their posed perceptions of urban space. How did they respond to the disruption? What trace has been left of their response to this elemental change?

## Dealing with the Demolition

It was left to chroniclers and artists to record some of the sense of shock and disorientation. Honoré Daumier, for example, recorded the responses of Parisians with real compassion: he temporarily suspended his acerbic satire of the bourgeoisie and noted their gentle bewilderment at the sight of a familiar urban world literally crumbling around them. In his lithograph, *Now We Will Know What Sort of Flower It Is* (1852, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris), he depicts a peaceful bourgeois placidly telling his wife that the demolition of the building next door will allow in more sunlight onto their window-box, so there is a chance that their little flower will bloom for the first time; their own apartment building will, of course, be the next to be demolished. Even more poignant is the lithograph, *Behold, Adelaide...* (1853, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris). Like the previous work, this image dates to the time at the beginning of the long process of transformation, when the sense of novelty, and of disorientation, was probably most acute. In this image, the bourgeois remarks: "Behold, Adelaide, there is our nuptial chamber" as he points to the semi-demolished apartment where they used to live. Perhaps there is a trace of the old pomposity when he declaims: "These workers don't respect anything. They don't have the cult of memory", but his sense of the invasiveness, and particularly of the brutal disruption of the barriers between public and private space, is touching and real.<sup>6</sup> Walls are the dividing line between your private domain and the public sphere, and these divisions were simply being torn down.

Other images record the sense of shock and displacement in terms of an

embodiment of the city of Paris as a person suffering unprecedented violence and invasion. One anonymous image represented Paris as Madam Lutetia Shunning the Advances of Baron Haussmann, the point being that the city is both historicised, by reference to its classical past as Roman Lutetia, and feminised, by personification as an elegant young woman confronted with a brutal suitor. A second image by Morin, *The City of Paris Invaded by Workers*, is even more revealing: it depicts the city as a woman weighed down to the ground by the weight of works being operated upon her. A female Gulliver, she is over-run by the swarm of workers streaming in from the countryside to take advantage of the work available on the construction sites. The image seems to conflate a long-established fear of the working classes as being sexually dangerous, and a more recent sense that the city was being taken over by the flood of unruly workers from the countryside.

If the bourgeoisie resented the invasion of workers, the inverse was also true. The working people of Paris quickly realised that they were being dispossessed. Before 1850, the social geography of Paris had been to some degree vertically aligned, in the sense that a typical apartment house contained tenants from a range of social classes: well-to-do bourgeois families lived in the apartments on the lower floors, working folk lived higher up, and the very poor lived in the garrets. It is true that we should not exaggerate the degree of this social integration: physical proximity of bourgeois and worker does not guarantee that there will be sympathy and understanding, but it does at least preclude the complete alienation of one class from another. If this cosy image of social integration has since been over-emphasised, it was precisely because the modernisation of Paris caused people to look back nostalgically to a smaller-scale, more intimate and harmonious city and to idealise the tenor of life there.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, there was some degree of parallel occupation of the apartment houses of pre-1850 Paris. The "Haussmannisation" of Paris put an end

to all that. The new apartments were more expensive overall, and their floor plans were usually identical from the ground floor to the fifth, so that there was little possibility for differentiation of prices and the setting aside of cheap rooms. There were still garret rooms, but even these were of a higher quality than their predecessors, and they were now reserved for the domestic servants of the rich bourgeois families. Was there a coherent plan to force the workers out of Paris? Historians seem to recoil from such a precise accusation. There can, however, be little doubt that when the logic of real estate values virtually made this process inevitable and ineluctable, the propertied classes were well pleased with the result. Haussmann himself was exceptionally frank in stating:

Already suburbs that seemed condemned to remain plunged in misery are being covered with sumptuous new constructions, which cannot fail to attract a quite different sort of population.<sup>8</sup>

## The Rent Goes Up

And what of the workers? They moved out, having been told that they should come back when the new building was finished. When they returned, they found that their previous rents of approximately 110 francs per annum had doubled, and were now unaffordable.<sup>9</sup> Many workers felt that the ploy was deliberate: socially exclusive prices were matched by discriminatory policies, and they recalled their bitterness when concierges whom they had known for years sniffily informed them the "the owner will not take workers any more".<sup>10</sup> A wife of a Parisian cabinet maker described how her family had had to make a series of outward moves, because they no sooner found an old apartment building with cheap rooms, than it was demolished as part of the progressive outward spread of speculation and development. She, like many others, found herself propelled to the very fringes of the expanded city, near the fortifications which surrounded Paris.<sup>11</sup> These suburbs, only recently integrated into the city of Paris, were

from the outset poorly equipped with civic infrastructure such as roads and sanitation, and were certainly not equipped to receive the influx of thousands of workers evicted from the centre of the city. The population increase was alarming: the population of central Paris increased by only 21% during the second Empire, whereas that of the outer suburbs increased by 63%.<sup>12</sup>

The rebuilding of Paris is such an extraordinary episode in the history of modern urban planning that its achievement seems almost to defy analysis of its origins. Insofar as there is discussion, it often tends to focus upon the end result: whether Paris was better off after the improvements had been made. Many contemporary observers bemoaned the destruction of old Paris, not merely because it was familiar, but because it seemed more intimate, more human in its scale, more individual in its charm. If one browses through the wonderful images of old Paris made by the photographer Charles Marville from the 1850s onwards, one can get a sense of how human, and idiomatic, this essentially medieval streetscape was, and how people used to such parochial closeness could have been shocked by the sudden destruction of these intimate neighbourhoods. From their point of view, the new boulevards seemed to be too big, too empty; the Haussmannian buildings, which were all constructed according to quite rigid specifications, seemed uniform and unimaginative. It is only from the perspective of our own dehumanised 20th century cities that we are tempted to find the Paris created during the Second Empire charming and elegant. The partisans of Haussmannisation would argue, however, that the modernisation was necessary simply to allow the city to keep functioning. They posit that Paris was essentially an overgrown medieval city that would soon have suffocated amidst its own congested groundplan as it tried to meet the increased pressures of modern life. Town planners have estimated that it would have cost as much as 20 times more to have made the same alterations had they been left to the last decades of the 19th century, and that by the first

decades of our own century they would have been financially impossible.

The discussion of the *fait accompli* tends also to obscure a more problematic question, that of the intentions and motives of Napoleon III in embarking upon such an extraordinary undertaking. There are four main lines of interpretation of the impulses behind the Haussmannisation of Paris.

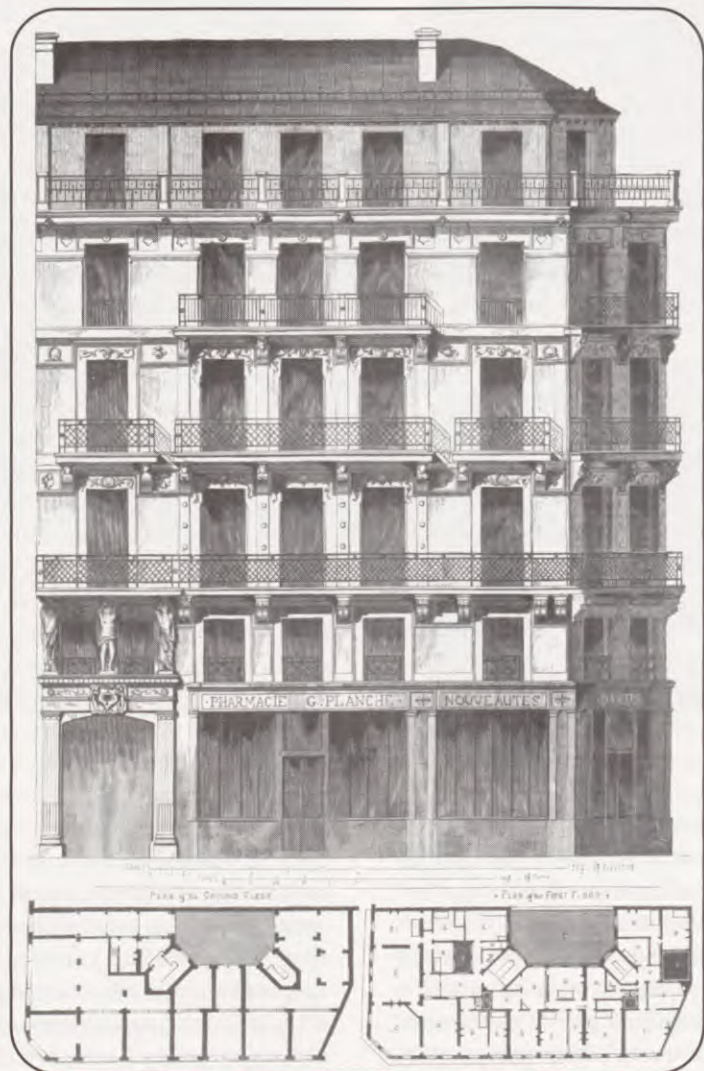
The first, and in a sense still the most pervasive, is the military explanation: that Napoleon III, himself a military man, was anxious to subjugate the rebellious capital to military control.

The second is the monumental argu-

ment: that Napoleon III, struggling to legitimate his regime, wanted to make the entire city into a monument to his rule, and thus appropriate to himself the traditional signifiers of grandeur and munificence used by previous rulers.

The third interpretation is the capitalist argument: that the emperor, who forged an alliance with the industrial bourgeoisie and presided over the birth of modern forms of enterprise such as joint-stock companies, wanted to convert the capital so that it could serve as an efficient venue for capitalist enterprise.

The fourth argument is the hygienist argument: that the emperor, and perhaps



An apartment house typical of the new building during the "Haussmannisation" of Paris in the 1850s (architectural drawing in *The Builder* XVI, 159, 6 March, 1858)

more particularly his advisors, became influenced by contemporary concerns about the organic functioning of the city.

I would like to reflect upon each of these theories in turn, by examining one particular project that would seem to confirm a particular interpretation. I would also like to suggest, however, that it is not possible to consider these interpretations in a sort of still-frame, as if the regime were acting under the same impulses from the start to the finish of the Second Empire. As the regime evolved from a tenuous position in the early years after the *coup d'état* of 1851, to a position of relative stability during the 1850s, then to a position of weakness and uncertainty prior to the military disaster of 1870, the concerns and motives of the emperor must have undergone corresponding changes, and he used his most visible signifier of prestige, the Haussmannisation of Paris, to different ends.

## The Strategic Plan

The most common, and still pervasive, explanation of Napoleon III's motive for the rebuilding of Paris is that he wanted to free his regime of the threat of urban insurrection that had haunted virtually every regime since 1789. Anybody who had observed the revolutions of 1830, of February 1848 and June 1848 would have reflected that a government stood at the mercy of a dangerous situation: a radical, militant working class familiar with the conduct of street fighting and barricade building in the narrow thoroughfares of the old quarters of Paris. The very fabric of the capital made it a liability to the rulers of the nation: the seat of government could just as easily become its prison. We can gain a sense of this threat from an engraving by Delaporte, depicting *The Royal Cavalry Driven Back by the People* (1830, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris). The incident took place on the 28th July, 1830: the king's élite cavalry was detailed to clear out worker resistance in the radical suburb of Saint Antoine. The image shows the result, a defeat that was at once humiliating and unthinkable: the local people blocked

the street with barricades, which effectively broke the devastating force of a cavalry charge, then, when the horsemen were immobilised, proceeded to hurl down a deadly rain of household objects, including furniture, from the windows of the houses above. The cavalry retired in confusion, suffering serious injury.

It therefore seems logical that Napoleon III should have insisted upon creating long, wide boulevards that would facilitate cavalry charges, and the use of cannon fire to destroy obstructions. The greater width of the boulevard would mean that it would take much longer to build barricades: workers would not have either the time or the materials to build the high, and remarkably solid, barricades that they had constructed so effectively in the past. John Merriman points out that as late as 1857 the emperor was still sufficiently concerned about military considerations to refuse permission for the construction of decorative arcades because they might affect the strategic plan of the boulevard Mazas.<sup>13</sup>

There is no doubt that Napoleon III was aware of the strategic importance of broad thoroughfares, and that he took some measures to secure the rebellious parts of the city. He was aware that systems of radiating boulevards, such as the famous formation at the *Arc de Triomphe* known as *L'Etoile*, or the Star, provided good points at which to marshal troops; he placed the main military barracks in the dangerous Saint Antoine district near one such formation, safe in the knowledge that it would be almost impossible for the crowd to blockade every one of the access roads. He used the broad roads to a second purpose, as a site for numerous grandiose military parades. They were frequent, and they were splendid. The parades were no doubt a tribute to the army, to reward it for its support during the *coup d'état*, and like all such manifestations they were intended to whip up popular enthusiasm for the regime. More subtly, though, they served as veiled warnings: they made it explicit, under the guise of peaceful rehearsal, how many soldiers there were, and how

easily they could now move around the capital. During the Second Empire, soldiers were everywhere, and they were now looking more magnificent in their uniforms than ever before. It was not without grim irony that Karl Marx quipped that Napoleon III had replaced Liberty, Fraternity and Equality with Infantry, Artillery and Cavalry.

The project most closely associated with Napoleon III's strategic preoccupations was the completion of the Rue de Rivoli, which most travellers will recall as a long street with beautiful arcades and luxurious shops bounding the north side of the Louvre Museum. It had been begun much earlier in the 19th century, by the emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, who wanted to create what he called the Great Axis, running east-west, and parallel to the River Seine. Napoleon Bonaparte might well have remembered that the nearby Saint Antoine district had been a centre of worker radicalism during the great revolution of 1789-95, but he cannot have been concerned about barricades, since this particular technique was not used during the first revolution. By the time his nephew, Napoleon III, returned to the project, the events of 1830 and 1848 must have transformed the significance of the great axis.

As things stood, the only main axis of east-west communication was on the roads that ran along the banks of the River Seine. Once they were blocked - and they could easily be obstructed - it would be almost impossible to move troops into the more congested parts of the city on the Right Bank. We can gain a good sense of the strategic importance of the new road by contemplating an aerial photograph of Paris: the road is sliced clean through the fabric of the city, as straight as an arrow, a virtual conduit from a significant point of departure to an even more significant destination. In the west, the great military barracks at Courbevoie housed the thousands of soldiers who would be at hand to quell an insurrection: they would march first down the Champs-Élysées, then swing into the Rue de Rivoli, then into the Rue Saint Antoine, whence they had access to the rebellious



The Reading Room of the National Library, Paris, illustration by Henri Labrousse: the roof "cupolas" are of enamelled porcelain and the room was heated via hot-air pipes at the feet of the readers. It housed 40,000 volumes (from the *Illustrated London News*, collection of the author).

eastern suburbs of the city, particularly those areas around the Canal Saint Martin and the Place de la Bastille. It was the last stage of this project - the actual cutting of the road into the Saint Antoine district - that had been left incomplete, and Napoleon III hastened to rectify the omission. When the road was completed, he stated triumphantly:

The rebels in the suburbs will no longer have the ability to obstruct the arrival of reinforcements from outside. The exit of the city to the west has been opened up.<sup>14</sup>

Napoleon III was not alone in voicing such sentiments: his assistant, Haussmann, seemed - retrospectively at least - to attach similar importance to the project. He wrote in his memoirs, perhaps under the pressure of justifying his own role in the vast project, that he had freed the government from "the concern caused to all our kings, even the most powerful, by the impressionable, turbulent nature of the Parisian popular classes".<sup>15</sup> He called the new way an "Artery", and claimed that he had added "a direct, spacious, monumental and above all strategic means of communication" into what one of his assistants

bluntly called "the suburb of the barricades".<sup>16</sup>

Despite these statements of strategic considerations, historians have challenged the military explanation of the emperor's motives. If one had to guess at Napoleon III's apprehensions about the Parisian working classes, one would speculate that they were most severe before his *coup d'état* of December 1851, when he fully expected a serious urban revolt in defence of the Second Republic. Indeed, Louis Napoleon had been exerting pressure upon the then Prefect of the Seine, Berger, to hasten the work on the new road as early as 1851, in the months before the coup.<sup>17</sup> In the event, the Parisian response was relatively small and easily controlled; to the emperor's surprise, it was the peasants in a number of provincial departments who rose in a massive revolt that seriously threatened his regime.<sup>18</sup> As the 1850s progressed, he also had reason to feel that he had won the working classes to his regime by practical if not ideological means: the very works he had initiated generated high levels of employment in the capital. As David Jordan has pointed out, the majority of new boulevards were built in the

wealthy western suburbs of Paris: purely strategic projects, such as the opening up of the rebellious quarter around the Montagne Ste. Geneviève, were in the minority. He argues that the military theory originated at the time of the transformations, amongst the opponents of the regime, who elaborated a form of conspiracy theory, suggesting that the capitalists had hidden their sinister intentions below the aesthetic beauty and amenity of the new city. Nor, he adds, should we place too much faith in the efficacy of these strategic arteries: the savage street fighting during the Paris Commune rebellion of 1870-71 revealed that the Parisian working classes could still use the city against the authorities.<sup>19</sup> This cautionary note is reiterated by other prominent historians of Paris, such as Donald Olsen.<sup>20</sup>

## A Monument to the Emperor

The second explanation for the transformation of Paris was that Napoleon III wanted to make the whole city, rather than just a handful of fine buildings, into a monument to his regime. As early as 1842, before the end of his exile from France, he had recorded his ambition to be a second Emperor Augustus, the ruler who made Rome into a splendid monumental city; more simply, he probably hoped to take up and outdo the early planning initiatives of his illustrious uncle, and in doing so substitute monumental glory for the military glory that was largely denied him.<sup>21</sup> His personal need for the grand conception accorded perfectly with his assistant's vision of urban renewal. Each project had two parts: the first was the monumental building itself, and the second was the vista, the line of sight, providing visual access to it. Haussmann is characterised as having the planner's mania for the straight line, but in his case it was accompanied by a concern for the visual experience of the city. There was no point, he argued, in erecting a new monument, or disengaging an existing one, if it was not made the end point of a vast boulevard sweeping up to it. Conversely, when new boulevards were being planned, he consciously

aligned them so that they would begin or terminate with an important building, be it a railway station or a church.

One of the most important disengagements of existing monuments occurred on the Ile-de-la Cité. Travellers who stroll in the open space in front of the cathedral of Notre Dame may not be aware that it was the site of what contemporaries called a slum, a close concentration of tenement buildings that were overcrowded and in poor condition. It must have looked a fearful place: contemporaries described the dark streets and crumbling houses as a sort of urban jungle, a place of subhuman existence and dangerous criminality.<sup>22</sup> Haussmann, endowed with extraordinary executive powers, ordered the precinct to be demolished. For the first time in five centuries, the Gothic cathedral was disengaged from surrounding dwellings, and stood alone as a monument.

Napoleon III's most famous achievement in the monumental terms was certainly the construction of the new Paris Opera House; perhaps his most beautiful was the creation of the Reading Room of the National Library. The emperor was appropriating the ruler's traditional role of patronising the arts, but he might have had a more personal motive: he had been stung by the way the cultured and well-educated "notables" of France made fun of his lack of traditional education and his slightly convoluted, hesitant way of expressing himself. He was certainly anxious to commemorate his role as a patron of the arts in commissioning Charles Garnier, a quite young architect, to create the new Opera House: a large oil painting by Edouard Gilis (n.d., *Musée de Compiègne*) depicts him visiting the construction site, with the Empress Eugénie and "Baron" George Haussmann, to give their personal encouragement to Garnier. The end result was a building that, for many commentators, characterises the Second Empire: for the purist, it is the epitome of architectural eclecticism and opulent bad taste, while for the social historian it is the very embodiment of the social preoccupations of the new high society. The grandiose foyer of the building is

not so much a place of passage as a place to promenade, to posture and to be seen. The vast sweeping stairway and the numerous balconies and landings are a series of small stages where the drama of social display and social competition was played out. The other stage, inside, where the performance was held, seems almost incidental by comparison.

The third main motive for the transformation of Paris was the creation of a modern city that would have the physical infrastructure necessary to the functioning of a modern capitalist economy. As Napoleon III understood this term, it meant an increase in the scale of existing industrial and commercial activity, as well as the introduction of new forms of urban activity. There were the new banks, the great new department stores, and all manner of new entertainments. In addition, new forms of transport, such as trains and omnibuses, meant that greater numbers of people were travelling to Paris from the countryside and were moving around the city. David Harvey has argued that Parisian property owners had tended to resist government initiatives for urban renewal during the preceding period of the July Monarchy (1830-48). The emperor, by contrast,

worked effectively to convince the capitalists that it was important to "improve the circulation of merchandise and people throughout the city".<sup>23</sup> We can gain some sense of his determination to "clear the way" for an efficient economy from aerial photographs of Paris showing key buildings such as the Stock Exchange building carefully set apart with ample space around it, as if to free it from the risk not only of barricades but of all possible encumbrance.

### **"Nothing But Iron!"**

The greatest project, though, was the construction of the new central marketplace of Paris, Les Halles. This too was a project whose signification shifted as the regime progressed: it began its life before the coup of 1851 as a sympathetic gesture to the working people of Paris; by the prosperous 1850s, it had become a tribute to the mercantile spirit. Napoleon III had quite accurately judged that by 1850 the existing marketplace had become inadequate for the new Paris, and that it would simply be unable to handle the enormous volume of food necessary to provision the growing capital. He ordered Berger to act



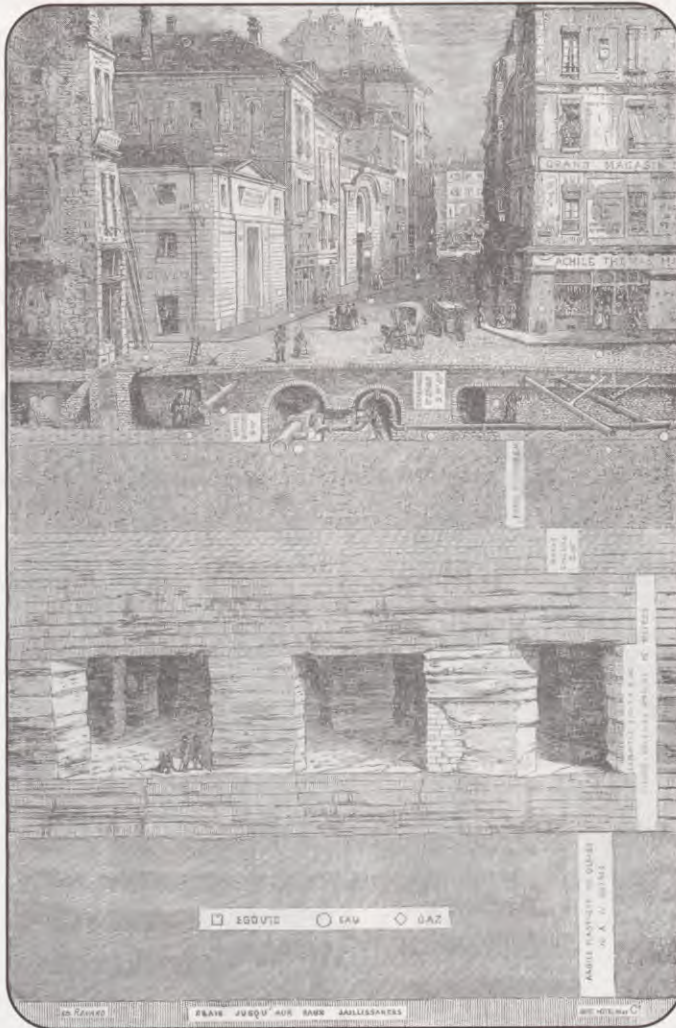
Painting *Paris Street; Rainy Day*, by Gustave Caillebotte, 1876-77, oil on canvas (Charles H. and Mary F. S. Worcester Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago, U.S.A.)

quickly to implement a design drawn up by the architects Baltard and Callet in 1847. The emperor was able to lay the foundation stone of the new markets as early as September 1851, thus signalling to the workers of Paris that he was able to translate his theoretical concern for the amelioration of working class life into physical form. The project was pushed through with such determination that it was almost complete by May 1852. It was then that the emperor's plan received a serious setback: the intended friendly gesture was misinterpreted by local people as a threatening one. Baltard's original design was for a very solid, fortress-like building with thick walls and small windows, and the working people of the area said that the

emperor was building a sort of military strong point from which to control the suburb.<sup>24</sup> At such a sensitive point - only a few months after the army had in fact crushed what worker rebellion had occurred in Paris - the emperor could not afford to ignore popular feeling like this, and concurred. He ordered that construction be stopped, and consulted with Haussmann. He revealed that he had been fascinated by the new industrial architecture of the great railway stations of Paris, and had a vision of vast, light "umbrellas" of metal and glass. Haussmann then generously took the project straight back to Baltard, who had been devastated by the shame of having the emperor cancel one of his designs. He tried to explain the emperor's vision

for a new type of building, and there was a scene when the Prefect was virtually shouting "Iron! Nothing but iron!" to the bewildered architect. Baltard had had a traditional training, which meant that he had been taught an essential truth: iron was merely a structural element, best kept hidden beneath more "noble" materials such as a stone facade. The idea of constructing a building in which the inner elements were also the outer elements must have seemed as outlandish then as the "inside-out" design of the Pompidou Centre seemed in our own time. It was literally the case of a pressure point in history, when an architect had to divest himself of the intellectual baggage of centuries of inherited tradition, and make the imaginative leap into an architectural idiom that belongs to the architecture of the 20th century. Baltard prepared two more plans, but still clung to the idea of masonry, if only as stone walls and stone columns. On the third try he got it right: he designed a series of pavillions that were virtually all made of iron. He then had to submit the plan in an architectural contest, in which the emperor would make the final choice. Napoleon III viewed the designs, and rejected one after the other. When he came to Baltard's plans, he burst out excitedly: "Here it is! This is exactly what I have been looking for!"<sup>25</sup> Haussmann tactfully neglected to tell the emperor that the architect was the same one whose earlier design had been rejected.

The final plan, agreed between Baltard and Haussmann in 1857, was for two groups of six pavillions separated by three covered streets, and divided by one broad central avenue which today bears the name of its creator. This provided a market area of 21 acres, of which half was sheltered. Baltard equipped Les Halles with its own underground reservoir, so that the markets could be guaranteed a supply of water, and with a system of gaslights so that provisioning could take place at night. Later, the stone pavillion, of which Baltard was so ashamed, was torn down and replaced by one of his iron pavillions. The engineers also devised a plan, some 50 years before the Paris metro



Many cutaway and cross-section views of Paris like this one helped people to visualise the new, hygienic city as, like the human body, a supporter of life. This contemporary engraving is by Renard.

was built, to construct an underground railway from the Gare de l'Est to Les Halles, but this was never realised.<sup>26</sup>

## The Hygienic City

The fourth interpretation of the transformation of Paris is that it was motivated by a concern for public health. It must be said, however, that the concern was not so much Napoleon III's - it does not seem to figure in any of his own plans - as that of Haussmann. It should also be noted that he placed a priority on the creation of an hygienic Paris from the outset, long before the gathering swell of criticism forced him to make use of it as a justification.<sup>27</sup> Later, when voices were raised in protest at the cost of the project, and at Haussmann's unorthodox means of financing it, he could draw upon one of the most acute of collective fears for justification, that of epidemic and disease. We can see this mechanism at work in contemporary images that he had put out, such as cartoons showing the ghastly figure of cholera as a rapacious monster reproaching him, the wise servant of the public, for depriving it of victims. Such images spoke powerfully to the Parisian public: a cholera epidemic in 1832 had killed 18,000 people in Paris, while a second outbreak in 1849 killed another 19,000; a further outbreak of the disease in 1865 added to the sense of urgency. The human suffering and panicky fear created by such outbreaks was therefore very fresh in people's minds when Haussmann turned his attention to the aspect of Paris that Napoleon III had almost completely neglected: the underground of the capital.

When Haussmann explained the principles of hygiene underlying the transformation of Paris, he was expressing himself in terms of an already well-established discourse. "Everything that is in movement," he wrote, "is healthy, everything that is stagnant is unhealthy: the free circulation of air and water and the access to light serve to combat the effects of crowding in, of the concentration of foul air, of the exhalation of miasmas and of evil odours. The straight

line therefore reconciles the needs of beauty, the needs of hygiene and the needs of commerce".<sup>28</sup> This hygienist discourse is intriguing in itself, and has been the subject of a fascinating study by Alain Corbin, which examines how western society's sense of smell, and its understanding of the human body and of hygiene, has evolved over time.<sup>29</sup>

Some of the hygienists' concerns are evident in images that were made of the new city. Their emphasis on air and light and space, for example, finds an echo in the works of the painter Gustave Caillebotte, the painter who most deserves the title of "an urban Impressionist", and whose superb work was much neglected until a recent retrospective exhibition organised by the Art Institute of Chicago.<sup>30</sup> Caillebotte's *Man at a Window* (1873, Private Collection), for example, was painted at precisely the point that Haussmann's project was nearing completion, when people felt that they could stand back and survey the result. What exactly is this young man admiring with such an air of possession? The elegant lady in the boulevard below, her own poise and stylishness both made possible and reflected in the streetscape around her? New, broad thoroughfares? The smooth flow of traffic? Grand vistas? New apartment buildings? New, prosperous tenants? Above all, the painting is about light and air. David Pinkney has pointed out that Parisians were not used to these qualities. With the exception of the few large pre-existing boulevards, especially those looking out over the River Seine, most streets in Paris had ended to be rather dark and narrow, and houses had been closely packed around courtyards that tended to be airless. By contrast, the new boulevards tended to be dazzlingly bright, a quality which Caillebotte has translated in the almost stark light that surrounds the figure in this painting. There is a second purchase that this figure has upon the spectacle before him, although we can only discover this from the context, rather than the text, of the painting: the painter's family had accumulated a comfortable fortune from the real estate speculation of the Second Empire, and owned this apartment due

to the benefits the speculation brought for the bourgeoisie. Caillebotte was in fact only able to devote himself to painting due to this family success. As if to repay the favour, he uses his art to slightly enhance the family apartment: most modern apartments only had wrought iron balconies; the elegant stone balconies were a thing of the past, and were now quite prestigious. Caillebotte has painted the young man in his family apartment standing in front of one of the beautiful old stone balconies, thus upgrading the quality of their dwelling.

## The Hidden City

Turning from what was visible above ground to what was hidden below, Haussmann realised that it would require quite an effort of propaganda to make people approve of expensive infrastructure which they could not see. Indeed, Haussmann invited people to think about the city in quite simple terms, as a parallel to the human body itself. People had been intrigued when publishers printed popular medical diagrams revealing the secrets of the human body, and so Haussmann crated the urban equivalent, cross-sections of Paris revealing the hidden infrastructure of the capital. Renard's engraving, *The Upper and the Lower of Paris* is typical of this genre. He compared the networks of underground Paris with those of our own bodies:

The underground galleries, the organs of the great city, will work like those of the human body, without being visible. Pure, fresh water, light and heat will circulate around the city like fluids which guarantee the continuation of life. All the necessary secretions will occur mysteriously, and will maintain public health without disrupting the beauty and order of the city.<sup>31</sup>

People now pored with fascination over cutaway diagrams depicting the hidden world below the macadam of the street, a replica of the city above, with every gas pipe and water pipe clearly marked with a suitable symbol.

The plan to improve the water supply of Paris was Haussmann's brain-child, and the detailed plans were the work of his assistant Eugène Belgrand.<sup>32</sup> The emperor had apparently not considered the problem, and when Haussmann invited him to do so he was willing to impatiently pass it on to a private company. Haussmann not only established the concept that important public facilities should be run by the government, but that Parisians deserved the best, not the cheapest, water available. He proposed that henceforth, the water of the River Seine should only be used for public fountains and for flushing out the gutters and the sewers of the city. Water for drinking and personal washing was to come from unpolluted springs in the countryside, and brought to Paris by a system of aqueducts; the water, descending by gravity, would have its own hydraulic pressure, and would not need to be pumped up laboriously by unreliable machines, as the water of the River Seine was.<sup>33</sup> Haussmann presented this idea to a reluctant Napoleon III, who remained distinctly unimpressed until his engineer, remembering the emperor's love of Roman history, began to talk expansively about the aqueducts that fed Rome, and were the wonder of the ancient world.<sup>34</sup>

He got his way. Construction of the aqueduct began in 1862, a new reservoir was begun at Ménilmontant in 1863, and by 1865 the first fresh water from springs eighty miles away in the Marne Valley was flowing through the mains of Paris.<sup>35</sup> Henceforth, water from the Seine was called "old water" and was distributed through one network serving public facilities. Parisians watched curiously as municipal workers opened up special taps to flush out the gutters, a sight recorded by Frank Boggs in his *Le Boulevard de la Madeleine*, (1893, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)<sup>36</sup> and still practised in Paris today.

The second type of water was "new water", from the countryside. Haussmann hoped to distribute it through a separate system of mains that would run down every street of Paris; its

pressure was to guarantee that it would rise to every level of Parisian apartments. His ambitious programme was, however vitiated and slowed by opposition from a surprising quarter: there was a public scare campaign which argued that Parisians had been drinking the water of the River Seine for generations and had apparently grown strong on it; clear water from country springs could have all sorts of germs in it.<sup>37</sup> In the end, Haussmann managed to double the total length of city water mains and to double the city's water capacity, and he increase the number of houses with piped water from 6,000 to 34,000.<sup>38</sup>

His grand project certainly transformed the private lives of Parisians. When the painter Alfred Stevens executed *The Bath* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris) in about 1867, he was depicting not an habitual or mundane aspect of everyday life, but a very novel one. It depicts an elegant young Parisienne luxuriating in the so-called "new water", which soon came to be termed "city water". For the first time, bathing could become a regular rather than an occasional occurrence, and the bathroom began to change from being the site of rather awkward and makeshift ablutions to being a place of stylishness and comfort. Soap became a luxurious item, and the first shampoos appeared on the market. Some companies began to advertise baths as luxurious pieces of furniture. The bathroom was now a place to tarry and to relax, and has taken on some of the intimate and romantic connotations of the boudoir: this young woman has been reading a novel, and now dreamily thinks of the lover who has no doubt presented her with the flower we see. Indeed, Stevens' painting has a note of subdued eroticism, and it may be that he has depicted another aspect of the new fashion, its association with sensuality and sexual enjoyment. It is possible that Stevens' model is a young courtesan, one of the stylish and wealthy professional prostitutes of the Second Empire. These women quickly perceived the attraction of receiving their customers amidst such lavish settings, but amongst the general population this sort of bathing did not become popular until

later in the century.<sup>39</sup>

There is therefore no doubt that Napoleon III and "Baron" Haussmann changed the nature of the urban experience of Parisians fundamentally and definitively. In this paper, I have tried to trace some of the impact of these changes upon people's consciousness. I must acknowledge that I have left certain areas unstudied. I can only note the interest of other issues, such as Haussmann's inventive methods of financing the great operation. I have barely mentioned the contribution of other officials, and should note the importance of men such as Alphonse Alphand and Eugène Belgrand, who would assume another important role as the "can-do" men of the Third Republic. I have only referred in passing to the extraordinary creation of Haussmann's mania for uniformity, the new apartment building wherein the very proportions of the facade and the nature of its decoration were standardised. I have preferred to speculate upon the more difficult issue of the impulses behind the project. I would close by suggesting that the way forward is not to probe into what the protagonists said, but into what they did, and the order in which they did it. The memoirs of the protagonists tend to be self-justifying in the face of subsequent opposition and criticism, and self-aggrandising in relation to each other. Haussmann, for example, attempted to give the impression that Napoleon III had made very little actual progress with the project before 1853, whereas it is clear that the emperor already had a detailed plan and had begun to implement it by the time Haussmann was appointed.<sup>40</sup> It is the sequence of actual projects that will prove to be most revealing, and it is their relation to the relative confidence or apprehension within the imperial regime that will reveal the shifting ground of the motives for the transformation of Paris. ♦

## Notes

- 1 John Merriman: *Aux Marges de la Ville*. This French edition of Merriman's celebrated work, *The Margins of City Life. Explorations of the French Urban Frontier, 1815-1851*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, has an extra chapter entitled "Les deux villes du baron Haussmann". p.281.
- 2 See: David Pinkney: *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, [1958], 1972, pp. 43-44. My paper is heavily indebted to David Pinkney's pioneering study, which is still authoritative, and which has been my main guide in this argument.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp.30-31.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.7.
- 5 Hervé Maneglier: *Paris Impérial. La Vie quotidienne sous le Second Empire*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1990. p.41.
- 6 See: Oliver Larkin: *Daumier, Man of his Time*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1966. p.111.
- 7 David Pinkney: *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, pp.8-9.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p.41.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p.42.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p.42.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.41.
- 13 John Merriman: *Aux Marges de la Ville*, p.285.
- 14 David Pinkney: *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, p.53.
- 15 John Merriman: *Aux Marges de la Ville*, p.284.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 284.
- 17 David Pinkney: *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, p.49.
- 18 See Ted Margadant: *French Peasants in Revolt. The Insurrection of 1851*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1979.
- 19 David Jordan: "Haussmann's Boulevards", a paper written for the Tenth George Rudé Conference, Melbourne, 1996. The paper is awaiting publication. pp. 2-3.
- 20 Donald Olsen: *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986. p.46.
- 21 David Pinkney: *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, p.3.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p.10.
- 23 John Merriman: *Aux Marges de la Ville*, pp.282-283.
- 24 David Pinkney: *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, p.77.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p.78.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p.79.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p.105.
- 28 Jean Des Cars and Pierre Pinon: *Paris-Haussmann. "Le Pari d'Haussmann"*, Paris, Picard, Edition du Pavillon de l'Arsenal, 1991. p.147.
- 29 Alain Corbin: *The Foul and the Fragrant. Odour and the (French) Social Imagination*, London, Picador, Pan Macmillan, 1994.
- 30 See the fine exhibition catalogue, Grand Palais, Paris, 1994-1995: *Gustave Caillebotte*, Paris, Editions des Musées Nationaux, 1994.
- 31 Hervé Maneglier: *Paris Impérial*, pp.101-102.
- 32 David Pinkney: *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, p.128.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p.114.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p.134.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p.121.
- 36 Barbara Stern Shapiro: *Pleasures of Paris: Daumier to Picasso*, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1991. p. 64. Exhibition catalogue no 6.
- 37 David Pinkney: *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, p.114.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p.126.
- 39 Hervé Maneglier: *Paris Impériale*, p.119.
- 40 David Pinkney: *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, p.53.

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