

The Politics of Public Space

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CHAPTER 2

The Political Economy of Public Space

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The idea of the “public sphere” as an arena of political deliberation and participation, and therefore as fundamental to democratic governance, has a long and distinguished history. The imagery of the Athenian *agora* as the physical space wherein that democratic ideal might be attained has also had a powerful hold on the political imagination. As a result, some kind of association or even identity has been forged between the proper shaping of urban public space and the proper functioning of democratic governance. But the status of this association is often left vague. For some it seems to offer merely a convenient metaphor, and with the arrival of the Internet and the construction of “virtual communities” the physical materiality of spatial organization seems irrelevant. Others will ask more pointedly how it might be possible to encourage political participation in an urban world constructed out of segregated suburbs, gated communities, privatized spaces, and shopping malls under surveillance and downtown streets monitored (thanks, these days, to some shadowy form of governance in U.S. cities called a “business partnership”) with a video camera at every corner.

While it may well prove impossible to sort out the relationship between the physicality of urban public space and the politics of the public sphere with any exactitude, there are, I think, some potent points of linkage between them. We do not, after all, experience the city blankly, and much

of what we do absorb from daily life in the city (be it the long drag of the commute, the jostle of subway crowds, the blandness of the shopping mall, the elegance or grandeur of certain forms of urban architecture, the pan-handlers on the sidewalk, or the peace and beauty of an urban park) surely has some kind of influence on how we are situated in the world and how we think and act politically within it. Conversely, firmly held conceptions filter our openness to and guide our interpretations of what the urban experience might be about. If, for example, suburbanites are consumed by mortal fear of someplace called “the inner city,” and therefore avoid it like the plague, then not only do they cultivate material ignorance of that space while preserving stereotypical images of what it contains, but in so doing diminish the prospects for any kind of political alliance between city and suburban interests. If inner city residents view suburban life as flat, dull, homogenizing, and boring, then they too will be less likely to warm to the political agendas of their suburban counterparts. There is, therefore, an intriguing mix of sociogeographical perceptions, expectations, and material conditions at work that need to be unpacked if we are to think more cogently about how urban design in general, and the shaping of urban public space in particular, might influence politics in the public sphere.

A case study or two on this topic might in this regard be helpful. So, here I take up a particular example of how the radical reorganization of public space in Second Empire Paris might have had, directly or indirectly, political implications. I choose this case in part because I am reasonably familiar with it, and have often reflected, inspired by a wide range of penetrating commentators such as Walter Benjamin, Richard Sennett, Marshall Berman and T.J. Clark, on the political effects and meanings of Haussmann’s works. But the case also has the advantage of being in some ways emblematic. Robert Moses, after all, studied Haussmann’s works very closely and modeled his activities in the reshaping of New York on what he saw as Haussmann’s virtues (he also copied some of his tactics and, at least in some people’s eyes, repeated some of his more egregious errors).¹

I begin with a consideration of a prose poem by Baudelaire entitled “The Eyes of the Poor,” because it encapsulates a whole series of themes and controversies that accompanied Haussmann’s interventions. Baudelaire opens the poem by asking his lover if she understands why it is that he suddenly hates her. Throughout the whole day, he says, they had shared their thoughts and feelings in the utmost intimacy, almost as if they were one. And then,

That evening, feeling a little tired, you wanted to sit down in front of a new café forming the corner of a new boulevard still littered with rubbish but that already displayed proudly its unfinished

splendors. The café was dazzling. Even the gas burned with all the ardor of a debut, and lighted with all its might the blinding whiteness of the walls, the expanse of mirrors, the gold cornices and moldings.....nymphs and goddesses bearing on their heads piles of fruits, pates and game.....all history and all mythology pandering to gluttony.

On the street directly in front of us, a worthy man of about forty, with tired face and greying beard, was standing holding a small boy by the hand and carrying on his arm another little thing, still too weak to walk. He was playing nurse-maid, taking the children for an evening stroll. They were in rags. The three faces were extraordinarily serious, and those six eyes stared fixedly at the new café with admiration, equal in degree but differing in kind according to their ages.

The eyes of the father said: “How beautiful it is! How beautiful it is! All the gold of the poor world must have found its way onto those walls.” The eyes of the little boy: “How beautiful it is! How beautiful it is! But it is a house where only people who are not like us can go.” As for the baby, he was much too fascinated to express anything but joy—utterly stupid and profound.

Song writers say that pleasure ennobles the soul and softens the heart. The song was right that evening as far as I was concerned. Not only was I touched by this family of eyes, but I was even a little ashamed of our glasses and decanters, too big for our thirst. I turned my eyes to look into yours, dear love, to read my thoughts in them; and as I plunged my eyes into your eyes, so beautiful and so curiously soft, into those green eyes, home of Caprice and governed by the Moon, you said: “Those people are insufferable with their great saucer eyes. Can’t you tell the proprietor to send them away?”

So you see how difficult it is to understand one another, my dear angel, how incommunicable thought is, even between two people in love.²

What is so remarkable about this prose poem is not only the way in which it depicts the contested character of public space and the inherent porosity of the boundary between the public and the private (the latter even including a lover’s thoughts provoking a lovers’ quarrel), but how it generates a sense of space where ambiguities of proprietorship, of aesthetics, of social relations (class and gender in particular), and the political economy of everyday life collide. It is also, incidentally, remarkable to think how easy it might be to transpose the incident and the diverse emotions expressed from 1860s Paris to, say, any upscale street café

in 1990s New York (“history and all mythology pandering to gluttony” often seems a very apt expression for the decor), although it would then have been the mayor, Giuliani, who would be appealed to as “proprietor” to send the poor family away (as indeed he did with many of the homeless).

Plainly, the reshaping of Paris that Haussmann was undertaking was very much on people’s minds (this is by no means the only time that the new boulevards loomed large in Baudelaire’s work). And, if we are to judge from the sentiments expressed, the political reaction to them was rich with ambivalence. A new boulevard, ostensibly a public space, provides the setting for the poem. But the right to occupy it is contested by the author’s lover who wants someone to assert proprietorship over it and control its uses. The café is not exactly a private space either; it is a space within which a selective public is allowed for commercial and consumption purposes. The poor family sees it as an exclusionary space, internalizing the gold that has been appropriated from them. The café projects an illuminated image outward onto the public space just as it spills outward onto the sidewalk. The poor can neither evade nor ignore it. They are forced to confront it in exactly the same way that the occupants of the café cannot avoid seeing them. The porosity of the boundary forms a zone of surprising and potentially conflictual contact.

So what, then, was this public space, the boulevard, and how did it come about? Everyone in Paris in Baudelaire’s time was all too aware, of course, that the preexisting boulevards had run with workers’ blood in the massacres of June 1848. The rights of those who sought a social and nurturing republic (as opposed to the rights of those looking for a purely political republic) had been violently denied upon the boulevards, and their access to the public sphere of politics thereafter strictly circumscribed. There were many then (just as now) who saw the new boulevards as spaces of militarization, surveillance, and control. The building of new boulevards in the Second Empire was considered strategic, designed to permit free lines of fire and to bypass the hard to assail barricades erected in narrow, tortuous streets that had made the military suppression of 1848 so difficult. The military coup that established the Second Empire in 1851 had first taken control of the boulevards. The new boulevards were construed as public spaces to facilitate the state’s protection of bourgeois private property. They should not be open, therefore, to those who might challenge (or even appear to challenge by virtue of their rags) the bourgeois social order.

Military domination was, however, but a minor aspect of what the new boulevards were about. To begin with, they were public investments designed to prime the pump of private profit in the wake of the serious economic recession of 1847–1849. Deficit financed, they were a manifestation

of what we later came to know as some mix of civilian and military Keynesianism. As such, they did much to revive the economy and enhance the values of private property both directly and indirectly. Land and property owners, some of whom early on resisted expropriation, came more and more to favor it as the Second Empire progressed (in part because they managed to inflate land and property prices to their own advantage). Clearly, the meaning of the new public spaces depended in large measure upon the private interests (such as landowners, developers, construction interests and workers, commerce of all kinds) they supported.³

But there were a whole series of secondary effects that had powerful reverberations for politics in the public sphere, and it is these cascading secondary effects upon which I wish to focus more closely here. Increasingly, Richard Sennett notes, the “right to the city” became more and more of a bourgeois prerogative. Social control and surveillance of who “the public” is (or is not) proceeded accordingly. The validation of the new public spaces (the splendor the boulevards displayed) was heavily dependent on the control of private functions and activities that abutted upon it. Haussmann set about a process of “embourgeoisement” of the city center that continued long thereafter. He sought to expel industrial activities (particularly noxious ones like tanning) and its associated working classes (often at the center of political revolt) from the center of the city. He strictly mandated design criteria and aesthetic forms for both the public and the private construction on and around the boulevards (with a lasting effect on Parisian architecture and aesthetics). Private activity was forced to support the political goal, which was to shape a certain kind of public space reflective of imperial splendor, military security, and bourgeois affluence. Haussmann sought to orchestrate the private and public spaces of Paris in mutually supportive ways. But he did so in class terms (as has happened recently in the reorganization of New York’s Times Square). This is transparently so in the case that Baudelaire describes: Although unfinished, the boulevard is full of splendor, reflecting back the brilliance of the café’s illumination. The café (an exclusive commercial space) and the boulevard (the public space) form a symbiotic whole in which each validates the other. But this presumes that the public space can be properly controlled. The poor, no matter how “worthy,” must be excluded from it just as they are from the café.

But what might this mean politically and socially for those who either felt welcomed or (like the poor family in Baudelaire’s account) excluded from such public spaces? In what ways did the experience of these highly stylized and controlled public spaces inflect consciousness, ways of thought, and even the possibilities for politics in the public sphere? And why do the two lovers react so differently to the scene before them?

Sennett, in *The Fall of Public Man* puts a very special gloss on these questions:

[I]n the remaking of the city by Haussmann in the 1850s and 1860s the intermixing of classes within districts was reduced by design. Whatever heterogeneity occurred spontaneously in the division of private houses into apartments in the first half of the century was now opposed by an effort to make neighborhoods homogeneous economic units: investors in new construction and renovation found this homogeneity rational in that they knew exactly what kind of area they were putting their capital into. An ecology of quarters as an ecology of classes: this was the new wall Haussmann erected between the citizens of the city as well as around the city itself.... [This] changed the very terms of localism and cosmopolitanism...⁴

Baudelaire's lover expresses sentiments consistent with these changed terms. She expects class homogeneity within the public space. This is what the new boulevard represents. Her deceived expectations lie behind the violence of her response. Baudelaire, on the other hand, is still in the old Paris, so brilliantly described by Balzac, and most famously represented by the iconography of the apartment building layered from a ground floor of tradespeople and artisans, through a first floor of affluent bourgeois or even aristocracy, a third floor of respectable clerks and government bureaucrats, a fourth floor of working class families, and finally to upper floors of starving artists, students, and the impoverished. Not only are cross-class encounters expected—they are also valued as part of the urban experience. The segregation that set in during the Second Empire was felt by many to have a deleterious political effect because the bourgeoisie no longer had contact with, and therefore lost its sense of obligation to and moral influence over the lower classes (Baudelaire's decanter and glasses "too big for our thirst" register the sense of obligation and mirror how the poor see all their gold upon the walls of the café). In contemporary terms, his lover wants the security of the gated community, while he values the mixing and diversity of a multicultural and class-variegated urban experience. Hers is exactly the sort of encounter that a bourgeois woman would fear (and the gender distinction is telling). Affluent New Yorkers, women in particular, are similarly grateful to Mayor Giuliani for removing the homeless and panhandlers from their paths en route to the boutiques of mid-town Manhattan.

T.J. Clark, in *The Painting of Modern Life*, provides another perspective on the depoliticization that flowed from "Haussmannization." This

process may have brought modernity to Paris, he argues, but it also provided "a framework in which another order of urban life—an order without imagery—would be allowed its mere existence." Capital, Clark asserts,

did not need to have a representation of itself laid out upon the ground in bricks and mortar, or inscribed as a map in the minds of its city dwellers.... [I]t preferred the city not to be an image—not to have form, not to be accessible to the imagination, to readings and misreadings, to a conflict of claims on its space—in order that it might mass-produce an image of its own to put in the place of those it destroyed.⁵

The new image was that of "the spectacle." Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris, writes Clark, "was spectacular in the most oppressive sense of the word." The mobilization of the spectacle (and splendor) of the boulevard and its luminous café was meant to mask and disguise the fundamentals of class relations, which is why the presence of the poor family on the boulevard comes as such a shock. The spectacle "was not a neutral form in which capitalism incidentally happened; it was a form of capital itself, and one of the most effective." Haussmannization was an attempt to put an image "in place of a city which had lost its old means of representation." What had been lost was the idea of the city as a form of sociality, as a potential site for the construction of utopian dreams of a nurturing social order. "The modes of political, economic and ideological representation in which the city had once been constructed, as a contingent unit in and through other social practices" had been dissolved in part by the repressions of 1848, but then further eviscerated under the transfixing power of spectacle. Once the city is imaged by capital solely as spectacle, it can then only be consumed passively, rather than actively created by the populace at large through political participation. In the previous social order, the city had been "a horizon of possible collective action and understanding." But, concludes Clark, "all such horizons must be made invisible in societies organized under the aegis of the commodity."⁶

It would be wrong, I think, to argue for a complete and radical break in political imagery after 1848.⁷ With the "bourgeois" revolution of 1830, the social emphasis shifted from Court to boulevard, but it was solely the Boulevard des Capucines (North Side) outside of the celebrated café Tortoni's that became the place for everyone who was someone to be seen between four and seven of an evening (and then within Tortoni's after midnight). So the boulevard was not a Second Empire invention. But the habits of social display and bourgeois (as opposed to aristocratic) power spread rapidly outwards along the new boulevards with their new cafés to

create a more dispersed pattern of social and political proprietorship. The revolutionaries (nurtured on the various utopian currents that circulated so strongly in France during the 1830s and 1840s) had, for their part, broadly construed the city and the republic as a potentially nurturing body politic. This motif was widespread in the thinking of the time: it exerts a powerful presence in the early works of Balzac, for example. Daumier's *Republic*, painted in response to the revolutionary government's call for suitable public art, illustrates the thought: A large bare-breasted woman, seated magisterially on a throne-like chair while gazing far into the distance, grasps the tricolor flag with one hand and suckles a sturdy child (by no means portrayed as young) at each breast while another sits reading at her feet. The city and the republic (often seen as an identity) should, the revolutionaries argued, provide sustenance in the face of hunger and distress, while the national workshops should provide work in the face of unemployment. All such hopes were crushed in the June days as the national workshops were closed, and the boulevards became sites for military massacres. Shortly thereafter, Napoleon III's election as president followed by the coup d'état put paid to all such hopes. It was then that public space began to be fashioned and orchestrated in fundamentally different ways. The spectacle took over. The sense of the city as a social body politic was laid low, or at least went underground only to be rediscovered and resurrected later in the tumultuous days of the Paris Commune.

But what kind of spectacle was constructed and what role did the shaping of public space have to play in its elaboration? And precisely how was the spectacle mobilized and controlled? For is it not also true that revolutionary action generates its own powerful sense of spectacle, that revolutions are, as Lenin put it, truly festivals of the people?

The spectacle of the Second Empire had, of course, a purely political aspect (which Clark largely ignores). This strongly focused on the populism of the Napoleonic legend and the idea of imperial power. The conscious plan for Paris to assume the mantle of imperial Rome and become the head and heart of civilization in Europe and beyond was central to Haussmann's efforts. The notion of a body politic was preserved but it was now construed as imperial rather than as social. The mobilization of spectacle, as in imperial Rome, became a crucial weapon in the struggle to maintain imperial power (recalling the famous slogan of "bread and circuses"). Court ceremonies, imperial marriages, burials, and royal visits, military parades (particularly to celebrate grand victories abroad with the emperor riding in the vanguard), and even boulevard openings, were turned into spectacular celebrations in which an adoring public was expected to bow down before imperial grace, munificence, and power.⁸ Popular support for the emperor was often manifest through

organized fêtes, galas, and balls (even the women of Les Halles, known for their republicanism, organized a grand public ball to celebrate the advent of empire). The more permanent monumentality that accompanied the reconstruction, even the monumentality of the new boulevards themselves, helped support the legitimacy and overwhelming mastery of imperial power. The flamboyance of the architecture—Garnier's elaborate Opera House comes very much to mind—mirrored the flamboyance of imperial spectacle more generally. Universal expositions, such as that of 1855 and 1867, added their weight to the glories of that power while simultaneously celebrating the city as a center of commodity circulation, technological innovation, and social progress. These universal exhibitions were, as Benjamin rightly remarks, "pilgrimages to the commodity fetish," but they also testified to the modernity of empire.⁹

Hausmannization also entailed, however, the reorganization of public space for the far more mundane purpose of facilitating the freer circulation of money, commodities, and people (and hence of capital) throughout the spaces of the city. Here, too, the sheer spectacle of that movement, the hustle and bustle of carts and public conveyances over newly macadamized surfaces, was not devoid of political meanings. Everything seemed to speed up; the stimuli of urban living became, according to many accounts, more and more overwhelming. What Simmel calls the "blasé attitude" took ever deeper hold on urban life (at least if we believe the innumerable tales of the flaneur and the dandy on the boulevards).¹⁰ The arrival of the new department stores and the proliferation of cafés (of the sort that Baudelaire describes), cabarets, and theaters meant, furthermore, that the sociality of the boulevards was now as much controlled indirectly by the commercial activity around it as by police power.

The increasing power of the commodity itself as spectacle was nowhere better expressed than in the new department stores. The Bon Marché, opened in 1852, was the pioneer (although prototypes existed in the 1840s). Such high turnover stores needed a large clientele drawn from all over the city, and the new boulevards facilitated such movement. The department stores opened themselves to the boulevards and streets, encouraging entry of the public without obligation to buy. The shop window was organized as an enticement to stop and gaze upon and then enter and buy. The commodities visibly piled high inside the department stores became a spectacle in their own right. The boundary between public and private space was rendered porous; the passage between them became easy, although an army of ushers and salespeople (particularly salesgirls) patrolled behavior in that interior space (much as they continue to do to this day, although now armed with surveillance cameras and more prominent security guards). The effect, however, was to transform the citizen

into a mere spectator and consumer. From this standpoint, the passivity of politics was tentatively and at least momentarily secured.

Women in this had a much more prominent role, both as sellers and buyers. The department stores, Zola noted in retrospect, particularly targeted women as consumers. In his novel *Au Bonheur des Dames*, Mouret, the proprietor of a pioneering department store (modeled on the Bon Marché), explains his “techniques of modern big business” to a baron (modeled, rather obviously, on Haussmann). Of “supreme importance,” says Mouret:

was the exploitation of Woman. Everything else led up to it, the ceaseless renewal of capital, the system of piling up goods, the low prices that attracted people, the marked prices that reassured them. It was Woman the shops were competing for so fiercely, it was Woman they were continually snaring with their bargains, after dazzling her with their displays. They had awoken new desire in her weak flesh, they were an immense temptation to which she inevitably yielded, succumbing in the first place to purchases for the house, then seduced by coquetry and, finally consumed by desire. By increasing sales tenfold, by making luxury democratic, shops were becoming a terrible agency for spending, ravaging households, working hand in hand with the latest extravagances in fashion, growing ever more expensive. And if, in the shops, Woman was queen, adulated and humoured in her weaknesses, surrounded with attentions, she reigned there as an amorous queen, whose subjects trade on her, and who pays for every whim with a drop of her own blood.... [Mouret] was building a temple to Woman, making a legion of shop assistants burn incense before her, creating the rites of a new cult; he thought only of her, ceaselessly trying to imagine ever greater enticements; and behind her back, when he had emptied her purse and wrecked her nerves, he was full of the secret scorn of a man to whom a mistress has been stupid enough to yield. “Get the women,” he said to the Baron, laughing impudently as he did so, “and you’ll sell the world.”¹¹

The art of enticement began with window display. Mouret, says Zola, “was the best window dresser in Paris, a revolutionary window-dresser in fact, who had founded the school of the brutal and gigantic in the art of display.” But the boulevards also became public spaces for displays of bourgeois affluence, conspicuous consumption, and feminine fashion. The theatricality of the boulevards fused with the performative world inside the many theaters that sprung up along them. The boulevards

became public spaces where the fetish of the commodity reigned supreme in every sense.

But note something very important here: It was the symbiotic relation between the public and commercial spaces that became crucial. The spectacle of the commodity came to dominate across the private/public divide giving a unity to the two. And while the role of bourgeois women was, in certain respects, much enhanced by this shift in emphasis from the arcades and many small shops as centers of commodity exchange to the department stores and larger-scale specialized commercial establishments, it was still their lot to be exploited, although this time as consumers rather than as managers of households. It became both necessary and fashionable for bourgeois women to stroll the boulevards, window shop, and buy and display their acquisitions in public space. They, too, became part of the spectacle (now heavily infused with overtones of sexual desire) that fed upon itself to create an entirely new sense of public space, but one that was defined in commercial and commodity terms overlaid with the intangibles of sexual desire. The direct encounter with femininity and fashion on the boulevard brought bourgeois men into these public spaces in droves.

Political pacification through consumption and arousal of erotic desire has long been a ruse to ensure capitalism’s own survival (we live with it every day in our TV commercials). The successive targeting of vulnerable groups, such as bourgeois women in the Second Empire (now, of course, the slogan is “get the children [at the earliest possible age] and you’ll sell the world”) has long been a critical tactic of commerce. But behind all this, there always lies the symbiotic organization of public/private spaces under the aegis of commodification and spectacle. The hoped for effect is depoliticization. Sennett concludes:

The capitalist order had the power to throw the materials of appearance into a permanently problematical, permanently “mystifying” state.... In “public,” one observed, one expressed oneself, in terms of what one wanted to buy, to think, to approve of, not as a result of continuous interaction, but after a period of passive, silent, focused attention. By contrast, “private” meant a world where one could express oneself directly as one was touched by another person; private meant a world where interaction reigned, but it must be in secret.... In the spectacle few men play an active role.¹²

Yet in important ways the private world mirrored the public even as it inverted it. Baudelaire for one was explicit in acknowledging the power of

the spectacle in relation to interior states of mind. "In certain almost supernatural inner states," he wrote, "the depth of life is almost entirely revealed in the spectacle, however ordinary, that we have before our eyes, and which becomes the symbol of it."¹³ The poor family with their staring eyes are part of the spectacle for him (as the sight of the homeless may be for us); but how he or his lover sees them reflects and expresses their separate inner states. But what happens to those inner states when the proprietor sends the poor away, leaving only the boulevard and the dazzling café as spectacle?

The spectacle, Clark insists, "is never an image mounted securely in place; it is always an account of the world competing with others, and meeting the resistance of different, sometimes tenacious, forms of social practice." In Second Empire Paris, for example, it failed "to put together its account of anomie with that of social division, it [failed] to map one form of control upon another."¹⁴ This failure, it seems to me, lies at the root of the lover's quarrel in Baudelaire's poem. The social control orchestrated through commodification and spectacle ("all history and all mythology pandering to gluttony" and the general glitter and splendor of café and boulevard) runs up against the clear signs of exclusion and exploitation of the poor to spark either anger ("send them away") or guilt ("I felt a little ashamed at our decanters and glasses...").

Governance by spectacle, it turns out, is a very chancy business, as it can all too easily spin out of control to produce unintended and sometimes quite surprising consequences. When the craft worker organizations were invited to attend the spectacle of the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867 and to deliberate collectively on their responses, the expectation seems to have been that they, like the bourgeoisie, would be so star-struck by the glamour and splendor of new technologies that they would overwhelmingly throw their support behind the imperial attempt to rival Britain in pursuing the fruits of technological progress. But the proceedings of the Worker Commissions tell a different story.¹⁵ The workers for the most part resented the incorporation of a bowdlerized and crude version of their own craft intelligence into the machines and the standardized and, by their lights, inferior product that resulted. Commodities produced in such a way may have been suited to the emergent market represented by the department stores but they were not at all consistent with the sense of self-worth and the dignity of craft labor. The response, interestingly, was not to oppose the application of machine technology (no hint of Luddite sentiments can be found), but to look for new forms of labor organization that could ensure lower costs, an improvement in product, and enhancement of the dignity of labor. The most favored answer was to explore the idea of worker associations. This then became a hot

topic of debate in the public meetings that were organized after 1868 and a nodal point of oppositional politics to the procapitalist politics of empire. The quest for worker association subsequently played an important role in the complex politics of the Paris Commune.

The mixing that went on in the exterior spaces—the boulevards and the public gardens (such as the Tuilleries)—was also not easy to control, despite the attempts to homogenize neighborhoods and to forge clearly demarcated public spaces. Fournel's 1858 account of what one was likely to encounter on the streets of Paris indicates an incredible mixing of types and genres that must have been a nightmare for the authorities.¹⁶ Policing the public spaces became a problem. The boundary between respectable women and women of easy virtue called for stricter surveillance and the politics of street life—the activities of itinerant musicians and pamphleteers—were a focus of considerable police activity. From this there always arose a sense of insecurity and vulnerability, of bourgeois anxiety behind the turbulent mask of spectacle and commodification. To be effective in the public space, therefore, the network of informers and secret police agents had to penetrate deep into private spaces—concierges were activated as spies, informers were everywhere, and "even the walls," advised Proudhon, "have ears." The spectacle might conceal class relations (indeed, that was its primary purpose), but what else might hide within its complex folds? The informal regulation of the boulevards by the flows of commodities, traffic, and pedestrian activity made the task of surveillance and policing much more difficult. It was all too easy to disappear into the crowd. The remarkable reception given to the translation of Poe's story "The Man in the Crowd" is suggestive, as is Fournel's clear distinction between the "baudet" (the loiterer and spectator) and the "flâneur" (whose actions are mysterious but somehow purposive and perhaps, therefore, threatening and subversive). The concealing of class relations does not erase them. There is a story, possibly apocryphal, that the revolutionary Jacobin idol, August Blanqui (who spent more than forty years of his life behind bars), stood on the Champs Elysée while several hundreds of his followers paraded past him concealed within the milling crowd without the police ever noticing.¹⁷

In Baudelaire's prose poem, bourgeois anxiety (coupled with guilt) is palpable. It is almost as if the rising power of commodity spectacle to command the public and commercial spaces of the city produces deeper and deeper levels of anxiety and insecurity in the bourgeois personality. Reassurance then depends on "sending them away." Any continued sign of "their" presence produces a fear of that other who is otherwise concealed. The "other" is concealed behind the fetish of the commodity, as well as within the folds of the urban crowd.

But here we encounter the greatest difficulty of all for total bourgeois control over public spaces and the public sphere. The drive, spearheaded by Haussmann, to make the right to the city an exclusively bourgeois prerogative could not help but create its “other,” primarily in the form of an increasingly homogeneous working class city where a quite different symbiotic relationship was set up between private, public, and commercial spaces. The division of Paris into a respectable west and a less fortunate and largely neglected east was broadly consolidated by Haussmann’s policies (particularly in the field of social provision that Haussmann reorganized on neo-Malthusian lines, thus ending the right to sustenance and welfare as the poor had previously known it).

To be sure, the boulevards were everywhere used to penetrate and then colonize unfriendly territory in a generalized attempt to create spaces subservient to empire in both military and political economic terms. And if the boulevards could not penetrate unfriendly zones, then at least they could surround them. But the mass of workers, condemned for the most part to live on miserable wages and faced with notoriously insecure and often seasonally episodic employment, had to live somewhere. A predominantly male and heavily immigrant population crammed into overcrowded rooming houses in insalubrious conditions. With limited cooking facilities, they were forced to depend either on meals provided collectively in-house or go on the streets into the innumerable small eating and drinking establishments that became, as a result, centers of sociality and politics. To take their pleasures, this population relied heavily on dance halls, cabarets, and drinking establishments that proved adept at relieving the working classes of any surplus moneys they had when times were good. More fortunate workers, usually those with craft skills or occupying that peculiar mixed status of independent artisan or employee, could, of course, construct for themselves a different kind of life. Concentrated largely in the central districts, they nevertheless relied heavily on small-scale commercial establishments as centers of sociality and pleasure (often to excess, if many commentators at the time are to be believed). The dingy private and commercial spaces in these areas cast a shadow rather than a luster on the public spaces of the street, while the roiling turbulence and animation of street life in working class Paris, where the eyes of the poor were everywhere, could do little to reassure anyone with bourgeois pretensions that this was a secure world. Such spaces were to be feared, and most bourgeois steadfastly avoided them apart, that is, from the shopkeepers and small employers who dwelt within their midst.

In a way, this is an all too familiar and dismal story of the ghettoization and segregation of a city, in this instance almost entirely according to class

interests and sentiments.¹⁸ But in this case, the rambunctiousness of working class Paris provided a seedbed for the growth and expression of a wide range of oppositional political sentiments that later underpinned the complex politics of the Paris Commune of 1871. It was a radically different kind of spectacle that held sway here: a complex mix of what Marx termed “animal spirits” and street theater where intensity of local contacts and confusions masked all manner of plots, including those with political and revolutionary aims. As the dance halls and cabarets became the loci of public meetings on political topics after the liberalization of empire in 1868, and as political meetings proliferated throughout working class Paris, so bourgeois hegemony over the right to the rest of the city was challenged. Seeping outward from their own symbiotic fashioning of public, commercial, and private spaces, popular forces more and more asserted a public and collective presence on the boulevards of bourgeois Paris. The image of hordes of workers descending from the working class district of Belleville and pouring out onto the public spaces of the city, even, on one occasion in 1869 getting as far as the new Opera House, struck political fear into the bourgeoisie. The boulevards became spaces of political expression, albeit ephemerally, for those whom they were supposed to exclude or control. To this climate of insecurity was added the spectacle of public funerals of noted oppositional figures or even, for that matter, anyone who had participated in the events of 1848. The authorities had a difficult time repressing them or preventing graveside elegies veering off into political statements. The cemeteries, particularly Père Lachaise, opened up as public spaces where political memory of a different sort could be exhumed along with future hopes for the city as a body politic. Here was a crucial mobilizing occasion (much as we have seen more recently in Northern Ireland and among Palestinians) that allowed private grief to be parlayed into a public statement. The public spaces of Paris were transformed toward the end of empire into sites of geopolitical struggles between warring factions in ways that were intensely symbolic of clashing ideologies in the public sphere of politics. The eyes of the poor would not be averted. Nor could they be sent away. The anxiety of the bourgeoisie was justified. The spectacle of the commodity may mask, but it can never erase, the raw facts of class relations.

So what conclusions can be drawn from this particular case? Most important, I think, is this: The character of public space counts for little or nothing politically unless it connects symbiotically with the organization of institutional (in this case, commercial, although in other cases it may be religious or educational institutions) and private spaces. It is the relational connectivity among public, quasipublic, and private spaces that counts when it comes to politics in the public sphere. It was Haussmann’s genius

to orchestrate this symbiosis on the ground, while fortuitously facilitating the stronger presence of the commodity as spectacle in the new Paris that his works helped create. The bourgeoisie could thereby assert their hegemony in politics as well as in economy at the same time as they claimed privileged access to and control over the public spaces of their city. To back this claim they needed legitimate force, and this is what empire provided in Paris (in much the same way as Giuliani provided it in New York). But this privileged claim encountered two particular difficulties. First, since (as Balzac earlier asserted again and again) the bourgeoisie worshiped only money and commodities, they were less and less patient with the expense and spectacle of empire and pursued forms of market freedoms (including that of limited freedom of expression) that were hard to absorb within the repressive and authoritarian imperial frame of governance. The bourgeoisie undermined the legitimacy of the very force they needed to back their claims to hegemony over public space. The boulevards eventually became spaces hostile to imperial spectacle. But then the power to send the poor away and keep them under strict police surveillance also diminished, thus opening up the boulevards to a different kind of politics.

But the success of Haussmann's orchestrations also stopped short of that "other" Paris where workers, immigrants, and small entrepreneurs struggled to make some sort of living and were forced to generate a different connectivity between their private state of deprivation and their uses of both institutional (commercial) and public spaces. Here, too, the rule applies: that politics does indeed relate to the symbiotic connectivity across the public, institutional (commercial) and private realms. The rising tide of republican and working class protest, culminating in the endless political meetings after 1868 and the eventual proclamation of the Commune, cannot be understood without glancing back at the symbiotic connections between these different realms in that area of Paris that lay outside of bourgeois control and which relied entirely upon the Emperor's spies and police to maintain order. On both sides, therefore, politics was inflected by the experience of a symbiotic connectivity between private, public, and institutional spaces. The fierce clash of ideologies and ideals in the Commune of 1871 was at least partially explicable in these oppositional terms.

Contestation over the construction, meaning, and organization of public space only takes effect, therefore, when it succeeds in exercising a transformative influence over private and commercial spaces. Action on only one of these dimensions will have little meaning in and of itself. Attempts to change one dimension may prove worthless or even counterproductive in the absence of connectivity to the others. It is, in the end, the symbiosis among the three that matters.

To take a contemporary example, no amount of "new urbanism" understood as urban design, can promote a greater sense of civic responsibility and participation if the intensity of private property arrangements and the organization of commodity as spectacle (of which Disneyfication is the prime example) remains untouched. Empty gestures of this sort with respect to the organization of public space abound. But what the Second Empire case illustrates is that when connections are made, then the political consequences can be both intense and far-reaching. (I believe a parallel argument could be constructed with respect to the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s.) Both sides of the class divide in Second Empire Paris achieved some level of that symbiosis, but they did so in such a segregated way as to create a dual city with only a demimonde and a complex zone of mixing to separate them. The intensity of politics that flowed from this had immense consequences for the transformation of Paris as a city. But it also brought the potentiality of the city as a body politic (no matter whether of a social or imperial sort) into a violent confrontation with that conception of the city as a tabula rasa for the accumulation of capital and the bourgeois pursuit of wealth and power. I sometimes wonder if we have ever succeeded in moving beyond that polarity within the whole historical geography of urbanization under capitalism. But that is a thesis to be further investigated and not offered up as a firm conclusion.

Notes

1. R. Moses, "What Happened to Haussmann," *Architectural Forum* 77 (July 1942): 1–10. See also M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).
2. C. Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, edited and translated by L. Varese (1869; New York: New Directions, 1947).
3. D. Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
4. R. Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man: The Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 145–148.
5. T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 36.
6. *Ibid.*, chapter 1.
7. In *Paris*, Harvey examines this process in depth.
8. M. Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics: Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and the Fete Imperiale, 1849–70* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997).
9. W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 165–167.
10. G. Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in G. Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, edited by D. Levine (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971).
11. E. Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise (Au bonheur des dames)*, trans. Brian Nelson (1883; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 76–77; M. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869–1920* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).
12. Sennett, *Fall of Public Man*.
13. Baudelaire, cited in G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. M. Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 192.
14. Clark, *Painting of Modern Life*, 49.

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15. J. Ranciere and P. Vauday, "Going to the Expo: The Worker, His Wife and Machines," in *Voices of the People: The Politics and Life of 'La Sociale' at the End of the Second Empire*, edited by A. Rifkin and R. Thomas, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988).
16. V. Fournel, *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris* (Paris: A. Delahays, 1858).
17. M. Dommanget, *Blanqui et l'opposition revolutionnaire et la fin du Second Empire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1969).
18. J. Gaillard, *Paris, la ville: 1852-1870* (Paris, Honoré Champion, 1976); L. Lazare, *Les quartiers pauvres de Paris* (Paris: Bureau de la Bibliothèque Municipale, 1869); W. Haine, *The World of the Paris Café* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).