

FACES OF PARIS

HOW HAS PARIS changed over the past decade? To answer that, one would ideally need to have returned to the city after a long absence; I have only been away for short periods over the last ten years, and so I see its progress as one does the wrinkles on a beloved face that one observes every day. The inner city is now changing only slowly. Time is needed for a quarter of Kabyl cafés to be transformed into fashionable bars, for the Chinese rag trade to advance a street or two, or for what is called renovation to press the poor a notch more towards the Périphérique.¹

The physical transformations of Paris may be read as a ceaseless struggle between the spirit of place and the spirit of time. Take, for example, the nameless spot formed by the widening of Rue Mouffetard below the church of Saint-Médard, in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau on the eastern edge of the 5th arrondissement. The ancient food shops, the market stalls, the immense trees that cast their shade onto the porch of the church, the remains of the little cemetery where the ‘convulsionaries’ danced on the tomb of a popular priest in the reign of Louis XV,² the two large cafés facing each other across the road—this whole panoply of eras, styles and events gives this place a spirit that cannot be compared with any other. Older Parisians are aware that under their feet flows the River Bièvre in its descent towards the Jardin des Plantes, and that this district was crossed by the main road towards Italy. The riotous tradition of the Faubourg Saint-Marceau extends far into the past: in the sixteenth century it was a bastion of popular Protestantism; later it was involved in all the great revolutionary *journées*.³

A spirit of place, therefore; but the spirit of the time has also succeeded in making itself felt. The centre of this space is now occupied by an enormous floral parterre, with a fountain in the middle. The combined

action of the Voirie and Espaces Verts departments has attempted the impossible—to transform this place into one of the thousands of roundabouts that punctuate roads the length and breadth of France. Respect for the spirit of place has nothing to do with the sad idea of ‘heritage’, any more than distrust of the spirit of time means rejecting the contemporary. Over the last twenty or thirty years, some innovations have indeed managed to create a new spirit of place. I. M. Pei’s pyramid, for example, gave life to Napoleon III’s Louvre courtyard, formerly a dusty parking place for the museum staff, and not far away is a whole new quarter, with its good points and bad, organized around the Beaubourg Centre. (I never say ‘Centre Pompidou’, as the late president had deplorable artistic taste—his office decorated by Agam—and besides he was opposed to the Piano–Rogers project, which was only adopted thanks to the stubbornness of the jury chair, the great Jean Prouvé.)

Conversely, the charm of certain places has evaporated without the historical décor having changed. On the Place Saint-Sulpice, the Café de la Mairie used to be a pleasant spot to drink coffee in the first rays of the morning sun; this was where Georges Perec wrote his ‘Attempt to Exhaust a Parisian Space’, noting its police station, cinema, publishing house, undertakers, travel agents, newspaper kiosk, beauty parlour ‘and much else’.⁴ The setting is the same, but I avoid it now because of its

¹ These extracts are drawn from Eric Hazan’s *The Invention of Paris: A History in Footsteps*, published this spring by Verso: hardback, 402 pp, 978 1 84967 411 4.

² The young deacon, François de Pâris (1690–1727), was known for his popular sympathies and left his worldly goods to the poor. His grave was acclaimed as a site for miracle cures, attracting large numbers; some fell into convulsions. Scandalized by reports of ‘pretty girls, their throats and chests bare, their skirts thrown back, their legs in the air, shaking in the arms of young men, who might thereby satisfy certain passions’, the authorities closed the cemetery in 1732. Popular graffiti soon sprang up: *De par le roi, défense à Dieu/De faire miracle en ce lieu*—‘By order of the King, it is forbidden for God to perform miracles on this site’.

³ Balzac described the quarter in *The Commission on Lunacy* (1836) as the poorest in Paris, ‘that in which two-thirds of the population lack firing in winter, which leaves most brats at the gate of the Foundling hospital, which sends most beggars to the poorhouse, most ragpickers to the street corners, most decrepit old folks to bask against the walls on which the sun shines, most delinquents to the police courts’. This passage, like a number of others, shows the degree to which Balzac, despite his defence of throne and altar, differed from Tocqueville, Du Camp or Flaubert: you never find in him the least expression of contempt for ordinary people.

⁴ *Tentative d’épuisement d’un lieu parisien*, Paris 1975. In homage to Perec (1936–82), I wrote the pages on the Place Saint-Sulpice in *The Invention of Paris* at a table in the same café.

clientele: smart tourists and elegant ladies taking a rest after doing their shopping in the *haute-couture* boutiques nearby. Easy to avoid, but then where to go? The answer is difficult, given how few café terraces on the historic Left Bank are now worth a visit.

Among the active agents of urban deterioration in these last ten years, I would give top marks to the Service des Espaces Verts. What they call *végétalisation* runs rampant in every quarter, afflicting places that ask only to be left in peace. Between Barbès and Place Clichy, the Boulevard de Rochechouart and the Boulevard de Clichy used to be divided by a central reservation that was used partly for parking, partly by the local kids as a football pitch, partly as somewhere you could drink a can of beer on a bench, but above all by Eastern European tourists emerging from the neighbouring sex shops and kebab joints. In sum, an undefined space, just what is needed to give the city some air. But the *mairie* is not fond of such spaces. Right along the length of these old boulevards, the Service has established plantations hemmed in by metal grilles, with plants of a particular ugliness that are now found throughout Paris, selected so that they never flower and rapidly get covered with an unpleasant dust. Sometimes this *végétalisation* is effected by shrubs in tubs or enormous pots, as for example in the Rue des Rosiers in the old Jewish quarter of the Marais: in combination with the newly laid paving and its central gutter, these sickly stems have given the *coup de grâce* to this street which, ten years ago, still kept something of its Ashkenazi-proletarian past.

Mapping metamorphoses

But I should not exaggerate. These last few years have not known any disaster comparable to the destruction of upper Belleville in the 1960s, or the ravaging of the Bastille by the installation of Carlos Ott's opera house twenty years later. They have even seen a number of successes, like the walkway on the old viaduct leading to the Bastille station, or Marc Mimram's footbridge, which cleverly links the Orsay museum with the Tuileries gardens. In point of fact, the very widespread impression that Paris has changed a great deal in recent years is quite correct, but what has changed is not so much the mineral and vegetable setting as the way in which the city is inhabited.

On the Left Bank there has been scarcely any change since the 1990s. Apart from the great Chinatown of the 13th arrondissement, the population

has remained almost uniformly white and bourgeois. For centuries Paris had mingled rich and poor in close proximity, if also in vertical order. The same building would house shops on the ground floor—the shopkeeper living on the mezzanine—apartments for the aristocracy on the second storey (the ‘noble’ floor before the invention of the lift), and workers in the attics. This mix had not yet completely disappeared even in the early 1960s, when for example on the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève, or on Rues Laplace, Lanneau and Valette, lodgings under the roofs were still occupied by workers. American-style zoning by income was never really established until the era of de Gaulle, Malraux and Pompidou, at the time when the old quarters, massively renovated, were reoccupied by the bourgeoisie. In today’s Latin Quarter, the Blacks are street sweepers, the Arabs are grocers, the police are rarely seen and the historic streets are as clean as in the pedestrianized zones of the provinces. Everything is just a little older: the friendly beggar whose pitch has always been the five metres between the La Hune bookshop and the newspaper kiosk at St-Germain-des-Près now has grey hair and wears glasses to read the volumes the bookshops give him. Nothing happens anymore on the Left Bank, whereas in my youth we hardly needed to cross the Seine: the Right Bank was like a faraway desert.

The Right Bank today is no more homogeneous than it was back in the insurrectional days of June 1848 or during the Commune. In what are rather ironically called the *beaux quartiers*—let’s say, west of a line that runs from Les Halles to the flea market, via Rue Poissonnière, Rue du Faubourg Poissonnière and Boulevard Barbès—almost nothing has changed in ten years. The Batignolles, Plaine Monceau, the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Auteuil and Passy slumber peacefully. The Avenue des Champs-Élysées has gone downhill. For some time now it has evoked the duty-free mall of an international airport, decorated in a style somewhere between pseudo-Haussmann and pseudo-Bauhaus. Today the airport is decidedly down-at-heel, and you can scarcely find a table to have a drink except in the chains of faux pizzerias, genuine fast-food outlets or pseudo-1900 cafés.

Working-class Paris still occupies the east of the city—the northeast to be precise. People often say that this is also getting gentrified, that the marginal, the poor, the immigrants are steadily being driven out by the irresistible advance of the *bobos*—‘bourgeois bohemians’: intellectuals, artists, designers, journalists—who cultivate their superficial

non-conformism and benign anti-racism in these quarters, while driving up the rents with the help of property speculators. This opinion needs some shading. It is true that certain places, formerly little visited at night, have become meeting points for a more-or-less gilded youth: the banks of the Canal Saint-Martin, the streets around Place Gambetta, Rue Oberkampf at its intersection with Rue Saint-Maur. Some fifteen years ago, I witnessed the start of this phenomenon on that corner: an old-established *bougnat*—the name once given to alcohol outlets kept by Auvergnats, who also supplied wood and coal to the storeys above—had been transformed into a smart café, the Café Charbon; in the wake of its success, bars mushroomed to the point of invading the Rue Oberkampf and the Rue Saint-Maur a hundred metres in each direction. It is also true that streets that were very poor and dilapidated some ten years ago, like Rue Myrha or Rue Doudeauville to the north of La Goutte d'Or, have been gradually renovated, which is leading to the expulsion of their fragile African population, often without identity papers or work.

But working-class Paris is resisting rather better than people say. The Chinese at Belleville, the Arabs at La Goutte d'Or, backed by well-established Algerian traders who own their freeholds, the Turks at the market of the Porte Saint-Denis, the Africans of the Dejean market (recently threatened, it's true), the Sri Lankans and Pakistanis on the Faubourg Saint-Denis near La Chapelle—all these welcoming enclaves are holding their own, and even gaining some ground here and there. Besides, the presence in the same streets of Blacks, Arabs and a precarious and proletarianized white youth tends to create ties, particularly in facing up to a police pressure that is far tougher than ten years ago. The eviction by the police of the *sans papiers* African hunger strikers who were occupying the Church of Saint Bernard at La Goutte d'Or aroused great indignation in 1996. Today it would be lost in the flood of arrests, raids and expulsions that are the common lot of the working-class quarters of Paris. But if there is no effervescence in these districts comparable to that of the revolutionary years, nevertheless solidarity and common action have gradually created a new situation; above all since the revolts of the suburban youth in October–November 2005, in face of which the government proclaimed a state of emergency for the first time since the Algerian War in the early 1960s.

The political division of Paris goes back a long way. In the nineteenth century, between the anonymous night-time barricades of November 1827

and the seventy sunny days of the Commune, the list of demonstrations, riots, coups, uprisings and insurrections is so long that no other capital can claim anything similar. Their geography, and their distribution between the quarters of Paris, reflects the industrial revolution, the new relationship between bosses and workers, the centrifugal migration of the labouring and dangerous population, the development of major works, and the 'strategic embellishment' of the city. The same street names, and the same quarters, return constantly throughout the century, but we do see the centre of gravity of Red Paris shift slowly to the north and east, with interruptions and accelerations that stamp on the map of the city the mark of an old notion now fallen into disrepute, that of class struggle.

Under the swastika

In the 20th century, these divisions mapped onto the geography of occupation. Thanks to plaques showing where those who were shot or deported lived and met, it is possible to sketch the traces of a Resistance Paris, northeast of a line running from the Porte de Clignancourt to the Porte de Vincennes, passing through the Gare Saint-Lazare, République and the Bastille, and spilling broadly out into the *banlieue*, from Saint-Ouen and Gennevilliers to Montreuil and Ivry. A small building on the corner between Rues Saint-Blaise and Riblette in Charonne, for example, has an entrance like thousands of others, except for two marble plaques that face each other in the doorway. The one on the left reads: 'Here lived Cadix Sosnowski, FTPF [Franc-Tireur et Partisan Français]. Shot by the Germans at the age of 17. Died for France 26 May 1943.' On the right side, framing the serious face of a boy of about fifteen, the inscription recalls: 'The home of Brobion Henri, FTPF. Soldier with the Fabien brigade. Fallen on the field of honour 18 January 1945 at Habsheim, Alsace.' It was perhaps Cadix who brought his friend Henri into the Resistance—his parents had probably arrived from Poland in the 1920s, like so many others living in Belleville-Ménilmontant; it was hardly surprising that the children of these immigrants should join the Resistance. One, Laurent Goldberg, recalled:

I spent my childhood there, Rue des Cendriers, until the age of eighteen, when I was wanted by the Vichy police and left for the unoccupied zone in order to hide, as I was wanted for Resistance activities. In other words: distribution of leaflets, scattering leaflets in cinemas in the Rue de Ménilmontant—the Phénix, the Ménil-Palace . . . My group was decimated and came to an end. There were three or four survivors out of a group that had sections in each

of the four quarters of the 14th arrondissement: Belleville, Père-Lachaise, Pelleport and Charonne . . . It's a miracle, to have survived all that we went through in those days.⁵

The other Paris, that of the Germans and their collaborators, closely corresponds to the *beaux quartiers*. Historically, the Champs-Élysées has always been the major axis of Paris collaboration. Back in 1870, Louise Michel noted how café chairs and counters were broken there, as the only cafés in Paris to open to the Prussians.⁶ After the Popular Front, 'the elegant crowd acclaimed Hitler in the Champs-Élysées cinemas at 20 francs a seat.'⁷ Every day, for four years, the changing of the Wehrmacht guard took place on the Champs-Élysées: at midday, starting from the Rond-Point, the new guard paraded to music up to the Étoile, where it passed in review, before dispersing to the palaces of the general staff. The Kommandantur Gross-Paris was on the Place de l'Opéra, at the corner of the Rue du Quatre-Septembre. The Gestapo had its headquarters in a private hotel on the Avenue Foch, close to the Porte Dauphine. The Propaganda-Staffel, where Ernst Jünger worked, was in the Hôtel Majestic, on the Rue Dumont d'Urville near the Étoile. The Pass Office was a couple of steps away, on the Rue Galilée. The German Military Tribunal was on the Rue Boissy-d'Anglas, and the Recruitment Office for the Waffen ss on the Avenue Victor-Hugo. The (French) Commissariat for Jewish affairs was on the Rue des Petits Pères, behind the Place des Victoires.

When I think that I passed on my way the church of Saint-Roch, on the steps of which César Birrotteau was wounded, and that at the corner of the Rue des Prouvaires the pretty salesgirl Baret took Casanova's measurements in the back of her shop, and that these are just two tiny facts in an ocean of real or fantastic events—I am overwhelmed by a kind of joyous melancholy, a painful pleasure,

Jünger wrote in his diary on 10 May 1943. Few Parisians would have been capable of such a diary entry, so disenchanting and so accurate. But Jünger also limited his customary itineraries to the elegant quarters of the Right Bank and the Faubourg Saint-Germain. He stayed at the Raphaël on Avenue Kléber, and frequented such luxury establishments as the

⁵ In François Morier, ed., *Belleville, belle ville, visage d'une planète*, Paris 1994.

⁶ Louise Michel, *La Commune, histoire et souvenirs*, Paris 1970.

⁷ Vladimir Jankélévitch, 'Dans l'honneur et la dignité', *Les Temps modernes*, June 1948.

Pâtisserie Ladurée on Rue Royale, the Ritz, ‘along with Carl Schmitt who gave a lecture yesterday on the significance, from the point of view of public law, of the distinction between land and sea’. He walked to the Bagatelle, where a French woman friend told him how ‘students are now being arrested for wearing yellow stars, with inscriptions such as “idealist”’. These individuals do not yet know that the time for discussion has passed. They also imagine that the adversary has a sense of humour.⁸ In the western part of the city, then, cultivated German officers—francophile and even anti-Nazi—signed orders for the execution of young people who, in the eastern part, were making posters and throwing leaflets in the Ménilmontant cinemas.⁹

Leaping the walls

The revolts of 2005 had the effect, among other things, of raising once again the old question of how to put an end to the divide between Paris and its suburbs. This question will certainly seem very odd to English or American readers, long familiar with suburban sprawl and a Greater London that stretches almost to the sea. Cities without walls—apart from those strictly organized on a rectangular grid, like Turin, Manhattan, or Lisbon as laid out by the Marquis of Pombal—grow up any which way, like the tentacles of an octopus, or a bacterial plaque multiplying in its milieu. In London, Berlin or Los Angeles, the city limits and the shapes of districts are vague and variable:

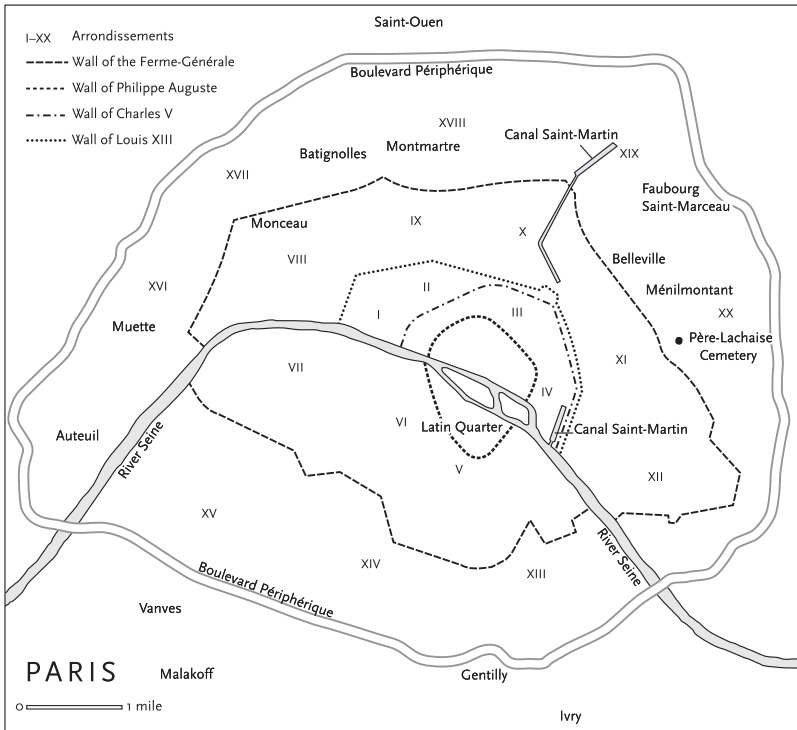
The rampant proliferation of the immense megalopolis that is Tokyo gives the impression of a silkworm eating a mulberry leaf. The form of such a city is unstable, its border an ambiguous zone in constant movement. It is an incoherent space spreading without order or markers, its limits only poorly defined.¹⁰

But Paris, so often threatened, besieged or invaded, has always been constrained by its city walls. These have given it a more or less circular form; it has developed in concentric rings, like an onion, to the rhythm of its successive defences. From the 13th-century ramparts of Philippe

⁸ Entry for 14 June 1942: Ernst Jünger, *Journal de guerre*, Paris 1979.

⁹ Jünger, on the Propaganda-Staffel, did not have to sign such orders, but Heinrich von Stülpnagel, the general in command, with his ‘nice way of smiling’ (*Journal de guerre*, 10 March 1942) and his great knowledge of Byzantine history, did indeed—though he committed suicide after the bomb attempt on Hitler in July 1944.

¹⁰ Yoshinobu Ashihara, *L’Ordre caché: Tokyo, la ville du XXI^e siècle*, Paris 1994.



Auguste to the 1970s Boulevard Périphérique, six different walls have succeeded one another in the course of eight centuries: Charles V's in the 14th century; Louis XIII's in the 17th century; the *octroi* wall of the Ferme-Générale, hated tax agency of the *ancien régime*, in the 1780s; and a further ring of fortifications in the 1840s, whose course the Périphérique follows almost exactly (see map above). The scenario has always been the same. A new limit is constructed, with ample space allowed inside for further building; but this is rapidly filled in, while outside the walls houses with pleasant gardens are constructed in the *faubourgs*.¹¹ When the *intra-muros* concentration becomes intolerable, these *faubourgs* are absorbed into the city and the cycle begins again. Like the rings of a

¹¹ 'The word *faubourg* means the section of a town that is outside its gates and its precinct. But this definition has for a long time ceased to be appropriate for the *faubourgs* of Paris, which, being forced to expand, has ended up enclosing them all within its walls. This name, however, given the weight of long usage, has been preserved for them, and helps a topographical understanding of the capital.' Antoine Béraud and Pierre Dufay, *Dictionnaire historique de Paris*, Paris 1832.

tree, quarters between any two walls are contemporary, even if the west side and the Left Bank have usually lagged behind. This explains why Belleville and Passy have so much in common, both finding themselves in the same stratum, only belatedly annexed to Paris and maintaining certain features of Île-de-France villages—the high street, church and cemetery, the theatre (now ‘municipal’), the lively central square where cakes are bought for Sunday.

Of Paris’s medieval fortifications, that built under Philippe Auguste has left its clearest traces on the Left Bank, where the names of streets and squares still perpetuate its memory: Fossés-Saint-Jacques, Estrapade, Contrescarpe. It then descended towards the Seine in a straight line, following Rue des Fossés-Saint-Victor (now Cardinal-Lemoine) and Rue des Fossés-Saint-Bernard, reaching the river at the tower of La Tournelle. Despite breaches and destruction, eight centuries later the ghost of this wall still defines the Latin Quarter. It is in this semi-ellipse—the neighbourhood of the Cordeliers refectory, the ossuary of Saint-Séverin, the robinia tree of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, around the Rue de la Harpe, Place Maubert, and behind the Collège de France—that a medieval layout still survives on the Left Bank: one of narrow plots in a dense and unbroken tissue, a whirl of streets going in all directions. To experience this, you need only leave the Sorbonne, climb Rue Saint-Jacques as far as Rue des Ursulines, Rue des Feuillantines beloved by Victor Hugo, Rue Lhomond and Rue de l’Abbé-de-l’Épée. Here, the high walls, trees and gardens glimpsed behind fences, the calm and regular pattern of the plan, show that you are *extra muros*, in a relaxed space, on the lands of former convents, along the roads leading to Orléans and Italy. Of the wall of Charles V—its curtain, its rampart walk, its fortress gates, its bastions used for evening strolls, its moats where people fished with rods—nothing physical remains. But its route along the ancient course of the Seine is still one of the fundamental lines of the city structure, completing in a wide circular arc the rectilinear plan inherited from the Romans. Between the Bastille and the Porte Saint-Denis, the noble curve of the boulevards that today bear the names of Beaumarchais, Filles-du-Calvaire, Temple and Saint-Martin precisely matches the line of the old wall.

The *octroi* wall of the Ferme-Générale was purely an instrument of taxation, without any military purpose, being only three metres high and less than one metre deep. The Ferme-Générale had long established offices around Paris, to collect tolls on certain commodities, including

foodstuffs, wine and firewood; but the vagueness of the boundaries—certain streets were subject to *octroi* on one side only—permitted all kinds of fraud. In the 1780s, as the public finances went increasingly into deficit, Louis XVI's Ministers Breteuil and Calonne decided to improve receipts. Old Paris is low-lying and flat; the course of the new wall followed a hillside route, taking its bearings from the heights above the valley hollowed out by the Seine. In today's Paris, it corresponds to the two lines of the overhead Métro: Nation–Étoile via Barbès, and Nation–Étoile via Denfert-Rochereau. The fifty-five barriers were conceived by Ledoux, architect for the privately run Ferme-Générale. They seem to have been based on models from antiquity or the Renaissance—the Roman Pantheon, Bramante's Tempietto, Palladio's Villa Rotonda—combined with a vivid imagination. In his *Essai sur l'architecture* of 1753, Abbé Laugier had regretted that the entry into Paris amounted to 'a few wretched palisades erected on wooden foundations, rolling on two old jambs, and flanked by two or three dunghills', to the point that foreigners found it hard to believe they were not still in some adjacent country town. Ledoux had promised something quite different: 'I shall *de-village* a population of eight hundred thousand and give them the independence that a city draws from its insulation; I shall place trophies of victory at the closed exits of its tendential lines.'¹²

This inconceivable wall, fifteen feet high and nearly seven leagues round, which will soon surround the whole of Paris, is supposed to cost 12 million; but as it should bring in 2 million each year, it is clearly good business. Make the people pay for something that will only make them pay more, what could be better? . . . The Farmers-General would have liked to enclose the whole Ile de France. But what is revolting from every aspect is to see the lairs of the tax office transformed into colonnaded palaces that are genuine fortresses. These monuments are supported by colossal statues. There is one on the Passy side that holds chains in its hands, presenting them to those who arrive: it is the spirit of taxation in person under these genuine attributes. Oh, Monsieur Ledoux, you are a dreadful architect!¹³

Louis-Sébastien Mercier was not alone in this opinion: the condemnation of the wall was so general that its contractors were forced to begin their work at the most deserted point, alongside the Salpêtrière hospital. Through an irony of fate Lavoisier, one of the most conspicuous of the forty 'partners'—all multi-millionaires—of the Ferme-Générale,

¹² Claude Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des moeurs et de la législation*, Paris 1804.

¹³ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, London and Hamburg 1781.

was held responsible for a project that Parisians charged would prevent pure air from entering the city, and his discoveries—on the very subject of the composition of air—did not save his head from the Revolutionary tribunal.¹⁴

The immediate pretext for the wall of the 1840s lay in tensions between the imperial powers—France versus Britain, Russia, Austria and Prussia—over the growing strength of Muhammad Ali's Egypt. Thiers, as prime minister, was inclined to a show of strength, and the fortification plans for the capital that had been under discussion since 1830 rose to the top of the agenda. A continuous rampart would be constructed, reinforced by seventeen fortresses. The spokesmen of the liberal opposition, François Arago and Lamartine, denounced this operation as one that could be turned against the people of Paris. Even Chateaubriand emerged from his silence to write a 'Lettre sur les fortifications': 'Internally, the peace of the barracks; outside these ravelins the silence of the desert—what a result of our Revolution!' The monstrous gnome, as Marx would call him, replied from the tribune of the Chamber of Deputies: 'What! To fancy that any works of fortification could ever endanger liberty!'¹⁵ The army, the department of bridges and roads, and private contractors mobilized 25,000 workers on this construction more than 30 kilometres long.

The new wall was completed in 1843. Its route was dictated by the contours of the land, and corresponded to what are now known as the 'boulevards of the marshals'—their names in fact taken from the military road that ran inside the wall. To the north of the city, across the Saint-Denis plain, the wall ran in a straight line from the Porte de la Villette to the Porte de Clichy, then turned to take in Monceau, Passy and Auteuil; crossing the river it circled Vaugirard and Grenelle, then cut across Issy, Montrouge, Gentilly and Ivry in a wide curve; it ran due north from the Porte de Charenton to the Porte des Lilas, finally swinging between the heights of Belleville and the Pré-Saint-Gervais. This was its most hilly section, and today the most picturesque part of the

¹⁴ 'It is Lavoisier, of the Academy of Sciences, to whom we owe these heavy and useless barriers, a new oppression exercised by the contractors over their fellow citizens. But alas, this great physicist Lavoisier was a Farmer-General' (Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris*, 10 Frimaire, year VII/1798).

¹⁵ Louis-Adolphe Thiers, cited by Karl Marx in 'The Civil War in France', *The First International and After*, Harmondsworth 1974, pp. 191–2.

'boulevards of the marshals', its hairpin bends overlooking the broad plain of the northern suburbs.

Among the villages surrounding Paris, some were thus entirely included within the wall and others cut in two, with one section remaining outside the fortifications. The *octroi* was now levied at the new gates, the wall of the Farmers-General was demolished, the number of arrondissements increased from twelve to twenty, with boundaries that remain today. The 'villages' that Paris swallowed up at this time were no longer hamlets reached by long roads across fields, as when Rousseau went to botanize at Gentilly on the banks of the Bièvre or by Ménilmontant.¹⁶ At the time of their annexation, the *banlieue*—this was when the word entered general usage—was already populated, urbanized, and partly even industrialized, to the point that Haussmann and Louis-Napoleon were concerned at the concentration of factories and workers to the north and east of the city.

Into the banlieue

How will Paris manage its next expansion, opening towards the *banlieue* across the Boulevard Périphérique? To the west of the city, this has been broadly achieved in the last few years along a wide arc that runs from Levallois—formerly the domain of secondhand car dealers, and rich today in the headquarters of showbiz and arms multinationals—through to Vanves and Malakoff. In this sector, both geographical and social conditions were favourable. The transition zone between the 'boulevard of the marshals' and the Périphérique is not dislocated; you can cross it on foot without risking your life. And the population on either side is homogeneous, white and fairly well-off.

It would need a Hugo, however, to make the comparison between the west's Porte de la Muette—a sumptuous embarkation for Cythera, complete with pink chestnut trees—and the east's Porte de Pantin: an unbridgeable barrage of concrete and noise, where the Périphérique

¹⁶ 'For some days the vintage had been harvested; the walkers from the city had already gone home, the peasants also were quitting the fields for the labour of the winter. The country, still green and smiling, but unleaved in part, and already almost desert, offered everywhere the image of solitude and of the approach of winter' (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, trans. J. G. Fletcher, London 1927).

passes at eye level, the Boulevard Sérurier running beneath it in a hideous cutting, the scrawny grass of the central reservation littered with greasy wrappers and beer cans, and where the only human beings on foot are natives of L'viv or Tiraspol trying to survive by begging at the traffic lights. The gulf between Paris and the *banlieue* remains a yawning one in this sector, for reasons that are political in the strong sense. The present population of the former Paris 'red belt'—from Ivry and Vitry in the south, to Saint-Denis and Aubervilliers in the north—is now for the greater part 'of immigrant origin', i.e., made up of Blacks and Arabs; the very people, or their relatives, who had been driven out of the city by renovation and rising rents.

This process, moreover, is very much in line with the history of Paris, in which the combined action of town planners, property speculators and police has never stopped pressing the poor, the 'dangerous classes', further from the centre of the city. At the request of the President of the Republic, the *fine fleur* of official architecture recently presented their projects for a Greater Paris, rather along the lines of gyroscopes or centrifuges: the idea was to make the poor revolve around the city at a distance, preventing them from returning for any longer than their work as cashiers or night watchmen required. For why risk retrieving on the periphery those whom it took so much trouble to evacuate from the centre?

Fortunately, thanks to the economic crisis, these latest plans may not be realized. For the time being, Greater Paris will be limited to a reorganization of police forces: it has already been announced that the city's Prefect of Police will have his authority extended to all the surrounding departments. But administrative decisions are one thing in the history of Paris, and what actually happens is something else, possibly very different. Already some years ago a new osmosis began to operate between the working-class quarters of the city—from Montmartre to Charonne, via Belleville and Ménilmontant—and the old proletarian bastions of the adjacent *banlieue*—Gennevilliers, Saint-Denis, Aubervilliers, Les Lilas, Montreuil. On both sides of the line, for many young people, the way of life, the music and the struggles are the same. It is true that you have to take the Métro to get from one side to the other. But as Hugo wrote in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, 'a city such as Paris is perpetually growing', and the bureaucrats can do little to stop it.

Translated by David Fernbach