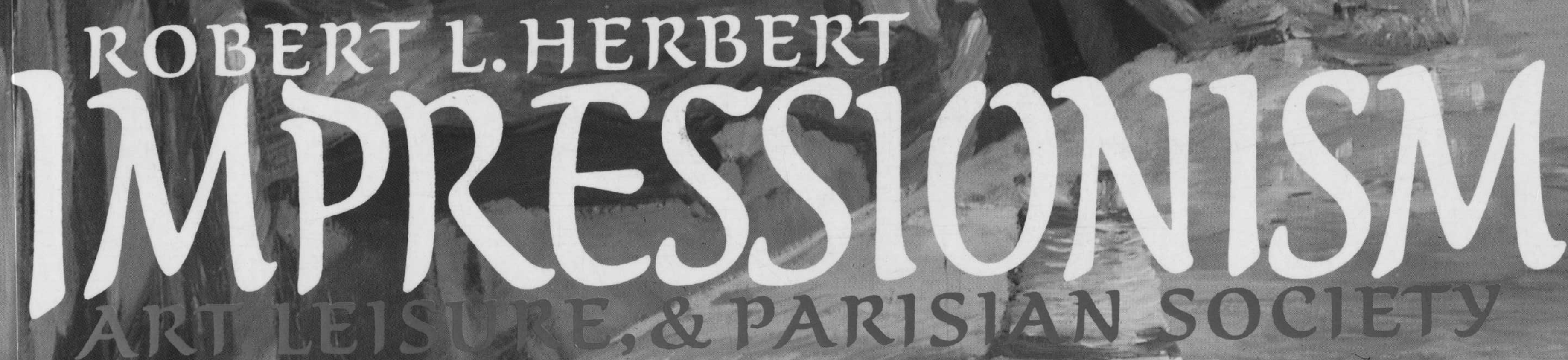

ROBERT L. HERBERT

IMPRESSIONISM

ART, LEISURE, & PARISIAN SOCIETY

When Henry Tuckerman came to Paris in 1867, one of the thousands of Americans attracted there by the huge international exposition, he was bowled over by the extraordinary changes since his previous visit twenty years before. The visitor, he wrote,

> finds the noble arcade of the Rue Rivoli indefinitely extended, the new wing of the Louvre, an imposing and solid line of masonry, approaching its junction with the Tuileries. ... Another striking change is visible in the fresh tint of nearly every structure along the principal thoroughfares—the effect of whitewash, paint, or the mason's hammer renewing the face of the stone-work, and giving a singular lightness to the streets; sidewalks, too, have multiplied, and the whole aspect of Paris made new, commodious, and progressive.[1]

He notes the surprisingly cosmopolitan nature of the renovated city, in which the Gallic character he knew has been "invaded and encroached upon" by "foreign elements." In restaurants he is amused, and a little dismayed, at being offered "cotelettes à la Victoria." Streets, theaters, and cafés are thronged by foreigners and French dressed in the latest fashions. Signs of prosperity and change greet the visitor at every turn: ,

> Baron Haussmann, the Prefect, has cut through streets, demolished whole quarters, made space and substituted modern elegance for old squalor. Those parts of the city which are in a state of demolition, present enormous high walls with the irregular smoke-stains of the dismantled chimneys, moving zig-zag higher and higher, and looking ready to topple over as you slowly pass through a crush of vehicles and debris of mortar and stones.

In the midst of his wonder and fascination, Tuckerman is also struck by the loss of the old Paris, and he places himself among those

> who, in the midst of the "improvements," like to recall the Paris of the time before the Empire; to turn from foreign clubs and cosmopolitan corso, from American gossip and Imperial receptions, from gas and glitter and the immense crowds..., and revive the memories of a favorite saloon, the talk of a cosy old café, the traditions of the first revolution—the spirit whereof yet gleams from the savage eyes of many a surly *ouvrier*, on his long walk from his work to the suburbs—in a word, the characteristic and normal traits and triumphs of the French metropolis, when it was more exclusively the nursery of Gallic genius and character....[2]

He wonders, then, if all the glory of the new Paris has not been won at considerable cost: loss of the historic old Paris and of the old "Gallic genius." All his instincts as an ardent democrat are sharpened by what he sees about him, "a certain reserve alien to the genius of the place, and discordant with our recollection of it." On the street he witnesses a policeman in the act of silencing a pedestrian for singing the Marseillaise, forbidden because of its evocation of revolution. He is unable to get his English newspaper from the post office, because it contains an article "obnoxious to the government," and when he expresses surprise that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is translated as

Père Tom, the bookseller answers: "Monsieur, there have been so many jokes about 'His Uncle' that the word is suspicious here." Tuckerman hardly needed such reminders of imperial power to conclude that "the trampled throne, the spasmodic republic, the bloody massacre, the cunning usurpation" have intervened "between the Paris of my remembrance and the Paris of today." He informs his readers that no alert American would be fooled by "the physical renovation of the metropolis, the sagacious device of a great *Exposition* of the world's products" into an unalloyed admiration of the material splendors laid before him.

As for the Parisians, they have simply been bought off by prosperity. "From the duchess to the drab," he writes, "the shop-keeper to the dandy, all have their brokers; increase of luxury, larger need of cash, in a word, 'pecuniary considerations,' have done more to strangle incipient revolution than the army." Louis Napoleon, Tuckerman sees, "works cunningly upon the prejudices and passions of the people, making old men exclaim 'he is doing for France more than his uncle,' as they complacently examine a new vista of streets."[3] Tuckerman was an unusually perceptive observer, but he was not alone in his views. A good many Parisians, from the exiled Victor Hugo on the Left to Louis Veuillot on the Right, shared his view that Paris's rampant prosperity and public show were a disguise for Louis Napoleon's dictatorial power and for his destruction of the old Paris, whose torn-down sites he handed over to speculators, and whose salvaged bits and pieces were placed in the new Musée Carnavalet, cynically devoted to "vieux Paris."

To the historian of Impressionism, it is important to look at this altered Paris, because its new streets and squares, its expositions, cafés, restaurants, and theaters are the images we see in the paintings of Manet, Degas, Morisot, Cassatt, Monet, Caillebotte, and Renoir. Manet shows us men and women in the fashionable new *brasseries* and cafés; he paints the approaches to the fairgrounds of the 1867 exposition and the streets in the renovated district where he lives, near the Gare Saint-Lazare. Degas shows men outside the stock exchange and at the racetrack; he shows middle-class women in fashionable hat shops, and prostitutes seated at sidewalk cafés. Monet represents the *grands boulevards*, glittering centers of commerce and tourism, he and Renoir paint the new squares and quais. Caillebotte takes us upon the new bridge over the tracks of the Gare Saint-Lazare, and Monet places us in the train shed and also out on the tracks.

Does this mean that they are partisans of the Emperor's new society, that they celebrate its shiny exterior, that they wear the mask of gaiety which, Tuckerman tells us, "reconciles many a giddy noddle to the loss of the liberty cap"? The answer to this question is not a simple yes or no. The impressionists, whose politics, as far as they can be determined, vary greatly one from the other, do not line up neatly on the side of Tuckerman or Veuillot. They do not cozy up to the Emperor nor to the government which succeeded his. The nature of their art which, superficially viewed, seems a whole-hearted adoption of the new city, is extraordinarily complex. In it we shall find not just happy strollers and charming waitresses: we shall find also pensive women alone in cafés or theater loges; couples seated in cafés or offices, bearing troubled expressions;

2. Marville, *The Rue des Sept Voies*, before 1860.

3. *The Avenue de l'Opéra*, before 1900.

men at windows, looking out on a few isolated pedestrians in the unfriendly expanse of pavement and sidewalk. We shall follow the impressionists out to the suburbs, also, and witness the effects on once-quiet villages of picnickers and others who seek entertainment outside the city. We shall go further, out to the seaports along the Channel coast, and see how impressionist painting reveals the conversion of fishing ports into outposts of Parisian society.

Paris Transformed

Before 1848 Paris was characterized by narrow, encumbered streets and bridges (Pl. 2). Earlier plans for transverse avenues that would speed movement through the city had seldom been carried through. The rue de Rivoli, cherished idea of the first Napoleon, was completed only over the years 1853 to 1857, providing the first clear route through the heart of the city from east to west. The new boulevard Saint-Michel through the Latin Quarter was continued northwards by the new boulevard Sébastopol. By the 1870s hundreds of miles of old streets had been altered, widened, and connected with new ones, including the hub of avenues around the Etoile, the boulevard Saint-Germain and the avenue de l'Opéra (Pl. 3). New streets like the boulevard Magenta were established to reorient the central city towards its suburbs, the near suburbs being annexed to the city in 1861.

Along the Seine, whole strips of buildings were razed to provide new quais which opened the banks of the river to vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Before 1848 the Seine often had to be approached at right angles along narrow streets. Masses of buildings crowded the river's edges, frequently preventing movement along its banks. Between 1852 and 1863 eight new bridges were built, several others were rebuilt (including the removal of shops and other forms of superstructure), and tolls were suppressed on all but two of them. These drastic changes played a major role in opening up the river and its banks to increased commerce. They opened it up also to light and air, and contributed to the embellishment of the city that catered to tourism, a rapidly growing industry in its own right.

A good sense of the extent of these alterations can be gained from the views published by the architect Fédor Hoffbauer in 1885. He juxtaposed aspects of the contemporary city with visual reconstructions of the same sites as they would have appeared one or more generations earlier. Plate 4 shows the Petit Pont, which joins the Ile de la Cité to the left bank, as it looked in about 1830, and Plate 5, the same area in 1880. The old bridges have been replaced by single spans that offer no obstruction to river traffic. For the sake of improved land traffic, the old shops on the bridge in the distance were eliminated. The buildings along the bank were removed, a new street put in their place, and a new row of buildings was erected, set back from the river.

These changes are not only of substance, but of "style," that is, the altered forms of the later view embody the new Paris. Instead of being massive, and varied in their individual masses, the later forms are light in weight and very regular. The new bridge seems to leap across the river with the quickness of the new city. Our view down the river is no longer obstructed, and the new street that runs along it further opens up this view, accentuated in turn by the implacable regularity of those new buildings. Dark shadows are no longer cast across the river, and the small compartments of limited space have given way to the open display of light and air.

These and other alterations of Paris were done at great costs, of which the least significant was the monetary one. Many tens of thousands of people were evicted from old buildings to make way for new streets, quais, bridges, and

4. Hoffbauer, *The Petit Pont as it appeared c. 1830.*

5. Hoffbauer, *The Petit Pont as it appeared c. 1880.*

buildings, nearly 14,000 from the Ile de la Cité alone. In a pattern all too familiar to twentieth-century city dwellers, poor residents (including Tuckerman's "surly *ouvrier*") were pushed out to the edge of the city, their homes replaced by government and commercial buildings, or by new apartments beyond their means. And an equally grievous loss was suffered as the result of the destruction of tens of thousands of old structures, some of them notable monuments, others the quasi-anonymous urban buildings of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Some writers voiced regret at the destruction of historic Paris: Veuillot, Hugo, des Essarts, Bouilhet, Fournel, de Lasteyrie. Haussmann was accused of vandalism. "Cruel demolisher," wrote the poet Charles Valette in 1856, "what have you done with the past?/ I search in vain for Paris; I search for myself."[4] By the early 1860s there was a widespread movement to record buildings of "vieux Paris" before they were destroyed, and artists like Martial and Delauney made such sites the mainstay of their etchings. However, the boom in commerce and real estate, which shifted vast sums of money into the coffers of the entrepreneurs who increasingly dominated society, simply swamped the opposition. Théophile

Gautier, for example, expressed some regret at the loss of historic buildings, but was seduced by the grandeur of the new city and the forward surge of France's industry and commerce. He phrased it succinctly and cruelly: "Every man who takes a step forward treads on the ashes of his forefathers." There is a cost, yes, in the loss of so much of old Paris, but this loss is put under the "purifying sign" of the renovated city, which

> ventilates itself, cleans itself, makes itself healthier, and puts on its civilized attire ["toilette de civilization"]: no more leprous quarters, no more malarial alleys, no more damp hovels where misery is joined to epidemic, and too often to vice.[5]

History has to retire in favor of progress, according to partisans of the new order, and history means not just old buildings, but the traditional subjects of the arts. Artists are urged to cast historical subjects aside in order to plunge into the present. In 1858 Maxime Du Camp cried:

> Everything advances, expands, and increases around us.... Science produces marvels, industry accomplishes miracles, and we remain impassive, insensitive, disdainful, scratching the false chords of our lyres, closing our eyes in order not to see, or persisting in looking towards a past that nothing ought to make us regret. Steam is discovered, and we sing to Venus, daughter of the briny main; electricity is discovered, and we sing to Bacchus, friend of the rosy grape. It's absurd![6]

The confrontation between the old and the new, between Venus and steam power, was made very graphically in the huge World's Fair of 1867 (Pl. 6), devised by Napoleon III as a proof of France's rise to new prominence in industry and the arts. Industry was represented by the latest machinery, both of large and small scale, the arts by a fine-arts section and, more numerously, by reproductions and imitations of earlier art with the aid of modern machinery. It was the "Exposition universelle" which drew Henry Tuckerman and millions of visitors to Paris, where they witnessed perhaps the highest moment of the Second Empire (they little expected it would

6. *The Paris World's Fair*, 1867.

shortly afterwards begin to falter). Edward King, another Exposition visitor, began his book about Paris in 1867 by asserting that

> The modern Babylon gets improvements, wondrous adornment, so marvelously quick that one might imagine the last of the Caesars had been taught the secret of summoning the obedient genii. Myriad blue-bloused workmen stand in rows, wield their nervous arms, and straightway magic palaces rise, glittering promenades are thronged, where of late stood only mean and narrow streets, dirty and hideous pavements.[7]

The fair, ostensibly dedicated to progress and peace, was built on the Champ de Mars, the military parade ground in front of the Ecole Militaire, an irony not lost on Tuckerman, nor on some other contemporaries. That new industry, progress in short, was linked with the armed might of the last of the Caesars was made clear in the military displays of the "National Panorama," one of the "magic palaces" on the fairgrounds (few visitors, if any, recognized the ominous portent in one of Prussia's main exhibits, a huge Krupp cannon).

The End of Empire

Henry Tuckerman, that unreconstructed republican from America, wondered just how long the bubbling prosperity of Louis Napoleon's Paris could keep discontent from bursting forth. If, he wrote, "we inquire into the condition of the working class, we learn that occupations too expensive for the coffers of the state are projected to keep them busy, and therefore less disposed to rebel." Tuckerman was no revolutionary, but he had sensed a pent-up desire for change, a desire frustrated since the European-wide ferment of 1848. An intelligent observer in 1867 was bound to sympathize, he said, with

> the problems which, in spite of bayonets, surveillance, treaties, cowardice, and hypocrisy, wait solution in Europe. The conviction is overwhelming that the people 'stand and wait;' their experiments, however futile in appearance, are

16. Manet, *The Barricade*, c. 1871. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.

> only suspended, not abandoned; their wrongs accumulate only to be the more certainly vindicated.[11]

Tuckerman correctly predicted a crisis, but he could not have foreseen the peculiar and tragic form it took: war, siege, and famine in Paris, the brief hegemony of the Commune, and its bloody repression in the May days of 1871.

For, three years after the Paris Universal Exposition came a great watershed in the history of Paris and of France. Haussmann, under increasing attack for the ruthlessness of his projects and the financial legerdermain that sustained them, was finally dismissed by Louis Napoleon in January 1870. Seven months later the Emperor was manoeuvred into war with Prussia, and on 2 September, at the head of his troops, he suffered a disastrous defeat at Sedan. Krupp's cannons rumbled towards Paris, this time not for exhibition, but for the real business of siege and bombardment. In January, after a four-month siege of the capital, which suffered ever-worsening famine, the interim French government had to sign a humiliating armistice with the new German empire.

Defeat and occupation would have been a sufficient national trauma, but still more was to come. In mid-March, angered at

what they regarded as betrayal and incompetence, Parisian insurgents established a radical government, the Commune of Paris, and took over the city. Hopes of a permanent revolution proved chimerical, and in May government troops marched in from Versailles to put down the Commune. The civil war that ensued was short-lived, but it left deep wounds. Paris was badly damaged (the most famous loss was the palace of the Tuileries), thousands of communards were executed without trial, and the political and psychological scars that resulted were palpable for decades.

Manet and Degas both served in the artillery, but apparently did not see active service. They suffered through the famine, however, and although they were not partisans of the Commune, both were repelled by the slaughterous repression of the insurgents.[12] Manet's reaction endures in the form of two lithographs and associated drawings, one that shows dead fighters by a barricade, the other (Pl. 16), Versailles troops shooting communards. For the latter, Manet used the composition of his *Execution of Maximilian* of 1867 (Pl. 63), transplanting it to the barricaded streets of Paris. His customary reserve and his graphic shorthand suggest the neutrality of a reporter, but at the very least he was pointing to tragedy, not to triumph. We know that he was much shaken by the whole bloody era and suffered a depression that lasted into 1872. Among the other impressionists, Bazille enlisted in the Zouaves and was killed; Renoir was conscripted into the cavalry and was returned unharmed to civilian life. After the outbreak of war in the summer of 1870, Monet and Pissarro had left for England, where they sat out the war and the Commune; Monet went on to Holland and did not return to Paris until late the next year. None of the impressionists, with the possible exception of Pissarro, was a partisan of the Commune, and, as we shall see in succeeding chapters, they accommodated well to the Third Republic as it recovered from the ashes of 1871.

War reparations were paid to the Prussians with unexpected speed, and a reasonable normalcy returned to Paris by 1873, although the aftermath of the war and the Commune continued to dominate politics and people's memories. A number of Haussmann's projects, only partly carried out, were completed in the next few years, including the boulevard Saint-Germain, the avenue de l'Opéra, and the Opéra itself. Louis Napoleon had intended that huge building to be the setpiece of his empire, but it opened only in 1875, five years after his fall. Essentially, however, the construction of the 1870s was a consolidation of the transformation of Paris that was largely completed by 1870, and the main features of Parisian life followed the patterns already established. Newcomers continued to flood into Paris, among them many who catered to the growing population by providing the goods and services it demanded. There was a steady increase in the numbers of cafés, cafés-concerts, restaurants, theaters, and hotels, and a constant growth also in large department stores, and in shops selling Parisian fashions, cosmetics, and similar goods.

The population that supported this urban commerce, abetted by seasonal influxes of foreign and provincial visitors, had nearly doubled between 1840, the year of Monet's birth, and 1870. In certain districts the rise in population was remarkable. In 1830, the village of Montmartre had numbered

about 6,000 inhabitants and, with its immediate environs, perhaps double that number. By 1861 it had 106,000 and in 1886, just before Toulouse-Lautrec settled there, it had risen to 201,000. To cater to this huge mass of people, horse-drawn omnibuses rumbled along the new streets in great numbers. In 1855, the omnibuses carried 40 million passengers, in 1873, 116 million, and in 1882, about 200 million.[13] These figures say nothing of horse-drawn cabs and carriages for hire, and other vehicles that clogged traffic to the constant complaint of contemporaries. Already in 1866, Louis Veuillot could lament that

> The streets of Paris are long and wide, bordered by immense houses. These long streets become longer every day. The wider they are, the more difficult it is to cross them. Vehicles encumber the vast pavement, pedestrians encumber the vast sidewalks. To see one of these streets from the top of one of these houses, it's like an overflowing river that carries along the debris of a society.[14]

And in the following decade, city traffic grew to such an extent that by the early summer of 1881, a daily average of between 11,000 and 18,000 vehicles were counted crossing the Pont Neuf, 20,000 along the rue Royale, and the staggering figure of 100,000 down the rue Montmartre.[15]

Les Grands Boulevards

The most prosperous district in central Paris through this whole period of 1850 to 1880 was formed by the *grands boulevards* near the Opéra, the linked avenues which stretch northeast from the church of the Madeleine (Pl. 17). This continuous arc changes its name successively from the boulevard de la Madeleine to the boulevard des Capucines, then to the boulevard des Italiens, before bending eastward to become the boulevard Montmartre and the boulevard Poissonnière. In one day, 20,000 vehicles passed along the boulevard des Italiens, according to that survey of 1881. (As a measure of the significance of this figure, the important commercial boulevard Saint-Denis further east had only 15,000 vehicles a day.) "What is the secret of the great attraction of this promenade?" wrote Edward King, at the time of his visit in 1867:

> Other streets are as fresh and gay, have the same advantages of lightness, airiness, verdure of trees in the midst of rush and crowds, but no longer the same prestige. The boulevards are now par excellence the social centre of Paris. Here the aristocrat comes to lounge, and the stranger to gaze. Here trade intrudes only to gratify the luxurious. . . . On the grands boulevards you find porcelains, perfumery, bronzes, carpets, furs, mirrors, the furnishings of travel, the copy of Gérôme's latest picture, the last daring caricature in the most popular journal, the most aristocratic beer, and the best flavored coffee. But prices have of late years crept up in this fashionable quarter, and he must have a long purse who will "do" the boulevards.[16]

It is true that Haussmann and Louis Napoleon could not claim credit for making this area, already prominent under Louis Philippe, into the center it was in their day and con-

17. *Plan of Paris from the Louvre to the Gare Saint-Lazare,* 1891.

tinued to be during the Third Republic, but their policies had a large, indirect share in its glitter. The Opéra was strategically placed as the culminating point of the new avenue de l'Opéra (Pl. 3). Although this avenue was not entirely pierced through and completed until 1877, the immediate environs of the huge new building were recast, so that it was joined to the expanded Gare Saint-Lazare, to the northwest, and ringed by a whole series of entirely new streets, including the rue Auber, the rue

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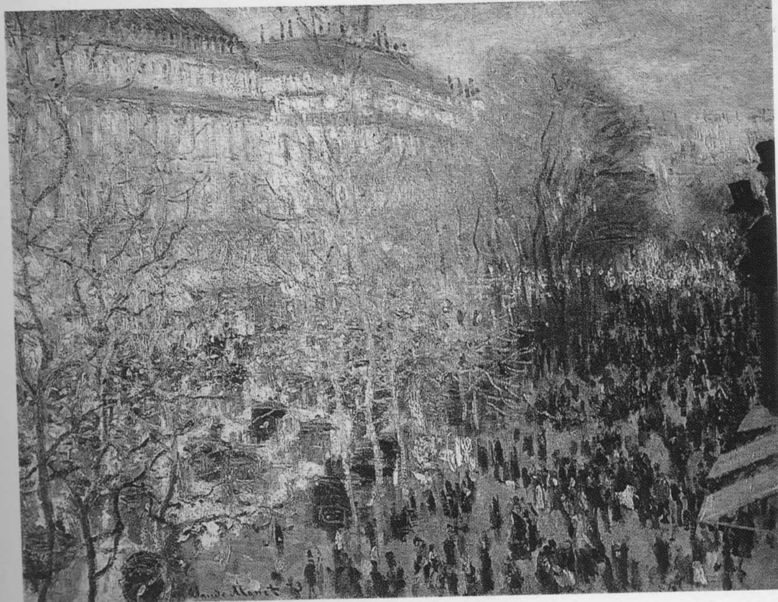
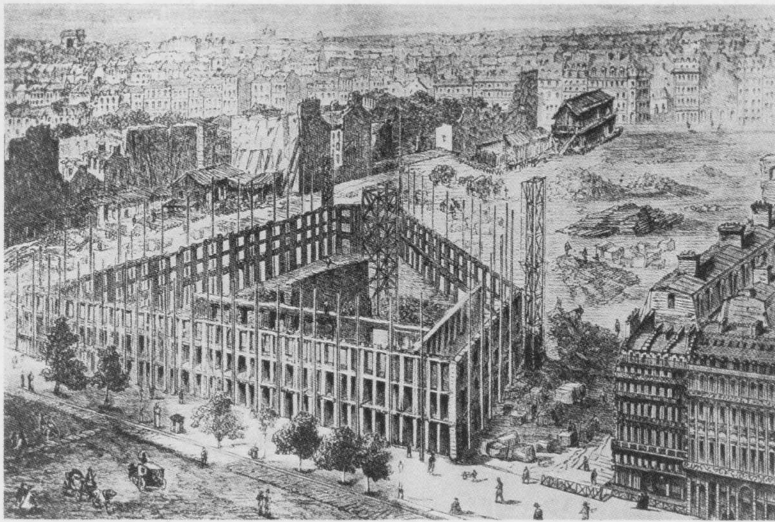
Halévy, and the rue du Dix-Décembre (now the rue du Quatre-Septembre); the latter led to the Bourse, the city stock exchange, to the east. Between the Opéra and the Bourse, along the boulevard des Italiens, there was a thriving financial center, including a number of new deposit banks. The rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, described as the "rendez-vous principal de la fashion parisienne,"[17] intersected the boulevard des Capucines as it changed its name to the boulevard des Italiens. Several major theaters were also near the Opéra (among them the Vaudeville, the Italiens, the Nouveautés, and the Opéra comique), and the wealthy, cosmopolitan crowds were served by some of the city's most famous cafés and restaurants. Along the boulevard des Italiens were the restaurant Maison Doré, and the cafés Riche, du Helder, Anglais, and Tortoni; along the boulevard des Capucines, the Café Américain, the Grand Café, and the Café du Grand Hôtel.

The last-named café was on the ground floor of the Grand Hôtel, in the heart of the district described by Henry James as "the classic region, about a mile in extent, which is bounded on the south by the Rue de Rivoli and on the north by the Rue Scribe, and of which the most sacred spot is the corner of the Boulevard des Capucines, which basks in the smile of the Grand Hotel."[18] In Monet's *Boulevard des Capucines* of 1873 (Pl. 18), the Grand Hôtel is the building to the left. Typical result of the rampant speculation of the Second Empire, the Grand Hôtel was opened in 1862, one of the many buildings erected by the real-estate firm established by the Pereire brothers. It occupied the entire triangular plot between the boulevard des Capucines, the rue Scribe, and the new place de l'Opéra. An engraving of it under construction (Pl. 19) shows the extent of the renovations in this area (the flattened zone in the upper right is the site of the new Opéra). Baron Haussmann's policies facilitated the demolition of old buildings along established thoroughfares, and the resultant changes of ownership favored entrepreneurs like the Pereires. The Prefect's powers were such that he could impose uniform designs upon these buildings, as well as upon those along entirely new

18. Monet, *Boulevard des Capucines*, 1873. Moscow, Pushkin Museum.





19. *The Grand Hôtel under construction*, c. 1860.

streets. The Grand Hôtel was required to align the levels of each story with those of nearby buildings, a policy which ensured near uniformity of design along entire streets. It was just such uniformity, not to say banality, that struck Henry Tuckerman and others as a great loss, compared to historic Paris. L. Vitet, writing in the prestigious *Revue des deux mondes* in 1866, complained of the monotony. He understood, he said, the virtues of modernization, "but in the midst of this more convenient, less harsh, less suffocating life, what happens to art?" The evil, as he saw it, was the triumph of the engineer over the architect, of material over art: "merely editors of projects, or passive surveyors of projects that they have not conceived, the architects of the city of Paris today are engineers. Should we be astonished that in their hands art is suffering?"[19]

We know that Renoir shared these ideas by 1877, when he published the first of a series of statements which decried the loss of historic buildings and their replacement by structures that are "cold and lined up like soldiers at review";[20] statements which demanded instead that initiative be granted to the individual artist. His painting of *The Great Boulevards* (Pl. 20) was done two years before he composed the first of these pleas for individual creativity, but it seems reasonable to assume that he had these views already by 1875. His picture shows a Haussmannian building much like the Grand Hôtel, but only a portion of it, its regular lines softened, its roofline partly absorbed by the sky, partly assimilated by the line of tree foliage. Although these trees form a clear recession into depth, there is no strong canyon of space favored by contemporary photographers and others who were bent on capturing the long, regular vistas that characterized Second Empire planning (Pl. 3). In the foreground, near a kiosk,[21] a figure is seated in the shade of the trees, reading a magazine or book. Out on the pavement, in the shadow of these trees and the unseen buildings to the left, two top-hatted men converse; near them is an elegantly dressed woman, with an equally well-got-up boy and girl. To the right, a carriage is coming down the boulevard, bearing another top-hatted man and a woman with a parasol.

20. Renoir, *The Great Boulevards*, 1875. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

20. Renoir, *The Great Boulevards*, 1875. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Such figures characterize the wealthy patrons of the *grands boulevards*, and, like the kiosk, they constitute also diverse spots of color and life which emphasize the animation of the district with pleasing irregularity. Together with the foliage overhead (which occupies slightly more than one-quarter of the picture's surface) and the strong play of light and shadow from the midday sun, Renoir's figures cover over the stark regularity of Haussmann's conception. They help expiate the crime of monotony with the aid of the picturesque. One can find similar figures in contemporary topographical views, for example, in the representation of a similar street corner (Pl. 21) published a decade earlier. The comparison shows Renoir's alertness to the tradition of such prints. After all, he wanted to find a client capable of buying the more elegant and permanent record of a famous street which an easel painting provides (the impressionist exhibitions and Renoir's dealer Durand-Ruel were located in this same district). The commerce he was engaged in, in other words, was related to that of the guide book.

One of the impressionists' collectors, Gustave Caillebotte, took on a unique role in the boulevard exhibitions, for he was a painter, and therefore both patron and participant. Several years younger than the other impressionists, he had met Degas by 1874 (Degas had listed him as a potential participant in the first impressionist show). Upon Renoir's invitation, he joined the group in the second exhibition, held in 1876 on the rue Le Peletier. Independently wealthy, he began buying works by his fellow exhibitors—he was the owner of Degas's *Women on a Café Terrace, Evening* (Pl. 47)—and eventually bequeathed to the Louvre an extraordinary collection of impressionist pictures. Immensely loyal, it was he who found and paid for the quarters for the 1877 exhibition on the rue Le Peletier. Wealth and social position obviously do not guarantee artistic talent, but Manet, Morisot, and Cassatt prove that they do not inhibit it, either. Caillebotte's financial independence coincided with his father's death in 1874 (the consequences for him were the opposite of Degas's bereavement the same year), but so too did his radical independence as an artist. In the second impressionist exhibition, in 1876, he showed his *Floor Scrapers*, three workmen vigorously scraping the wood floor of a bourgeois apartment. It was loosely associated with Degas's pictures of washerwomen, in the same exhibition, as a piece of contemporary realism, but it had no close precedents in recent French painting and was striking evidence of an original point of view.

In the same exhibition, Caillebotte showed *The Man at the Window* (Pl. 23), a picture in which, like Monet's *Boulevard des Capucines* (Pl. 18), the viewer looks out over a Paris street. Seen from this bourgeois apartment, Caillebotte's streets have a stark emptiness that contrasts sharply with Monet's boulevard. The apartment is that of the artist's family, on the third floor of a building on the corner of the rue de Miromesnil and the rue de Lisbonne.[28] We are looking over the shoulder of Caillebotte's brother René, down the rue de Miromesnil to its intersection with the boulevard Malesherbes, which it meets at an acute angle. It is afternoon, because we are facing northward, and the sunlight is coming from the west. Perhaps it is Sunday or a holiday, but since this is a residential area whose ground-floor shops attracted only a modest clientèle, there is little reason for the streets to be as well peopled as Monet's boulevard.

In fact, Caillebotte's painting is, precisely, a record of a new Haussmannian residential quarter built in the 1860s, not of the fashionable boulevards, and therefore we should expect it to create a very different effect. Caillebotte's brother watches a street that is quiet, but full of psychological import. Because of the vantage point the artist has chosen, the insistent angles of Haussmann's regular building lines virtually crush the space of the street (Pl. 25). In that imploding space is the psychological focus of René Caillebotte's gaze, therefore of ours: the woman who is about to cross the intersection. Her distance and size make her curiously vulnerable, like some insect captured by the artist's perspective lens. She is the anonymous city dweller, whose fragile aloneness is so different from any of the

23. Caillebotte, *The Man at the Window*, 1876. Private collection.

busy figures crowding Monet's boulevard of shoppers and strollers. Because René stares directly at her, he is not at all like Monet's top-hatted men leaning out over the boulevard des Capucines. These men are peering out over the public space, participating in the current of activity that flows along that fashionable avenue. René Caillebotte is sheltered by the obtrusive reality of his interior. Because his empty chair faces the window, we can surmise that his vigil on the city is habitual.

Caillebotte's figure is the thoughtful observer, the characteristic urban person who appears in so much naturalist literature of the period, in the act of seeking the meaning of private interior versus public exterior. Caillebotte's view has been likened to the ideas expressed by Edmond Duranty, one of the leading naturalist writers, in his pamphlet *La nouvelle peinture*, a polemical defense of the impressionists' exhibition of 1876 in which *The Man at the Window* appeared. Duranty was especially close to Degas, who was consistently rumored to have been his collaborator on the brochure. Duranty makes an ardent plea for painters to cast aside traditional subjects, and turn to contemporary city life:

And because we cling closely to nature, we shall no longer separate the figure from the background of an apartment or of the street. In real life, the figure never appears against neutral, empty, or vague backgrounds. Instead, around and behind him are furniture, fireplaces, wall hangings, or a partition that express his fortune, his class, his profession. . . .[29]

He asks the artist to remove the wall that separates the studio from ordinary life outside, to create "an opening on the street." Thirteen times in this thirty-four-page essay, Duranty juxtaposes apartment or studio to the street. In so doing, he gives witness to the topicality of Caillebotte's pictorial dialogue between anonymous pedestrian and brother/self/viewer. He points out that "the frame of the window, depending on whether we are near or far, seated or standing, cuts off the outside scene in most unexpected ways. . . ." Because the observer's eye is constantly moving, she might see just a portion of a nearby figure, or at other times, "the eye takes one in from up close, in its full size, while all the rest of a street crowd . . . is pushed off into the distance by the play of perspective."[30]

Caillebotte's *Man at the Window*, in other words, takes up a theme common in contemporary naturalism. Nor must it be thought that his matter-of-fact presentation was inconsistent with the psychology inherent in it. Duranty's pamphlet and his early writings on realism tell us that the artist who deals with contemporary life *seems* to disappear behind the apparent objectivity of his presentation, but in fact has implanted in the viewer's mind the conclusions he aims for.[31] By choosing salient elements from daily life, the artist is far from neutral in his observations. Out of the vast array of objects and events that make up experience, he selects only a few. These choices alone constitute acts of judgment, but in addition the artist transforms them by the artificial conventions of his art. For this reason observation itself is not a passive act, but one that transforms the things being seen by lifting them out of the full context of life's complexities and subjecting them to the handful of associations that the artist cleverly manipulates. "What a wonderful thing observation is," wrote Victor Fournel,

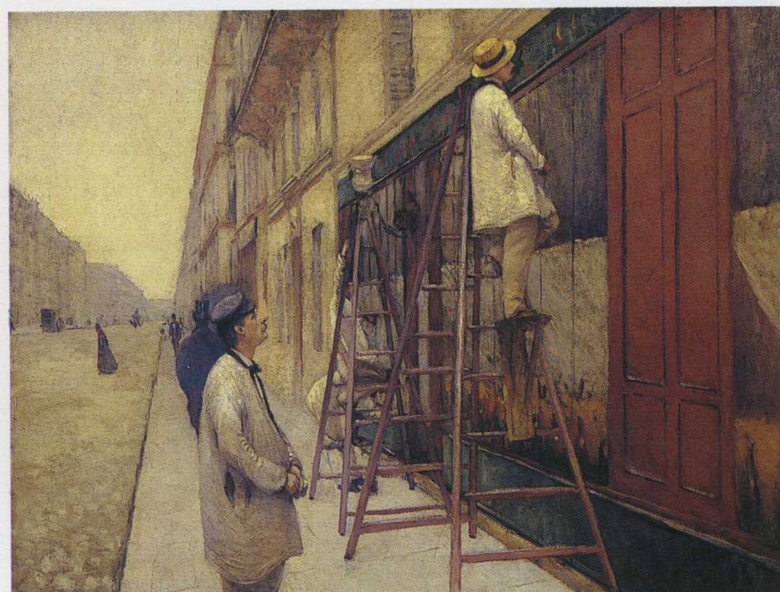
> and what a fortunate man an observer is! For him boredom is a word empty of meaning; nothing dull, nothing dead to his eyes! he animates everything he sees. . . . Where others see only a rose, the observer discovers a worm lurking in its calyx. . . . What a cruel thing observation is, and how unfortunate is the observer.[32]

Gare Saint-Lazare

The year after the appearance of Duranty's pamphlet, which firmly attached Impressionism to the ideas of naturalism already current in literature, the painters held their third group exhibition. It was again on the rue Le Peletier (a few doors from the site of the second show), and again the artists were aided by friendly pens, including this time Rivière's journal devised for the exhibition, *L'Impressionniste*. The second of Renoir's two articles[33] is what retains our attention today, but the review was dominated by Rivière's passionate and rather

maladroit attacks on the contemporary press for ignoring or disliking the exhibition. His steady refrain was that the impressionists had turned their backs on traditional subjects and were instead devoted to contemporary life, rendered in sincere and highly original works. Among the most original of the paintings shown in 1877 were three street scenes by Caillebotte and seven views of the Gare Saint-Lazare by Monet. These works had few precedents in French painting, and they take important places in the artistic record that the impressionists made of the transformation of Paris.

Each of Caillebotte's three city views has a striking, funnel-like perspective which immortalizes Baron Haussmann's long vistas. (Pl. 3) *The House Painters* (Pl. 24) shows two workers looking at the shop facade they are painting, while to the left the street zooms back with unaccustomed abruptness. *Paris, A Rainy Day* (Pl. 26) presents umbrella-laden figures at the intersection of eight streets near the Gare Saint-Lazare. *Le Pont de l'Europe* (Pl. 27) takes the viewer to the street bridge over the tracks of Saint-Lazare. The modernity of these paintings lies, in part, in their exploitation of Haussmannian planning, a seeming acceptance of the Second Empire's most controversial feature: its ruthless urban geometry. The site of the first of



24. Caillebotte, *The House Painters*, 1877. Private collection.

the three paintings is unidentified, but *Paris, A Rainy Day* represents one of those star-burst intersections that typified Haussmann's work, the crossing of the rue de Turin, the rue de Moscou, the rue de Leningrad, the rue Clapeyron and the rue de Bucarest (Pl. 17). The Pont de l'Europe is a multi-spanned bridge completed in 1868. Both sites were entirely recast during the impressionists' lifetimes, and nothing remained of the previous era.

To place Caillebotte's paintings in historical perspective, the twentieth-century viewer does well to recall the earlier opposition to the Second Empire's destruction of the old city. The opponents were a minority, swamped by the power of autocratic government and by entrepreneurial prosperity, but among their number were prominent artists and writers, whose most frequent target was the long, straight avenue,

25. Caillebotte, detail of *The Man at the Window* (Pl. 23).

symbol of arbitrary power and of the triumph of utility over history. The exiled Victor Hugo addressed a poem to Haussmann that wonderfully expresses this view:

> Today this enormous Paris is a charming Eden,
> Full of cudgels and decked out in Ns.
> Lutèce, the old Hydra, is dead;
> No more anarchic streets, running freely, crammed full,
> Where in the evening, in a dark corner, a facade
> With leaping gables made one dream of Rembrandt;
> No more caprice; no more meandering crossroads
> Where Molière confronted Léandre with Géronte;
> Alignment! You are today's password.
> Paris, which you've pierced from side to side in a duel,
> Receives right through the body fifteen or twenty new
> streets
> Usefully leading out from barracks!
> Boulevard and square have your name as their cockade,
> And everything done looks forward to cannon balls.[34]

Unlike Hugo, Caillebotte, born in 1848, was a child of the Second Empire. Only twenty-eight years old when he painted his city views, he treated Haussmann's new streets as a normal constituent of his environment. The site of *Paris, A Rainy Day* was only five streets away from the family apartment on the rue de Miromesnil, on the other side of the Gare Saint-Lazare, and still closer was the sexpartite bridge over the tracks featured in *Le Pont de l'Europe*. The Paris of Hugo's memory could not have supported the vehicular and pedestrian traffic near the Gare Saint-Lazare. A year after the new span was completed, that station was receiving over thirteen million passengers, 40% of all rail clients in Paris.[35] More than 80% of the Saint-Lazare traffic involved the suburbs, for there poured out onto nearby streets a modern commuting society: workers,

26. Caillebotte, *Paris, A Rainy Day*, 1877. Art Institute of Chicago.

clerks, businesspeople, and shoppers who helped swell the crowds along the *grands boulevards* directly south of the station.

Caillebotte's *Le Pont de l'Europe* deals with this contemporary society, organized along Haussmann's lines, not along the picturesque, irregular lines that Hugo would have preferred. The perspective draws the eye inward, as was true of *The Man at the Window* (Pl. 23). It is an even starker network of perspective, because we are not sheltered by the imposing balusters of the earlier picture. Out on the street itself, little impedes the speed of our eye into Caillebotte's visual tunnel.[36] The prominent dog, like some animated projectile, hurries our view into the picture. We look down on it as though it were a horse, hitched to a carriage in which we are riding; not all of its shadow has made its way into the painting. This sense of rapid movement is enhanced by the force of the two figures who come towards us, especially the man, whose rapid pace has carried him beyond the woman, in whom, nonetheless, he shows an interest (as she does, in him). The perspective lines converge on the man, so he literally looms out from the far point of our vision, creating a push and pull of psychological and perceptual tension.

Distinct from the elegantly dressed pair are the men in working-class clothes. One, his back to us, walks into the picture, and yet he lines up with the bourgeois pair to form a diagonal grouping that blocks off the sidewalk from our view. The worker to the right, looking out over the unseen tracks, is so prominent that the viewer has to reckon up his particular significance, *vis-à-vis* the elegant strollers. A working-class variation upon Caillebotte's bourgeois *Man at the Window*, he looks out, not on residential streets, but the tracks. Instead of protective stone balusters, it is the metal barrier and the huge girderwork through which he looks. Leaning on the metal railing, he is part of the world of industry and work, an association consistent with the rest of the picture. The worker further back looks towards the girderwork as he walks away from us, and further along are two more workers, both leaning on the railing, like the foreground figure. The raw industrial forms are the everyday domain of the working class, in contrast to the upper-class strollers (including the bourgeois whose bowler hat peers over the shoulder of the man), who keep their distance from the bridge supports. Perhaps they are merely out for exercise, but there is a purposive air about their brisk pace. The well-dressed male is a *flâneur*, a stroller, featured in contemporary naturalist writing, who reconnoiters

27. Caillebotte, *Le Pont de l'Europe*, 1876. Geneva, Musée du Petit Palais.

city streets and stores up his observations for eventual use (hence the artist gives his own features to this man). The workers are treated as idlers (*badauds*), absorbed in a familiar environment, and lacking the *flâneur's* powers of detached, analytical observation.

The key to Caillebotte's painting is the cyclopean metalwork, embodiment of industrial power, aggressive symbol of the transformation of Paris. Caillebotte's frank use of its unembellished geometry brings this raw power out into the open. Its stark lines are deliberately ugly, all the more so because they dwarf the humans. Revealed in a strong, pale light which casts prominent blue-grey shadows, they repeat the perspective lines of sidewalk, street, and buildings beyond. They stand for Haussmann's controlling directives which slashed through this part of Paris to create a new quarter around the expanded rail station. Nothing of the old city is here: roadway, bridge, and buildings all date from the previous twenty years. Everything in Caillebotte's painting conforms to the altered city: the plunging perspective, the opposed forward force of the figures on the left, the rapid pace of dog and *flâneur*, the plain surfaces of sidewalk and pavement, the impersonal brushwork, the bleached light. The girderwork, given its overpowering presence, and the perspective, given its exaggerated, eye-sucking action, reveal the extent of Caillebotte's achievement. He does not praise the new Paris. He strips away the natural and the delicate (none of his three city views shown in 1877 has trees or foliage), and in doing so he exposes the harsh power, full of tensions, which underlay industrial Paris and its new society.