



**PARIS,  
CAPITAL OF  
MODERNITY**

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CHAPTER TWELVE  
CONSUMERISM, SPECTACLE,  
AND LEISURE

*The relations connecting the labor of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things.*

—MARX

The spectacle of Empire initially had a purely political aspect that focused on the populism of the Napoleonic legend and the presentation of imperial power. The plan for Paris to assume the mantle of imperial Rome and become the head and heart of civilization in Europe was part of Haussmann's mandate. Court ceremonies, imperial marriages, burials and visits of foreign dignitaries, military parades (preferably with the Emperor riding in the vanguard after some victorious venture, as in the return from Italy in 1859) all provided occasions to mobilize spectacle in support of imperial power. Haussmann's appointment to Paris in part depended on his successful orchestration of Louis Napoleon's spectacular entry into Bordeaux in the autumn of 1852, shortly before the Empire was declared. Haussmann was a master at organizing spectacles of this sort, and transformed the Hotel de Ville into a perpetual center of spectacle with balls and galas for every occasion. Boulevard openings—Sebastopol (1858), Malesherbes (1861), and Prince Eugene (1862)—were elaborately staged and decorated events as were the unveilings of monuments (St. Michel Fountain in 1860). All such events were turned into spectacular celebrations in which an adoring public could applaud imperial munificence, grace, and power. Popular support for the Emperor was likewise mobilized through galas, fêtes, and balls (even the women of Les Halles, known for their republicanism, organized a grand public ball to celebrate the advent of Empire in 1852). August 15 was declared a day of the *fête imperial*.



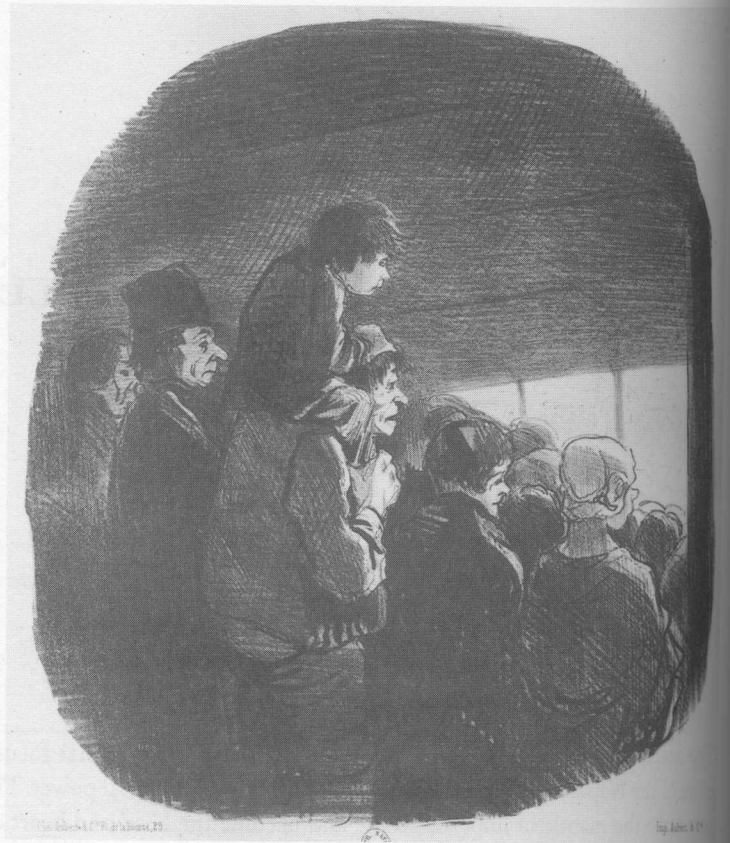


FIGURE 71 Daumier, as early as 1849, picked up the idea that spectacle might be good for the popular classes after a day's hard work.

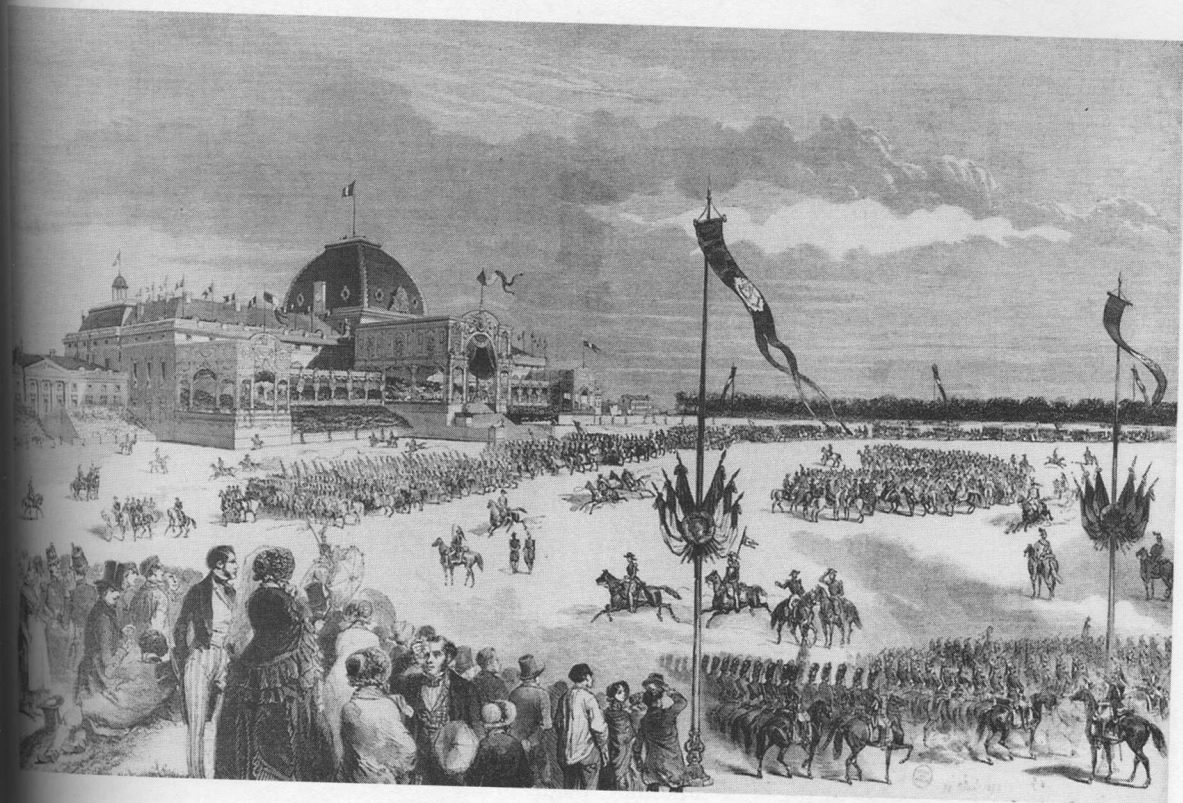
The more permanent monumentality that accompanied the reconstruction of the urban fabric (the design of spaces and perspectives to focus on significant symbols of imperial power) helped support the legitimacy of the new regime. The drama of the public works and the flamboyance of the new architecture emphasized the purposive yet festive atmosphere within which the imperial regime sought to envelop itself. The universal expositions of 1855 and 1867 added their weight to the glory of Empire. Yet there was, as Van Zanten (1994, 211) notes, a rapid falling off in this theatricality after 1862 as imperial power gradually faded before that of capital and commerce as driving forces in the reconstruction of Paris. Haussmann thereafter increasingly lost mastery of the urban process. The architect Garnier, in the midst of the universal exposition of 1867 and on the eve of the fête of August 15, had to organize the unveiling of the newly completed facade of his new opera house with no public help or participation.<sup>1</sup>

Spectacle, even that of the city itself, has always been fundamental to urban life, and its political aspects have long played an important role in the construction of legitimacy and social control. There had been no lack of spectacle under the July Monarchy, but much

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of it escaped social control by the authorities. Sunday excursions took the workers outside the city limits to the bars and dance halls of places like Belleville, culminating in a ribald and riotous evening descent back into the city center. The fear lurked that spectacle of this sort could all too easily lead to riot and revolution. This was particularly true of the Carnival in the week preceding Lent during the 1840s, characterized as "the last, exuberant fling of a pre-industrial theatre of excess which cut hard against the nascent ideologies of the metropolitan city." The "promiscuous mixing and reversals," the cross-dressing, the temporary loss of class distinctions, threatened the social order. Carnival "too rudely mocked the careful modulations between spectacle and urban menace staked out across the city. In making gestures, looks and appearances both more explicit and more explicitly counterfeit, in mixing them pell-mell as if no ill would come of the brew, it called the bluff of the Boulevard des Italiens, the Chaussée d'Antin." The authorities and those bourgeois who were not drawn into the frenzy were fearful and horrified.<sup>2</sup> The macabre carnivalesque way in which the bodies of those shot down on the Boulevard des Capucines on that February evening of 1848 were paraded around the city as an incitement to revolution drew upon such traditions. This, then, was what the socially controlled spectacles of the

FIGURE 72 *Military parades played a vital role in the construction of imperial spectacle. This one, in May 1852, preceded the formal declaration of Empire.*





Second Empire set out to displace. The aim was to transform active players into passive spectators. The Belleville Carnival declined during the Second Empire through a mix of displacement, active repression, and administrative shifts (such as the incorporation of Belleville into the city through the annexation of 1860). The troublesome image of "the descent from Belleville" remained, however, and when it was finally resurrected in the late 1860s, it was with the clear intent of ending Empire and making revolution.

But Second Empire spectacle went far beyond imperial pomp. To begin with, it sought directly to celebrate the birth of the modern. This was particularly true of the Universal Expositions. These were, as Benjamin remarks, "places of pilgrimage to the fetish Commodity," occasions on which "the phantasmagoria of capitalist culture attained its most radiant unfurling."<sup>3</sup> But they were also celebrations of modern technologies. In many respects, imperial spectacle dovetailed neatly with commodification and the deepening power of the circulation of capital over daily life. The new boulevards, besides generating employment, facilitated circulation of commodities, money, and people. The expositions drew massive crowds from the provinces and from abroad, stimulating consumer demand. And all those spectacles took skill, labor, commodities, and money to mount. The stimulus to the economy was therefore considerable.

Haussmann worked at all these levels simultaneously. The new boulevards created their own forms of spectacle, through the hustle and bustle of carts and public conveyances over newly macadamized surfaces (which some radicals thought were designed to prevent them from converting cobblestones into barricades). The arrival of the new department stores and cafés, both of which spilled out onto the sidewalks of the new boulevards, made the boundary between public and private spaces porous. The proliferation of cabarets, circuses, concerts and theaters, and popular opera houses produced a frenzy of popular entertainment (the frivolity of Second Empire culture was strongly associated with Offenbach's popular spoofs on Italian opera in the form of the opera bouffe). The transformation of parks like the Bois de Boulogne, Monceau, and even squares like that at the Temple into places of sociality and leisure likewise helped to emphasize an extrovert form of urbanization that emphasized public show of private opulence. The sociality of the masses of people drawn to the boulevards was now as much controlled by the imperatives of commerce 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, opening in 1852, was the pioneer; it was followed by the Louvre in 1855 (though prototypes went back to the 1840s). Such high turnover stores needed a large clientele drawn from all over the city, and the new boulevards facilitated such movement. The shop windows were organized as an enticement to stop and gaze. The commodities visibly piled high inside the department stores became a spectacle in their own right. The stores were open to the street and encouraged entry of the public without obligation to buy. An army of ushers and salespeople (particularly seductive young men and women) patrolled behavior in the interior space at the same time they sought to cater to consumer desires. The sexuality involved

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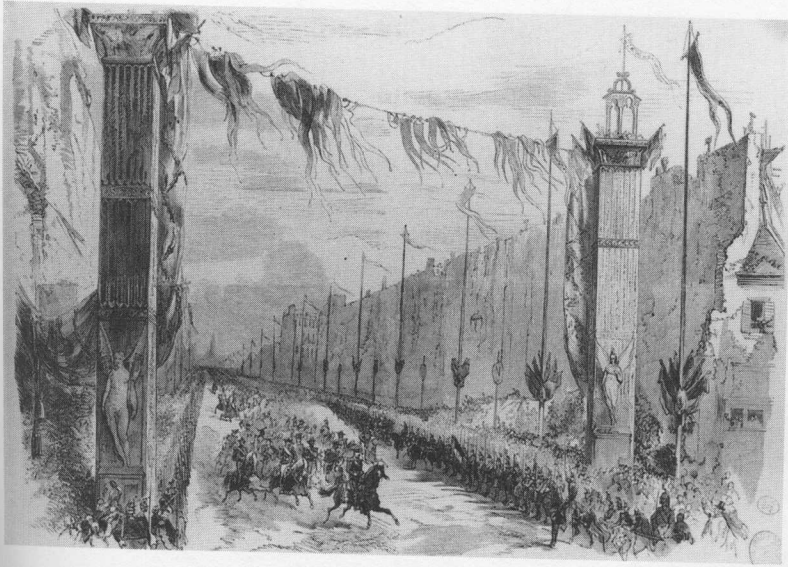


FIGURE 73 *Boulevard openings—Sebastopol in 1858 (top, anonymous) and Prince Eugene in 1862 (bottom, Thorigny and Lix)—were also occasions for display.*





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FIGURE 74  
*Excursions to the Bois  
de Boulogne by day  
and to the Opéra by  
night (both by  
Guerrard) kept every-  
one who could afford  
it, entertained.*



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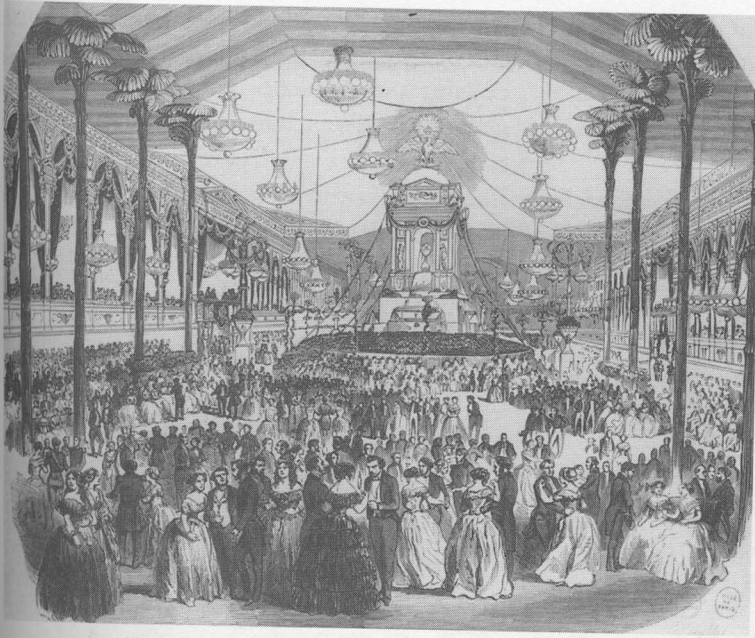
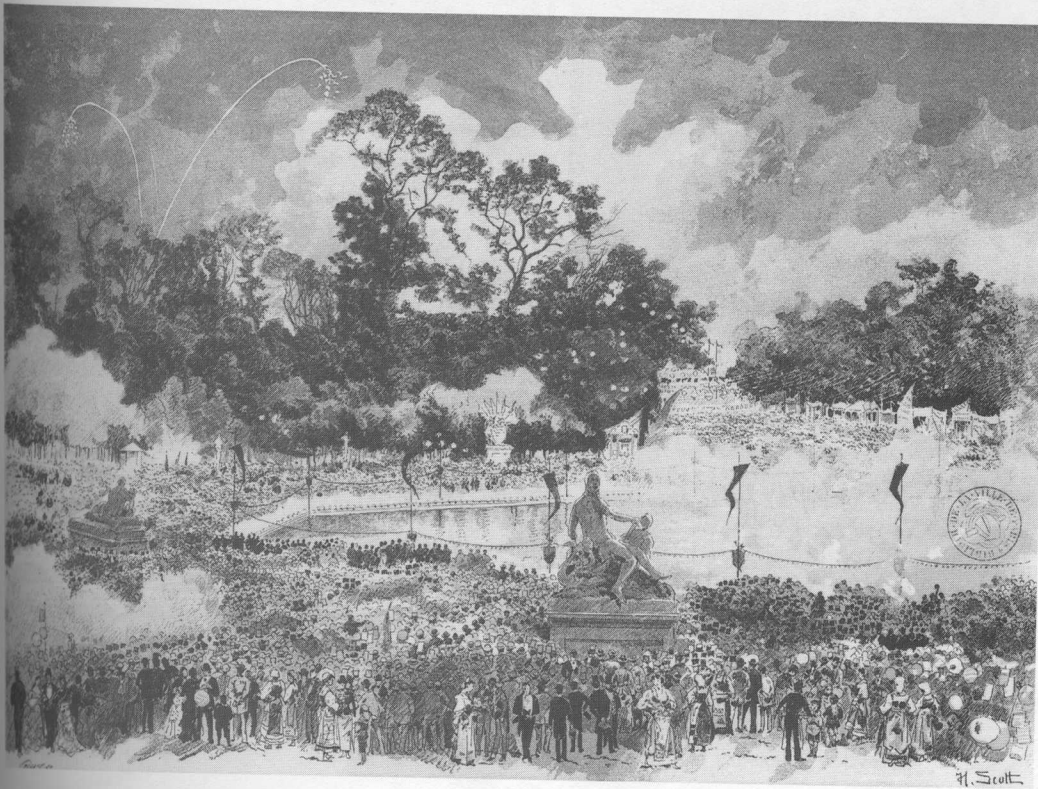


FIGURE 75 Galas and balls were arranged as celebratory events, often concentrated around August 15. Even the women of Les Halles and Les Marches des Innocents (historically Republic sympathizers) organized an event in August 1853 to celebrate the coming of Empire. Later on, the gardens of the Tuileries were regularly packed for the August 15 fête and the firework displays.





in this was blatant. Women therefore had a much more important role, as both buyers and sellers. Mouret, the fictional proprietor of a store like the Bon Marché in Zola's retrospective novel *Au Bonheur des Dames*, explains "the techniques of modern 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. . . . "Get the women," he said to the Baron, laughing impudently as he did so, "and you'll sell the world."



FIGURE 76 *Leisure days in the countryside became a feature of Second Empire life, but here Daumier comments on the competitive trauma of getting there on overcrowded trains. Note the contrast with the restful scenes typically presented by the impressionist painters.*

The art of enticement began with window display (sparking a new line of skilled and well-paid employment). Mouret was depicted as "the best window dresser in Paris, a revolutionary window dresser who had founded the school of the brutal and gigantic in the art of display."

The role of the boulevards, already established under the July Monarchy as important centers of public display, was reemphasized and rendered far more extensive. Their theatricality fused with the performative world inside the many theaters, cafés, and other places of entertainment that sprang up along them to create spaces for the display of bourgeois affluence, conspicuous consumption, and feminine fashion. The boulevards, in short, became public spaces where the fetish of the commodity reigned supreme. The new rail communications also

facilitated the rise of new leisure forms. Many more tourists and foreigners came in, and excursions for weekends at the coast or in the country (favorite topics for impressionist painters, though Daumier put more emphasis upon the trauma of getting there on overcrowded "pleasure trains") became exceedingly popular.



FIGURE 77 The cartoonist Cham took up the consequences of replacing cobblestone streets with macadamized surfaces. Here the woman is carefully stacking the displaced cobblestones at the side of the road, "in case they might be needed for barricades."

The symbiotic relation between commercial and public spaces and their private appropriation through consumption became crucial. The spectacle of the commodity came to dominate across the public/private divide and effectively unified the two. And while the role of bourgeois women was in some ways enhanced by this progression from the arcades to the department stores, it was still their lot to be exploited, though this time as consumers rather than as managers of the household. It became a fashionable necessity for them to stroll the boulevards, window-shop, buy, and display their acquisitions in the public space rather than squirrel them away in the home or in the boudoir. They, too, became a part of the spectacle (particularly when the fashion turned to enormous crinoline dresses) that fed upon itself and defined public spaces as exhibition sites for commodities and commerce overlain with an aura of sexual desire and sexual exchange. This was, obviously, in deep contradiction to the cult of bourgeois domesticity that sought to confine women to the home. The other effect, Sennett claims, was depoliticization:



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FIGURE 78 *The fashion for crinoline dresses afforded Daumier multiple opportunities for humorous commentary.*

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<sup>5</sup>

Yet in important ways the private world mirrored the public even as it inverted it. Baudelaire, for example, fully acknowledged the power of the spectacle over 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.”<sup>6</sup>

Who were all these consumers? Increasing mechanization (e.g., the advent of the sewing machine), falling costs of raw materials, improving efficiencies in both production and consumption, and a rising rate of exploitation of labor power cheapened many com-

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FIGURE 79 Boulevard life—around the famous café Tortoni's (by Guerrard) and around the new grand hotels (anonymous)—became part of the consumerist urbanism that took over during the Second Empire.



modities, clothing in particular. This broadened the consumer base for certain products down to the lower middle classes and even to the better-paid (or single) workers. The older segregations remained—Tortoni's and the Boulevard des Italiens still centered the haute bourgeoisie and the Boulevard du Temple the anxious middle classes, but mass consumerism backed by the democracy of money proliferated all over the place at the same time that it muddled some of the spaces (such as the Champs Elysée). The mixing that went on in the exterior spaces—the boulevards and the public gardens (such as the Tuileries)—was hard to control, despite the evolution of a more segregated residential ecology within the city. Policing the public space became difficult. The boundary between respectable women and women of easy virtue called for stricter surveillance, and the politics of street life—the itinerant musicians and pamphleteers—was a focus of considerable police activity. From this there arose a sense of insecurity and vulnerability, of bourgeois anxiety, even of anomie, behind the turbulent mask of spectacle and commodification in the public spaces.

Consider, for example, how this anxiety is expressed in Baudelaire's prose poem *The Eyes of the Poor*.<sup>7</sup> He opens by asking his lover if she understands why he suddenly hates her so. Throughout the day they had shared their thoughts and feelings in the utmost intimacy, almost as if they were one. And then that evening:

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 wall, 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.

But then on the street they see a gray-bearded man about forty with two children dressed in rags, staring at the café in admiration of its beauty. The eyes of the father said: "All the gold of the poor world must have found its way onto those walls," and the eyes of the little boy said, "But it is a house where only people who are not like us can go." The boy stares, awestruck. Baudelaire says:

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 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," the poet concludes, "how difficult it is to understand one another, my dear angel, how incommunicable thought is, even between two people in love."

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The public space of the new boulevard provides the setting, but it acquires its qualities in part through the commercial and private activities that illuminate and spill outward onto it. The boundary between public and private spaces is depicted as porous. The poem signals ambiguity of proprietorship, of aesthetics, of social relations, and a point of contestation for control over public space. The poet's lover wants someone to assert proprietorship over the public space. The café is not exactly a private space either: a selected public is allowed in for commercial and consumption purposes. The poor family sees it as a space of exclusion, internalizing the gold that has been taken from them. They cannot ignore it, and are forced to confront it in the same way that those in the café cannot ignore them. The poet sees them as part of the spectacle of modernity, a sign of those "thousand uprooted lives" that constitute Paris. He appreciates the differences and the mixing. She wants the poor evicted, just as Cavaignac cleared the revolutionaries off the boulevards in the June days of 1848. She looks for safety and exclusion through segregation.

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."<sup>8</sup> Haussmannization, he maintains, failed "to put together an account of anomie with that of social division, it [failed] to map one form of control upon another." And it is this failure that is highlighted in *The Eyes of the Poor*. The social control of commodification and spectacle ("all history and all mythology pandering to gluttony") runs up against the clear signs of exploitation of the poor to spark either anger ("send them away") or guilt ("I felt a little ashamed at our decanters and glasses too big for our thirst"). The sense of bourgeois anxiety and insecurity in the midst of the spectacle is palpable. The anxiety in part reflected the rise of new senses of class distinctions based on consumption and appearances rather than on relations to production. Class divisions stood out more than ever, the mask now became more significant than the reality as daily life came to mimic the facades displayed at the masked ball or during Carnival. "Faces are eclipsed by clothes, feelings by landscapes," wrote Goncourt.<sup>9</sup>

How this all played out in terms of political identifications within the bourgeoisie is a matter of conjecture. But I suspect that Sennett has it roughly right when he argues that presentation of self in the public sphere came to substitute for representation, and that the presentation of self was more and more reduced to a matter of commodification and spectacle. The public sphere became, as a result, more and more mystified. In the spectacle few people play an active role. While, therefore, the public persona was a participant in the sense that individuals became bearers of the spectacle (if only as the walking mannequins of fashion), they were passive in the sense that it was what they were bearers of (i.e., commodities) which mattered, rather than what they might stand for politically or socially. By the same token, the withdrawal into family life on the part of the bourgeoisie became more marked, for it was there and only there that intimacy, trust, and authenticity seemed possible. But the price of that was extreme secrecy, isolation, and constant fear of exposure, to say nothing of fierce pressures on bourgeois women to conform to these



new requirements while straddling the contradiction between their role as bearers of commodity values and their role as guardian of all that was left of intimacy and warmth within the bourgeois household.

The mass of workers, condemned for the most part to live on miserable wages and faced with notoriously unstable conditions of employment, had to live and consume somewhere else. A predominantly immigrant male population resorted for its sustenance to the innumerable small eating and drinking establishments and turned to the cafés, dance halls, cabarets, and drinking establishments for its pleasures. Transformed into what Balzac called "the parliament of the people," a place where all "the notables of the quarter gather," the working-class cafés came in for a lot of regulation and surveillance during the Second Empire. But the inexorable increase in their numbers (from four thousand in 1851 to forty-two thousand in 1885) guaranteed their burgeoning importance in social and political life. "The café may have become the most stable and accessible space in many a worker's existence." And women and families were by no means excluded—many marriages took place in cafés (with the owner acting as witness). The café or wineshop therefore performed an institutional as well as a political and social role in working-class life. Workers "who frequently changed dwellings often stayed in the same neighborhood and continued to patronize the same café." The café or wineshop, in short, became a center through which working-class solidarities were forged on a neighborhood basis.<sup>10</sup> For the working-class women the washhouses that proliferated after 1850 likewise became exclusive centers of social interaction, intimacy and solidarity, gossip, and occasional conflict (of the sort so graphically described in Zola's *L'Assomoir*<sup>11</sup>).

More fortunate male workers could construct a rather different life. Concentrated in the center, they relied upon small-scale commercial establishments as centers of sociality, political discussions, and pleasure (often to excess, as many contemporary commentators, like Poulot, complained). The dingy private and commercial spaces in these areas cast a shadow over public space, while the roiling turbulence of proletarian street life could do little to reassure the anxious bourgeoisie that they lived in a secure world. Such spaces were to be feared, and most bourgeois steadfastly avoided them. The Second Empire authorities sought to regulate them, but there was a limit to this, and housing scarcity and cramped conditions ensured that the street and the café were always in demand as centers of sociality in working-class quarters.

<sup>10</sup> The Second Empire began with tremendous emphasis upon imperial spectacle, but as time went on, it was more and more the spectacle of the commodity that prevailed. Not everyone appreciated these changes. Ernest Renan, a man of letters of some renown, inveighed against them at length and assailed the weakness of women in the face of the sordid commercial temptations that beset them. The Goncourt brothers were equally horrified, Edmond writing in their diary for 1860:

Our Paris, the Paris in which we were born, the Paris of the manners of 1830 and 1848, is disappearing. And it is not disappearing materially but morally. Social life is beginning to

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undergo a great change. I can see women, children, husbands and wives, whole families in the café. The home is dying. Life is threatening to become public. The club for the upper classes, the café for the lower—this is what society and the common people are coming to. All this makes me feel like a traveler in my spiritual homeland. I am a stranger to what is coming and what is here, as for example, to these new boulevards that have nothing of Balzac's world about them, but make one think of London or some Babylon of the future."<sup>12</sup>

How, then, to distinguish oneself in the midst of that restless crowd of purchasers that confronted the rising ride of commodities on the boulevards? Benjamin's stunning analysis of Baudelaire's fascination with the man in the crowd—the flaneur and the dandy, swept along in the crowd, intoxicated by it, yet somehow apart from it—provides one interesting masculine reference point.<sup>13</sup> The rising tide of commodity and money circulation cannot be held back. The anonymity of the crowd and of money circulation can hide all kinds of personal secrets. Chance encounters within the crowd help us penetrate the fetishism. These were the moments that Baudelaire relished, though not without anxiety. The prostitute, the ragpicker, the impoverished and obsolete old clown, a worthy old man in rags, the beautiful mysterious woman, all become vital characters in an urban drama. The poet is startled by an encounter in a public park: "It is impossible not to be gripped by the spectacle of this sickly population which swallows the dust of factories, breathes in particles of cotton, and lets its tissues be permeated by white lead, mercury and all the poisons needed for the production of masterpieces."<sup>14</sup> Open to chance encounters, the poet can reconstruct, at least for the male bourgeois man of pleasure, the innumerable interrelations between the medley of hands that money touches. The insecurity was something to be reveled in rather than feared.

But there were more disquieting signs at work within the culture of governance and pacification by spectacle. When, for example, Louis Napoleon invited the workers from the various trades to report collectively to him on their impressions of the wondrous new technologies on display at the Universal Exposition of 1867, the workers failed to be impressed by the spectacle and pointed instead to the degradation of labor and of skills, as well as to the inferiority of the product. It was better, they generally concluded, to form worker associations (that magical term could now once more be used) supplemented by new technologies to improve efficiency as well as to ameliorate conditions of labor. And when someone remembered the poor unfortunate Baudin, the democratic-socialist deputy senselessly shot down on one of the few barricades erected to protest the coup d'état of 1851, the result was a campaign to erect a monument by public subscription as part of a more general argument to counter the imperial monumentality that Haussmann had imposed. It was at this time that the idea of a monumental statue of liberty to be placed somewhere was first mooted as a political gesture with obvious implications. Even more troublesome was the habit of turning funerals of almost anyone who had the remotest connection to 1848 or the resistance of 1851 into spectacular political occasions for fiery graveside rhetoric. And when Napoleon's nephew killed Victor Noir, a republican jour-



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nalist, in an argument in 1869, the burial was attended by at least twenty-thousand people. The whole symbolic order turned back upon itself as the return from Père Lachaise Cemetery and the descent from Belleville fused into a threatening spectacle that augured ill for the regime as a harbinger of revolution. Theatricality and spectacle could be turned to account by both sides, and as the Empire weakened, the center of gravity of spectacle shifted not only toward commodification but also toward political opposition.

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