

Paper

Hausmannization and the Conquest of Place: Configuring Parisian Global Influence in the Second Empire (1852–1870)

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Abstract

Paris of the Second Empire, habitually characterized as a site of transition where the unsettling of social, cultural and spatial boundaries announces the tensions of early modernity, is irrevocably associated with the process of urban renovation known, after Engels, as Hausmannization (1:559). Indeed, this process, whose influence exceeds the temporal parameters of the empire, establishes Paris as a paradigm of urban planning for other major Western cities throughout the latter half of the 19th century. Beyond the objective to render the city more “legible,” facilitating movement of goods and populace as well as addressing the dearth in supply of much-needed sources of waste disposal and water provision, Hausmannization was undoubtedly motivated by a self-conscious and systematic agenda of capital-building, formulated as the necessary means by which France might avoid an otherwise seemingly inevitable decline as an imperial and colonial world power, eclipsed by British global supremacy. ...

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In this article it will be argued, with reference initially to Victor Hugo’s political reflections of the 1830s, how the perception of its secondary status as a colonial power spurs France of the mid-19th century to devise a compelling case for its global significance in a way which will confidently distinguish it from the British model. Through the transformations of the Second Empire particularly, Paris is charged with offsetting that deficit, becoming a proxy for colonial expansion. However, as is evident in Haussmann’s writings, the justification for the transformation of “Vieux Paris” into a universal capital requires a problematization of the pre-transformation city which is shown to be on the verge of decline, and which can be salvaged only through a total othering of its features. As will be argued, in both his discourse and through the actual transformation of Paris itself, Haussmann elaborates a highly problematic vision of Parisian capitalness which foregrounds its uniqueness as a privileged locus for specific practices, whilst removing specific

loci and practices from the map of Paris in a process which enacts a form of colonization at the very heart of the empire.

Claire Hancock, in her insightful analysis of Second Empire Paris, has already signaled the regime’s concerted endeavor to divest the city of its inherited revolutionary (and thus republican) symbolism and recast Paris as a monumental imperial capital in deference to the Roman model (66). Writing in the second volume of his memoirs in 1890, Haussmann himself gushingly retraces the ceremonial arrival of the emperor into Paris, his “entrée triomphale,” as he terms it, from the success at Solferino in the Italian campaign of 1859:

Je n’oublierai jamais l’entrée vraiment triomphale de l’Armée dans Paris, l’Empereur en tête, par la Barrière du Trône, le Faubourg Saint-Antoine, la ligne des boulevards, et l’émouvant défilé des drapeaux et des canons enlevés à l’ennemi; des prisonniers faits sur le champ de bataille, devant son Auguste Chef à cheval, Place Vendôme, en face de la Colonne portant la statue de Napoléon 1^{er}. (2:576)

Haussmann’s retrospective re-appropriation of what are by 1890 (albeit contentious) lieux de mémoire of the republican left, underscores the tentative grounds on which the tenure of the symbolic representation of the city lay. As Hancock states, “Imperial Paris became a highly contested notion as those with conflicting political ideals fought for symbolic ownership of urban space and representation” (64). For the Second Empire, Paris becomes arguably the single most significant agent in the expression of its absolutist and centralizing power. As is often remarked, the Second Empire travaux seemed to occasion the exteriorization of the city: the erstwhile capital of private entertainment housed in the galeries and panoramas spills on to the street; or rather onto the tree-lined boulevard with its refurbished vespassiennes,¹ kiosks, lamps, benches, and particularly cafés – for this is primarily an externalization of bourgeois leisure habits.² The International Expositions of 1855 and 1867 further endow the Parisian spectacle, and provide a showcase as much

of the city as of its imperial outspread, opening up the capital, it has been argued, less to its some 1.7 million inhabitants than to the wealthy foreign visitor.³

But this putative externalization of the city seems to occur in tandem with an internalization of the regime's imperialist focus, most notably through the reinforcement of its centralist political ethos. Unlike other imperial capitals, such as Amsterdam or Brussels, for instance, Paris is not only the commercial, industrial and cultural hub of an empire but furthermore its political and administrative center. The erstwhile particularity of its street-based traditions is superseded by a seemingly more universal variety of uniqueness: "Tout vient aboutir à Paris: Grandes Routes, Chemins de Fer, Télégraphes. Tout en part: Lois, Décrets, Décisions, Ordres, Agents. ... Paris est la Centralisation même" (2:557). Paris is presented as the sum of all cultural and political achievement – the identifiable center of law and culture – which is taken to be its defining quality as a locus, and indeed its specific condition of its status as a capital. "À Paris se rencontrent en même temps et se développent, par un mutuel contact, toutes les intelligences, toutes les activités de la nation: c'est ... le foyer des Lettres, des Sciences, des Arts" (2:557). The consequences of this centralization, where municipal and state powers are, if not interchangeable, then to some extent overlapping, is a tendency to over-invest in the symbolic, capital potential of the city. Paul Valéry would much later remark in similar but more equivocal terms on this concentration of attributes and functions within Paris, a legacy which can be largely dated to the policies of the Second Empire:

Etre à soi seul la capitale politique, littéraire, scientifique, financière, commerciale, voluptuaire et somptuaire d'un grand pays; en représenter toute l'histoire, en absorber et en concentrer toute la substance pensante aussi bien que tout le crédit et presque toutes les facultés et disponibilités d'argent, et tout ceci bon ou mauvais, pour la nation qu'elle couronne, c'est par quoi se distingue, entre toutes les villes géantes, la ville de Paris. (141)

In his reading of Valéry's essay, Derrida infers an "insistent ambiguity" in such an evaluation, noting that, "Ce qui distingue, ce qui *se* distingue est toujours le plus menacé, le meilleur au plus proche du pire. Le privilège est par définition une délicatesse en danger. Ce danger vient de l'étranger" (92, original emphasis). Thus distinction and privilege, following Derrida, are meaningful only as a configuration in light of an imminent threat external to it. When Haussmann stridently declares his objective to "faire une capitale digne de la France" (2:598, emphasis added), what comes across is that the city's privileged status is by no means an inherited given, indeed that the securing of this state of distinction seems an outstanding concern yet to be delivered because the stakes have been raised, it might be surmised, on the global, rather than simply, local scale.

The early historical musings and later political essays of Victor Hugo are a fruitful source in this regard, not least for their temporal breadth which covers the period from the beginning of the second phase of French colonial expansion after 1830 through to the post-commune period, but also because the author's convinced idiom provides an incisive example of how the city of Paris is fundamental to the reconfiguration of French influence in the shadow of British supremacy. Although France amassed considerable colonial possessions during the Second Napoleonic Empire – particularly in Asia – its material outspread was nevertheless overwhelmed by the success of the British model.⁴ Hugo's searching reflections on the balance of power in Europe comprise a resolute attempt to redress the fallout of British colonial superiority by way of strategizing a differentiated (and thus distinct) status for France on the global imperial scene, prefiguring somewhat the aspirations of the Second Empire. Instead he attempts to make a virtue of the seeming lag in French colonialism, and distinguishes the notion of global influence from the purely colonial. The secondary status of France emerges rather as

the successor model, the inevitable second phase proceeding from and thus rendering redundant the sway of British imperialism: “La France ... saura mal coloniser et n’y réussira qu’avec peine... L’Angleterre ... coloniser[a] le monde barbare; la France civilisera le monde colonisé” (42:429). The alternative paradigm is one cast as a corrective, or rather a negation of the “esprit commercial” (42:375) of British colonialism: “S’enrichir n’est pas son objet exclusif; s’agrandir n’est pas son ambition suprême. Éclairer pour améliorer, voilà son but” (42:375). In terms which draw from long-running debates concerning France’s mission civilisatrice,⁵ Hugo formulates French imperialism instead as a disinterested bestowal outwards beyond itself in the name of civilization rather than a voracious drawing inwards through colonization. Thus, he attempts to create the circumstances, if not the space, for a new need or moral immunity for France within the colonial sphere in which the idea of improvement, or more particularly, civilization is itself colonized a specifically French virtue. This counter-model is reactive rather than innovative, a rhetorical retrieval of lost ground. His retort to the perception of British supremacy is, however, revealing: “Les îles sont faites pour servir les continents, non pour les dominer; les navires sont faits pour servir les villes, qui sont le premier chef-d’oeuvre de l’homme; le navire n’est que le second” (42:429, emphasis added). Besides the reduction of Britain to a position of subservience to France (effectively enacting a reversal of the actual circumstances at the time), whereby the island must serve the continent, the overwhelming opposition drawn is between two conflicting impulses: the British impetus to take possession and to settle other lands, which is contrary to the spirit of the French mission civilisatrice which requires movement to impart its message but where settlement is not the primary goal. However, it is the implied reduction of the two opposing imperial models to the respective metonyms of the ship and

city which then strikes a problematic if not contradictory tone: as Hancock also notes, unlike London, Paris, at some 400km from the English Channel, is not a natural sea-port because of the difficulty of berthing of large sea-faring vessels (66). Thus, on the basis of mundane infrastructural shortcomings alone, the city constitutes an unlikely hub of a vast colonial empire. Yet Hugo, in terms which are later echoed by Haussmann, as quoted above, will still insist upon the global influence of France in specifically dynamic terms: “Ce qui inquiète étrangement les couronnes c’est que la France par cette puissance de dilution ... tend à répandre au dehors sa liberté” (42:412, emphasis added). If the sea-vessel, as the emblem of British global expansion,⁶ as Hugo sees it, is foregone as a means of guaranteeing world dominance, it is because the superiority of France resides in its capacity to diffuse outwards from a central point, and it is less the means than the a priori fact of dilation which is emphasized. Thus “la ville” here takes on the role of a “fleet in being” of sorts, forestalling the rival’s advance, keeping it literally at sea, through a disquieting potential dynamism. Where French imperialism might otherwise capitulate, instead, after Hugo’s model, it capitalizes through the privileging of the role of the city, or more precisely, one city: colonization of the far is substituted by a re-imagining of the influential possibilities of the near.

Through a similar insistence upon the at once continent and dilatory virtues of Paris, its immanence and transcendence, Haussmann’s model will further elaborate what might be termed the agonistic nature of this capitalization, where contraction operates a simultaneous expansive counteraction. The identity of the capital, as it is envisioned in the course of the Second Empire travaux, seems a volatile configuration of the supreme attributes of place on the one hand – uniqueness, particularity – and the space-affirming features of extension and universality on the other. To paraphrase Edward Casey in The

Disappearance of Place: if place is to be understood as site-based, and linked to the specificities and traditions of a given locus, and privileging the place of the body within it, then in the modern age of exploration and the scientific affirmation of the infinite nature of space, how can that specificity of placeness hold its own and continue to be meaningful against potential dilution or abstraction enforced by the un-endingness of “outer” space? (134). Haussmannization actualizes this dilemma, insofar as the city’s potential for dilution and abstraction is enacted at the very level of its specificity, rather than out there in some inchoate beyond.

Much has been made of the regime’s blithe indifference to the “specialness” of Parisian topographical heritage (although Haussmann will go to certain lengths to dispute this in his memoirs⁷), and to the integrity of the commune-like distinction of its quartiers. Reviewing the first réseau of renovations undertaken between 1855 and 1859, and particularly the “dégagement complet des abords de l’Hotel de Ville” (810), Haussmann, as if to face down his critics, puts it bluntly and somewhat provocatively:

Devant l’Hotel de Ville, dans l’intervalle qui sépare l’ancienne Place du Chatelet de l’espace irrégulier qualifié Place de Grève, l’oeil était affligé par d’horribles cloaques, nommés rue de la Tannerie, de la Vieille-Tannerie, de la Vannerie, de la vieille Place aux Veaux, Saint-Jérôme, de la Vieille-Lanterne, de la Tuerie, des Teinturiers, etc., etc. ... Que nos percements, ‘nos prétendus embellissements’ aient doté vieux et nouveaux quartiers d’espace, d’air, de lumière ... en un mot de ce qui dispense de la salubrité, tout en réjouissant les yeux, la belle affaire! (3:810)

The apparent unconcern for the preservation of “Vieux Paris” reveals a more fundamental anxiety at work. In the heterogeneity of place, in its qualitative facets, Haussmann sees only a random and imprecise geometry, which offends and perturbs a spatially coherent visual appropriation. Light and air seem less bearers of salubrity than attributes of a post-enlightenment privileging of homogeneous, expansive space. It is a concern pri-

marily with a quasi-mathematical correctness towards a vectorial apprehension of space -- articulated as an aspiration towards the facilitation of movement and communication -- which is frequently repeated in his memoirs: “C’était l’éventrement du vieux Paris... ce dédale presque impraticable, accosté... de communications transversales” (3:825), and again, “l’éventrement des quartiers de ce centre de ville aux rues enchevêtrées, presque impraticables à la circulation des voitures” (2:589).

Haussmann was of course by no means the first urban observer of modern Paris to problematize by recourse to ideals of coherent dimensionality. One of the many more notable was the Fourierist disciple Considérant who, in his 1840 Déscription du Phalanstère, likened the old center to a “spectacle de désordre qui ... frappe ... vos yeux,” enumerating the many “murs qui se dépassent, s’entrechoquent, se mêlent, se heurtent sous mille formes bizarres; des toitures de toutes inclinaisons qui se surhaussent et s’attaquent” (cited in Choay, 107). Extant urban placeness, in the utopian imagining, similarly epitomizes the haphazard, and thus hazardous chaos prior to an ordering spatialization. What is more, when he writes, “Le Verbe de la Creation a retenti sur le Chaos; et l’Ordre s’est fait” (cited in Choay, 109, emphasis added), it might be ventured that if the ideal of legibility will be favored, it is only because the spectator fails to read the city by the pre-existing terms of place.

But whereas the création of the Fourierist counter-model of the phalanstère is predicated on an abandonment rather than on a transformation of the modern city, following the trajectory of colonization to a purer elsewhere beyond it, Haussmannization necessarily confines its application of the tabula rasa to the city itself. Thus the vehement terminology of remedial urbanization -- “éventrement,” “percement,” “assainissement,” “alignement,” “nivellement” (803-810) -- if not actually coined by Haussmann is still given a wholesale and unprecedented realization,

as if to bestow material expression onto Kant's observation that "we can never represent to ourselves the absence of space, though we can quite well think of it as empty of objects" (cited in Casey, 198). Indeed, as it is suggested particularly by Haussmann's procedural use of the now stock term of urban renewal ("dé-gagement"), it is primarily space, above "salubrité," which will be liberated through the elimination of place (807-810). He goes on: "L'achèvement ultérieur de la rue de Turbigo fit disparaître la rue Transnonain de la carte de Paris!" (825).⁸ Thus, the notorious déplacement of the working-class peuple is the consequence of a literal de-placing of extant locales, a de-figuration prior to a "transfiguration" of the city, as he terms the travaux at one point, into an ostensibly consistent spatial whole through which pre-existing place must undergo a wholesale "suppression" (824-825).

Perhaps more than an imperial capital then, Haussmannization, in its deterritorialization and denaturing of place, transfigures Paris into an archetypal colonized city. Haussmann would seem to suggest as much in his assertion, after the many "vifs débats" prior to the final acceptance of his proposals for renovation, that: "je me sentis fermement en selle, pour aller à la conquête du vieux Paris" (589 emphasis added). Aside from the posturing in Haussmann's unashamed analogy with the Emperor's "entrée triomphale" from Italy, there can be inferred a necessary distancing in relation to the city, analogous to the abstraction fundamental to colonial expansion to remote territories, such that the Second-Empire will to colonization would similarly seem to be subject to the over-riding imperative of centralization. This distancing is particularly evident in Haussmann's virtual crystallization of the opposition between space and place in his evaluation of the differing provenance and characteristics of the commune and département:

La Commune est presque aussi ancienne que la Famille. Ce n'est pas seulement une division

territoriale; c'est une collection de personnes liées par des intérêts tout à la fois moraux et matériels, présents à l'esprit et aux yeux de chacun. C'est le principe, le point de départ de toute organisation sociale; c'est l'élément constitutif des empires. Au contraire, le Département, de création relativement récente, est surtout une circonscription administrative, n'ayant en rien le caractère ...de nos anciennes provinces. Ses limites peuvent être arbitrairement étendues ou restreintes. (701)

What is most striking here is that while Haussmann acknowledges the virtues of the commune as a preliminary place-type and as the chief constituent of an empire, it is only in order to then foreground its obsolescence and inadequacy to the demands of progressive modernity. The almost primordial, holistic nature of the commune-place facilitates a collectivity that is dependent on non-linear, experiential networks, "communications transversales," as it were, which resist easy quantification. Conversely, the "département" constitutes an arbitrary designation which has neither a substantive presence as place nor bears any material relation to it: it is an administrative transposition which supersedes and circumvents the qualitative limits of the commune, in order to sanction spatial expansion or reduction at will. In short, the département facilitates the total spatial abstraction of urban morphology: "Paris n'est pas une Commune; c'est la Capitale de l'Empire, la propriété collective du Pays entier, la Cité de tous les Français" (2:701). Haussmann is here underscoring that in Paris, above all other possible places, the designation of commune is entirely inappropriate because the state of being a capital, or rather the process of capitalization, must be based on more spatially flexible criteria. The absorption of several outer communes into Paris, after the loi d'annexion of 1859, extended the city beyond Thiers's fortifications by a seemingly negligible 250 meters. However, this extension signals that the perception of an unbreachable city limit, designating the city's beginning and end, is nonetheless under question, and thus a stable spatial definition

of how the position and form of Paris is to be conceived is similarly tenuous and variable.

Ironically, this measure of uncertainty concerning the city's morphology is arguably the outcome of a drive for increased precision in the drafting of urban plans. Although it is an inconvenient irony that after the devastation of the Hôtel de Ville during the Commune of 1871, no cartographic evidence remains of the survey projections undertaken prior to the delineation of the various réseaux for renovation, there are ample references to Haussmann's methodology, his employment of a team of géomètres under the supervision of Eugène Deschamps, le Chef du Service du Plan de la Ville de Paris, and particularly to their innovative use of the "triangulation" method in the drafting of their plans which permitted, as he puts it, "la vérification minutieuse de toutes les parties de cette opération capitale." This meticulous procedure allows the city of "rues enchevêtrées" to conform to principles of mathematical accuracy: "[O]n leva le plan détaillé des espaces, bâtis ou non, circonscrit par les cotés de chaque triangle, c'est-à-dire des maisons, terrains et voies publiques que son périmètre embrassait" (3:802). It is important nonetheless to point out that the drafting of geometrically exact maps is in no way a pioneering development of the 19th century, much less of Haussmannization. They can be dated to at least the 17th century where, as Casey notes, increasingly "the earth is construed as a global scene of sites of discovery and exploitation" (201). An analogous development occurs in urban cartography around this time: the picturesque "city portrait" of earlier cartographic forms, a figurative and allegorical representation of the city, which gives, as Daniel Roche puts it, a birds-eye "perspective rendering of the high points of the city, when the map maker was working in two dimensions, reveal[ed] an ideal of urban culture in which the concrete spectacle was more important than the abstract image" (12). This allegorical representation is superseded by the new geometric

map which, as Roche explains, "imposed the imperatives of measurement and planning; [where] space was rendered in its totality, empty, waiting to be filled, controllable, the city thus measured was no longer the living organism adorned with all the prestige of culture and originality" (13).

The emphasis thus gradually moved from the aesthetically pleasing representation of the "bâti" to a proportionately correct "voirie." It can be said that Haussmann had to an extent availed of a cartographic method which had been developed in the late 17th century. Where Haussmannization's originality lay, however, was in its indiscriminate reliance on and commitment to the exigencies of the two-dimensional, graphic medium above those of the "living organism" which inspired it. In one remarkably telling recollection of the use to which these plans were put, Haussmann writes:

La juxtaposition et l'entoilage de ces nombreuses feuilles dans un cadre porté par des montants sur pieds à roulettes, et placé bien en vue au milieu de mon cabinet de travail, y constituait derrière le fauteuil de mon bureau un immense paravent, où je pouvais, à toute minute, en me retournant, chercher un détail, contrôler certaines indications, et reconnaître les corrélations topographiques des arrondissements et quartiers de Paris entre eux. (3:802-803)

Haussmann's vision is a superlative abstraction of the city of Paris in which the blank map is waiting not just to be filled, as Roche described, but whose application in practice will result in an unprecedented alteration of the city's form and features. The seeming neutral facsimile of topographical truths, proffered as an authentic acquiescence between the requirements of the two-dimensional medium and the material realities of the built environment, becomes an arena of play and anticipation; a geometrical grid in which places, quartiers are reduced to moveable "indications," meaningful only in their correlation with other points on this unpeopled, compliant canvas.

In his 1938 essay, "The Age of the World

Picture”, Heidegger wrote that in the modern conception of space, “every place is equal to every other” (119). These terms would seem to encapsulate the Haussmannized vision of space, inasmuch as this method constituted more than the mere rationalization of the city, as has often been commented, it comprised the total relativization of place. It is this facet which betrays the fundamental tension at the core of this process of capitalization: in both Haussmann and Valéry’s claims we saw the

wish for Paris to be at once a unique place identifiable for specific practices – cultural, political, social – and a world capital which disinterestedly normalizes and universalizes those practices, thus transcending the specificity of place. Just as *liberté*, for Hugo, cannot be contained as a site-specific attribute, so too does the Haussmannian aspiration to ubiquity nullify the relevancy of any one locus, and thus perhaps particularity or placeness as a viable feature of capitalness.

Notes

- 1 A street urinal whose name is derived from the Roman Emperor Vespasian. For a brief but useful explanation of the history of the *vespassienne* see Jones, 457-460.
- 2 See Benjamin, 146-149.
- 3 See Greenhalgh, 54-67; Hussey, 276; Jones, 372.
- 4 Second Empire imperial expansion had its greatest successes in Australasia. New Caledonia was annexed in 1853. Throughout the 1850s inroads were made into Indochina, and in 1863 Cambodia became a protectorate. For a comprehensive overview of French modern colonial history, see particularly Aldrich.
- 5 To a certain extent, Hugo appropriates the major themes of this discourse which had originally emerged from late 18th-century debates on liberty, progress and revolution. Jennifer Pitts's *A Turn to Empire* provides an enlightening evaluation of this shift in concepts of colonialism and empire. She argues how intellectuals, such as Condorcet, initiated a rethinking of the implications of conquest and colonialism as potentially progressive and salutary forces, which might spread the revolutionary message, civilizing supposedly primitive societies (168-171). Hugo's contemporary, Alexis de Tocqueville, was a foremost proponent of the concept in the mid-19th century. As Pitts argues, for Tocqueville national glory was intertwined with the idea of conquest of the other lands (193-194). Moreover, as Pitts shows, he cautioned against the pitfalls of Parisian centralization (214). Hugo, on the other hand, developed a contrary vision of the mission civilisatrice, in which centralization, for which the city is a physical representation, is fundamental to its success.
- 6 The three-mast ship is the actual crest of the city of Paris.
- 7 See particularly Haussmann 2:595, 3:810, 3:954-956.
- 8 That Rue Transnonain was the site, in April 1834, of a bloody massacre of civilians by Louis Philippe's forces, gives Haussmann's words a further charge: insofar as it might be said that the removal of a site of republican significance constitutes an endeavor to redraft collective political memory.

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