
Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century

Exposé <of 1939>

Introduction

History is like Janus; it has two faces. Whether it looks at the past or at the present, it sees the same things.

—Maxime Du Camp, *Paris*, vol. 6, p. 315

The subject of this book is an illusion expressed by Schopenhauer in the following formula: to seize the essence of history, it suffices to compare Herodotus and the morning newspaper.¹ What is expressed here is a feeling of vertigo characteristic of the nineteenth century's conception of history. It corresponds to a viewpoint according to which the course of the world is an endless series of facts congealed in the form of things. The characteristic residue of this conception is what has been called the "History of Civilization," which makes an inventory, point by point, of humanity's life forms and creations. The riches thus amassed in the aerarium of civilization henceforth appear as though identified for all time. This conception of history minimizes the fact that such riches owe not only their existence but also their transmission to a constant effort of society—an effort, moreover, by which these riches are strangely altered. Our investigation proposes to show how, as a consequence of this reifying representation of civilization, the new forms of behavior and the new economically and technologically based creations that we owe to the nineteenth century enter the universe of a phantasmagoria. These creations undergo this "illumination" not only in a theoretical manner, by an ideological transposition, but also in the immediacy of their perceptible presence. They are manifest as phantasmagorias. Thus appear the arcades—first entry in the field of iron construction; thus appear the world exhibitions, whose link to the entertainment industry is significant. Also included in this order of phenomena is the experience of the flâneur, who abandons himself to the phantasmagorias of the marketplace. Corresponding to these phantasmagorias of the market, where people appear only as types, are the phantasmagorias of the interior, which are constituted by man's imperious need to leave the imprint of his private individual existence on the rooms he inhabits. As for the phantasmagoria of civilization itself, it found its champion in Hauss-

mann and its manifest expression in his transformations of Paris.—Nevertheless, the pomp and the splendor with which commodity-producing society surrounds itself, as well as its illusory sense of security, are not immune to dangers; the collapse of the Second Empire and the Commune of Paris remind it of that. In the same period, the most dreaded adversary of this society, Blanqui, revealed to it, in his last piece of writing, the terrifying features of this phantasmagoria. Humanity figures there as damned. Everything new it could hope for turns out to be a reality that has always been present; and this newness will be as little capable of furnishing it with a liberating solution as a new fashion is capable of rejuvenating society. Blanqui's cosmic speculation conveys this lesson: that humanity will be prey to a mythic anguish so long as phantasmagoria occupies a place in it.

A. Fourier, or the Arcades

I

The magic columns of these *palais*
Show to enthusiasts from all parts,
With the objects their porticos display,
That industry is the rival of the arts.

—*Nouveaux Tableaux de Paris* (Paris, 1828), p. 27

Most of the Paris arcades are built in the fifteen years following 1822. The first condition for their development is the boom in the textile trade. *Magasins de nouveautés*, the first establishments to keep large stocks of merchandise on the premises, make their appearance. They are the forerunners of department stores. This is the period of which Balzac writes: "The great poem of display chants its stanzas of color from the Church of the Madeleine to the Porte Saint-Denis." The arcades are centers of commerce in luxury items. In fitting them out, art enters the service of the merchant. Contemporaries never tire of admiring them. For a long time they remain an attraction for tourists. An *Illustrated Guide to Paris* says: "These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-paneled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of the arcade, which gets its light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the *passage* is a city, a world in miniature." The arcades are the scene of the first attempts at gas lighting.

The second condition for the emergence of the arcades is the beginning of iron construction. Under the Empire, this technology was seen as a contribution to the revival of architecture in the classical Greek sense. The architectural theorist Boetticher expresses the general view of the matter when he says that, "with regard to the art forms of the new system, the Hellenic mode" must come to prevail. The Empire style is the style of revolutionary terrorism, for which the state is an end in itself. Just as Napoleon failed to understand the functional

nature of the state as an instrument of domination by the bourgeoisie, so the architects of his time failed to understand the functional nature of iron, with which the constructive principle begins its domination of architecture. These architects design supports resembling Pompeian columns, and factories that imitate residential houses, just as later the first railroad stations will assume the look of chalets. Construction plays the role of the subconscious. Nevertheless, the concept of engineer, which dates from the revolutionary wars, starts to gain ground, and the rivalry begins between builder and decorator, Ecole Polytechnique and Ecole des Beaux-Arts.—For the first time since the Romans, a new artificial building material appears: iron. It will undergo an evolution whose pace will accelerate in the course of the century. This development enters a decisive new phase when it becomes clear that the locomotive—object of the most diverse experiments since the years 1828–1829—usefully functions only on iron rails. The rail becomes the first prefabricated iron component, the precursor of the girder. Iron is avoided in home construction but used in arcades, exhibition halls, train stations—buildings that serve transitory purposes.

II

It is easy to understand that every mass-type “interest” which asserts itself historically goes far beyond its real limits in the “idea” or “imagination,” when it first comes on the scene.

—Marx and Engels, *Die heilige Familie*²

The secret cue for the Fourierist utopia is the advent of machines. The phalanstery is designed to restore human beings to a system of relationships in which morality becomes superfluous. Nero, in such a context, would become a more useful member of society than Fénelon. Fourier does not dream of relying on virtue for this; rather, he relies on an efficient functioning of society, whose motive forces are the passions. In the gearing of the passions, in the complex meshing of the *passions mécanistes* with the *passion cabaliste*, Fourier imagines the collective psychology as a clockwork mechanism. Fourierist harmony is the necessary product of this combinatory play.

Fourier introduces into the Empire's world of austere forms an idyll colored by the style of the 1830s. He devises a system in which the products of his colorful vision and of his idiosyncratic treatment of numbers blend together. Fourier's “harmonies” are in no way akin to a mystique of numbers taken from any other tradition. They are in fact direct outcomes of his own pronouncements—lucubrations of his organizational imagination, which was very highly developed. Thus, he foresaw how significant meetings would become to the citizen. For the phalanstery's inhabitants, the day is organized not around the home but in large halls similar to those of the Stock Exchange, where meetings are arranged by brokers.

In the arcades, Fourier recognized the architectural canon of the phalanstery. This is what distinguishes the “empire” character of his utopia, which Fourier himself naively acknowledges: “The societarian state will be all the more brilliant at its inception for having been so long deferred. Greece in the age of Solon and

Pericles could already have undertaken it.”³ The arcades, which originally were designed to serve commercial ends, become dwelling places in Fourier. The phalanstery is a city composed of arcades. In this *ville en passages*, the engineer’s construction takes on a phantasmagorical character. The “city of arcades” is a dream that will charm the fancy of Parisians well into the second half of the century. As late as 1869, Fourier’s “street-galleries” provide the blueprint for Moilin’s *Paris en l’an 2000*.⁴ Here the city assumes a structure that makes it—with its shops and apartments—the ideal backdrop for the flâneur.

Marx took a stand against Carl Grün in order to defend Fourier and to accentuate his “colossal conception of man.”⁵ He considered Fourier the only man besides Hegel to have revealed the essential mediocrity of the petty bourgeois. The systematic overcoming of this type in Hegel corresponds to its humorous annihilation in Fourier. One of the most remarkable features of the Fourierist utopia is that it never advocated the exploitation of nature by man, an idea that became widespread in the following period. Instead, in Fourier, technology appears as the spark that ignites the powder of nature. Perhaps this is the key to his strange representation of the phalanstery as propagating itself “by explosion.” The later conception of man’s exploitation of nature reflects the actual exploitation of man by the owners of the means of production. If the integration of the technological into social life failed, the fault lies in this exploitation.

B. Grandville, or the World Exhibitions

I

Yes, when all the world from Paris to China
Pays heed to your doctrine, O divine Saint-Simon,
The glorious Golden Age will be reborn.
Rivers will flow with chocolate and tea,
Sheep roasted whole will frisk on the plain,
And sautéed pike will swim in the Seine.
Fricassee spinach will grow on the ground,
Garnished with crushed fried croutons;
The trees will bring forth apple compotes,
And farmers will harvest boots and coats.
It will snow wine, it will rain chickens,
And ducks cooked with turnips will fall from the sky.

—Langlé and Vanderburch, *Louis-Bronze et le Saint-Simonien*
(Théâtre du Palais-Royal, February 27, 1832)

World exhibitions are places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish. “Europe is off to view the merchandise,” says Taine in 1855.⁶ The world exhibitions were preceded by national exhibitions of industry, the first of which took place on the Champ de Mars in 1798. It arose from the wish “to entertain the working classes, and it becomes for them a festival of emancipation.”⁷ The workers would constitute their first clientele. The framework of the entertainment industry has not yet taken shape; the popular festival provides this. Chaptal’s celebrated speech on

industry opens the 1798 exhibition.—The Saint-Simonians, who envision the industrialization of the earth, take up the idea of world exhibitions. Chevalier, the first authority in this new field, is a student of Enfantin and editor of the Saint-Simonian newspaper *Le Globe*. The Saint-Simonians anticipated the development of the global economy, but not the class struggle. Thus, we see that despite their participation in industrial and commercial enterprises around the middle of the century, they were helpless on all questions concerning the proletariat.

World exhibitions glorify the exchange value of the commodity. They create a framework in which its use value becomes secondary. They are a school in which the masses, forcibly excluded from consumption, are imbued with the exchange value of commodities to the point of identifying with it: "Do not touch the items on display." World exhibitions thus provide access to a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted. Within these *divertissements*, to which the individual abandons himself in the framework of the entertainment industry, he remains always an element of a compact mass. This mass delights in amusement parks—with their roller coasters, their "twisters," their "caterpillars"—in an attitude that is pure reaction. It is thus led to that state of subjection which propaganda, industrial as well as political, relies on.—The enthronement of the commodity, with its glitter of distractions, is the secret theme of Grandville's art. Whence the split between its utopian and cynical elements in his work. The subtle artifices with which it represents inanimate objects correspond to what Marx calls the "theological niceties" of the commodity.⁸ The concrete expression of this is clearly found in the *spécialité*—a category of goods which appears at this time in the luxuries industry. World exhibitions construct a universe of *spécialités*. The fantasies of Grandville achieve the same thing. They modernize the universe. In his work, the ring of Saturn becomes a cast-iron balcony on which the inhabitants of Saturn take the evening air. By the same token, at world exhibitions, a balcony of cast-iron would represent the ring of Saturn, and people who venture out on it would find themselves carried away in a phantasmagoria where they seem to have been transformed into inhabitants of Saturn. The literary counterpart to this graphic utopia is the work of the Fourierist savant Toussenel. Toussenel was the natural-sciences editor for a popular newspaper. His zoology classifies the animal world according to the rule of fashion. He considers woman the intermediary between man and the animals. She is in a sense the decorator of the animal world, which, in exchange, places at her feet its plumage and its furs. "The lion likes nothing better than having its nails trimmed, provided it is a pretty girl that wields the scissors."⁹

II

Fashion: "Madam Death! Madam Death!"

—Leopardi, "Dialogue between Fashion and Death"¹⁰

Fashion prescribes the ritual according to which the commodity fetish demands to be worshipped. Grandville extends the authority of fashion to objects of everyday use, as well as to the cosmos. In taking it to an extreme, he reveals its

nature. It couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the living, it defends the rights of the corpse. The fetishism which thus succumbs to the sex appeal of the inorganic is its vital nerve. The fantasies of Grandville correspond to the spirit of fashion that Apollinaire later described with this image: "Any material from nature's domain can now be introduced into the composition of women's clothes. I saw a charming dress made of corks. . . . Steel, wool, sandstone, and files have suddenly entered the vestimentary arts. . . . They're doing shoes in Venetian glass and hats in Baccarat crystal."¹¹

C. Louis Philippe, or the Interior

I

I believe . . . in my soul: the Thing.

—Léon Deubel, *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1929), p. 193

Under the reign of Louis Philippe, the private individual makes his entry into history. For the private individual, places of dwelling are for the first time opposed to places of work. The former come to constitute the interior. Its complement is the office. (For its part, the office is distinguished clearly from the shop counter, which, with its globes, wall maps, and railings, looks like a relic of the baroque forms that preceded the rooms in today's residences.) The private individual, who in the office has to deal with realities, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions. This necessity is all the more pressing since he has no intention of grafting onto his business interests a clear perception of his social function. In the arrangement of his private surroundings, he suppresses both of these concerns. From this derive the phantasmagorias of the interior—which, for the private individual, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together remote locales and memories of the past. His living room is a box in the theater of the world.

The interior is the asylum where art takes refuge. The collector proves to be the true resident of the interior. He makes his concern the idealization of objects. To him falls the Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them. But he can bestow on them only connoisseur value, rather than use value. The collector delights in evoking a world that is not just distant and long gone but also better—a world in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need than in the real world, but in which things are freed from the drudgery of being useful.

II

The head . . .

On the night table, like a ranunculus,
Rests.

—Baudelaire, "Une Martyre"¹²

The interior is not just the universe of the private individual; it is also his *étui*. Ever since the time of Louis Philippe, the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment. It is as if he had made it a point of honor not to allow the traces of his everyday objects and accessories to get lost. Indefatigably, he takes the impression of a host of objects; for his slippers and his watches, his blankets and his umbrellas, he devises coverlets and cases. He has a marked preference for velour and plush, which preserve the imprint of all contact. In the style characteristic of the Second Empire, the apartment becomes a sort of cockpit. The traces of its inhabitant are molded into the interior. Here is the origin of the detective story, which inquires into these traces and follows these tracks. Poe—with his “Philosophy of Furniture” and with his “new detectives”—becomes the first physiognomist of the domestic interior. The criminals in early detective fiction are neither gentlemen nor apaches, but simple private citizens of the middle class (“The Black Cat,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “William Wilson”).

III

This seeking for *my* home . . . was *my* affliction. . . . Where is—
my home? I ask and seek and have sought for it; I have not found it.

—Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*¹³

The liquidation of the interior took place during the last years of the nineteenth century, in the work of Jugendstil, but it had been coming for a long time. The art of the interior was an art of genre. Jugendstil sounds the death knell of the genre. It rises up against the infatuation of genre in the name of a *mal du siècle*, of a perpetually open-armed aspiration. Jugendstil for the first time takes into consideration certain tectonic forms. It also strives to disengage them from their functional relations and to present them as natural constants; it strives, in short, to stylize them. The new elements of iron construction—especially the girder—command the attention of this “modern style.” In the domain of ornamentation, it endeavors to integrate these forms into art. Concrete puts at its disposal new potentialities for architecture. With van de Velde, the house becomes the plastic expression of the personality. Ornament is to this house what the signature is to a painting. It exults in speaking a linear, mediumistic language in which the flower, symbol of vegetal life, insinuates itself into the very lines of construction. (The curved line of Jugendstil appears at the same time as the title *Les Fleurs du mal*. A sort of garland marks the passage from the “Flowers of Evil” to the “souls of flowers” in Odilon Redon and on to Swann’s *faire catleya*.)¹⁴—Henceforth, as Fourier had foreseen, the true framework for the life of the private citizen must be sought increasingly in offices and commercial centers. The fictional framework for the individual’s life is constituted in the private home. It is thus that *The Master Builder* takes the measure of Jugendstil. The attempt by the individual to vie with technology by relying on his inner flights leads to his downfall: the architect Solness kills himself by plunging from his tower.¹⁵

D. Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris

I

Everything for me becomes allegory.

—Baudelaire, "Le Cygne"¹⁶

Baudelaire's genius, which feeds on melancholy, is an allegorical genius. With Baudelaire, Paris becomes for the first time the subject of lyric poetry. This poetry of place is the opposite of all poetry of the soil. The gaze which the allegorical genius turns on the city betrays, instead, a profound alienation. It is the gaze of the *flâneur*, whose way of life conceals behind a beneficent mirage the anxiety of the future inhabitants of our metropolises. The *flâneur* seeks refuge in the crowd. The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city is transformed for the *flâneur* into phantasmagoria. This phantasmagoria, in which the city appears now as a landscape, now as a room, seems later to have inspired the décor of department stores, which thus put *flânerie* to work for profit. In any case, department stores are the last precincts of *flânerie*.

In the person of the *flâneur*, the intelligentsia becomes acquainted with the marketplace. It surrenders itself to the market, thinking merely to look around; but in fact it is already seeking a buyer. In this intermediate stage, in which it still has patrons but is starting to bend to the demands of the market (in the guise of the *feuilleton*), it constitutes the *bohème*. The uncertainty of its economic position corresponds to the ambiguity of its political function. The latter is manifest especially clearly in the figures of the professional conspirators, who are recruited from the *bohème*. Blanqui is the most remarkable representative of this class. No one else in the nineteenth century had a revolutionary authority comparable to his. The image of Blanqui passes like a flash of lightning through Baudelaire's "Litanies de Satan." Nevertheless, Baudelaire's rebellion is always that of the asocial man: it is at an impasse. The only sexual communion of his life was with a prostitute.

II

They were the same, had risen from the same hell,
These centenarian twins.

—Baudelaire, "Les Sept Vicillards"¹⁷

The *flâneur* plays the role of scout in the marketplace. As such, he is also the explorer of the crowd. Within the man who abandons himself to it, the crowd inspires a sort of drunkenness, one accompanied by very specific illusions: the man flatters himself that, on seeing a passerby swept along by the crowd, he has accurately classified him, seen straight through to the innermost recesses of his soul—all on the basis of his external appearance. Physiologies of the time abound in evidence of this singular conception. Balzac's work provides excellent examples. The typical characters seen in passersby make such an impression on

the senses that one cannot be surprised at the resultant curiosity to go beyond them and capture the special singularity of each person. But the nightmare that corresponds to the illusory perspicacity of the aforementioned physiognomist consists in seeing those distinctive traits—traits peculiar to the person—revealed to be nothing more than the elements of a new type; so that in the final analysis a person of the greatest individuality would turn out to be the exemplar of a type. This points to an agonizing phantasmagoria at the heart of *flânerie*. Baudelaire develops it with great vigor in “Les Sept Vicillards,” a poem that deals with the seven-fold apparition of a repulsive-looking old man. This individual, presented as always the same in his multiplicity, testifies to the anguish of the city dweller who is unable to break the magic circle of the type even though he cultivates the most eccentric peculiarities. Baudelaire describes this procession as “infernal” in appearance. But the newness for which he was on the lookout all his life consists in nothing other than this phantasmagoria of what is “always the same.” (The evidence one could cite to show that this poem transcribes the reveries of a hashish eater in no way weakens this interpretation.)

III

Deep in the Unknown to find the *new*!

—Baudelaire, “Le Voyage”¹⁸

The key to the allegorical form in Baudelaire is bound up with the specific signification which the commodity acquires by virtue of its price. The singular debasement of things through their signification, something characteristic of seventeenth-century allegory, corresponds to the singular debasement of things through their price as commodities. This degradation, to which things are subject because they can be taxed as commodities, is counterbalanced in Baudelaire by the inestimable value of novelty. *La nouveauté* represents that absolute which is no longer accessible to any interpretation or comparison. It becomes the ultimate entrenchment of art. The final poem of *Les Fleurs du mal*: “Le Voyage.” “Death, old admiral, up anchor now.”¹⁹ The final voyage of the *flâneur*: death. Its destination: the new. Newness is a quality independent of the use value of the commodity. It is the source of that illusion of which fashion is the tireless purveyor. The fact that art’s last line of resistance should coincide with the commodity’s most advanced line of attack—this had to remain hidden from Baudelaire.

“Spleen et idéal”—in the title of this first cycle of poems in *Les Fleurs du mal*, the oldest loanword in the French language was joined to the most recent one.²⁰ For Baudelaire, there is no contradiction between the two concepts. He recognizes in spleen the latest transfiguration of the ideal; the ideal seems to him the first expression of spleen. With this title, in which the supremely new is presented to the reader as something “supremely old,” Baudelaire has given the liveliest form to his concept of the modern. The linchpin of his entire theory of art is “modern beauty,” and for him the proof of modernity seems to be this: it is marked with the fatality of being one day antiquity, and it reveals this to whoever

witnesses its birth. Here we meet the quintessence of the unforeseen, which for Baudelaire is an inalienable quality of the beautiful. The face of modernity itself blasts us with its immemorial gaze. Such was the gaze of Medusa for the Greeks.

E. Haussmann, or the Barricades

I

I venerate the Beautiful, the Good, and all things great;
 Beautiful nature, on which great art rests—
 How it enchants the ear and charms the eye!
 I love spring in blossom: women and roses.

—Baron Haussmann, *Confession d'un lion devenu vieux*²¹

Haussmann's activity is incorporated into Napoleonic imperialism, which favors investment capital. In Paris, speculation is at its height. Haussmann's expropriations give rise to speculation that borders on fraud. The rulings of the Court of Cassation, which are inspired by the bourgeois and Orleanist opposition, increase the financial risks of Haussmannization. Haussmann tries to shore up his dictatorship by placing Paris under an emergency regime. In 1864, in a speech before the National Assembly, he vents his hatred of the rootless urban population. This population grows ever larger as a result of his projects. Rising rents drive the proletariat into the suburbs. The *quartiers* of Paris in this way lose their distinctive physiognomy. The "red belt" forms. Haussmann gave himself the title of "demolition artist." He believed he had a vocation for his work, and emphasizes this in his memoirs. The central marketplace passes for Haussmann's most successful construction—and this is an interesting symptom. It has been said of the Ile de la Cité, the cradle of the city, that in the wake of Haussmann only one church, one public building, and one barracks remained. Hugo and Mérimée suggest how much the transformations made by Haussmann appear to Parisians as a monument of Napoleonic despotism. The inhabitants of the city no longer feel at home there; they start to become conscious of the inhuman character of the metropolis. Maxime Du Camp's monumental work *Paris* owes its existence to this dawning awareness. The etchings of Meryon (around 1850) constitute the death mask of old Paris.

The true goal of Haussmann's projects was to secure the city against civil war. He wanted to make the erection of barricades in the streets of Paris impossible for all time. With the same end in mind, Louis Philippe had already introduced wooden paving. Nevertheless, barricades had played a considerable role in the February Revolution. Engels studied the tactics of barricade fighting. Haussmann seeks to forestall such combat in two ways. Widening the streets will make the erection of barricades impossible, and new streets will connect the barracks in straight lines with the workers' districts. Contemporaries christened the operation "strategic embellishment."

II

The flowery realm of decorations,
The charm of landscape, of architecture,
And all the effect of scenery rest
Solely on the law of perspective.

—Franz Böhle, *Theater-Catechismus* (Munich), p. 74

Haussmann's ideal in city planning consisted of long straight streets opening onto broad perspectives. This ideal corresponds to the tendency—common in the nineteenth century—to ennoble technological necessities through spurious artistic ends. The temples of the bourgeoisie's spiritual and secular power were to find their apotheosis within the framework of these long streets. The perspectives, prior to their inauguration, were screened with canvas draperies and unveiled like monuments; the view would then disclose a church, a train station, an equestrian statue, or some other symbol of civilization. With the Haussmannization of Paris, the phantasmagoria was rendered in stone. Though intended to endure in quasi-perpetuity, it also reveals its brittleness. The Avenue de l'Opéra—which, according to a malicious saying of the day, affords a perspective on the porter's lodge at the Louvre—shows how unrestrained the prefect's megalomania was.

III

Reveal to these depraved,
O Republic, by foiling their plots,
Your great Medusa face
Ringed by red lightning.

—Pierre Dupont, *Chant des ouvriers*

The barricade is resurrected during the Commune. It is stronger and better designed than ever. It stretches across the great boulevards, often reaching a height of two stories, and shields the trenches behind it. Just as the *Communist Manifesto* ends the age of professional conspirators, so the Commune puts an end to the phantasmagoria that dominates the earliest aspirations of the proletariat. It dispels the illusion that the task of the proletarian revolution is to complete the work of '89 in close collaboration with the bourgeoisie. This illusion had marked the period 1831–1871, from the Lyons riots to the Commune. The bourgeoisie never shared in this error. Its battle against the social rights of the proletariat dates back to the great Revolution, and converges with the philanthropic movement that gives it cover and that was in its heyday under Napoleon III. Under his reign, this movement's monumental work appeared: Le Play's *Ouvriers européens* [European Workers].

Side by side with the overt position of philanthropy, the bourgeoisie has always maintained the covert position of class struggle.²² As early as 1831, in the *Journal des débats*, it acknowledged that “every manufacturer lives in his factory like a

plantation owner among his slaves." If it was fatal for the workers' rebellions of old that no theory of revolution had directed their course, it was this absence of theory that, from another perspective, made possible their spontaneous energy and the enthusiasm with which they set about establishing a new society. This enthusiasm, which reaches its peak in the Commune, at times won over to the workers' cause the best elements of the bourgeoisie, but in the end led the workers to succumb to its worst elements. Rimbaud and Courbet took sides with the Commune. The burning of Paris is the worthy conclusion to Baron Haussmann's work of destruction.

Conclusion

Men of the nineteenth century, the hour of our apparitions is fixed forever, and always brings us back the very same ones.

—Auguste Blanqui, *L'Eternité par les astres* (Paris, 1872), pp. 74–75

During the Commune, Blanqui was held prisoner in the fortress of Taureau. It was there that he wrote his *L'Eternité par les astres* [Eternity via the Stars]. This book completes the century's constellation of phantasmagorias with one last, cosmic phantasmagoria which implicitly comprehends the severest critique of all the others. The ingenuous reflections of an autodidact, which form the principal portion of this work, open the way to merciless speculations that give the lie to the author's revolutionary élan. The conception of the universe which Blanqui develops in this book, taking his basic premises from the mechanistic natural sciences, proves to be a vision of hell. It is, moreover, the complement of that society which Blanqui, near the end of his life, was forced to admit had defeated him. The irony of this scheme—an irony which doubtless escaped the author himself—is that the terrible indictment he pronounces against society takes the form of an unqualified submission to its results. Blanqui's book presents the idea of eternal return ten years before *Zarathustra*—in a manner scarcely less moving than that of Nietzsche, and with an extreme hallucinatory power.

This power is anything but triumphant; it leaves, on the contrary, a feeling of oppression. Blanqui here strives to trace an image of progress that (immemorial antiquity parading as up-to-date novelty) turns out to be the phantasmagoria of history itself. Here is the essential passage:

The entire universe is composed of astral systems. To create them, nature has only a hundred *simple bodies* at its disposal. Despite the great advantage it derives from these resources, and the innumerable combinations that these resources afford its fecundity, the result is necessarily a *finite* number, like that of the elements themselves; and in order to fill its expanse, nature must repeat to infinity each of its *original* combinations or *types*. So each heavenly body, whatever it might be, exists in infinite number in time and space, not only in *one* of its aspects but as it is at each second of its existence, from birth to death. . . . The earth is one of these heavenly bodies. Every human being is thus eternal at every second of his or her existence. What I write at this moment in a cell of the Fort du Taureau I have written and shall

write throughout all eternity—at a table, with a pen, clothed as I am now, in circumstances like these. And thus it is for everyone. . . . The number of our doubles is infinite in time and space. One cannot in good conscience demand anything more. These doubles exist in flesh and bone—indeed, in trousers and jacket, in crinoline and chignon. They are by no means phantoms; they are the present eternalized. Here, nonetheless, lies a great drawback: there is no progress. . . . What we call “progress” is confined to each particular world, and vanishes with it. Always and everywhere in the terrestrial arena, the same drama, the same setting, on the same narrow stage—a noisy humanity infatuated with its own grandeur, believing itself to be the universe and living in its prison as though in some immense realm, only to founder at an early date along with its globe, which has borne with deepest disdain the burden of human arrogance. The same monotony, the same immobility, on other heavenly bodies. The universe repeats itself endlessly and paws the ground in place. In infinity, eternity performs—imperturbably—the same routines.²³

This resignation without hope is the last word of the great revolutionary. The century was incapable of responding to the new technological possibilities with a new social order. That is why the last word was left to the errant negotiators between old and new who are at the heart of these phantasmagorias. The world dominated by its phantasmagorias—this, to make use of Baudelaire’s term, is “modernity.” Blanqui’s vision has the entire universe entering the modernity of which Baudelaire’s seven old men are the heralds. In the end, Blanqui views novelty as an attribute of all that is under sentence of damnation. Likewise in *Ciel et enfer* [Heaven and Hell], a vaudeville piece that slightly predates the book: in this piece the torments of hell figure as the latest novelty of all time, as “pains eternal and always new.” The people of the nineteenth century, whom Blanqui addresses as if they were apparitions, are natives of this region.