

One will have understood that these reflections on the "true form" of things-destined-to-be-consumed, to disappear, constituted an entire philosophy, which Victor Hugo fully intended to put into practice. It was at once an aesthetic, a policy, an archaeology, and an anthropology of *cultural memory*, whose *organon*, encapsulated in a few lines, will not fail to trouble later readers of Aby Warburg, Benjamin, and even Georges Bataille.

Philosophy is the microscope of thought. Everything desires to flee from it, but nothing escapes it. Tergiversation is useless.... In the effacement of things which disappear, in the lessening of those which vanish, it recognises everything. It reconstructs the purple from the rag and the woman from the tatter. With the cloaca it reproduces the city; with the mire it reproduces its customs.<sup>28</sup>

Our "piece of sacking" is indisputably a choice object for this kind of philosophy. We might recognize in it the "unessential in motion" (as Warburg used to say of the veils floating around Botticelli's nymphs), the humble and sumptuous *drapery of sidewalks*. No longer stirred by a lascivious Zephyr, it moves quietly along in the dirty water. In any case, a truth rises in this rag. No less than the luxurious Baroque draperies in which the bodies of Bernini's *St. Ludovica Albertoni* or *St. Theresa* were merged, this piece of fabric squashed into the ground presents the interface and the *fold* - extension, envelope, inherence" - of the entrails and the surface. It is precisely in this fold that the memory of cities is *at labour*: childbirth and dying mixed with the Long Ago in the present, its "inmost image."

28 Hugo, *Les Misérables*, part 5, book 2, section 2, 1059. On the relationship of this to classical antiquity, see the poem from the *Châtiments 'Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 7, 4) entitled "L'égout de Rome."  
29 See Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), 31.

## SPECULATIVE ARCHITECTURE: ON THE AESTHETICS OF HERZOG & DE IMEURON

Robert Kudielka

Without opposition nothing is revealed,  
no image appears in a clear mirror  
if one side is not darkened.<sup>1</sup>

Jacob Böhme, *De tribus principiis* (1619)

To speak of speculation in relation to buildings may beg questions. One instantly thinks of capital investment and tax write-offs, under-occupancy and undeserved profit. The word speculation has become so closely identified with calculation, with eyeing the bottom line, that the term in its older, more literal sense, which moved the minds of the Western world for centuries, is rarely employed today. Speculation once referred to the highest form of movement in human thought, to reflection that leads to self-recognition by looking outwards rather than inwards. But even where this meaning survives, as in philosophy and among its anthroposophic admirers, architecture is the last field one would associate with the conflation of looking, reflecting, and cognition. The gap between the plan and the execution of a building seems too great, the purpose too practical, and the appearance too physical to associate architecture with the spontaneous satisfaction of perception.

However, this was not always the case. In the traditional European canon of the Arts the speculative position of architecture was firmly established. It belonged - like mathematics, music, and rhetoric - to the liberal arts, whose components are constituted by the intellect. On the other hand, the

1 Jacob Bohme, *Sämtliche Schriften*, facsimile reprint of the edition of 1730, ed. Will-Erich Peuckert (Stuttgart: Frohmanns Verlag, Günther Holzboog, 1960), vol. 2, frontispiece.

Nothing more difficult to pierce and to penetrate than that geological formation upon which is superposed the wonderful historical formation called Paris; ...<sup>21</sup>

Benjamin would have been able to claim each of these propositions, namely: the palimpsest city, the primacy of rubbish and of things unseen ("microlology" and its Warburgian motto, "God lies in the details"), memory as geological depth, and history as a "formation." The *Misérables* has been called the "very novel of refuse."<sup>22</sup> The entire part entitled "Leviathan's Intestine" gives a haunting description of Paris from the viewpoint of its *entrails*, namely, of its sewers. Hence, the *anthropomorphism* of the organ-city merges into the *dissimilarity* of a thing that moves, which concerns humanity but does not itself have human form. It is something shapeless that lives, moves, is metamorphosed, and appears to the inhabitant of Paris only as an *intrusion* or *discomfort*. This happens whenever the visceral substratum rises to the surface. Hugo compared it to the symptoms of a monstrous indigestion but also of an immense collective remorse:

Sometimes, the sewer of Paris took it into its head to overflow, as if that unappreciated Nile were suddenly seized with wrath. There were, infamous to relate, inundations from the sewer. At intervals, this stomach of civilisation digested badly, the cloaca flowed back into the city's throat, and Paris had the aftertaste of its slime. These resemblances of the sewer to remorse had some good in them; they were warnings; ....<sup>23</sup>

Now, what returns - like a monstrous "belch" - in such symptoms is nothing other than the *repressed memory* of the city: the drowned corpses and the black moods of its history. In short, when the muck comes back up onto the sidewalks, *it is memory flooding back* - a certain long-buried historic past that re-emerges suddenly into the present in the form of a rag, a scrap, a remnant. Even "jumbled as in a medley, ... apparently pell-mell," in such a way "the history of men is reflected in the history of cloacae."<sup>24</sup>

Hugo recalled how Bruneseau, during his terrifying exploration of the sewers of Paris, discovered "a sort of shapeless and filthy rag, which, doubtless,

21 Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (1862), «ans. Charle! E. Wilbour (New York: The Modern Library, 1931), part 5, book 2, section 6, 1066.

11 Françoise Chenet-Faugeras, "Du roman comme reliquaire: Conversion, transfiguration et sacralisation des déchets dans *Les Misérables*," *Jris* 19 (2000): 31.

23 Hugo, *Les Misérables*, part 5, book 2, section 3, 1060.

24 Hugo, *Les Misérables*, part 5, book 2, section 2, 1057-59; see also 1064.

caught there on its passage, had fluttered in the darkness, and was finally worn to tatters." It turned out to be - a bit of heraldic embroidery making authentication possible - a piece of Marat's shroud:

Bruneseau passed on. They left this scrap where it was; they did not make an end of it. Was this contempt or respect? Marat deserved both. And then, destiny was so imprinted upon it that they might hesitate to touch it. Besides, we should leave the things of the grave in the place which they choose. In short, the relic was strange. A marchioness had slept upon it; Marat had rotted in it; it had passed through the Pantheon to come at last to the rats of the sewer. This rag of the alcove, every fold of which Watteau would once have gladly sketched, had at last become worthy of Dante's fixed regard.<sup>25</sup>

## I

Such would be the modern relic, mixing the impurity of the alcove with the impurity of death, choosing unassisted the altar on which it will finish rotting, "finally worn to tatters." Perhaps, not having completely disappeared, it will rise one day to the surface of the drain, to be taken for a simple piece of sacking. Be that as it may, Hugo wished to stress the anamnestic effect that this reflux carries with it. Along with memory, *truth itself rises*. Such would be, more precisely, its function as a *symptom* - "the disease of Paris," on the one hand, and its *memory*, full of the "vestiges of all the cataclysms from the shellfish of the deluge down to the rag of Marat," on the other<sup>26</sup> - and, finally, its very *truth*.

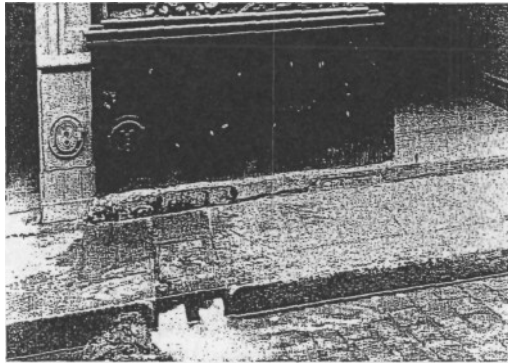
The sewer is the conscience of the city. All things converge into it and are confronted with one another. In this lurid place there is darkness, but there are no secrets. Everything has its real form, or at least its definitive form. This can be said for the garbage-heap, that it is no liar... All the uncleanness of civilisation, when once out of service, falls into this pit of truth, where the immense social supping is brought to an end. They are swallowed up, but they are displayed in it. This pell-mell is a confession. Here, no more false appearances, no possible plastering, the filth takes off its shirt, absolute nakedness, rout of illusions and of mirages, nothing more but what is, wearing the sinister face of what is ending. Reality and disappearance.<sup>27</sup>

25 Hugo, *Les Misérables*, part 5, book 1, section 4, 1063-64.

26 Hugo, *Les Misérables*, part 5, book 2, section 6, 1069.

27 Hugo, *Les Misérables*, part 5, book 2, section 2, 1058.

IMPRINTS AND MOULDS



and brought it to life, namely, its ragmen, "dustmen," "boot-blacks," and, of course, its beggars.<sup>15</sup> Then, Maxime Du Camp understood the advantage of describing Paris in physiological terms, namely, in terms of *organs*. The model of the *tableaux* was too weak, too flat, too exclusively optical or picturesque, too odourless to describe the teeming life that stirred the great city.<sup>16</sup>

Paris: a colossal body, a hyperbolic animal made up of millions of types of life that agglutinate and struggle with each other, which come together in a monstrous embrace and destroy one another. One might compare it to a *mass of entrails* always ready to spew onto the surface, as when the sewers overflow. Is this not precisely what Emile Zola put into words in *Le Ventre de Paris* in 1873, a novel about matter both preying and preyed upon?<sup>17</sup> Is this not the very thing he noted in a more stenographic and ethnological form in his *Carnets*, in which the *things* of Paris rather than its histories are described - for example, the endless succession of "choked" streets, the "gutters forever overflowing with soapy water," the "stinking courtyards,"

15 Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Tableaux de Paris* (1782-89), J.-C. Bonnet, ed. (Paris: Mercure de France, 1994), vol. 1, 110-11 (gutters), 452-53 (ragmen), 671-74 (beggars), 1202-03 (sidewalks), 1237-40 (dustmen), 1255-59 (boot-blacks).

16 Maxime Du Camp, *Paris, ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1870; Monaco: Rondeau, 1993), 144-54 (slaughterhouses), 339-60 (prostitution), 361-82 (begging), 565-82 (water department), 599-14 (sewers), etc.

17 Emile Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873), ed. Henri Mitterand (Paris: Gallimard, 1979). See notably Marie Scarpa, "Le Ventre de Paris or the 'monde immonde' by Emile Zola: Lecture ethnocritique," *Iris* 19 (2000), 45-55.

THE DRAPERY OF SIDEWALKS



the "old rags lying around everywhere," the "piles of slimy snails," the "wrapped filth." Consider this randomly chosen, but poetically concise, phrase: "Landslide. Falling scraps."<sup>18</sup>

Paris: capital of the historic and social matter of the nineteenth century. Honoré de Balzac wrote *Le Père Goriot* from a truly *hylemorphic* inspiration, according to which "things suffer from the same illnesses as mankind," and vice versa.<sup>19</sup> As regards the *Misérables* or the little monograph on Paris written in 1867, Victor Hugo explicitly oriented them to archaeology of the city, which brings on a state of dizziness:

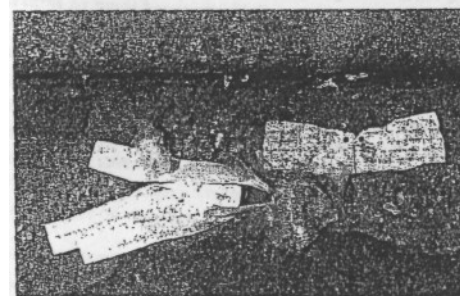
Anyone who looks deep down into Paris becomes dizzy.... Beneath present-day Paris, the old Paris is distinct, like the old text between the lines of the new... In the presence of this history of Paris, one must continually exclaim, like John Howard in the face of other woes: // *is here that minor events are great...!*\*

18 Emile Zola, *Carnets d'enquêtes* (1870-91), ed. Henri Mitterand (Paris: Plon, 1991), 44, 356, 367, 387, 419, 421, 436.

19 Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot* (1834), ed. Marcel Bouteron, *La Comédie humaine. II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 847-1085. On Balzac's hylemorphism, see Cyrille Harpet, "Métaphores de l'abjection," *Iris* 19 (2000), 7-22. It should be recalled that Balzac dedicated *Le Père Goriot* to Etienne-Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire.

20 Victor Hugo, *Paris* (1867), ed. Yveje Gohin, *Oeuvres complètes: Politique* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1985), 8, 11, and 13.

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Alain Fleischer **Paysage de sol (Groundscape)** 1967-68  
 Chromogenic colour prints  
 Each 42 x 60 cm  
 Private collection, Paris

THE DRAPERY OF SIDEWALKS

Whoever wishes to know how much at home we are in entrails must allow himself to be swept along in delirium through streets whose darkness greatly resembles the lap of a whore. - Antiquity.<sup>12</sup>

We are in the street. But what do we know of the street if we do not touch it (like the ragman) with our bare hands, if we do not feel (like the tramp) the cobblestone under our exhausted body, if we do not pace up and down in its obscurity (as does the solitary man in search of a prostitute) in the hope that something like a bosom may open to us. Benjamin ultimately summed all this up in one word: *Antike*, Antiquity. Would the present of the street be, therefore, the *most visceral image of the Long Ago*, its most organic *Nachleben* (afterlife)?

Baudelaire previously compared the gutter or drain to a "death bed on which all world-weariness departs," an infernal river which, if only in miniature, "carries, boiling, the secrets of the sewers."<sup>13</sup> By definition, by its very function, the "sacking" of these sidewalks is never far from a hole, whether a manhole or a sewer vent. It is therefore an indication - a kind of warning - that at this precise place, in this street, the living surface of the city communicates with the *quasi-infernal* kingdom of the subterranean.

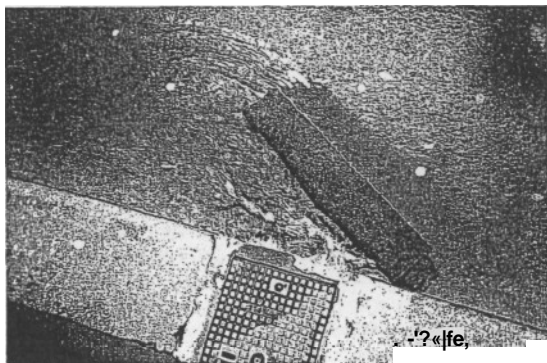
One knew of places in Ancient Greece where the way led down into the underworld. Our waking existence likewise is a land which, at certain hidden points, leads down into the underworld - a land full of inconspicuous places from which dreams arise.<sup>14</sup>

Now really begins in earnest this *anthropological topography* of the city that Benjamin ardently wished for. It consists of studying, like so many stations in a kind of hell or purgatory haunted by anachronism (the stratification of heterogeneous pasts), the network of manholes or metro entrances, of fountains, archways, passages, street urinals, and brothels. Here the Human Comedy sustains a fundamental anthropology of the *body confronted with the doorway*, at work in the past on each page of the Divine Comedy.

Moreover, none of the great historians of Paris failed to note this. In the *tableaux* of Louis Sébastien Mercier, the Parisian *genius loci* was already conditioned by the gutters of the street and by all those who touched the street

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin, 519.  
<sup>13</sup> Baudelaire, cited by Benjamin, 446.  
<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, 84; see also 411-12.

## IMPRINTS AND MOULDS



This *archaic* object, almost appalling in a modern city, was recently the subject of a fine series of photographs by Steve McQueen<sup>5</sup> (fig. D). But his find in 1998 was only the latest of a long series of which their "inventor" is probably unaware. If Paris was the "capital of the 19th century," it was as much the capital of an *archaeology* as it was that of a *modernity*, of a modernity that never ceased to produce these "time imprints," these "immemorial glimpses," as Charles Baudelaire phrased it, which are able to make *antiquity* appear suddenly from (or in) the least piece of sacking. Provided, of course, that one is an anthropologist of the memory of streets, namely, that one has the ability to extract from each shred "the mysterious beauty unwittingly invested in it by human life." Photographers have continually done so by latching their eyes onto the streets of Paris.<sup>1</sup>

Thirty years before Steve McQueen, Alain Fleischer, known since the early 1960s for his underground films but who has also produced photographs and installations,<sup>7</sup> devoted a magnificent series of images to the same Parisian "dams" (fig. 2). Fleischer adopted an approach to the urban fabric that is truly *topographical*. For example, districts were systematically explored and all the

5 See Friedrich Meschede, ed., and Steve McQueen, *Barrage* (Cologne: Walther König, 2000).

6 For an initial approach, see Sylviane de Decker, éd., *Paris, capitale de la photographie* (Paris: Hazan, 1998).

7 See, for example, Dominique Paint, *Alain Fleischer au monde regardé par les images: Fleischer, Rome, Carte Segrete* (1988), 7-65, and Régis Durand, *Alain Fleischer, 1970-1995* (Barcelona: Fundado Joan Miró, 1996).

1 Steve McQueen *Barrage (Dam)* 1998  
Chromogenic colour print between plexiglass  
45.7 x 68.8 cm  
Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris

## THE DRAPERY OF SIDEWALKS

"doormats" (as he calls them) of a given street carefully inspected. The artist would sometimes come back to rephotograph a "doormat" after letting a few weeks or a few months go by. What Walter Benjamin so aptly called the "intense work within things" then became visible from one image to the next."

In 1968, however, these poor old cast-offs were not yet *in fashion*, that is, in "postmodern" fashion. Their genuine and unequivocally accepted *modernity* even appear - if we are willing to shift the emphasis of the contemporary viewpoint slightly and adopt a more historical approach - to be the result of a long evolution of the photographic eye in its relationship with the avant-garde, from Eugène Atget (fig. a) to László Moholy-Nagy (fig. 4l).

So how does this rag, thrown in a heap into the drain along the sidewalk, offer to the present - to the *modern*, if I may say so - the chance to grasp, if only by a ragged thread, "the inmost image of what has been"? That is the question. To begin to answer it, we must go back to Walter Benjamin's choice of terms - in particular, to the superlative form he gives to the adjective *inner*, a feature that has not been rendered in the standard French translation. To say that this street rag is an *innerste Bild* is to say that it provides "the inmost image" of what has been.

Of what "inner part" does the street reveal the mysteries? In Section P of the *Arcades Project*, devoted to the streets of Paris,<sup>1</sup> Benjamin speaks of the "gutters" that during the Ancien Régime flooded the streets with refuse. This began to change in 1802,<sup>10</sup> with the construction of sidewalks, mile-stones, and drains - and along with them our street "rags." Would the *inner* nature of these commonplace objects not then stem from the silent motion that drives and transforms them? Paris, noted Benjamin, has been called the "city that stirs," a notion that permitted him to introduce the motif of a *tactile sensuality* of the street, a street that is organic to the point of revealing, when it unfolds, its ultimate reality - a *visceral reality*.

For what do we know of streetcorners, curbstones, the architecture of the pavement - we who have never felt heat, filth, and the edges of the stones beneath our naked soles, and have never scrutinized the uneven placement of the paving stones with an eye toward bedding down on them.<sup>11</sup>

1 See Georges Didi-Huberman, "L'histoire de l'art à rebrousse-poil: Temps de l'image et 'travail au sein des choses' selon Walter Benjamin," *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'Art moderne* 72 (2000), 92-117.

9 Benjamin, 516-26; see also 796-99 ("The Seine, the Oldest Paris").

10 Benjamin, 520, citing Lucien Dubech and Pierre d'Espezel.

11 Benjamin, 517.