What Makes a Cité a City? A Parisian Case Study For a City's Algorithmic Model

Isabella J. Castillo
Johns Hopkins University, isbellajo16@gmail.com

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Cover Page Footnote
First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge that I stand on the shoulders of giants. I am fully indebted to the guidance, intellectual prowess, and wondrous curiosity of my advisor, Dr. Wilda Anderson, who has firmly believed in all my ideas and helped me actualize them. I would like to also thank every other professor within the department of Modern Languages and Literatures that took interest in my thoughts and sought to help me cultivate them and care for them. None of my research would have been possible without the generosity of the Bander Family Fund and the endless support of Dr. Natalie Strobach. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my family and friends who have always thoroughly shared my joys throughout this process of discovery.

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What Makes a Cité a City? A Parisian Case Study for a City’s Algorithmic Model

Isabella Castillo

*Johns Hopkins University*

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**Abstract**

When thinking of the country of France, the republic whose revolutions and spirit have sparked fires of passionate reform and transformations of a global sociopolitical landscape throughout history, we often fall into thinking, almost automatically, of Paris, the celebrated city of lights and love. We envision the city that has also been tied to empires, royalty, revolt, violence and blood since the dawn of the Gauls to the gilet jaunes of today. The question, therein, lies in why Paris? Why is this city so emblematic of a country that expands beyond the confines of the European continent? Why does it represent the cultural and transportational center of an entire people who once witnessed the rise and fall of the great Roman empire? Before assessing these questions specific to one place, we must first turn to the general definition for a city. By inverting the order of thought and centering our discussion on the principal question of what makes a city a city, we will find a general pattern for the collective human experience and our unique tendency for complex manipulation of space. I propose an open-ended algorithmic model to explain the foundations of a city’s composition. In studying three different texts spanning three centuries by Louis XIV, Louis-Sébastien Mercier and Jules Michelet, we will see this model consisting of a precise arrangement of space, an element of disjunction, and a living body. With Paris as our case study, we will see how a city operates as a monument of monuments.
Introduction: On Placeness

Place has a significant meaning — it is where we live, we breathe, we feel within the whole wide spectrum of human emotions and where we make memories that we come back to later. For humans, space and place are essential parts of daily life that hold great significance. In fact, spatial cognition, memory, and the limbic system responsible for accessing and processing emotion all work together to remind us of what we do or once did in a particular place. It is no wonder why we sometimes try to retrace our steps — this is part of our intuition, our being, our nature. We like to remember experiences. We have to remember experiences. Space and place act as a mediator between us and the unlocking of past experiences as well as the creation of new ones. Just as music does, for example.

We all remember the place where we grew up, the place where we spent time as a child outside, the place where we first rode our bike, the place where we went to school, the place/path we took home daily, the place of firsts and lasts and all that is in between. So, it follows that when we think of a place — of a city — we feel it to be alive. The very pavement we step on, the very shops within it, the way we find within its numerous alleys and avenues; these are all parts of us living beings which by extension, are part of the city. This is placeness.

Algorithm

For many years, the question of what makes a city truly a city has plagued intellectuals in a diverse number of fields. The answer has been sought through an anthropological, sociological,
and etymological explanatory style. Indeed, the problematic has puzzled many because before urbanization, a city was defined as a large settlement providing its inhabitants some form of system in place for interactions between individuals to ensure survival.¹ There had to be some form of centralized governing body and compartmentalized function of buildings within it. There had to be a distribution of goods, a system of exchange, an economy. There had to be borders dividing it from the surrounding wilderness or desert. However, many definitions also neglected to investigate an additional sense of “placeness” and other factors necessary in picturing and defining the quintessential portrait of a thriving city.

One way of delineating the components of a city to include such “factors” is by way of an algorithm, particularly one that arises from a case study. According to “The Computational Theory of Mind” by Stanford’s Encyclopedia of Philosophy, an algorithm, roughly speaking, is an explicit, step-by-step procedure for answering some question or solving some problem. It provides a recipe for action at each step, creating a deterministic way to come to a determined outcome. It is important to note that not all algorithms are uniformly authored by a particular person or are constrained to a fixed state devoid of evolution. Indeed, there are algorithms that are open-ended and can thus change over time, self-modify and create a product that is only partially determined. Such an algorithm forms an integral part of what it means to be human, allowing us to efficiently arrive at a product, a conclusion, an enterprise.

As humans we preserve, transmit, and modify information by memory. Memory, an active process, links spatial cognition and the notion of “placeness”, the summed experiences of individuals within a space. In fact, “cityness”, which I would here define as the measure of a

collective interaction between individuals and places within it, relies heavily, if not entirely, on memory. Algorithms serve the function of describing and therefore qualifying how the different elements contributing to cityness and depending on memory, come to produce a result. An algorithm for a city provides a model of both what a city consists of and how these distinct parts can operate to create something unique to cities, such as revolutionary madness. The city itself is not an algorithm but it can be described by it. This algorithm is one with no formal author, as numerous local architects, city planners and their equivalent, as well as builders may have contributed to its edification but their identity pales in comparison to their creation. There is also no fully determined product emanating from this algorithm as it recursively strives for adaptation. As much as the product may be insanity of the populace, as in the case of the September massacres, it may also be the sudden eruption of war, as in the whole of the French Revolution. With each outcome, small or large, the previous syntactic code of the algorithm, memory, becomes fossilized in the city’s configuration and induces a correspondence between people and place.

For this reason, proposing an open-ended algorithmic model for a city may be an idea worth exploring. This is particularly true if the model is one which writers, philosophers, poets, and leaders have been mesmerized by and spoken extensively about for thousands of years, with approaches to what a good city consists of dating back to Plato’s Republic\(^2\). My proposal is that Paris may very well serve as a model for how we can construe cities and their “placeness”, i.e. “cityness”, according to the idea of the open-ended algorithm. There should follow some order: (1) particular arrangement of space and the (2) the element of disjunction. We will see in the

\(^2\) In Plato’s Republic, Socrates argues for the virtues of a city, forming one of the first ideas regarding utopianism.
sections following three texts depicting the people of the city of Paris interacting with the space of the city. I wish to argue that what we can discern from close readings of these discursive objects allows us to argue that they are experiencing their city in an algorithmic mode. Through the writings of Louis-Sébastien Mercier, we will observe a transmission of political memory from inanimate compositions of the city, such as its bare stones and architectural backbones, to its people by means of physical, reciprocal influence. Jules Michelet will then introduce the notion of action and inaction of Paris’s inhabitants as dependent upon the city’s construct through his chapters detailing the September Massacres. Up to this point we will have been exposed to pure criticism and analysis of the algorithmic experience within the city. Together, Mercier and Michelet will uncover, each in their respective century, the algorithmic activity of Paris as having a manipulative function.

I. “Cityness” I: Arrangement of Space

The arrangement of space and building materials is usually one of the most important factors considered by architects when commissioned by the state to design an architectural feature for the public. The interaction between the space and the people that will inhabit it is the decisive component for the way in which a structure is built. Indeed, building is a visionary process which requires concentrated contemplation of the past, present, and future, of what once was, what is, and what will be of both the space and the humans that will interact with it and in
It is both frozen memory and the birthplace of foresight, with each stone encapsulating life in it — every erosion, crack and discoloration tracing a picture of history.

The nature of this interaction determines the identity of the structure itself. The first aspect of this identity is its **functional purpose** — whether it will be a palace for the heads of state to gather in and make crucial decisions on behalf of “all”, a museum to house great works of art to be admired by commoner and aristocrat alike, or a hospital to both pragmatically and humanistically tend to those in need. The second component is its **appearance** — the specific geometric shapes taken by the pieces of the structure that may reflect degree of movement, of fluidity, of openness, contributing to both its functionality and the aesthetic pleasure that may be derived from admiring it. Finally, the third characteristic of its identity is the **power and significance** of the structure. Power refers to the effect of the structure on every individual that will be in it or around it, for the collective whole of the population that inhabits the general area where this structure will reside. It is the height, width, and degree of complexity in the manipulation of both space and materials used for building. The significance of the structure refers to its critical quality of transcendence in relation to time, that materials can be forged at one point in time to create a representation of and enclosure for the universal human qualities of *theoria*, *poiesis*, and *praxis*\(^4\) for present and future individuals that are yet to be born. It denotes that an arrangement of space influences cultural, political, and historical exchanges between social beings, between men, over cycles of time. This last component of identity — power and

\(^3\) More of the sociological components of architecture is explored thoroughly in Book 4 (“Public Works”) of Leon Battista Alberti’s *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, translated by Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, Robert Tavernor.

\(^4\) Here, “theoria” refers to activity resulting in acquisition of knowledge and understanding, “poiesis” is akin to activity conducing to production and creation and “praxis” relates to practical matters, an activity whose end is action. More on this matter can be found in Aristotle’s *Poetics*.
significance — scaffolds on both the functional purpose and the appearance of the structure, the
two preceding components of identity.

Taking into account both the relationship between humankind and the buildings created
by it, we can conclude that the arrangement of space is precise. It is not random or authored by chance. There is causality and meaning, from the dawn of its inception to the dictation of its borders, from the first stone cast on an empty lot to the last hinge placed on its gated doors. This precise arrangement of space, rather than embodying merely disordered chaos, answers a serious question that has plagued man for ages concerning the boundary between the private and public domain of life: who do you let in? Perhaps in some curious instances, the question may very well become: who do you keep from coming out?

I will present here an example of this precision in the arrangement of space. In the eighteenth century, a century after Louis XIV, Louis-Sébastien Mercier wrote in his *Tableau de Paris* (1781–1788) of two iconic edifices definitive of the city of Paris: Bastille and Palais-Royal. He described on the one hand the Bastille castle (in Chapter XLIV: “Bastille”), a prison of the state:

« *O murs épais de la Bastille*, qui avez reçu sous les trois derniers règnes les soupirs et les gémissements de tant de victimes, si vous pouviez parler, que vos récits terribles et fidèles démontreriont le langage timide et adulateur de l'histoire ! »

Here, Mercier clearly speaks of the prisoners cruelly and inhumanely detained inside. When discussing the movement in and out of its confines, Mercier stipulates that death is the only way by which a soul can escape it:

« *Quand un prisonnier décède à la Bastille*, on l'enterre à S. Paul, pendant la nuit à trois heures du matin. Au lieu de prêtres, des guichetiers portent le cercueil, & les membres de l'état-major

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After having described both the Bastille’s purpose and the key structural appearance of its thick walls, Mercier introduces its power and significance derived from these via a description of what exactly it holds within it. Closer to the beginning of its creation: « Henri IV fit garder le trésor royal à la Bastille. Louis XV y fit enfermer le dictionnaire encyclopédique, qui y pourrit encore. »

This history of the Bastille introduces a vital piece of information. It is not just socially undesirable people that were once housed in the Bastille, but knowledge and economic sovereignty as well. Thus, we arrive at the notion that Bastille is, in fact, the living embodiment of secrecy and monarchical abuse. It is a symbol of tyranny, not merely because of how it operates functionally, but because of its walls, the manipulation of the very stones that constitute it, the vertical arrangement of its towering appearance which creates an impenetrable veil between the nation’s leader and its subjects (see Figure 4):

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6 Mercier, *Tableau*, 724.
To a greater extent, it is the unknown it represents and the quality of silence, of muteness, that make it so negatively revelatory of a government founded on the basis of hierarchical disparity (see Figure 5): « La partie la plus intéressante de notre histoire nous sera donc à jamais cachée : rien ne transpire de ce gouffre, non plus que de l'abîme muet des tombeaux. »⁹ It is no coincidence that Mercier elects for the last words of this chapter to fittingly be Voltaire’s: « L’effet cri est affreux, la cause est inconnue. »¹⁰

Almost entirely on the opposite end of the spectrum is situated the Palais-Royal, the establishment made for all types of exchanges between Parisians, ranging from intellectual to business, from profound to banal, from murmurs to shouting. Its interior garden and colonnades form a space for an economy of thought and expression. Mercier first introduces the Palais-Royal by describing its essence, in a more metaphorical and theatrical manner, placing great emphasis on the main players of this seemingly lively stage:

« Ce séjour enchanté est une petite ville luxueuse, renfermée dans une grande ; c’est le temple de la volupté, d'où les vices brillants ont banni jusqu’au fantôme de la pudeur : il n’y a pas de

⁸ Mercier, Tableau, 723.
⁹ Mercier, Tableau, 722.
¹⁰ Mercier, Tableau, 725.
guinguette dans le monde plus gracieusement dépravée ; on y rit, et c’est de l’innocence qui rougit encore. »

In succeeding lines, he introduces a description of its structural appearance, noting that, « Quant au bâtiment, quel dommage que l’enceinte n’ait point permis un plus vaste développement, une forme oblongue au lieu de ce carré, qui tient trop de la construction d’un cloître ! » This interwoven presentation of both its spatial openness and liberation in spirit is further molded into shape as he comments on the openness it provides to people of all walks of life, of all social stations:

« Dans ces sortes d’assemblées, on s’instruit en s’amusant ; l’histoire, la physique, la poésie, s’y donnent la main : c’est une espèce d’académie composée de personnes de tout état, où le goût de toutes les sciences & de tous les arts y fait un heureux mélange, qui doit contribuer à leurs progrès. »

Once having catalogued its functional purpose and appearance, Mercier lays down the significance of the Palais: « La liberté de penser donnait souvent à nos expressions une tournure neuve et singulière, qui, dans nos innocens débats, faisait éclore le rire dans toute sa naïveté. » In a striking opposition to Bastille, the Palais holds and fosters this spirit of full unshackling freedom in words, in knowledge, in information exchange, in physical emancipation, a total kinetic disinhibition (see Figure 6):

« [...] on ne sauroit croire combien un tel exercice donne de pénétration à l’esprit ; le flux & reflux des idées qu’on discute ou qu’on combat, en fait naître qu’on n’avait pas même soupçonnées; ce choc d’une conversation animée, fait jaillir une foule de brillantes étincelles. »

While there is physical and mental imprisonment at Bastille, there is liberation in the Palais. The Palais-Royal is an electric space because it is a safe space, all have access to it, from

11 Mercier, Tableau, 931.
12 Mercier, Tableau, 931.
13 Mercier, Tableau, 932.
14 Mercier, Tableau, 932.
15 Mercier, Tableau, 933.
the most undesirable individuals of society, such as prostitutes, to the most privileged, such as men of letters and academicians. In the garden, anyone can interact with another without fear of ruthless captivity or suppression. Most importantly, Mercier observes that the Palais is not solely characteristic of the city of Paris, but that it is definitive of it:

« Je n'ai point la déplorable injustice de croire qu'on ne cause bien que dans la capitale ; que le soleil des arts ne se lève que pour Paris, & que les villes de province ne jouissent que de la faible lueur de quelques étoiles errantes : qu'un académicien du Louvre dise une pareille sottise, sans y croire, à la bonne heure; mais il n'en est pas moins vrai de dire que l'esprit humain, pressé de tous côtés dans la capitale par mille objets, y rend plus qu'ailleurs. Là, les idées sont plus vives & plus secondes, parce qu'elles y sont éveillées, appréciées ou combattues par la foule des événements journaliers, et par l'immense multitude de caractères, qui tous diffèrent entre'eux d'une manière plus forte, & quelquefois plus bizarre que dans les provinces, où règne une . forte d'égalité uniforme, qui ressemble au cours paisible d'un fleuve. La capitale est une mer bouleversée, chaque jour, par tous les vents qui y soufflent en sens contraires. »

Thus, we come to understand one principal abstraction. As we can observe through this illuminating contrast between both buildings — one a

“fortified castle” and the other a

16 Mercier, Tableau, 933.
“palace”, we begin to see that the particular arrangement of a space, its verticality versus horizontality for instance, affects its operation within a culture. With the Bastille, we observe that its vertical spatial manipulation gives off a sense of oppression. As one approaches the walls of stone, there is a feeling of being more and more distanced, detached and remote, regardless of which side of the wall you find yourself on. With the Palais-Royal, its horizontality instead produces a fraternal closeness among those that interact in its space, where the humans inside it and their social nature are of more daunting interest than the opulence of the structure itself.

Figure 7. A clear distinction can be observed by looking at the structural layout of the Bastille, on the left, versus the Palais-Royal, on the right.

Mercier’s utilization of personification when painting the portrait of Paris provides a literary example of the notion of precise space arrangement. As he addresses the buildings, streets, and material compositions of the city, he sheds light on the fundamental idea of “placeness” and “cityness”. In this juxtaposition of two key structure within Paris he also presents a case of spatial disjunction (see Figure 7). Before continuing in our consideration of different forms of disjunction, we must first define the concept of disjunction.
II. “Cityness” 2: The Element of Disjunction

In common everyday language, *junction* is a word that has come to be associated with an intersection, a point where multiple things become joined. When one is driving and four roads from different directions converge, one arrives at a junction. Conjunction, similarly, is a word that grammatically connects clauses, such as *and*. Alternatively, it could refer to an agglomeration of something. If one were to leave their license at home before going on the road to drive, spilled coffee onto their shirt when speeding over a pothole and ended up receiving a traffic ticket for an illegal right turn, one could say they’ve experienced a conjunction of chaos. The antonym of conjunction, *disjunction*, is just as essential to vernacular.

Disjunction is a concept possessing chameleonic attributes, appearing in the jargon of multiple areas of knowledge. In the field of genetics and molecular biology, for example, disjunction refers to the necessary division of two separate entities, i.e., homologous chromosomes or sister chromatids, for the purpose of cellular replication and division. Here, disjunction can be pictured as one entangled mesh of genetic material separated as cleanly as possible into two. In linguistics, disjunction serves the purpose of introducing contrast between two statements. One word in English—“*or*”—provides English speakers with the ability to make these distinctions between one argument, person, place, thing and another in the form of a sentence or question. For instance, in the morning, one can drink an espresso or a cappuccino. There is an implicature of exclusivity that a plain affirmative sentence or simple question are now subject to through this disjunction. If one chooses to drink an espresso rather than a  

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17 Gottlieb and Tegay, “Genetics, Nondisjunction” (2019) as it appears in StatPearls
18 Grammatical disjunction is in terms of non-classical logic. Classical logic would assert, more specifically, that a disjunction can be defined as a proposition or truth statement which has an output considered true only if at least one of the disjuncts/inputs is true. Otherwise it would be false.
cappuccino, or vice versa, the other alternative is automatically eliminated. The way the word or is used as a grammatical disjunction is akin to the principle of bivalence in logic, which dictates that for every proposition or truth function there are only two truth values—true or false. This disjunction allows for the separation of two portions of a statement and create stark disambiguation between two clauses. Finally, in the field of behavioral economics and psychology, disjunction is used mainly to refer to the presence of contradiction. It represents a violation of expectations. For example, how humans face uncertainty is a reflection of this disjunction which riddles cognitive processes involved in decision-making. Take the Monty Hall problem, a paradox illustrating how internal conflict can only be fully resolved with counterintuitive solutions. When individuals are presented with a problem such as the following:

"Suppose you're on a game show, and you're given the choice of three doors: Behind one door is a car; behind the others, goats. You pick a door, say No. 1, and the host, who knows what's behind the doors, opens another door, say No. 3, which has a goat. He then says to you, 'Do you want to pick door No. 2?' Is it to your advantage to switch your choice?"

Initially, it is clear by the probability rule of independence that choosing any door yields a 1 in 3 chance of obtaining a car, as opposed to a goat. However, once the host has opened another door distinct from the one originally chosen, the assumption of independence no longer holds. At this point, any participant on this game show would actually have a mathematical probability of $2/3$ in obtaining a car if they were to switch to door No. 2. Yet, the most intuitive choice and most popular choice is remaining with door No. 1 because it seems easier to believe that after one door’s success has been eliminated there remains an equal 50/50 chance of obtaining a car by choosing either door No. 1 or door No. 2. For those remaining with door No. 1, they are often flabbergasted by this violation of what appears to be “logical”.

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19 Aloni, “Disjunction” (2016) as it appears in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
In all of these fields, disjunction has a unified quality of inconsistency, of opposition, of detachment and dissociation. Simply put, disjunction implies a separation. The same can very well be said about cities. In a place where the arrangement of space and the presence of a living body of people interconnected with its structural conformity yield its identity, the element of disjunction as we have seen and will explore further through Mercier, is of equal importance. In the preceding section, I introduced the concept of spatial disjunction. We saw that the Bastille and Palais-Royal represented two entirely different spaces with contrasting emotional and intellectual connotations. The interactions between individuals enabled by the physical structure of the two buildings were of two opposing kinds. Now, we must delve further into one of them, the Palais-Royal, and see a case of temporal disjunction. Here we will see that temporal disjunction invokes memory in a two-fold sense. A split between this edifice prior to the French Revolution and after it illustrate the bidirectional effects of history on space and the space’s disjunctive quality on history. This could be categorized as cultural memory, stored in the buildings itself and contributing to the ongoing modifications of the city with time and events. There are also the individual human memories resulting from direct interaction with the city which enables the consequent modification of the city and thus adds to the overall amalgamated memory of a people and/or of the city, though not of a person. In Mercier’s second description of Palais-Royal we will see both memories in action.

Originally a royal palace nestled in the heart of the 1st arrondissement, directly across from the Louvre, the Palais-Royal is a distinct emblem of the cityness of Paris, of the city’s people and its spirit. Louis Sébastien Mercier writes on the building’s daunting infrastructure and the lively activities within the Palais-Royal in two different accounts: first in *Tableau de Paris* (1782-1788), a purveyor of a panoramic picture of Paris approximating the end of the Ancien...
Régime, and second, in *Le nouveau Paris* (1797), written during the Fall of Robespierre just as the Revolution began to instill the turmoil of political unrest and bloody violence and published near the end of it.

Monuments act as a physical form of memory. According to the *Dictionnaire de l’académie française* 1694, a monument could be described as illustrious, superb, magnificent, glorious, durable, and eternal. Monuments are to posterity and for posterity; their sole purpose is the conservation of memory. The Palais-Royal is a monument by all means. By contrasting these two radically different descriptions of one same monument and thus the operation of the singular components of an architectural feature — its stones, walls and halls, an insight into the evolution of operations within a space of great significance emerges.

Mercier notably writes on the Palais-Royal in Chapitre DCCCXIX: “Palais-Royal” of tome X of his *Tableau de Paris*, emphasizing its connection to Paris:

« *On l’appelle la capitale de Paris.* Tout s’y trouve; mais mettez là un jeune homme ayant vingt ans, et cinquante mille livres de rente, il ne voudra plus, il ne pourra plus sortir de ce lieu de féerie […] »

Charming and seductive, much like the amenities and intoxicating socialization opportunities found in its midst, there appears to be a duality imbued within the Palais-Royal. On the one hand, it is a church for worship of vices:

« *Ce séjour enchanté est une petite ville luxueuse,* renfermée dans une grande : c’est *le temple de la volupté,* d’où les vices brillants ont banni jusqu’au fantôme de la pudeur : il n’y a pas de guinguette dans le monde plus gra cieusement dépravée ; on y rit, & c’est de l’innocence qui rougit encore. »

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22 Mercier, *Tableau*, 931.
On the other, it is representative of the intellectual and artistic spirit of a bourgeois culture which so heavily emphasized the importance of education and the image of a prototypical man of letters:

« Dans ces sortes d'assemblées, on s'instruit en s'amusant ; l'histoire, la physique, la poésie, s'y donnent la main : c'est une espèce d'académie com posée de personnes de tout état, où le goût de toutes les sciences & de tous les arts y fait un heureux mélange, qui doit contribuer à leurs progrès. »

Even more so, despite its obtuse rectangular shape, the Palais-Royal proved to be essential to the spirit of liberty dominating the French aristocracy, one which could afford a consistent existence drenched in ostentatious pursuit of knowledge, rendering spoken thoughts quintessential to a right and freedom of expression. Enlightenment and disjunction manifest themselves through the ethos of a people encapsulated within the Palais-Royal:

« La liberté de penser donnoit souvent à nos expressions une tournure neuve & singulière, qui, dans nos innocens débats, faisoit éclorre le rire dans toute sa naïveté. »

Roughly a decade later on the eve of Revolution, in the chapter titled “Palais-Égalité, ci-devant Palais-Royal” of his Le nouveau Paris (1994), a remarkable difference is palpable in the account which Mercier provides of this same edifice. Rather than painting a portrait of iconoclastic beauty, he likens it to virulent disease and decadent death:

« Ainsi que la corruption du plus beau fruit commence par une pourriture légère, de même le Palais-Royal est la tache qui a corrompu nos mœurs modernes, et propagé la gangrène. »

Indeed, rather than representing a direct connection amongst the individuals promenading within its confines, the Palais-Royal becomes a causal agent for the decline of a city’s citizens. The causality of person to monument is essentially flipped. Rather than a marriage of cultural components at the cornerstone of Paris, it takes on the form of villainous divorce between the

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23 Mercier, Tableau, 932.
24 Mercier, Tableau, 932.
excessive depravity now dominating Paris in times of war and the idyllic vision of republican glory it once bore:

« Je ne traverse point ces longues galeries, sans voir l’Ombre qui, du même lieu où son aïeul avait donné, ainsi que le dit Voltaire, le signal des voluptés, donna le signal de toutes les intrigues ambitieuses, de tous les crimes atroces, et qu’on peut regarder comme le fondateur réel des échafauds de Robespierre, et du régime sanguinaire qui a tout à la fois opprimé et avili la nation ; car sa stupeur et son silence, pendant dix-huit mois de forfaits, sont, comme je l’ai dit ailleurs, plus épouvantables à la réflexion du philosophe, que la dissolution physique d’un monde. »

In the detailed illustrations of the Palais-Royal, a desperate longing for what things once were accompanied by a conscious awareness that irreparable changes have redefined the architectural landscape of it become apparent. A sense of ozymandian melancholia is tangibly incarnated in the walk that Mercier takes through the building, talking of the unhygienic sanitation conditions, the symphony of cacophonous noises of dirty pleasure, and the grave fog of a spleen-inducing underworld:

« Des ruisseaux d’urine coulent auprès ; les avenues sont ténébreuses et froides ; le libertinage y a pris je ne sais quelle forme glacée, qui paraît avoir son code et ses motifs. »

No longer do we observe, as before, a temple full of divine vices, glorified and romanticized. The Palais-Royal becomes a temple of terror, where citizens are taken advantage of. The cityness found in this place no longer centers on leisure and pleasure but injustice:

« J’y suis, sous ces arcades, serres chaudes de toutes les plantes empoisonnées qu’on a pris soin de semer dans tous les départements : voilà le foyer des cabales et des discordes civiles ! voilà le temple où l’agiotage dévore la fortune publique et condamné à la faim des familles entières, réduites au plus affreux dénuement par un trafic solennel et meurtrier ! »

As we journey through the halls and steps of the Palais along with Mercier, we see the eerie and corrosive degeneration through a lens of misery rather than alluring debauchery:

« Vos pas, sous les arcades, sont arrêtés par une fumée qui vous prend aux jambes : vous regardez ; c’est la flamme de la cuisine des restaurateurs ; et tout à côté, des bals commencent

dans les grottes souterraines. *On aperçoit à travers les soupiraux, les rondes de filles qui sautent, qui ricanent, qui se ruent sur leurs cavaliers comme des bacchantes, les cheveux épars.*" 

There is no longer a vision of the halls and curiously uplifting ambience, but disgust at the state of a decaying city structure. The Palais-Royal thus is no longer the center itself (as seen in *Le nouveau Paris*). It acquires a sort of anthropomorphic quality. To Mercier, the Palais-Royal in times of Revolution is now a cloaca, a vessel for obscenity, rancid decomposition and death:

« [...] *le cloaque infect placé au milieu de la grande cité, qui menacerait la société entière d’avilissement et de pourriture, si les scandales qu’il offre n’étaient pas resserrés dans un point.*»

By juxtaposing two texts written within a decade and a half of each other, a tangible degradation can be seen through Mercier’s ethnographic and architectural writing. The same stones, halls, and entryways explored and experienced previously have become comprehensively different. These mere components of an opulent establishment, pieces of overlooked constructive value forming the basic foundations of a space, have absorbed and internalized the very essence of revolution, the pith of the ever-fluctuating sociopolitical landscape of a city. The disjunction between the Palais-Royal before the Revolution and the one during the Revolution becomes clear, spatially and temporally.

**Conclusion: A Monument of Monuments**

Near the end of *Histoire de la Révolution française*, as Jules Michelet traverses the cimetière de Mousseaux, a cemetery containing Robespierre’s tomb, he speaks of history:

« *Qu'est-ce que l'histoire? La spécification.* Plus elle spécifie, précise, caractérise, plus elle est historique, plus elle est elle-même. Mon mérite, celui de ce livre, c'est son constant effort pour échapper aux vagues généralités, pour retrouver la personnalité, la pénétrer en soi, la suivre en ses variations, la noter jour par jour. Rien ne nous a coûté pour atteindre ce but. Et le

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While we learn of the importance of retrospective historical reflection through this
definition of the term “histoire”, we also arrive once again at the notion of the monument. We
have observed through the preceding sections of text that memory plays a crucial basis for
architecture and that monuments within the city act as representations of this concept. However,
it is also important to identify not just the physical buildings as monuments but also the works
written to describe them. Michelet and Mercier as writers detail the scaffolding level of
monument by physically engraving on paper an account of the nature and changes that a
monument of monuments, a city, undergoes. In their individual narratives spaced a century
apart, we get first account of “cityness”. By taking an imagined walk with them through a Paris
ravaged by Revolution, we find ourselves in a different spatial-temporal scene bursting with a
“placeness” still palpable today and tomorrow, by generations to come.

In my discussion of texts spanning two centuries from Mercier to Michelet, I’ve proposed
an algorithmic model for the city. Through the concepts of “placeness” and “cityness”, which
build upon the spatial and temporal recollection imbued within the very stones and construction
materials for various architectural structures of great historical significance, I have attempted to
describe a city as a function of memory, of the present and past people and of events transpiring
in the city’s space.

[996] bonheur aussi m'a servi. Plusieurs, ici, ressuscités, y garderont pour l'avenir la vie que leur
devait l'histoire en échange de celle qu'ils ont héroïquement abrégée.
Ainsi revit l'infortuné Fabre d'Eglantine, perdu d'honneur et pour qui pas une voix ne
s'élevait, jusqu'à ce que nous ayons donné pour toujours l'irrécusable preuve de son innocence.
Ainsi le vaillant Meuris, qui, plus que personne, sauva Nantes et la France, peut-être. Il
gisait, oublié, dans la tombe inconnue où le coucha l'épée d'un girondin. Il a reçu de nos mains
l'humble et durable monument qui le sauvera dans le souvenir reconnaissant de la patrie. »

31 Michelet, Histoire, 995-996.
In a chapter titled “Deux modèles linguistiques de la cité”\textsuperscript{32}, Émile Benveniste, a structural French linguist, gives the etymology and historical analysis of the term we have come to know as “city”. He addresses the two meanings attributed to the word “cité” in French from Greek (\textit{polis}) and Latin (\textit{civis}) origin, with one referring to the physical structure of a centralized political stronghold and the other referring strictly to the community. On the one hand, \textit{polis} seems to derive and break down the identity of the state to the individuals, insinuating that there lies an implicit dependence on geographical location for the concept to exist. On the other hand, \textit{civis} and its successive \textit{civitas} (the origin for “citizen”) appear to integrate the joint souls, spirit, and essence of its reciprocal membership and plurality of human beings into one society. One modern example of this distinction can be found in the \textit{cité scientifique}, which is merely a floating intellectual community that is neither defined by nor constricted to a particular geographical location. While separating \textit{civis} from \textit{polis} functions well in his two linguistic models for the city, taking into account the element of disjunction and the particular arrangement of space found in a city, we can see that instead of dissecting space and representation into two distinct categories, a city is a community and body politic composed of and by the very stones of the urban structure that fill the void of space.

\textsuperscript{32} Émile Benveniste, “Deux Modèles Linguistiques De La Cité”, \textit{Problèmes De Linguistique générale}, 272–280.
Images


Houel, Jean. *Délivrance De Prisonniers De La Bastille.* 1789, Musée Carnavalet - Histoire de Paris


Massacre à la prison de la grande Force et au couvent du Luxembourg, les 2-3 septembre 1792, actuels 2-4 rue du Roi-de-Sicile et 76 rue de Vaugirard, 4 et 6ème arrondissements. Estampe en deux tableaux p.426 et 428 du journal des Révolutions de Paris des 1-8 septembre 1792.


Works Cited


