3

Paris: Ghosts and Visions of a Revolutionary City

INTRODUCTION

I had been following in the footsteps of Walter Benjamin, rambling through the arcades from the proletarian haberdashery of the rue St Denis to the consumption theme park of the Passage de Panorama. Exiting into the brittle February morning, I retreated across the road into a small bistro, the Café Le Croissant. It was here in 1914 that Jean Jaurès, philosopher, socialist and founder of *L'Humanité*, had stopped to gather his thoughts before heading for a meeting of the Worker's Internationale. He never made it, and a plaque outside commemorates his death at the hands of an appropriately-named assassin, Villain. As the sleet smeared the windows, it seemed the perfect place to sit for an afternoon and ponder the spatial tactics of urban revolution, in particular that of the Paris Commune, which like an otherworldly phenomena possessed of uncertain qualities and shifting form, has been pored over, researched, and theorised from every conceivable angle.[1] Arguments over its significance and political character were a keystone in debates on the left during the twentieth century; one of the litmus tests, with which you could tell by the shade of red, where an individual stood in the historic disputes between Communists, social democrats and anarchists.[2] As might be expected, there is no consensus. For Engels and Lenin it was nothing short of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat in action.'[3] But for others, this is romantic and wishful thinking. The Commune might have been many things – a demand for municipal liberties, a viciously repressed rent strike, an anarchist rejection of authority, an angry outburst at the capitulation of Versailles to the Prussians, but a revolution it was not.[4] To which the Situationists replied: 'How would you know? For those that really lived it, it was already there.'[5]

3.1 Boulevard des Italiens

ACT 1

The attempt to banish the memory of 1848. Paris is transformed into an outdoor cemetery. Preparation for a coup d'état and the inauguration of the Second Empire.

Enjoyed by Parisians and tourists alike, who come to sit on the randomly distributed chairs, the Jardin du Luxembourg is a tranquil enough place, and there is nothing on the information plaque that tells of its grisly history. If after 1789, the full programme for the socialisation of land and property had been implemented, then like all other private gardens of the aristocracy, it would have been planted with wheat and sunflowers. But there was to be no such picturesque fate for the Jardin. In marked contrast, in 1848 it was temporarily closed to the public because the giant pools of blood that had accumulated with the mass slaughter of insurgents had become impossible to hide. The Jardin du Luxembourg – one of the green lungs of Paris – had been transformed into a butcher's yard.[6] It was just one episode in a macabre 'saturnalia of reaction' that was unleashed across the city. Rivers of blood coursed down street gutters, mountains of corpses stood in squares, and prisoners were shot on the spot. The idea of a social republic was defeated and within days all the progressive laws that had been fought for, such as the tax on capital, on the restriction of the working day, and on the illegality of debt imprisonment, were repealed.[7] The repression was ruthless and thorough. On the eve of the revolution of 1848 there had been 300 socialist associations in Paris. By 1851, there were none.[8]

3.2 The Rue de Rivoli

ACT 2

The Prelude to the Commune. The dialectic of urban development. Paris is rebuilt as the Capital of the Second Empire to tumultuous acclaim and equally passionate condemnation.

I am standing on a traffic island in the middle of the Boulevard von Haussmann. In all such places I tend to stop, transfixed, camera in hand, and peer through squinted eyes along avenues that like the bourgeois determination to conquer and colonise the world seem to have no limits. Contemplating infinity is disorientating and unsettling. Time begins to drift and the vista fills with picks, rams and a phantom army of unemployed labourers busily demolishing the city's prehistory. Marshalling their activities is Haussmann, the Ahab of modern urban reconstruction, a man whose name would become synonymous with the relentless search for the ideal city of god, empire and capital.

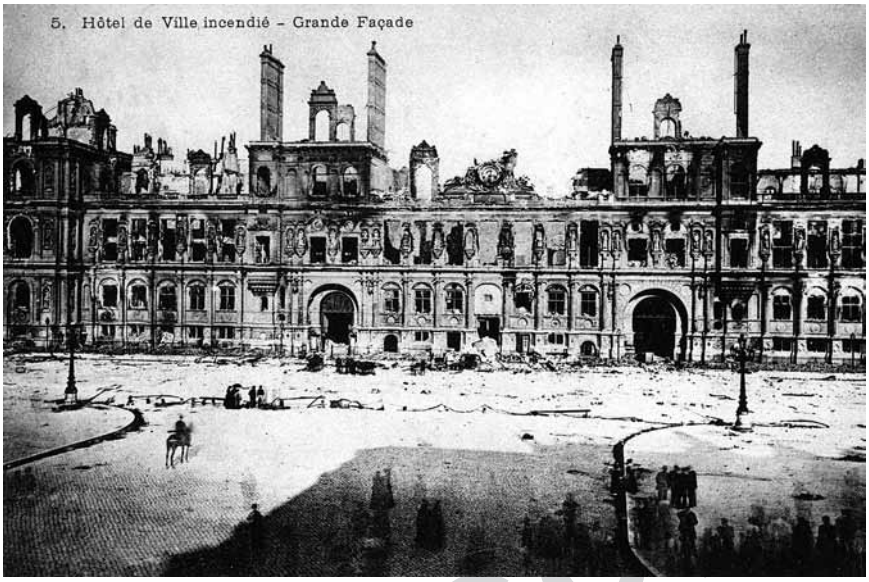
Tourists flocked to the city from as far away as New York and Moscow to marvel at the elegant embodiment of the modern urban imagination. On a daily basis they left the city spellbound by tales of how the magician Haussmann had rescued Paris from 'moral epilepsy',[9] of how he had stimulated economic revival, restored France's world reputation, and improved the city's sanitation, infrastructure and transport.[10] 'Look,' they said, 'at how the new streets are fast, clean, airy, brightly illuminated, and safe from pickpockets and pimps.'[11] Most important of all, they left happy, comforted by the expert manner in which Haussmann had absorbed the monumental propaganda and urban surveillance techniques of Ledoux and Boullée and made the city 'unfavourable to the habitual tactic of local insurrection'.[12] The pursuit of profit and autocratic government had created a city that encapsulated the bourgeois worldview, and if the forces of progress smashed antiquated patterns of life, this was simply the work of the immutable law of

creative destruction in which the ends justified the occasional errors of means.[13] So admired was his blueprint for an imperial city of order and authority, that it was copied and speedily dispatched to the endangered ruling class across Europe. In Madrid, Budapest and Berlin, bankers, priests and the siblings of fallen absolutist monarchs knelt and gave thanks for the restoration of the holy cross and private property. In turn, they, too, set about building their own Parisian facsimile.

But there is another version of events in which the noble city of empire, smashed together in great haste, has begun to crack and fade like the paint on a hurriedly finished canvas. The fairy lights and flowers that once festooned the streets flicker and wilt. The furious clapping that celebrated the mythic restoration of order subsides. Majestically illuminated tenements and arcades are plunged into darkness as the whole panorama is enveloped in a mucky grey. Damned is the empire. The roars of conquering cannon struggle to compete with the groans of Africa and the curses of unemployed insurgents. Haussmann's name plaque, once securely fastened to the wall as a signal of his restoration as a hero of France, has slipped and is dangling precariously. Another history begins to emerge. This one has no happy ending. It speaks not of valour and pride but of financial corruption, unregulated speculation and politically motivated urban vandalism. It speaks of urban dictatorship.

Paris is now condemned as 'a plague of senseless constructions in which unknown thousands lost their lives'. Far from a demonstration of the mason's art or the tectonic wonder of modern construction, it has mutated into an ugly pile of stones shifted 'by the hand of despotism' that lacks 'all social spontaneity'.[14] No longer the capital of romance and poetry, it has become an 'eternal prison' of endlessly repeated details that 'represses all forms of organic self-development and individuality'.[15] In this version of events, Haussmann is the villainous urban dictator who, with the full backing of the emperor, bypasses the planning commission and co-opts the unelected municipal council to suit his will.[16]

He is no longer the enlightened urban planner, but a criminal manipulator who masterminds the operations of a secret cult of public officials, financiers, bankers, builders, developers and landowners.[17] Together they hatch a plot to rebuild the city but in a way that would personally assure them of vast fortunes. To fund their scheme, they build an elaborate and impenetrable financial system specialising in credit.[18] Fictitious capital and mythical bonds create money out of nothing. Architecture assumes full commodity form as a nameless money object.[19] Leases are fabricated out of thin air. Lawyers are happy to make it all legal.[20] Recently bought property is suddenly expropriated and the landowner, a member of the inner circle, laughs all the way to the bank as if he has won the lottery.[21] Haussmann's wife is heard joking; 'It is curious that every time we buy a house, a boulevard passes through it.'[22] And for 20 years the banquet of unrestrained speculation and pleasure seeking continued.[23] Then in 1870, it came to an abrupt end in a financial scandal that revealed that debt charges constituted over 44 per cent of the city's budget.[24] Haussmann and his friends had bankrupted the city and mortgaged the future.[25] The culprit ends up in the dock, accused along with the directors of financial companies and contracting firms of defrauding the city of Paris.[26]



3.3 The ruins of the Hôtel de Ville

But the trial would have to wait. By July of the same year France was at war with Prussia – a conflict that would culminate in one of the most celebrated and controversial episodes in urban history.

ACT 3

26 March. The real action begins. The city votes and citizens pour into the streets. The city is seized. The town hall is occupied and the ruling class flee to Versailles.

The temptation that lurks in romantic exaggeration is matched in equal measure by the desire to forget. Defeat should never be confused with failure. The Commune might never have seized the Bank of France – a single act that would have stopped the vengeful bourgeoisie in its tracks, but as Marx reflected, 'the great social measure of the Commune was its existence'.[27]

In 1848, captured revolutionaries were starved to death in the cellars of the Hôtel de Ville. Twenty-three years later, their former comrades returned to occupy its debating chambers and raise the red flag from its roof that they claimed was not only the emblem of the Commune, but the flag of the World Republic. It was from a platform in front of the main façade bedecked in red streamers and banners that on 28 March 1871 the Commune was proclaimed and the greatest festival of the nineteenth century began.[28] A massive crowd had assembled to celebrate the results of the election in which over a quarter of a million Parisians had participated. All manner of romantics, fantasists, liberals, radicals and revolutionaries thronged the square and surrounding streets, parading their beliefs in an ideological carnival, vying with each other in their claims to be speaking on behalf of the people. Many had voted simply for the right to a municipal democracy, and for the fair and just

administration of the city. They had lost their patience with the emperor, were seething with resentment at the theft of public money, but had no interest in the overthrow of the capitalist state. A spokesman held forth: 'Friends, there is no need for arms. Capitalism can be reformed by peaceful means without us threatening private property or attacking the principles of the free market.'

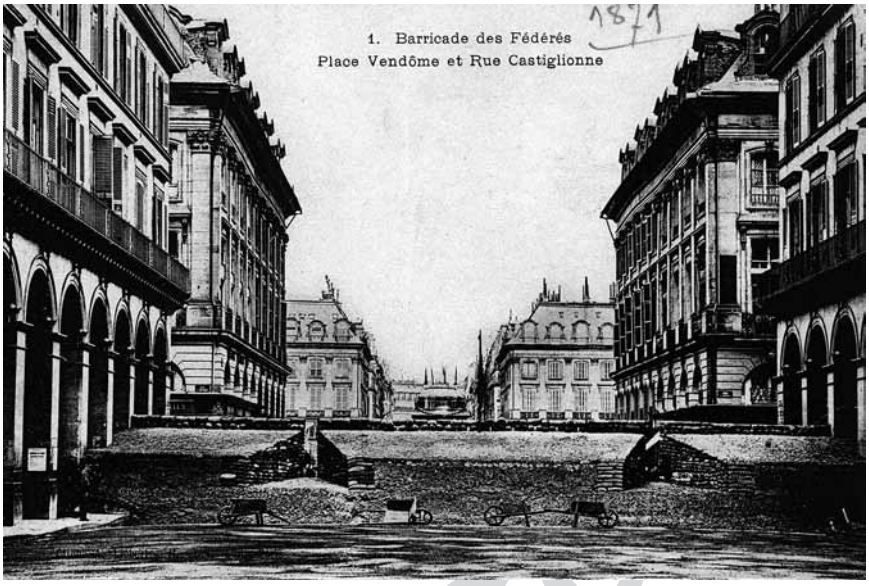
But the mood of the crowd had decisively shifted away from such timorous talk towards the songs of ardent revolutionary socialists, 29 of whom had just been elected to the new municipal government and who promised a quite different political future. Re-emerging from the shadows and political catacombs of two decades of repression, they were determined to rekindle the memories and programmes of 1848 and 1789. Ridiculing the idea that the political and economic system, which they held to be morally corrupt, could be reformed, they dreamt instead of the 'levelling of wealth', and of a 'communism of land, industry and commerce', in which at long last an individual would have 'the right to the produce of his or her labour'.[29] Armed with glue and hastily printed posters, they covered the city with manifestos that demanded in a prefiguration of future plans for the socialisation of property, the establishment of a Republic that would 'guarantee political liberty through social equality – by handing over to the workers the tools of their production'.[30]

Kropotkin had argued that the soul of the 1789 Revolution was to be found in the Communes that abolished feudal dues and appropriated what had formerly been communal lands from the lords.[31] Now, after a century maturing in the political imagination, this spirit of collective self-organisation had been reborn in the occupation of the city and in a succession of famous decrees announced over the next four weeks that included: the formal separation of Church and State, the suspension of rent payments, the requisitioning of empty houses, the closure of pawnshops and the handover of abandoned factories to workers' cooperatives.[32]

ACT 4

11 April. An invading army surrounds Paris. The Commune tries to protect itself by building barricades. Its streets, parks and construction sites are pillaged for anything that can be used as building material. Women take to the streets in their thousands to defend their new found civil liberties. Patriarchs choke with fury and are met with abuse.

The appearance of barricades announces that an urban revolution has begun (but is also under threat). Thousands were built in the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, in spectacular examples of collective urban construction that consumed millions of paving stones.[33] Some of them, inspired by medieval fortifications, 'towered like mountains' and stretched 'to the level of the rooftops.'[34] In the Rue St Jacques alone, a steeplechase of 38 barricades was built along its length to defend the area around the Panthéon where, in 1848, students and workers had sparked the revolution. It was an epic building enterprise, but despite their number and structural ingenuity, they were to prove no match for Cavaignac's troops, who took them one by one



3.4 Barricade des Fédérés

as revolutionaries retreated to the balconies of the dome. From there, flitting amongst the columns, they fired their last bullets as a fatal fusillade of cannon fire ripped through the door of the former church and blew off the head of the statue of immortality. As Engels was to point out in the aftermath of 1848, barricades had been shown to be obsolete in the face of modern weaponry.[35]

However, completely undeterred by such history lessons, barricades sprang up again in 1871, first in Belleville, the Rue de Charonne and the Fauborg du Temple, and then all over the East and the Left Bank. Once more the city was transformed into a real time construction site, in which all manner of experimental structures appeared. Their proliferation was helped by the fact that construction workers were the biggest occupational group amongst the Communards, or at least, in the list of those arrested and deported.[36] Some were little more than hastily-built barriers piled up out of stolen building materials and whatever objets trouvés the city could offer: carts, carriages, fences and street furniture. But others, like the Barricade de Fédérés in the Rue de Castiglionne, were elegant engineering works, meticulously detailed and as picturesque as the Beaux Artes terraces that they bridged.

It was the twenty-first time since 1789 that the streets of the city had been barricaded. If inanimate objects could speak or a forensic archaeologist could diagnose chips and cracks, many of the cobblestones could tell of how they had been repeatedly used as missiles or construction materials. But why such madness if they were of little military use? Because the barricades were like magic charms, moral fortifications, a highly-charged and symbolic declaration that 'the city is ours'. They might not stop bullets and cannonballs but that mattered little to those that waited behind them, ready and intoxicated by a 'crazed ecstasy of senseless expectations'.[37]

And it wasn't just men that waited either. So often marginalised from the political history of such events, women were at the forefront of the Commune. They mobilised the people, organised neighbourhood meetings and

demonstrations and were some of the most enthusiastic barricade builders.[38] In the midst of them was the spiritual godmother of Emma Goldman and Alexandra Kollontai, the anarchist poet Louise Michel, nicknamed the Red Virgin. Touring the barricades she read Baudelaire to students, who sat enthralled by the legends of her fearlessness and revolutionary ardour and by her reputation as an advocate of free love.[39] Like a phantom, she was seen everywhere from Montmartre to Belleville. One moment she was chairing a meeting, the next she was seen waving a red flag, standing fearlessly on top of a barricade with gun in hand, firing on the Versailles troops.

There was little that the conservatives, monarchists and right-wing republicans hated more than revolutionary women. Delacroix's romanticised painting of a noble bare-breasted Liberté was bad enough. But the reality was far worse. Nothing could be more offensive than mothers, sisters, and daughters demanding equality between the sexes, sexual freedom and the right to divorce. For a century, 'creatures from the underworld', 'nameless harpies', atheists, communists, and 'middle-aged women who should no better', had offended God and the sanctity of the family. Their ranks had spawned the hideous *petroleuses* who, dressed in black with red bandanas, would bare their genitalia at the bourgeoisie and for ten francs throw a milk-can full of kerosene into a house. Equally terrifying was the sight of women demonstrating at the Hôtel de Ville over rising bread prices and soaring rent levels – women who were ready and willing to tear the city apart if their demands went unmet.

ACT 5

The end of April and early May. Everyday life in the city is transformed. Buildings are squatted and turned over to new uses. The volume of programmes and manifestos turn the cogs of the printing presses white-hot. Cardinals flee as the revolution mounts the pulpit.

For a while at least Paris was like a mythological city bursting with strange and unfamiliar phenomena, in which the profane had replaced the normal rules and conventions of civic order and behaviour.[40] Ordinary citizens forgot the causal promenade and immersed themselves in the tactics of urban rebellion. Shop-keepers, buildings workers and teachers became students in the art of barricading streets, and in occupying and changing the use of key buildings and government institutions. They altered place names, destroyed the symbols of repression and authority, and in place of the cherubs and chariots of imperial monuments, there emerged a 'terrifying' architecture of constructive negation. It was as if the city's inhabitants had willingly agreed to participate in an epic drama, a pageant of retributive justice that they somehow knew would be remembered for centuries. The optimism was contagious. After all, the city had been released from the suffocating stranglehold of imperial rhetoric. It had begun to breathe again. And yes, the people drank and sang, as is to be expected at the celebratory wake that follows the death of tyrants.

3.5 The destruction of the Vendôme Column

There was, then, far more at stake than simply the right to vote. A different sort of city fluttered in the imagination of urban revolutionaries, who could draw upon a tradition that included Fourier's Phalansterie, Godin's Palais Sociale and Tony Moilin's plan for a socialist Paris.[41] Artists such as Courbet joined in, and carried away with the emotion of the moment, painted a portrait of a Paris liberated from all exploitation where everyone would be 'engaged in unfettered genius', remaking the city into the international capital of Europe. No longer governed by the 'pretensions of monsters', Paris would become a creative idyll that offered 'arts, industry, trade, and transactions of all kinds' to refugees from repressive regimes.[42]

Political bleach and a broom had swept the city clean of the rich and powerful, leaving barely a trace of 'the meretricious Paris of the Second Empire'. It was no longer the rendezvous of British landlords, American ex-slaveholders and Russian boyars.[43] The ruling class had fled, along with the thieves and murderers. Paris had begun to police itself. Nocturnal burglaries and robbery had virtually ceased, and for the first time since February 1848, the streets were safe. Gendarmes were nowhere to be seen inside the barricades.

A pressure valve had blown; this much we know. Newspaper stands overflowed with new titles such as the *Vengeur* and *La Commune*. The *Cri de Peuple* alone had a circulation of 100,000. Pamphleteers, political artists and caricaturists were hard at work and the kiosks displayed cartoons ridiculing and satirising the opponents of the Commune. The Corps Legislatif was cleared of politicians and transformed into a sandbag factory. The red flag flew from the glass dome of the Bourse.[44] Theatres staged benefit concerts for the wounded. The Opera performed revolutionary hymns. Where once Bonaparte had been entertained in the Salle de Marechaux, now Mademoiselle Agar recited Victor Hugo's poetic condemnations of imperial grandeur. Great works of music drove away the 'musical obscenities of Empire'. The Museum de Louvre was opened to the public, and the Place de Bastille hosted a bizarre gingerbread fair.[45]

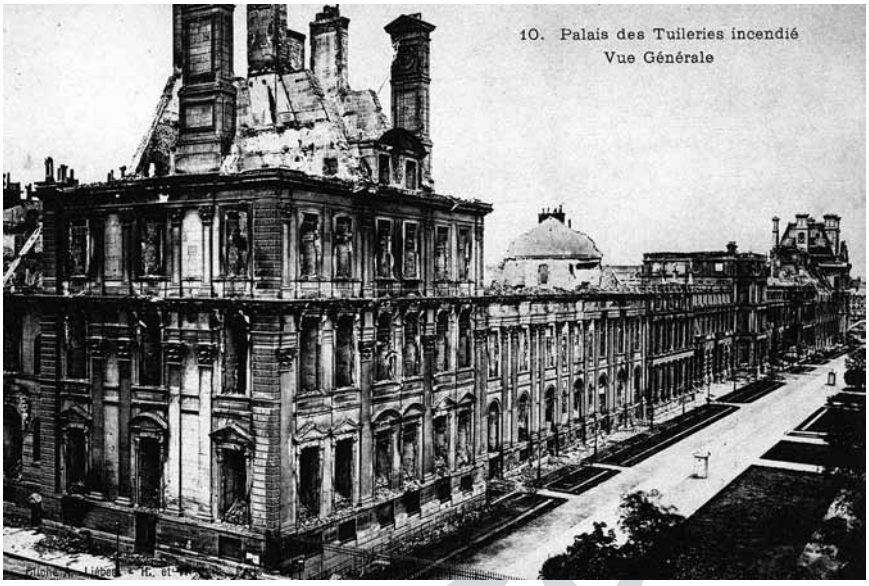
As in previous revolutions, clubs became the home of political life and were organised in halls, rooms and appropriated buildings across the city. Windows rattled as the streets and squares resounded with the noise of passionate debate on women's rights, the role of trade unions and the idea of producer and consumer cooperatives.[46] Dance halls, that only a few weeks earlier had heaved to the sound of bands and orchestras, were transformed into revolutionary debating chambers. It was reported that in the Montmatre Club, one could hardly see for the clouds of blue smoke or hear for the tumult of voices. An extraordinary cross-section of Parisian society, national guards, suburban philosophers, women of the people, prostitutes, girls in red hoods, 'all of them red from the insides of their hats to the uppers of their shoes',[47] had gathered underneath the chandeliers to argue and dance to a new way of life. For that is what the Commune promised – a quotidian revolution in which nothing was sacred and just as in 1789, when churches and chapels were turned into Temples of Reason, so once again they were secularised, as God was pronounced dead.

Like their revolutionary ancestors, many Communards saw little distinction between the crucifix and the time clock of the bourgeoisie and attacked both with equal force. The pulpits, draped in scarlet and bathed in blood-red candlelight, were transformed into revolutionary stage sets. In place of humble submission, quite different ideas of moral authority echoed down the aisles. Psalms and promises of salvation were replaced by demands for freedom from exploitation. The altars shook with threats to despotic employers, who considered workers as 'production machines' and who failed to pay them the full value of their labour.[48] The anti-clerical and revolutionary sentiment was contagious. In the St Severin Church, the club chairman announced his intention to once and for all 'crush the bourgeoisie' and 'take over the Bank of France'.[49] At a meeting in the Trinité, a speaker rose from the pews and promised the audience of women that the factories, all means of production and profits, would be fully socialised, but that to achieve such goals they must make 'an immediate and total break with the insane superstitions that are preached in this building'.[50] Meanwhile, from the St Ambroise Church of the XI arrondissement, the Club Prolétaire distributed its own revolutionary newspaper in which they demanded the abolition of all special privileges and religious instruction, and the introduction of workers' control and universal primary school education.[51]

ACT 6

> *16 May. The antithesis of architecture. In time-honoured fashion insurgents attack the symbols of oppression. With the applause of the Communards ringing in his stone ears, Napoleon Bonaparte is toppled from his perch. The city burns. Versailles blames vandals. Communards blame it on the cannon fire of Versailles as they flee in an effort to escape the execution squads.*

Throughout the short-lived Commune, apoplexy, indignation and panic had filled the corridors of Versailles. Outraged clerics and factory owners fearing damnation declaimed the Communards with all their might: 'They planted crops in our



3.6 The burnt-out remains of the Tuileries

gardens, burnt the royal throne, and made a bridge out of the ruins of our prison. They decapitated the statues of apostles, and ridiculed us. Now they have shot our generals and plan to demolish not only the Nôtre Dame but also the Chapel of Atonement built to make amends for their execution of Louis XVI. Is there no end to their ungodliness?'

On 16 May, as the fate of the Commune hung in the balance, the Parisian workers, in one of their last acts of defiance, decided to carry out the decree of 12 April and demolish the Vendôme Column, an event that was to become as famous in urban history as the storming of the Bastille. Forged out of the cannons of defeated armies and etched with images of the debris of war, angels, eagles, and Roman standards, Napoleon's column was considered an affront to the civilised world and democracy.[52] An estimated 15,000 onlookers thronged the square, hung out of windows and sat on rooftops. The column was sawn above the pedestal, a pulley was attached and with a drawn-out moan, it was dragged to the ground. The bands played the *Marseillaise*, as the 'head of Bonaparte rolled on the ground, and his parricidal arm lay detached from the trunk.' Immediately after, a red flag was hoisted on the 'purified pedestal'.[53] If the council hadn't prevented the massive crowd from picking up pieces of the column as mementoes, the Versaillese would have been unable to put Napoleon back together again, and the pedestal would have remained empty as a permanent reminder of the folly of war and empire.[54]

Toppling the Vendôme was an outrage. But what happened next was worse. Had Versailles not attacked the Commune with such ferocity, then Paris might well have escaped unscathed. The Communards were in retreat. There would be no time to build a new city, but just enough to strike at the heart of the body politic and French history by torching the Town Hall and the Royal Palace. With 12 remaining Communards, Jean Louis Pindy, an anarchist carpenter who would later represent the Paris construction workers at the Second International, led the defence of the

last barricade in front of the Tuileries. Facing certain defeat, he instructed the others to set fire to the palace. As the flames ripped through the salons and galleries, he proclaimed: 'Let the imperial palace, this shame of France, perish in flames, and never rise again from the ashes.'[55] He was successful. The Tuileries, ruined beyond repair, was never rebuilt and the Louvre courtyard lost its western façade.

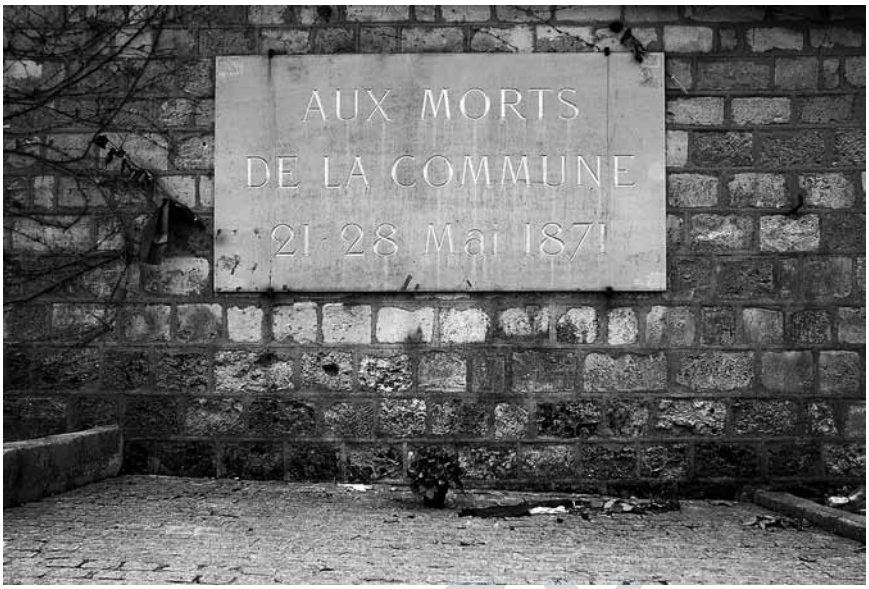
Its charred husk was still there when Kropotkin visited the city in 1878. Overwhelmed by the sight, as if it presaged the dawn of a newly-liberated Europe, he talked of how its broken pediments, crumbling stone and empty windows, already overgrown with 'new vegetation, were the most beautiful monument in Paris'. 'How fine it was', he said, 'that in at least one city of Europe the dwelling place of emperors should be a scenic ruin.'[56] These were the last days of the Commune. Flames licked the Hôtel de Ville, and quickly consumed the Rue de Rivoli, the Palais Royale and the left bank all the way up to the Palais de Justice and Prefecture de Police. Before long, the whole of central Paris was burning in an unexpected son et lumière, in which 'the caprices of the fire displayed a blazing architecture of arches, cupolas, and spectral edifices'.[57]

Although much of the firestorm was the result of the cannon fire of Versailles, the Communards were inevitably blamed for the desecration of Paris – an act that confirmed that these godless rebels were no better than a horde of barbarians, who should be dealt with accordingly. Retribution was swift and violent, proving Marx's contention that the value placed on human death lies in inverse proportion to the value placed on the destruction of property. For that was certainly the case in the reaction to the burning of Paris that accompanied the fall of the Commune, when '(t)he bourgeoisie of the whole world, which looks complacently upon the wholesale massacre after the battle', was 'convulsed by horror at the desecration of brick and mortar'.[58]

ACT 7

The city of Hope gives way to the city of vengeance. Unspeakable savagery takes place. The rest of Europe looks on in shock at the unjustifiable blood lust of the bourgeoisie.

The meanings that we attach to buildings, built out of some warped notion of retributive justice or to satisfy the megalomaniac conceit of rulers, can soften and alter over time. Few of us worry that the mediaeval cathedrals and monuments of the ancient world required armies of conscripted labourers and the forcible taxation of civilians. There are, however, some buildings that retain all of their horror. Franco's tomb at El Valle de Los Caídos is one. And such is the case with the Sacré Coeur, whose only hope of redemption is when it is turned into a revolutionary theatre or a climbing centre. From the top of the Eiffel Tower it resembles the upturned teats and udder of an un-milked cow. It was famously located and built to be unavoidable. In the sun, its white stone shimmers like a daylight spectre. At night, floodlights illuminate its facades and transform it into a pale cadaver that casts a sickly glow across Montmartre. Commissioned in 1873,



3.7 Mur des Fédérés, cimetière Père Lachaise

for the faithful it signifies the victorious restoration of the Church after the defeat of the blasphemous Commune – architectural penitence for a century of defiant anti-clerical sentiment in which holy places had been defamed. This is also why it is despised. As construction workers wound their way up the hill to lay the foundation stones they ran a gauntlet of taunts from surviving insurgents, who sang 'Long live the devil' and the 'The good lord in the shit'.[59] Some say that the Sacré Coeur 'hides its secrets in sepulchral silence'.[60] But for those sympathetic to the aspirations of the Commune, it remains a loud and permanent reminder of the slaughter conducted by General MacMahon. The descendent of an Irish doctor from Limerick, the Duc de Magenta, a favourite of Napoleon III, orchestrated the murder of 30,000 Communards in response to the loss of 700 Versailles troops. The rapidity, brutality and bloodthirsty madness of Versailles's revenge traumatized a nation. However, not content with the reclamation of the living city, the bourgeoisie had one last act to perform – the occupation of the city of the dead. In tune with their imperial ambitions, figures like Thiers and Haussmann are interred in a hybrid architecture of classical antiquity and Egypt. Not surprisingly, they are located off the main avenue in the centre of the cemetery Père Lachaise. In marked contrast to the pompous memorial of the rich and powerful is the Mur des Fédérés in the far eastern corner. This was the last stand of the Commune and after a ferocious gun battle amongst the gravestones, 147 Communards were executed and buried in a communal pit at the foot of the wall.

EPILOGUE

…Three ghosts stand looking at the carved inscription, each proffering an answer to the question: so what was the Commune? The first speaks:

> *'It was the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour, and had it survived, it would have undoubtedly abolished the capital and the class which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few.'*[61]

The second demurs:

> *'But to the best of my knowledge my friend, it neither declared itself socialist, nor did it expropriate capital. It didn't even take stock of the general resources of the city, let alone break with the tradition of the state. It could be nothing but a first attempt.'*[62]

The third tries to provide a conclusion:

> *'It was as far as I am concerned the only realisation of a revolutionary urbanism to date, that attacked on the spot the petrified signs of the dominant organisation of life, and understood social space in political terms, refusing to accept the innocence of any monument…'*[63]

NOTES

1 Such as Marx, Lenin, Lefebvre, Debord, Castells, and Harvey, to name but a mere handful.

2 Along with the history of the Russian Revolution and Spanish Civil War.

3 Engels quips, 'Gentleman; do you want to know what the dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat'. Frederick Engels, 'Introduction' in Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970), pp. 17–18.

4 "To many then and now the Commune was not a revolution at all, but an anarchist parody of what had begun as an old-fashioned bourgeois rejection of ossified authority.' G. Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 125. It was a 'spontaneous, patriotic and democratic outburst' at the capitulation of Versailles to the Prussians. See Eugene E. Schulkind, *The Paris Commune of 1871* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), No. 78, p. 7. It was Castells who described it as the most 'repressed rent strike in history'. M. Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), p. 23.

5 Guy Debord, Attila Kotanyi and Raoul Vaneigem, 'Theses on the Paris Commune' in *The Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. by K. Knabb (California: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), p. 316.

6 Eric Hazan, *The Invention of Paris* (London:Verso, 2011), p. 289.

7 Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), p. 57.

8 David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 76 ff.

9 Hazan, *The Invention of Paris*, p. 232.

10 The urban historian Peter Hall tries to give what he considers a balanced view of Haussmann's works, emphasising in particular the necessary infrastructural

improvements. P. Hall, *Cities in Civilizsation: Culture, Innovation and Urban Order* (London: Phoenix, 1999), pp. 708 ff.

11 Jules Simon comments in *Le Gaulois* in 1882: 'There were cries that he would bring on the plague; he tolerated such outcries and gave us instead – through his well considered architectural breakthroughs – air, health, and life.' In Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 127.

12 In the words of Marcel Poëte in 1925. Quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 121. On this Hazan writes: 'By an amalgam that is characteristic of the spirit of our time, the (useful) re-appreciation of nineteenth-century architecture has led to a positive revaluation of Haussmann, to the point of a ridiculous minimisation of his anti-insurrectionary concerns, just as it is good form to present Napoleon III as a philanthropic Saint-Simonian.' Hazan, *Invention*, p. 106. It was Ledoux who designed the 'ideal' Panoptican salt works city of Chaux, whilst Boullée was the author of the monumental cenotaph for Isaac Newton and the Biblioteque Nationale.

13 Hall, *Cities*, p. 718.

14 Blanqui issued an extraordinary denunciation of Haussmann's plan, a lengthy extract of which is quoted in Benjamin, *Arcades*, p. 144 ff.

15 In Benjamin, ibid., p. 122.

16 Harvey, *Paris,* p. 132. Harvey has written extensively on the history of nineteenth-century Paris. In particular, *Paris: Capital of Modernity*, which offers an extensive political economy of the urban reconstruction of the city. See also Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanisation,* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 70–90, for a shorter excellent overview.

17 As Harvey says, Haussmann put together, 'a well organised monopolistic form of competition with him at the top of the hierarchy. It was, he argued, "best to leave to speculation stimulated by competition the task of recognising the people's real needs and satisfying them." To this end he forged an alliance between the city and a coterie of financial and real-estate interests (builders, developers, architects, etc.) assembled under the umbrella power of "associated" or "finance" capital.' Harvey, *Paris*, pp. 134.

18 The financiers and bankers were the bloodline ancestors of the financial moguls of the late twentieth century, who were similarly adept at setting up a baroque financial architecture heavily laden with bizarre acronyms and clandestine details.

19 Powerful commercial landlords who could buy and sell whole urban blocks and for whom property was no more than a financial asset quickly dominated the real-estate market. With regards to the general shift in the organisation of the construction industry and the commodity form, Harvey comments; 'a form of fictitious capital whose exchange value, integrated into the general circulation of capital, entirely dominated use-value.' Harvey, *Paris*, pp. 125–7.

20 If there were any impediments to planned demolitions, there were plenty of barristers who could provide the necessary documents for the expropriation of property and who could fabricate leases on antedated sheets of paper bearing official stamps. Benjamin, *Arcades,* p. 123.

21 Quoted in Hall, *Cities*, p. 738.

22 Benjamin, *Arcades*, p. 132.

23 Benjamin, ibid., p. 135.

24 Hall, *Cities*, p. 737.

25 The 'ideological' situation was not unlike the way in which neo-liberal ideology encouraged individuals to believe that boom time would last forever. But the mid 1860s, the warning signs were already there as Haussmann's efforts to camouflage the growing state debt began to fail. He had in effect mortgaged the future, in a manner similar to the way in which bankers and speculators bankrupted nations in the early twenty-first century.

26 For Marx there could be only one verdict on the rule of the Baron – it was a series of 'colossal robberies committed upon the city of Paris by the great financial companies and contractors.' Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France,* pp. 78–9.

27 Marx, *Civil War*, p. 78.

28 Which is how the Situationists described it.

29 Of all the burning questions of the revolution of 1789 was that of land, on which the radical Dolivier in his 'Essai sur la justice primitive' declared 'two immutable principles: the first, that the land belongs to all in general and to no one in particular; and the second, that each has the exclusive right to the produce of his labour.' Adding 'the land…taken as a whole, must be considered as the great common-land of nature'; the common property of all: 'each individual must have the right of sharing in the great common land (au grand communal). One generation has no right to make laws for the next, or to dispose of its sovereign rights.' Peter Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution 1789–1793* (London: Heinemann, 1909), p. 494. Sections of the Communes preached like the Diggers in England for the 'levelling of wealth' and vociferously denounced property owners, merchants and monopolists in general.' In addition, they advocated fixed prices for grain and food – not just equality before the law but equality in fact (égalité de fait) and wage equalisation between labourers and deputies.' Kropotkin, ibid., *The Great French Revolution*, pp. 354–7, and p. 488.

30 Schulkind, *The Paris Commune of 1871*, p. 88. One of the proclamations fly-posted around the city was issued by the Democratic and Socialist Republican Club of the 13th arrondissement. Article 3: 'The purpose of the club…is to study all political and social problems which relate to the liberation of labour, the emancipation of workers; to pursue their solution by revolutionary means.' Schulkind, ibid., p. 77. It was a sentiment shared by the newspaper *La Lutte* that declared, 'We believe that workers have the right today to take possession of the tools of production just as in 1789, the peasant took possession of the land.' Schulkind, ibid., p. 39.

31 '…The soul of the revolution was therefore in the Communes, and without these centres scattered all over the land, the revolution would never have had the power to overthrow the old regime…' Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, pp. 180–84.

32 In addition, it placed a moratorium on the payment of commercial bills, limited the salaries of civil servants, decreed that labour should be allowed to participate in the setting of working conditions, forbad employers from deducting penalties from wages, and decreed that bakery workers no longer had to work nights.

33 Benjamin, *Arcades*, p. 139.

34 Michael Bakunin, 'The Revolution of February 1848, as seen by Bakunin', in D. Guérin, *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism*, Book 1 (Edinburgh: AK PRess, 1998), p. 108.

35 'Rebellion in the old style, street fighting with barricades, which decided the issue everywhere up to 1848, was to a considerable extent obsolete.' Frederick Engels, 'Introduction' in *Class Struggles in France*, p. 18.

36 Manuel Castells, *Grassroots*, p. 16.

37 Bakunin, *The Revolution*, p. 109. In 1991, just after the attempted coup, I was visiting Moscow and went down to see the barricades around the Beliye Dom. Heroic ensembles of urban debris, they could have been mistaken for works of street art. The students who maintained their camp and were holding a vigil in defence of democracy asked for them to be left as a memorial. Overnight they vanished, no match for a bulldozer, let alone a tank.

38 Castells, *Grassroots*, p. 19. Women were in the vanguard of the revolutions of 1789, 1848, 1917 and 1936 and it was women who led the rent strikes in Glasgow, 1914 and New York, 1931.

39 See for instance A. Hussey, *Paris: The Secret History* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 289, Hazan, *The Invention of Paris*, p. 236, and Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), pp. 396–409.

40 For the Situationists, it 'was the biggest festival of the nineteenth century', Debord et al., *The Situationist International*, p. 314. Writing in 1947, Henri Lefebvre fell out with orthodox communists by emphasising this aspect of the goals of any revolution. 'It is ludicrous to define socialism solely by the development of the productive forces. Economic statistics cannot answer the question: what is socialism? Men do not fight and die for tons of steel, or for tanks or atomic bombs. They aspire to be happy, not to produce…To put it another way, socialism (the new society, the new life) can only be defined concretely on the level of everyday life, as a system of changes in what can be called lived experience.' H. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 48–9.

41 See for instance Charles Fourier, 'New Material Conditions: The Establishment of a Trial Phalanx', reprinted in J. Beecher, and R. Bienvenu (trans. and ed.), *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love and Passionate Attraction* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), and T. Moilin, *Paris en l'An 2000* (Paris: Libraire de Renaissance, 1869). Ahead of his time, Moilin advocated the complete socialisation and state ownership of the housing stock.

42 Quoted in Louise Michel, *La Commune* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1978) (1898), p. 222.

43 His address to the General Council of the International Working Men's Association in London, K. Marx, *The Civil War in France,* p. 423.

44 It is suggested by Marx and others that this single act – the seizure of the state treasury and all of its bullion – would have prevented the slaughter.

45 Oliver Lissagaray, *History of the Paris Commune of 1871*, pp. 239–45.

46 Harvey, *Paris*, p. 214.

47 Taken from a journalist's observations of the activities of one of the clubs quoted in R. Baldrick, *The Siege of Paris*, (London: History Book Club, 1964), p. 61.

48 Schulkind, *The Paris Commune of 1871,* pp. 126–9. In the church of St Nicholas des Champs, the only illumination came from the reading desk that faced the pulpit and was hung with red, as the people chanted the *Marseillaise,* launched into 'fantastic declamations', discussed the events of the day, censured the members of the Council, and voted on resolutions to be presented at the Hôtel de Ville the next day. Lissagaray, *History of the Paris Commune of 1871*, p. 244.

49 Schulkind, *The Paris Commune of 1871*, p. 128.

50 'The factories in which you are crowded together will belong to you; the tools placed in your hand will belong to you; the profit that results from your labour, your care, and the loss of your health, will be shared by you.' Schulkind, ibid., p. 129. Another speaker

proposes to forcibly enter the homes of the rich to seize bed linen for the wounded workers and soldiers defending the Commune.

51 The aims of the Prolétaire were the '…Abolition of all privileges and special prerogatives and their replacement by the law of ability, in order that the worker may truly enjoy the fruits of his labour.' Not only that, but the club called for the 'complete abolition of all religious instruction', and the introduction of 'universal free primary school education'.

52 'The Paris Commune, considering that the imperial column in the Place Vendôme is a monument to barbarism, a symbol of brute force and false glory, an affirmation of militarism, a denial of international law, a permanent insult directed at the conquered by their conquerors, a perpetual attack upon one of the three great principles of the French Republic, decrees the column in the Place de Vendôme shall be demolished.' 'Decree of the Commune to Demolish the Column in the Place de Vendôme, April 12th 1871' in Schulkind, *The Paris Commune of 1871*, p. 159.

53 Lissagaray, *History of the Paris Commune of 1871,* p. 236.

54 See introduction by Engels, *Civil War in France,* p. 394. It was not the first time in history that the monuments of tyrants had been toppled and certainly not the last. Like the removal of the tsar from his pedestal in Sergei Eisenstein's film *October*, it has become an iconic moment in the history of urban revolution.

55 Kropotkin, 'Western Europe', in *Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 226.

56 'The window holes affording glimpses of the sky in a framework of greenery were highly artistic. As the young plant life increasingly took possession of the cracked walls, they would have become, more and more artistically resplendent.' Kropotkin, 'Western Europe', pp. 226–7.

57 Lissagaray, *History of the Paris Commune of 1871*, p. 281.

58 'The working men's Paris, in the act of its heroic self-holocaust, involved in its flames, buildings and monuments. While tearing to pieces the living body of the proletariat, its rulers must no longer expect to return triumphantly into the intact architecture of their abodes. The government of Versailles cries, "Incendiarism!" and whispers this cue to all its agents, down to the remotest hamlet, to hunt up its enemies everywhere as the suspect of professional incendiarism. The bourgeoisie of the whole world, which looks complacently upon the wholesale massacre after the battle, is convulsed by horror at the desecration of brick and mortar.' Marx, *Civil War in France*, p. 92.

59 Hussey, *Paris: The Secret History,* p. 292.

60 Harvey, *Consciousness*, p. 249.

61 Marx, ibid., pp. 72–3.

62 Notes from Kropotkin, 'The Commune of Paris', in Schulkind, *Paris Commune*, p. 225. See also M. Bookchin, *The Third Revolution – Popular Movements in the Revolutionary Era* (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 225–35.

63 G. Debord, R. Kotanyi and R. Vangeim, 'Theses on the Paris Commune' in *Situationist International Anthology*, pp. 314–16.