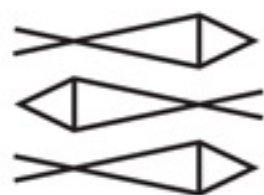
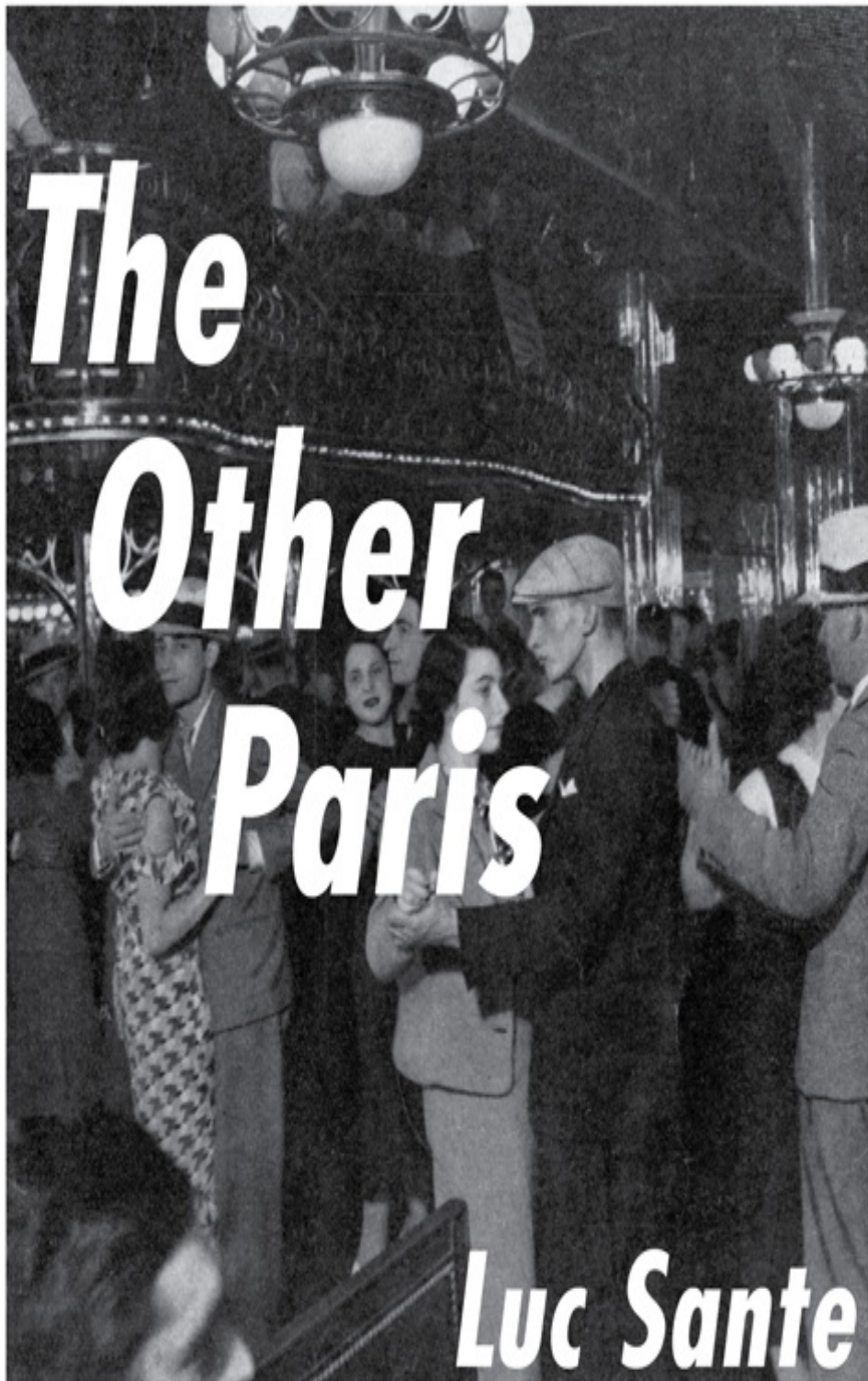


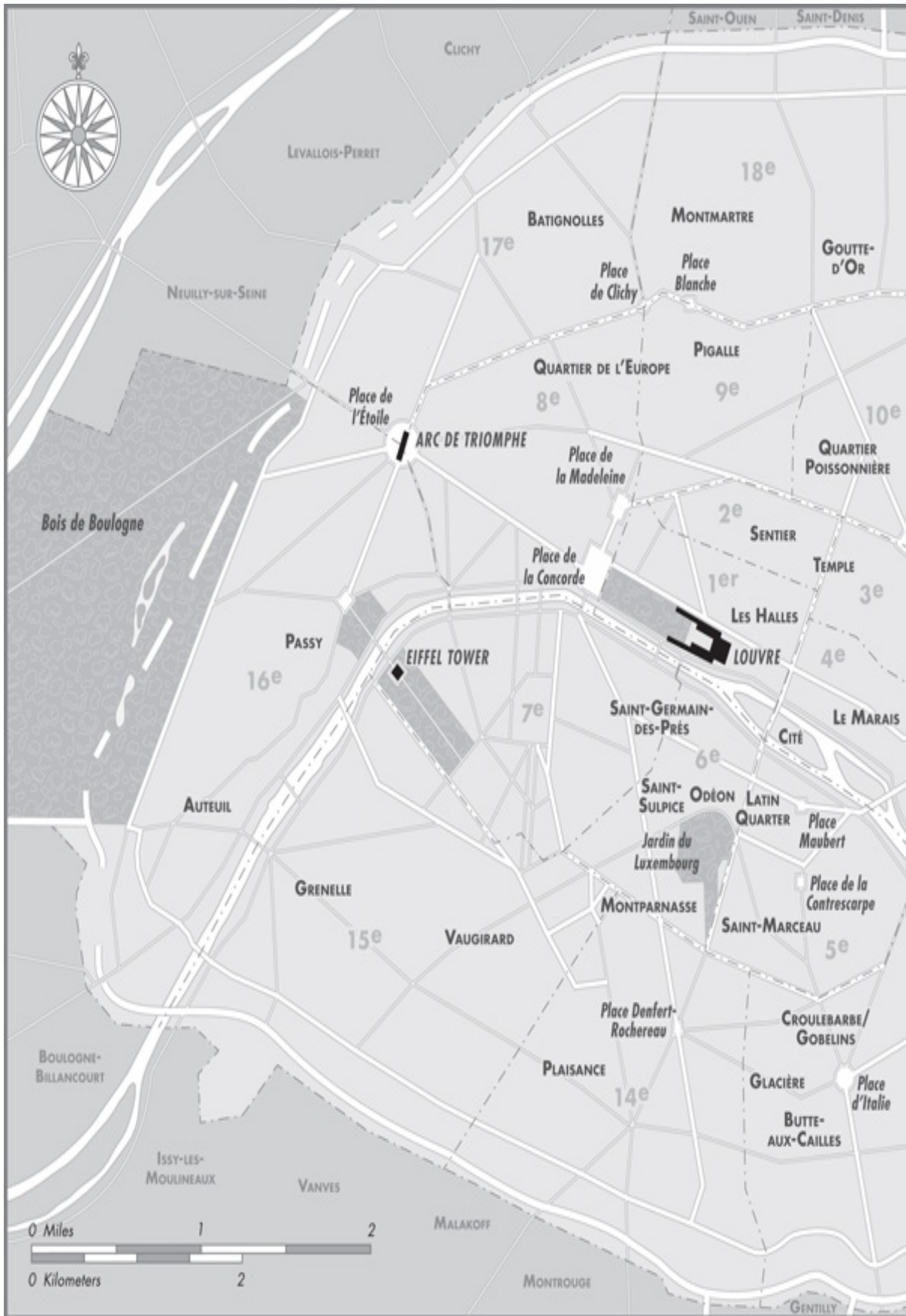
THE OTHER PARIS

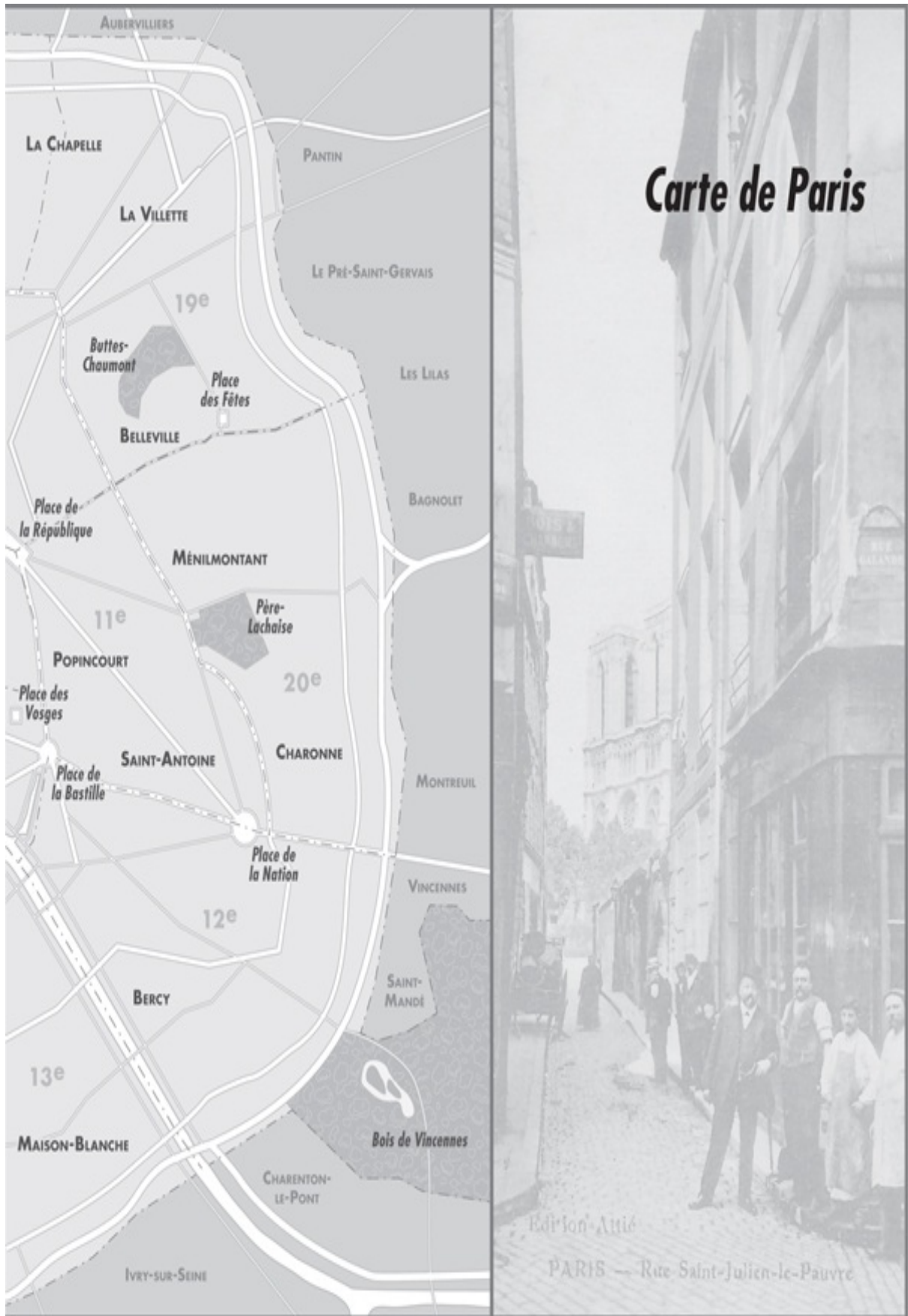
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2

Ghosts

Paris is sufficiently compact that you can cross it with ease, in a few hours, and it has no grid, forestalling monotony. It virtually demands that you walk its length and breadth; once you get started it's hard to stop. As you stride along you are not merely a pedestrian in a city—you are a reader negotiating a vast text spanning centuries and the traces of a billion hands, and like a narrative it pulls you along, continually luring you with the mystery of the next corner.

Paris contains some 3,195 streets, 330 *passages* (a term that encompasses both arcades and alleys), 314 avenues, 293 *impasses*, 189 villas (an enclosed mansion, or a grouping of houses not unlike a mews), 142 *cités* (a contained development, sometimes carefully designed and sometimes a slum), 139 squares, 108 boulevards, 64 courts, 52 quays, 30 bridges, 27 *ports*, 22 *galeries* (arcades), 13 *allées*, 7 *hameaux* (literally “hamlets”), 7 lanes, 7 paths, 5 ways, 5 peristyles, 5 roundabouts, 3 courses, three *sentés*

(another variation on “path” or “way”), 2 *chaussées* (an ancient term more or less cognate with “highway”), 2 *couloirs* (literally “hallways”), 1 parvis (an open space in front of a church, in this case Notre-Dame), 1 *chemin de ronde* (a raised walkway behind the battlement of a castle), and 11 small, undefined passageways. At least those were the figures in 1957; since then quite a number of the smaller entities have been obliterated by urban renewal, while others have been confectioned by those or other means. A count made in 1992 gives the total number of Parisian thoroughfares as 5,414, which is 133 more than there were twenty years earlier and nearly 1,700 more than in 1865, when the city’s present limits were fixed.



The frontispiece, by Célestin Nanteuil, for *Les rues de Paris* (G. Kugelmann, 1844)



Boulevard de Ménilmontant, circa 1910

Sometimes the histories of streets are inscribed in their names: Rue des Petites-Écuries because it once contained small stables, Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire (Daughters of Calvary) after a religious order that once was cloistered there, Rue du Télégraphe marking the emplacement during the revolution of a long-distance communication device that functioned through relays of poles with semaphore extensions. Sometimes streets named by long-ago committees take on a certain swagger from their imposed labels: the once-lively, nowadays flavorless Rue de Pâli-Kao given a touch of the exotic (the name is that of a battle in the Second Opium War, in 1860), the stark and drab (and once extraordinarily bleak, owing to the presence of enormous gas tanks) Rue de l'Évangile endowed with the gravity of the Gospels, the already ancient Rue Maître-Albert made to seem even more archaic in the nineteenth century by being renamed after the medieval alchemist Albertus Magnus, who once lived nearby.



Rue Cloche-Perce. Photograph by Suzanne Beaumé, circa 1900

Among the oldest thoroughfares in Paris are the streets of the Grande and Petite Truanderie, which is to say the Big and Little Vagrancy Streets. There is the Street of Those Who Are Fasting (Rue des Jeûneurs), the Street of the Two Balls, the Street of the Three Crowns, the Street of the Four Winds, the Street of the Five Diamonds, the Street of the White Coats, the Street of the Pewter Dish, the Street of the Broken Loaf—one of a whole complex of streets around Saint-Merri church (near the Beaubourg center nowadays) that are named after various aspects of the distribution of bread to the poor. Many street names were cleaned up in the early nineteenth century: Rue Tire-Boudin (literally “pull sausage” but really meaning “yank penis”) became Rue Marie-Stuart; Rue Trace-Putain (the “Whore’s Track”) became Trousse-Nonnain (Truss a Nun), then Transnonain, which doesn’t really mean

anything, and then became Rue Beaubourg. Many more streets disappeared altogether, then or a few decades later, during Haussmann's mop-up: Shitty, Shitter, Shitlet, Big Ass, Small Ass, Scratch Ass, Cunt Hair. Some that were less earthy and more poetic also disappeared: Street of Bad Words, Street of Lost Time, Alley of Sighs, Impasse of the Three Faces. The Street Paved with Chitterling Sausages (Rue Pavée-d'Andouilles) became Rue Séguier; the Street of the Headless Woman became Rue le Regrattier.



Sometimes the streets come assorted in themes, such as the Quartier de l'Europe, which encircles the Saint-Lazare train station: Rues de Bucarest, Moscou, Édimbourg, Madrid, Rome, Athènes, and so on. The exterior boulevards are called *les boulevards des maréchaux* because they were all named after field marshals in Napoléon's army: Brune, Masséna, Poniatowski, Sérurier, Ney, Murat, Macdonald, etc. You'll note that the American names—Avenue du Président-Wilson, Avenue du Président-Kennedy, Avenue de New-York, Rue Washington—are clustered in the high-hat Sixteenth Arrondissement or the adjacent western edge of the Eighth. Names associated with the labor movement or left-wing motifs, on the other hand, tend to be restricted to the northeast of the city: Avenue Jean-Jaurès, for example, after the great Socialist leader assassinated in 1914 (and there is not a sizeable city or industrial suburb in France that lacks a thoroughfare named after him) or Place Léon-Blum, after the leader of the Popular Front in the 1930s, or Place de Stalingrad (officially renamed Place de la Bataille de Stalingrad in 1993, lest there be any confusion), or indeed Rue Marx-Dormoy, although it was named not for Karl but for the Socialist politician René Marx Dormoy, assassinated in 1941, who was no relation.



Porte Jean-Jaurès, leading to Pantin, probably 1914

There is seldom a correspondence between a nominal theme and one of ambiance or architecture, and the disjunction can provide a sort of cognitive dissonance, frequently disappointing. If you expect a water tower on Rue du Château-d'Eau, for example, or think you might spot a knoll, let alone quails, on Rue de la Butte-aux-Cailles, you are more than a century too late. But the streets do develop their own thematic tendencies, not all of them imposed by architects or developers. Some of them have accrued through occupational necessity (all those large courtyards along the formerly artisan-intensive Rue Saint-Antoine) or topography (such as the tiered terraces that tumble down the hill in Ménilmontant, definitively spoiled by urban-renewal demolition and construction in the 1960s, but shown to advantage in Albert Lamorisse's lovely short film *The Red Balloon*, 1956), or sometimes they were founded in the mists and are perpetuated by custom, such as the eternally carnivalesque Rue de la Gaîté. You see the

way a theme will establish itself along a given street—for example, the Egyptian motif on Rue du Caire (the exception that proves the rule) or the country village ambiance of Rue de Mouzaïa or the august academic procession of Rue d’Ulm—and then be contradicted, sometimes radically, with the simple turn of a corner. The city is not just a palimpsest—it is a mass of intersecting and overlapping palimpsests. Even as it becomes socially more homogeneous, many of its streets and houses continue to bear witness to former circumstances. The tone of the Marais is still determined by medieval walls and Renaissance *hôtels particuliers*, and while today these are employed and intermittently decorated by the fashion industry and its ancillary commerce, if you look above the storefront level you can here and there make out traces of the centuries of misery that prevailed between the era of their construction and ours. You can admire the tenacious way the Canal Saint-Martin still assumes the existence of barge traffic, Rue de la Lune seems to have been designed for prostitution, or Rue Volta folds together about seven centuries, not necessarily including the present one.

Walter Benjamin wrote, “Couldn’t an exciting film be made from the map of Paris? From the compression of a centuries-long movement of streets, boulevards, arcades, and squares into the space of half an hour? And does the flâneur do anything different?” Paris invented the flâneur and continues to press all leisurely and attentive walkers into exercising that pursuit, which is

an active and engaged form of interaction with the city, one that sharpens concentration and enlarges imaginative empathy and overrides mere tourism. The true flâneur takes in construction sites and dumps, exchanges greetings with bums and truck drivers and the women washing their sidewalks in the morning, consumes coffees and *gros rouge* at as many bus stop cafés as terrace-bedecked boulevard establishments, studies trash and graffiti and sidewalk displays and gutters and rooftops, devotes as much attention to the arcades filled with dentists' offices or Indian restaurants as to the ones lined with antique shops, spends more time in Monoprix than at the Louvre.



Rue des Immeubles-Industriels, Walter Benjamin's favorite street, circa 1910



An illustration by José Belon for *Paris anecdote*, by Privat d'Anglemont, 1885 edition

The history of Paris, the active and engaged history of the streets, was written by flâneurs, and each conscious step you take follows their traces and continues their walk into a continuous walk across the centuries. The great text of the streets was given voice by those relentless walkers who were also writers: Louis-Sébastien Mercier and Nicolas-Edmé Restif de La Bretonne in the eighteenth century; Alexandre Privat d'Anglemont, Victor Fournel, Alfred Delvau, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and Victor Hugo in the nineteenth; in the twentieth, Georges Cain, André Warnod, Francis Carco, Léon-Paul Fargue, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Yonnet, Jean-Paul Clébert, Robert Giraud, Richard Cobb, Louis Chevalier, and the members of the Lettrist International, most notably Guy Debord and Ivan Chtcheglov; thus far at least Éric Hazan in the twenty-first.* This to name only the most significant and most committed—there have been hundreds of others. Of course there were also those who expressed themselves by different means.

These would include the artists Constantin Guys, Célestin Nanteuil, Honoré Daumier, Gavarni, Édouard Manet, Gustave Caillebotte, Edgar Degas, Camille and Lucien Pissarro, Jean-François Raffaëlli, Georges Seurat, Théophile Steinlen, Félix Vallotton, André Dignimont, and the photographers Charles Marville, Gabriel Loppé, Eugène Atget, Brassai, Germaine Krull, Eli Lotar, André Kertész, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau, Willy Ronis, and Ed van der Elsken, among others, including some of the seldom-credited press photographers of the past and the anonymous makers of the very local postcards that were produced in Paris before World War I. Even those whose habits are unknown to us can be considered part of the company by virtue of the fact that they were observers who caught things on the fly—they moved through the streets, collected and preserved their impressions, and left us with valuable information about time and place, in addition to beauty.



Nicolas-Edmé Restif de La Bretonne

Baudelaire most famously defined the flâneur: “The crowd is his domain, as air is that of a bird, as water is that of a fish. His passion and his profession is to *marry the crowd*. For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate observer, it is an immense pleasure to make a home in the multitude, in the flux, in the motion, in the fleeting and infinite.” Richard Cobb, the British historian of

France, specified further that the task requires going “into the streets, into the crowded restaurant, to the central criminal courts, to the *correctionnelles*..., to the market, to the café beside the Canal Saint-Martin..., to the jumble of marshalling yards beyond the Batignolles, to the back-yards of the semi-derelict workshops of the rue Saint-Charles, to the river ports of Bercy and Charenton...” It is imperative “to dawdle, to stop, to see, to notice small changes and to have one’s attention caught by a drawn blind, by a closed shutter, by a shop-door without its handle, by the small square of a white notice, *Fermé pour cause de décès* [closed on account of death], or *fermé jusqu’au 1er septembre*, by a sign-painter painting out a familiar name, by a child’s face at a window, by a geranium in flower.”



An illustration by Théophile Steinlen for *Barabbas: Paroles dans la vallée*, by Lucien Descaves, 1914

The flâneur is not a reporter. Reporters are in the business of asking specific questions, to which they require specific answers. The flâneur may entertain questions in the course of things, but overall he or she is in the business of negative capability. The flâneur must be alive to the entire prospect, to the ephemeral and perishable as well as the immemorial, to things that ordinarily lie beneath notice, to minute changes and gradual shifts of fashion, to things that just disappear one day without anyone paying attention, to happenstance and accident and incongruity, to texture and flavor and the unnameable, to prevailing winds and countercurrents, to everything that is too subjective for professionals to credit. The flâneur must possess a sixth sense, possibly even a seventh and an eighth, must have an intuitive suss for things about to occur without warning and things that are subtly absent and things that are silently waving goodbye. The flâneur must be able to read the entire text of the streets, including its footnotes, interleavings, and marginal commentary. The flâneur must comprehend the city holistically, must understand it as a living being—on the order of, though infinitely more complex than, those mushroom colonies that may cover hundreds of square miles while remaining a single entity—and must constantly risk overidentifying with his or her subject.



"Who opens the door of my death chamber? I said that no one shall enter. Whoever you are, go away!" Plaque marking the house where Lautréamont died, 7 Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre

Among the intuitive stretches required of the flâneur is a lively belief in ghosts that does not particularly assume a belief in the supernatural. The past is always present, if sometimes in the way of those movie spirits who can be seen in the room but not in the mirror, or vice versa. All the tyrants and landowners and monopolists in vain set their shoulders to bulldoze the past out of existence, but it stubbornly remains, sometimes in the most indefinable and evanescent way and sometimes as a bad conscience. If you are properly attuned you can feel it even in the middle of the Passerelle Simone de Beauvoir, the footbridge across the Seine that links the Parc de Bercy with the Bibliothèque Nationale, a place from which it is nearly impossible to see anything much more than twenty years old—and yet in that formerly industrial location countless people labored and many died, from accidents and floods and wars, in the complex of wine depots on

the one side and the vast railroad freight terminal on the other. A bit farther down, near Rue Watt, on the Left Bank side, under residential high-rises and the Diderot branch of the University of Paris, is the site of the municipal storehouses (Magasins Généraux), which beginning in November 1943 were employed as an internment camp for Jews.

The popular historian G. Lenotre, who arrived in Paris from Lorraine as a teenager at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War (and then, over the next sixty-five years, wrote more than fifty volumes of *petite histoire*, primarily about the city during the revolution), recalled that even as he was dazzled by the swarm of traffic that he could see from the windows of the modest hotel on Rue Montmartre where he first lodged, as well as by the masses of tall houses on every side, he could not help thinking about what those houses had witnessed and contained over the decades. “Each of those casements opened onto a room where how many comedies had transpired! And how many dramas, for that matter! Their shutters had been closed in times of mourning, they had been bedecked with bunting and hung with fairy lights on occasions of victory. For the first time there came to me the vague thought that houses have a soul, composed of the joys and sorrows and labors of those they have sheltered, and that all have their history: secret, romantic, or joyful.”



The corner of Rue de la Parcheminerie and Rue de la Harpe, circa 1910

The occult forces in the city are always at work, indifferent to rationality, scornful of politics, resentful of urban planning, only intermittently sympathetic to the wishes of the living. They operate with a glacial slowness that renders their processes imperceptible to the mortal eye, so that the results appear uncanny. But much like the way stalagmites and stalactites grow in caves, such forces are actually the result of vastly long passages of time, of buildup and wear-down so gradual that no time-lapse camera could ever record them, but also so incrementally powerful they could never be

duplicated by technology or any other human intent. Over the course of time they have worn grooves like fingerprints in the fabric of the city, so that ghostly impressions can remain even of streets and corners and culs-de-sac obliterated by bureaucrats, and they have created zones of affinity that are independent of administrative divisions and cannot always be explained by ordinary means.

Guy Debord and his barfly friends in the early 1950s, who came to constitute the Lettrist International, were the first to attempt to chart what they called “ambience units” (*unités d’ambiance*), even if they were hardly the first to notice them. These units could be entire neighborhoods, could be described in a few words (for example, the Îlot Chalon, the first Chinese district in Paris, a tiny cluster hard by the Gare de Lyon now erased by urban renewal), could be determined by architecture (such as the extraordinary rotunda built by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux in 1785 as part of the wall of the Farmers-General and which now sits by itself in Place de Stalingrad, shadowed by the Métro overpass), could embody a forceful rebuke to their surroundings (such as the Lettrists’ beloved and now long-gone Rue Sauvage, by all accounts an eerie blend of desolation and *rus in urbe*—“the most confounding nocturnal landscape in the capital,” according to their newsletter, *Potlatch*—that plied a parallel course between the riverbank, edged with vacant lots, and the tracks leading to the Gare d’Austerlitz). Or the units could be fleetingly subjective, identifiable only by their

familiars, an effect of light and shadow or an imbalance of scale or a pattern of commerce. A map Debord annotated in 1957, covering just the first six arrondissements, shows some seventy-five of those units, a few no more than a block long. That same year, he produced the exploded maps *The Naked City* and *Guide psychogéographique de Paris*, each of which isolates kernels of blocks in the center of the city, according respectively to their function as *plaques tournantes* (“turntables,” in the railroad sense) and as “psychogeographic gradients,” with arrows of varying thicknesses showing the involuntary tendencies of pedestrians to err this way or that when pursuing the determined wandering that Debord called *dérive*, or “drift.”



Rue Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, circa 1910



Guide psychogéographique de Paris, by Guy Debord, 1957



Rue Mouffetard, circa 1910

Home base for the Lettrists was the “Contrescarpe continent,” a vaguely oval complex of blocks centering on the Place de la Contrescarpe, just southeast of the

Panthéon in the Fifth Arrondissement. This area, a very old working-class district that shades into the Latin Quarter, was of interest to them not only for its proximity but because of the way it seemed to direct the steps of anyone venturing in. Owing to the turnings of streets and to the way edifices seem to abruptly block passage while artfully concealing narrow channels that wind around them, so that the pedestrian changes course without really thinking about it, the district presents only one smooth route of entry (which is nevertheless mined with attractive digressions), from the north, and only one reasonable exit track, toward the south. This remains the case and can be verified by visitors. As a consequence, the zone, according to Debord, “inclines toward atheism, oblivion, and the disorientation of habitual reflexes.”

Ambience units are collective, anonymous works achieved over long passages of time through accretion, accident, habit, juxtaposition, improvisation, endurance, and one or more inexplicable X factors—a sort of blend of theater and sculpture enacted upon the city and adapted to the *longue durée*. Who knows how many of them came and went in the centuries before ours and especially before Baron Haussmann’s depredations of 1853–70? In parts of the city without interfering large-scale landowners, where all building and alteration occurred through small-scale labor, the crop of ambience units was once so dense and profound that it seems incongruous to call them that. It is easy to imagine that every corner had its own distinct flavor,

that such a thing would have been taken for granted the way every face is different. *Ambience units* begins to sound like a name given in an alienated time to the last isolated examples of a phenomenon that was once so widespread that it was the rule.

They were habitats in which generations spent their entire existences, happily or not. People who lived there naturally gravitated toward the local commerce, trade, or practice the place was known for—associations owed to circumstances often lost in the mists of time. Hence the mystical phenomenon of unexplained recurrence. “There is always a certain public square or a certain intersection that, through mysterious and providential forces, seems forever devoted to a single specialty,” wrote a mid-nineteenth-century chronicler. “I don’t know what secret instinct impels the same classes or the same professions always toward the same places. Thieves, pickpockets, beggars, streetwalkers, street performers have still not left the haunts they have inhabited since the Middle Ages.” His subject was Rue Pierre-Lescot, which lay somewhere in the tangle of streets east of the Louvre, cleared by Haussmann a decade later. The name—that of the sixteenth-century architect responsible for the southwest wing of the Louvre and for the Fontaine des Innocents—was then reapplied to the street marking the eastern edge of Les Halles, formerly Rue du Cloître Saint-Jacques, so that, curiously, his observation applies today. The thieves, beggars, and streetwalkers may no longer live nearby, but they certainly exercise their trade on the block;

shopping mall, fast food, fake Irish pubs, and cheap teenage clothing outlets have drawn their own sucker traffic.



The dog pound. Illustration by J. J. Grandville, from *Scènes de la vie publique et privée des animaux*, 1842

In the 1950s the historian and redoubtable flâneur Louis Chevalier noticed a local anomaly around Place de la Bastille, which was never “a particularly criminal district and ... not even a place of prostitution, except for one side street, Rue Jean-Beausire, where prostitution thrives.” There was no reasonable explanation, no matter of lighting or building stock or

layout that could account for this street being set aside from all the others around it. Therefore, “from all the available evidence, circumstances beyond those of the present must be exercising an influence,” since the material reality of the current era is shaped by the past —by “the force of interests, habits, and beliefs, particularly if those habits and beliefs are negative, which ... are more ineradicable than their positive counterparts.” And indeed, the street had been the site, long ago, of a *cour des miracles*, which was the name given in the Middle Ages to an encampment of beggars, whores, and thieves.



A *cour des miracles* in the Middle Ages

Today it is clean, neutral, and impersonal. But even now there remain streets and vicinities that draw prostitutes and their clients as they have for generations if not centuries. Rue Saint-Denis was until very recently the main stem, a virtually unbroken line of *filles*

publiques on display at all hours, from Place du Châtelet to Porte Saint-Denis.* This had been the case since sometime during the Middle Ages, perhaps before. Rue Saint-Denis is one of the city's oldest streets, going back to Roman rule in the first century. Until the royal palace moved to Versailles under Louis XIV—arguably the pioneering instance of suburban flight—it was the custom for newly crowned kings to descend its length as they officially proceeded from the basilica of Saint-Denis, north of Paris, to their residence at the Louvre (and they departed in the reverse direction after death). Perhaps the royal procession and the procession of harlots are not unlinked. For that matter, excavations for the Métro in 1903 uncovered the skeleton of a woolly mammoth, leading to the discovery of the pachyderms' habitual path from their dwelling on the heights of Belleville down to the river to drink and bathe—their course descended obliquely via what is now Rue de la Grange-aux-Belles, then joined the future Rue Saint-Denis at about the height of the *porte*, which is to say the top of the street's miracle mile. Rue Saint-Denis remains to this day an unprepossessing, surprisingly narrow thoroughfare, but it was clearly consecrated to the pageantry of horizontal motion.



Porte Saint-Denis, circa 1910

The city's principal constituent matter is accrued time. The place is lousy with it. Not everyone is happy about this, since the past is burdensome and ungovernable and never accords with totalizing ideologies or unified design theories or schemes for maximizing profit. The faceless residential and commercial units that conceal large parts of working-class northeastern and southeastern Paris were imposed over the past half century for reasons that include the wish to extinguish an unruly past. History is always in the gun sights of planners and developers, and of reactionaries, who in the absence of a convenient past are content to invent one, winding their fantasies around some factual nugget suitably distant and fogged by legend. Official appropriations of history, however ostensibly benevolent in intent and graced with accredited consultants, will always be chary of the actual mess and stink of the past, and as a consequence they always gravitate toward the condition of the theme park. Those paddle-shaped markers planted here and

there throughout Paris are very nice, but they are like historical multivitamins, meant to be ingested and immediately forgotten. They are nagging footnotes to your shopping and dining experience, good for you but starchily dutiful, so that you tend to avoid them and feel obscurely guilty about it. And of course they are far less evocative of lived time than the most derelict building in any chosen neighborhood.



The people of Les Halles, 1906

What the flâneur sees while walking around is a tremendous expanse of time in compressed and vestigial form. The flâneur is in sympathy with time not from nostalgia but from an obligation to truth. The past is hardly a single era, after all, but the combined, composted layers of a thousand eras, and any given moment includes some proportionate blend of all those

eras. The future is a threat or a sales pitch, the present flies around you like the landscape as seen from a moving car, but the past is what you stand on, lean against, breathe in. The very spark of the new that distinguishes an era will be fully visible only in retrospect. Each epoch may dream the next, in Jules Michelet's formulation, but that dream will come while it is digesting its predecessor. The past is always in flux, surviving not in icily dust-free façade restorations but as a dynamic undercurrent—in the slope of hills, shapes of streets, breadth of squares; in lintels, shutters, courtyards; in habits and associations and prejudices; among working people and recent immigrants and the aged and a lot of youths who didn't go through the career door; among what remain of vagrants and eccentrics and clochards; among a great many people lying low who remember things.



Les Halles and Saint-Eustache, late nineteenth century

To experience Paris as an organic entity is to absorb

that great undulating panorama down below and forget what year it is, like Francis Carco looking south from the heights of Montmartre:

He bore to the right to get to Rue Lamarck and suddenly, under the vast sky, heavy with rain, the whole of Paris appeared. He took in its receding immensity. Smoke coming from different points wove together and fluttered in sharp chorus. The wind blew through the acacias, their jumble of foliage blending with the fog. In the distance, thousands of fires flickered. Black holes indicated neighborhoods hidden below, from which crowds of shadows emerged: Grenelle and Montrouge. A necklace of stars marked the Great Wheel. Things gradually revealed themselves. Diffuse glimmers shone and then dimmed. Successive strings of lights rose tier upon tier, followed by an opaque and swelling wave of clouds. The belfries of Notre-Dame looked as big as thimbles, but you could make them out, and you could also make out the fluid coil of the river that snaked behind them and stretched out toward the red glimmer of the train stations. What a world! It wasn't a city, but an ocean of swells and eddies. It was a living mass. It quivered, fluctuating like the sea, a rough gray sea barely heaved by the light wind, and he heard the acacias grinding drily above like rigging.

* I don't have to tell you that the absence of women from this list is the sadly simple result of social conditions—until very recently it was impossible for women to walk around by themselves unobserved, and it is crucial for the flâneur to be functionally invisible. Among the numerous women of the past who might have been flâneurs had they had the opportunity, perhaps the most striking is Marie d'Agoult, the novelist and republican who wrote the most observant and detailed chronicle of the revolution of 1848; it and all her other work appeared under the byline “Daniel Stern.”

* In 2003, France passed an internal security law, put through by Nicolas Sarkozy, who then held a string of cabinet positions, including the charmingly named pair “internal security and local freedom.” Solicitation was targeted, along with begging and vagrancy, and the hitherto undisguised display suddenly disappeared—although that doesn’t mean the girls aren’t still out and about.