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

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

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Résumé

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 principle 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.
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What Makes a Cité a City? A Parisian Case Study For a City’s Algorithmic Model

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. 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, (2) the element of disjunction, (3) and what one could call “a living body”, or the interaction between people and spaces. We will see in the sections following

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2 In Plato’s Republic, Socrates argues for the virtues of a city, forming one of the first ideas regarding utopianism.
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. In Louis XIV’s *Manière de montrer les jardins de Versailles* we will see the delivery of a prescriptive manual for the operations within Versailles in terms of both the space and the people at court. 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, Michelet and Louis XIV will uncover, each in their respective century, the algorithmic activity of Paris as having a manipulative function, with Louis XIV going one step further and himself procuring other officials and royals of international class to engage in such a manipulation.

**Versailles: An Introduction to the Parisian Case Study**

Today many have come to know Versailles as the opulent palace frequented by tourists around the world, where in reality it was once a regal estate reserved to those blessed by the genetic lottery with noble birth. The principal residence of the royal Louis XIV, the Château de Versailles came to embody the mythical deification of the Sun King (see Figure 1). With the gardens on the exterior organized around the legend of Apollo — god of the sun, the arts and of prophesy — and the painting, engravings and sculptures of Versailles’s interiors fixed on this reticent two-bodied monarch, the visions of myth and legend found in the classics of ancient
Greece came to form the petrified skeleton of Versailles. While many books have been dedicated to cover the grounds for the palace’s fame and luxe, there is one that remains an iconic piece of reference for Versailles’ rich history and the culture found behind closed doors. Received as one of the great texts of the 17th century and penned by none other than Louis XIV, his *Manière de montrer les jardins de Versailles*, an itinerary for how to traverse the grounds of his palace at Versailles and its gardens, remains a literary piece relevant to our discussion on placeness.

![Fig. 1 Promenade de Louis XIV en vue du Parterre du Nord vers 1688 by Étienne Allegrain](image)

From the vestibule of the cour de mabre to the bains d’Apollon, Louis XIV prescribes with an authoritative, if not also authoritarian, voice how the landscape of the socio-political space that was Versailles ought to be promenaded (see Figure 2), paying special attention to the appreciation and sensibility of the richness of history and opulence tied to each piece of architecture in the path he lays out for the audience, his guests. Perhaps one of the most notable

3 More can be found in Jean-Marie Apostolidès’ *Le roi machine* (1981).
4 Rather than inviting his readers to join him, Louis XIV imposes a series of commands.
statements found in this work is its stylistic approach and general chronology which point to an orchestrated rhythm much like that of the baroque concerts and theatrical performances arranged in the gardens. That many of the statues outside were staged as congealed memories of the exact spatial-temporal arrangement of his human guests, all of which were organized based on genealogical and political rank, is a notable example of the notion of intentionality. This intentionality of architectural assemblage and structuring is analogous to the same coordination involved in the ballet at court.

Versailles, apart from its political power as the home of the French king (see Figure 3), was also a place of grandiose celebration. One such celebration called “Les plaisirs de l’Île enchantée” which marked the beginning of the building campaigns for Versailles also marked the first of the grandes fêtes. A performance combining both dance and theatre, les Plaisirs spanned six legendary days from May 7 to 13 in 1664. Collaboration from Molière and Jean-Baptiste Lully in the festivity’s organization meant grandeur in the confection of drama and spectacle. The coordinated fashion of costumes and masks served to accentuate, rather than mask, those who wore them. In his Le roi machine, Jean-Marie Apostolidès describes in
detail how extravagant hedonistic celebration of ancient myth came to form, in a two-fold sense, the very myth of Versailles as a place of carousel and entertainment:

« ...les Plaisirs se présentent comme une accumulation de divertissements, monopolisés par la monarchie et redonnés à la minorité nationale. Le spectacle tient pour elle la place de l'idéologie. Tout concourt à faire de ces quelques jours, séparés du temps et de l'espace communs, une totalité qui engendre de nouvelles valeurs. Les sens sont frappés, l'intelligence stimulée ; tous les arts, peinture, sculpture, littérature, musique, feu d'artifice, participent & l'harmonie de l'ensemble. Car c'est bien de la création d’un monde harmonique qu’il s’agit, rassemblant sous l'égide de la mythistoire, les parties disséminées de l’ancien univers morcelé par la pratique et l’échange marchands. »

The avid practice of fêtes royales at Versailles, a cultural tradition emblematic of aristocratic and monarchical power, is inscribed in stone and preserved by a choreographed positioning in location. Indeed, if one were to visit modern Versailles, many of these conserved monuments remain, telling a story of what once was and what is. Each molded concretion, hornbeam hedge and spurring fountain form Versailles’s placeness. By way of this instruction manual, we are introduced not only to a proto algorithmic model but also to the importance of a particularly arranged space. In effect, Louis XIV’s portrait of Versailles offers a portion of the schematic that is my proposed algorithmic model. We can now look at more complex issues occurring a century later, moving from a palace and its “placeness” to a city and its “cityness”.

I. “Cityness” 1: 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

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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. 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* for present and future individuals that are yet to be born. It denotes

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7 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*.
that an arrangement of space holds influence over cultural, political, and historical exchanges between social beings, between men, over cycles of time. This last component of identity — power and 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:

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8 Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, (Mercure de France, 1994), 723.
« 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 assistent à la sépulture. Ainsi le corps n'échappe au terrible pouvoir que par la route du tombeau. »

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):

Figure 4. La Bastille dans les premiers jours de sa démolition by Hubert Robert, 1789. Comparing the size of human figures at the base of the Bastille with its imposing size, it is no wonder why this building was called a monument of despotism.

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9 Mercier, Tableau, 724.
10 Mercier, Tableau, 722.
« On a une histoire de la Bastille en cinq volumes, qui offre quelques anecdotes particulières et bizarres; mais rien de ce qu'on souhaiterait tant d'apprendre, rien, en un mot, qui puisse porter quelque jour sur certains secrets d'état, couverts d'un voile impénétrable. »

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. »

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. »

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

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11 Mercier, Tableau, 723.
12 Mercier, Tableau, 722.
13 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 singulièr, 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'avoit 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

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14 Mercier, Tableau, 931.
15 Mercier, Tableau, 931.
16 Mercier, Tableau, 932.
17 Mercier, Tableau, 932.
18 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 foible 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 évènements journaliers, et par l’immense multitude de caractères, qui tous diffèrent entr’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 principle abstraction. As we can observe through this illuminating contrast between both buildings — one a “fortified castle” and the other a

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19 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.

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.

**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.
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. 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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20 Gottlieb and Tegay, “Genetics, Nondisjunction” (2019) as it appears in *StatPearls*

21 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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22 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 DCCXIX: “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 féeerie […] »

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 gracieusement dépravée ; on y rit, & c’est de l’innocence qui rougit encore. »

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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 sciencés & 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 donnait souvent à nos expressions une tournure neuve & singulière, qui, dans nos innocens débats, faisait 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

26 Mercier, Tableau, 932.
27 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

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. Now, we must study the final piece of the algorithmic model for cityness, a concentrated space for human life.

### III. “Cityness” 3: A Living Body

Urban spaces, or cities, are places whose inhabitants are active in an elaborate process of being and becoming. Every person has a function, each is a unit within the social strata of life,

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34 For more on urban ecology, see “Urban Ecology” by Allan Stoekl in *Fueling Culture: 101 Words for Energy and Environment*, 361-4.
regardless of the invariable differences in position granted by genealogy. Within the space of the city, human life is flourishing amidst dichotomies — individuals are born as others are dying, there is construction as much as destruction, and new cycles of culture flourish as much as past ones are preserved in architecture and artifacts. The city space, a human space, represents the totality of experiences and activity at the individual and collective level. It is not marked solely by the progression of life events in one person — their development, rites of passages, their growing old, their desires, their tragedies, their joys and sorrows — but also the progression of life in the society as a whole — the blossoming of the political hub, expansions in trade, new buildings in innovative styles being erected, growing centers for human expression in all its forms. A city is a nexus for change, transformation and the process of modification. It is a living body, a vessel for life and its entanglement with architecture and the engineering of space.

In some interesting cases, we see what happens when things go wrong. As we will explore in Michelet’s *Histoire de la Révolution française*, particularly in the chapters “*Préludes du massacre (1er septembre 1792)*”, “*Le 2 septembre*”, and “*Le 3 et le 4 septembre*”, there are cases in which the living body that is a city develops a sort of violent tumorous growth in the face of uncertainty, rage, bloodshed and atrocious murder that spurs from war, Revolution or repression alone.

September 2nd of 1792 marked the date in which Paris burned — not with fire, but with a particular type of insanity. In the midst of the French Revolution, the eve of September of 1792 produced one of the greatest historical instances of paranoia, social contagion, and mob mentality, as well as this trio’s stark ability to impact citizens embroiled in a period of political instability and social insurrection. Leading up to the September Massacres, a motivating fear of an impending possibility of territorial invasion from foreign powers, i.e. the Allied army
composed of mainly Prussians and Austrians, was coupled with a divided form of government preoccupied with consolidating control of a chaotic environment and its people.

In his *Histoire de la Révolution française*, Michelet retrospectively provides a portrait of the events leading up to the September massacre as well as what ensued during the dark days of the event itself and its aftermath. In addition to the description of the events that transpired during the September massacres themselves, specific instances of conspicuous and tangible movement are sprinkled throughout Michelet’s narration. The first discernible example occurs as the crowd becomes more violent with the fall of night at the Abbaye prison, the first location for the massacres (see Figure 8). Making sure to include details of lighting, Michelet paints a formidable picture of darkening streets, alleyways, and courtyards through which the bloodthirsty mob makes its way to kill:

> « Tout cela fut inutile. *La foule était sourde et aveugle* ; elle buvait de plus en plus, de moins en moins comprenait. La nuit venait ; *les sombres cours de l’Abbaye devenaient plus sombres*. Les torches qu’on allumait faisaient paraître plus obscur ce qu’elles n’éclairaient pas de leurs funèbres lueurs. » ³⁵

From here, at the Abbaye, we move to other prisons (see Figure 10), taking to the streets. The sense of urgency and resolution to engage almost instinctively in a primordial, barbaric stampede throughout the streets of Paris is palpable:

> « Ce qui commençait à donner un caractère terrible au massacre, c’est que, par cela même que la scène était resserrée, les spectateurs mêlés à l’action, touchant presque le sang et les morts, étaient comme enveloppés du tourbillon magnétique qui emportait les massacreurs. Ils buvaient avec les bourreaux et le devenaient. L’effet horriblement fantastique de cette scène de nuit, ces cris, ces lumières sinistres, les avaient fascinés d’abord, fixés à la même place. *Puis le vertige venait, la tête achevait de se prendre, les jambes et les bras suivaient ; ils se mettaient en mouvement, entraient dans cet affreux sabbat et faisaient comme les autres.* » ³⁶

Michelet describes the movement of the crowd as a grotesque sort of birthing process. It is almost as if individual body parts begin to form through the creation and coagulation of a new beast consisting of each sole member following the rest mechanistically and carrying on primitively amidst the multitude. The rhythm of each step gives a sense of the brutish gesticulation of the crowd. With this reduction to anatomical components the city itself is also deconstructed and dissected, revealing its simplest form of street, alleys, and arranged spaces. Yet, the consumption of the people into one large form of agency also becomes equivalent to the melding of the city’s terrain.

The behavior and nature of the crowd becomes increasingly affected by shapes and space. As it runs, it trickles through a labyrinth of walls and passageways, stepping over stones, inhaling and exhaling rhythmically, and moving so quickly across the city’s terrain, it quickly become one with it:

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**Figure 8.** Massacre à la prison de l'Abbaye du 2 au 6 septembre 1792

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Dans cette disposition d'esprit effroyable, beaucoup trouvèrent que l’Abbaye était un champ trop étroit ; ils coururent au Châtelet. »

Though Michelet does not elaborate the streets taken from the starting point of l’Abbaye to Châtelet by Parisians, it must have involved crossing La Seine from the left bank to the right bank (see Figure 9), requiring the crowd to trot frantically for roughly 1.5 km. Here, the act of trotting operates as a form of converging, allowing for the fusion to pass through the bridge connecting Rive Gauche to Rive Droite via l’Île de la cité. Even more than mere logistics, the activity of using a geometric sense of spatial cognition to run through the streets with the sole objective of ferocious debauchery transforms the “spaceness” of the city by shedding light on an emergent functionality — providing passageway and direction with a finality. Compression and convergence allows for the city of Paris itself to shape its citizens into a living mob, one that massacres.

Figure 9: This portion of the Turgot map of 1739 shows different locations of where the 1792 September massacres began and continued: (1) Hotel de Ville; (2) Prison de l’Abbaye; (3) Châtelet; (4) Conciergerie.

Michelet, Histoire, 153.
In « Préludes du massacre (1er septembre 1792) », Michelet introduces the overall sentiment preceding the massacre, one of hatred and corruption. He does this by an artful incorporation of anecdotal references representative of common actions taken by citizens and government officials alike. The first picture is that of a thief: « Un voleur qu’on exposait, et qui sans doute était ivre, s’avisa de crier : Vive le Roi ! Vivent les Prussiens ! et Mort à la nation ! »

Michelet then ventures to describe that just as this pitiable thief was about to be torn to pieces in the Place de Grève, the procureur of the commune indeed tried to spare him a gory end. Yet, despite his attempts, in light of the violence that seemed to be escalating, he was forced to, in order to save himself, give the thief over to be tried by the popular jury.

« Il fut à l’instant arraché du pilori, il allait être mis en pièces. Le procureur de la Commune, Manuel, se précipita, le reprit des mains du peuple, le sauva dans l’Hôtel de Ville. Mais il était lui-même dans un extrême péril ; il lui fallut promettre qu’un jury populaire jugerait le coupable. Ce jury prononça la mort. L’autorité tint cette sentence pour bonne et valable ; elle fut exécutée ; l’homme pérît le lendemain. »

Figure 10. A drawing depicting the massacres at the Hotel de la Force, a prison. Following the events at the Prison de l’Abbaye, the killings spread to other prisons in Paris.

38 Michelet, Histoire, 114.
39 Michelet, Histoire, 114
Another picture that Michelet provides is that of a policeman:

« Le même jour, 1er septembre, un gendarme apporta à la Commune une montre d’or qu’il avait prise au 10 août, demandant ce qu’il devait en faire. Le secrétaire Tallien lui dit qu’il devait la garder. Grand encouragement au meurtre. Plusieurs furent bien tentés de conclure de ce précédent que les dépouilles des grands seigneurs, des riches qui étaient à l’Abbaye appartiendraient à ceux qui pourraient délivrer la nation de ces ennemis publics. »

Here, a gendarme who comes across a coveted possession is later told by the man in the position of overseeing the justice within the behavior of the agents of the law, le secrétaire Tallien, that he should keep such a possession. Michelet makes sure to write that this is a « grand encouragement au meurtre »

suggestions the twisted corruption perpetuated within the government, especially those in charge of establishing order.

Thus, it becomes evident that both of these minimal events detailed by Michelet’s account of the day before the September massacres carry great weight in significance, with both setting a precedent in terms of behavior and both functioning as tools of foreshadowing. The anonymity and generalizability of each of these characters in this chapter is noteworthy, as it highlights the violent nature of an entire society undergoing a radical revolution. There is on one end of the spectrum the miscreant and on the other the authority figure, both nameless and yet each symbolic of all. From the very bottom of the food chain — a thief pressured with the expectation to perform as a sort of jester, an evildoer systematically responsible for injecting disorder to a functional society — to the top — a lawful civil servant charged with maintaining order, here Michelet introduces a notion of instability and a hint at the tumultuous savagery to come the following day.

40 Michelet, Histoire, 114.
41 Michelet, Histoire, 114.
As Michelet fittingly writes, « La vie semble moins artiste, parce que les changements y sont lents et successifs. Il faut des yeux et du cœur pour voir et goûter les lentes transitions de la vie, de la nature qui enfante. Mais, pour la destruction, elle frappe l’homme le plus médiocre. »

Though the monotonous minutiae of daily life may necessitate time for successive changes to be observed throughout history, the French Revolution with its bloody and forcefully self-liberating nature, sparing none in its course, inspired many other recursive instances of rapid revolution globally. These were more momentous and marked by a fast rate of progression than they were slow, and thus celebrated and considered artistic for their avant-garde, expressive and transformative quality. Mediocrity, as used by Michelet, does not refer to that which is often considered synonymous to brutality. Rather, mediocrity here refers, as it had under the Ancien Régime, to that unifying role of the man who finds himself in the middle, providing a portrait of the civilized man who lies on the outskirts of importance and relevance within society. However, here it has gone beyond the 17th century definition. The mediocre man is not a barbarian, as he is not an external, foreign agent incomprehensible to his surrounding people. He is deemed mediocre because he is indistinguishable from anyone else, whether by degree of education, economic prospect, or unfortunate placement, or displacement, within the hierarchical social structure. To say that destruction can touch even the most mediocre man is to say that destruction does not discriminate. Destruction comes for all, knowing no societal bounds, no width or depth, and refusing to submit to the norms of its victims.

The connotation of assigning the identity of « ennemis publics » to other citizens provides an insight not only into the political climate of a divided nation, but to the act of pitting

42 Michelet, Histoire, 114.
44 Michelet, Histoire, 114.
people against their own, against their neighbors, against their employers, and against their fellows. Further, that the imprudent thief in the first scenario would be given over to the people, or as Michelet notes « ce jury »\textsuperscript{45}, for a judgement of death illustrates both the destruction and decadence of order in a system of proper law enforcement as well as a marked shift in authority, something which would alarm even someone as powerful as le procureur de la Commune. Thus, the emergence of an important trend becomes observable; that of the Paris Commune turning a blind eye to a wrath of the people born out of previous suffered injustice.

In Chapter 5, « Le 2 septembre », Michelet describes the government’s role in the massacres, mainly its orchestration and staging by the triumvirate of the Reign of Terror — Marat, Robespierre, and Danton. After stipulating the two desires of the Commune, massacre and dictatorship, which launched the event of September 2nd into motion, Michelet writes in the same calculated\textsuperscript{46} way as was concocted by the Commune:

« Le massacre n’était pas encore si facile à amener qu’on eût pu le croire, quelle que fût la terrible agitation du peuple, et ses paroles violentes [...] \textit{Quant à la dictature, elle était plus difficile encore à organiser que le massacre. Nul homme n’était assez accepté du peuple pour l’exercer seul. Il fallait un triumvirat.} »\textsuperscript{47}

Further, this explication is followed by a delineation of Marat, Robespierre, Danton, and the convoluted nature of their conspiracy for power consolidation.

« Le prophète Marat, que Panis venait d’introniser au comité de surveillance, ne laissait pas que d’effrayer parfois ses propres admirateurs. Mais son extrême vêhémence semblait appuyée, autorisée par Robespierre, qui, la veille au soir, avait dit qu’il fallait remettre l’action au peuple.

\textsuperscript{45} Michelet, \textit{Histoire}, 114.
\textsuperscript{46} In volume 4, book 6 of \textit{Histoire de la Révolution française}, Michelet writes a descriptive account of one of revolutionary France’s most remarkably macabre moments. Perhaps what is most astounding of this historical snapshot of the Parisian climate by Michelet is that it is done so retrospectively, in a staged manner, and not by his own personal account. This reconstruction of a timeless memory (i.e., this monument), provides not just a vivid characterization of each figure that played a part in the great stage of history, but also yields a more humanistic take on raw information of past occurrences essential to the understanding of French culture’s epicenter: the city of Paris.
\textsuperscript{47} Michelet, \textit{Histoire}, 130.
Marat était déjà au comité, Robespierre vint siéger au conseil général [...] Le troisième triumvir, s’il fallait un triumvirat, ne pouvait être que Danton. »

Additionally, Michelet positions the audience within the clamorous unfolding of events which propelled the massacre forward by including pieces of the day’s legislative actions and speeches made by key revolutionary figures. One such example is the inclusion of Vergniaud’s girondist speech which clearly demonstrates the upheaval and violence emblematic of governmental factions split in degree of radicality at the time:

« Je demande aussi que l’Assemblée nationale, qui dans ce moment-ci est plutôt un grand comité militaire qu’un corps législatif, envoie à l’instant, et chaque jour, douze commissaires au camp, non pour exhorter par de vains discours les citoyens à travailler, mais pour piocher eux-mêmes ; car il n’est plus temps de discourir, il faut piocher la fosse de nos ennemis ; ou chaque pas qu’ils font en avant pioche la nôtre. »

This excerpt is revelatory of a determination on behalf of those in positions of power to hand the life of the prisoners being transferred to the Abbaye prison over to the civilians for some sort of violent measure of justice. Indeed, it becomes evident that the instrumentation of the massacre of September 2nd was based on a hidden agenda of paranoia. This paranoia was a direct result of a fear of the invasion of foreign powers likely to take measures against Paris, as was the theoretical case postulated by the Brunswick Manifesto which stated that action against France would be taken should it revolt further by harming the royal family after having removed them from the throne.

In terms of how exactly the killing started, Michelet dispels the ambiguity of the massacre’s origins by pointing to its instigation: « La foule s’irritait, il est vrai, aboyait autour, mais n’agissait pas. » Of great importance is Michelet’s use of the terms « la foule » and «

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49 Michelet, *Histoire*, 133.
In order to describe the herd of people that formed the crowd, he could have chosen from two distinct words: « foule » or « horde », one denoting a multitude or abundance and the other a predatory gang, the former having a positive connotation (e.g. une foule d’étoiles) and the latter carrying a negative one (e.g. une horde de Vikings). Even more so, the use of the « aboyait » as an example of anthropomorphism further gives authority and life to this new monstrous crowd, a sum of individuals that have been masked with deindividuation as they form a part of a virulent host gathering momentum, a compacting that will result in hysteria.

In truth, the crowd of Parisians did not behave as expected initially. There was no immediate pouncing on the prisoners by those observing their transportation through the city streets:

« On eût pu fort aisément les massacrer dans la prison ; mais la chose n’eût pu être présentée comme un acte spontané du peuple. Il fallait qu’il y eût une apparence de hasard ; s’ils avaient fait la route à pied, le hasard eût servi plus vite l’intention des massacreurs ; mais ils demandèrent des fiacres. Les vingt-quatre prisonniers se placèrent dans six voitures ; cela les protégeait un peu. Il fallait que les massacreurs trouvassent moyen ou d’irriter les prisonniers à force d’outrages, au point qu’ils perdisssent patience, s’emportassent, oubliassent le soin de leur vie, parussent avoir provoqué, mérité leur malheur ; ou bien encore il fallait irriter le peuple, soulever sa fureur contre les prisonniers ; c’est ce qu’on essaya de faire d’abord. La procession lente de six fiacres eut tout le caractère d’une horrible exhibition… « Les voilà, criaient les massacreurs ; les voilà, les traîtres ! ceux qui ont livré Verdun ; ceux qui allaient égorger vos femmes et vos enfants… Allons, aidez-nous, tuez-les. » »

It was one single moment of violence that incited the bloody massacre which ensued:

« Au carrefour, où se trouvait dressé le théâtre des enrôlements, il y avait beaucoup d’encombrement, une grande foule. Là, les massacreurs, profitant de la confusion, prirent leur parti et commencèrent à lancer des coups de sabre et des coups de pique tout au travers des voitures. Un prisonnier qui avait une canne, soit instinct de la défense, soit mépris pour ces misérables qui frappaient des gens désarmés, lança à l’un d’eux un coup de canne au visage. Il fournissait ainsi le prétexte qu’on attendait. »

Fascinatingly, Michelet hereafter provides a moral dilemma about the massacre. He describes the possible reasoning of the multitude for such a display of atrocious wickedness:

\[52\] Michelet, Histoire, 137-8.
« Ils déclarèrent eux-mêmes, dans l’enquête, que les prisonniers les insultaient, les provoquaient tous les jours à travers les grilles, qu’ils les menaçaient de l’arrivée des Prussiens et des punitions qui les attendaient [...] La plus cruelle, déjà on la ressentait : c’était la cessation absolue du commerce, les faillites, la fermeture des boutiques, la ruine et la faim, la mort de Paris. L’ouvrier supporte souvent mieux la faim que le boutiquier la faillite. Cela tient à bien des causes, à une surtout dont il faut tenir compte : c’est qu’en France la faillite n’est pas un simple malheur (comme en Angleterre et en Amérique), mais la perte de l’honneur. Faire honneur à ses affaires est un proverbe français et qui n’existe qu’en France. Le boutiquier en faillite, ici, devient très féroce. »

By providing once more a voice to someone seemingly chosen purely at random such as a shopkeeper, Michelet lends the general populace their own vox populi, a list of reasons for why their behavior, though not fully excusable, is somehow understandable:

« Nul doute aussi que la panique n’ait été pour beaucoup dans leur fureur. Le tocsin leur troubla l’esprit ; le canon que l’on tirait leur produisit l’effet de celui des Prussiens. Ruinés, désespérés, ivres de rage et de peur, ils se jetèrent sur l’ennemi, sur celui du moins qui se trouvait à leur portée, désarmé, peu difficile à vaincre, et qu’ils pouvaient tuer à leur aise, presque sans sortir de chez eux. »

Here we see the vindictive resolve of the Parisian crowd, whose violent actions were an expression of moral outrage. The crowd’s impulse to punish and correct, to instigate harm and severe disgrace upon its abusers, is at the heart of « leur fureur ». The mobilization for the cause of retribution is most evident in the ease with which individuals no longer have to move too far from their homes to kill, making most anyone able to participate. Now, as for the perpetrators of such heinous crimes committed on the 2nd of September, Michelet writes:

« Cette foule n’était pas imposante ; il y avait beaucoup d’aboyeurs, de gamins et de femmes, mais seulement vingt hommes armés ; et encore leur chef, un savetier, borgne et boiteux, portant son tablier de cuir sur un méchant pantalon rayé de siamoise, n’avait pour arme qu’une lame liée au bout d’un bâton. »

Women and children formed the majority of the crowd. Though surprising, with this detail Michelet places a focus on the generalizable and universal nature of the criminals which induced a forced death upon their fellow Frenchmen who had perpetually abused their power,

53 Michelet, Histoire, 142-3.
54 Michelet, Histoire, 143.
instilled fear and bred disdain in other citizens on the lower end of the social strata. That even a blind and lame cobbler could carry some form of dangerous weapon for the purposes of assault is both comedic and insightful. This unity, a collective violence of which everyone partakes, is bound to configure into own crowd, as will be later seen.

As understandable as some actions were, Michelet also identifies certain instances of an inexplicably decadent mindset of the united Parisians. One such occurs when a gruesome enchantment with the morbidity of their crimes dominated the curiosity and behavior of most of the general public:

« Ce qui commençait à donner un caractère terrible au massacre, c’est que, par cela même que la scène était resserrée, les spectateurs mêlés à l’action, touchant presque le sang et les morts, étaient comme enveloppés du tourbillon magnétique qui emportait les massacreurs. Ils buvaient avec les bourreaux et le devenaient. L’effet horriblement fantastique de cette scène de nuit, ces cris, ces lumières sinistres, les avaient fascinés d’abord, fixés à la même place. Puis le vertige venait, la tête achevait de se prendre, les jambes et les bras suivaient ; ils se mettaient en mouvement, entraient dans cet affreux sabbat et faisaient comme les autres. »

It is because of such a twisted shared frame of mind that one massacre becomes many, and as Michelet writes:

« Où s’arrêterait le meurtre sur cette pente effroyable ? Comment borner cette fureur d’épuration absolue ? Qu’arriverait-il, et qui serait sûr de rester en vie, si, par-dessus l’ivresse de l’eau-de-vie et l’ivresse de la mort, une autre agissait encore, l’ivresse de la justice, d’une fausse et barbare justice, qui ne mesurait plus rien, d’une justice à l’envers, qui punissait les simples délits par des crimes ? »

In chapter 5, Michelet concludes by stating: « Dès qu’une fois ils avaient tué, ils ne se connaissaient plus et voulaient toujours tuer. » Michelet provides here an illustration of the mechanistic execution done by ordinary citizens, bloodthirsty for murder. Though the act of killing was deceitfully presented to them as justice, a need and hunger as intense as that for sustenance, it is clear that the crowd’s violence led to one overarching event of serious

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55 Michelet, Histoire, 152.
56 Michelet, Histoire, 152-3.
57 Michelet, Histoire, 152.
depersonalization. This collaborative, communal mentality based on a socially generated paranoia of the destruction accompanying the “revolution” led to a sense of loss of identity. Parisian citizens taking solace in the idea of violence and engaging in acts of brutal barbarism to vent their frustrations and fears of the present and future, ended up turning on one another. In chapter 6, « Le 3 et le 4 septembre. », Michelet describes the aftermath of September 2nd and the plunge into an unbridled terror that sprang from it: « La contagion des fureurs populaires est parfois si grande et si rapide qu’on pouvait croire en effet que la première étincelle ferait un grand embrasement. »58 With this picture of little fires forming a larger, destructive one wreaking havoc across a considerable area, we see the tie between this living body of people and its interaction with the living body of Paris.

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 [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'irréécusable preuve de son innocence.

Ainsi le vaillant Meuris, qui, plus que personne, sauvait 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 reconnaissante de la patrie. »59

58 Michelet, Histoire, 164.
59 Michelet, Histoire, 995-996.
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 various texts spanning three centuries from Louis XIV to Mercier and Michelet, I’ve propose 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.

In a chapter titled “Deux modèles linguistiques de la cité”60, 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 (polis) and Latin (civis) origin, with one referring to the physical structure of a centralized

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political stronghold and the other referring strictly to the community. On the one hand, *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, *civis* and its successive *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 *cité scientifique*, which is merely a floating intellectual community that is neither defined by nor constricted to a particular geographical location. While separating *civis* from *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.
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


