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Author(s): Anthony Vidler

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Reading the City: The Urban Book from Mercier to Mitterand

ANTHONY VIDLER

I sometimes dream that I am walking down a Paris street whose Haussmannian facades are transformed little by little into shelves of books piled up and stretching to infinity, each floor becoming a shelf, each window the spine of a book. I search for an address and find only a call number.

—Gérard Genette, *Bardadrac*¹

THE DREAM OF A WRITER IN THE MODERN CITY, LOST AMONG THE endless facades of Georges-Eugène Haussmann's Paris or in the equally endless housing blocks of the periphery, is to find a way through what for Walter Benjamin was the contemporary equivalent of the antique labyrinth. And what better way than that of the library reading room, the catalog, that renders all books equal and in number series? Gérard Genette's fantasy of Paris as a massive library evokes a two-century-long tradition of the aspiration to read the city as if it were a book, a book composed of an infinite number of other books, all ranged as if on the shelves of a public library. From the city as an eighteenth-century version of the philosophical *Encyclopédie* through the city as mystery novel to the city of modernist collage and later to the city of cybernetic communication and finally to the city of virtual networks, the image has persisted, to the extent that city and library have been conflated in the imaginary of modern writers from Sébastien Mercier and Charles Nodier to Georges Perec—and now to Genette.

The Enlightenment aspiration for the city to be an open book to its inhabitants was a product of the twin demands of the mid-eighteenth-century philosophes: to transform the city of light into an environment worthy of the name, with fresh air, water, and light in every quarter, and to render this new city legible to its citizens,

ANTHONY VIDLER is dean and professor of architecture at Cooper Union School of Architecture. His most recent book is *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux: Architecture and Utopia in the Era of the French Revolution* (Birkhäuser, 2006). He is completing a book on utopias and ideal cities from antiquity to the present.

as if it were a three-dimensional treatise in civic virtue written on the facades of its institutions. To read the city, to understand its apparent chaos and bewildering contrasts through the eyes of a writer, whether as a topographic, historical, or critical discourse, became by the end of the century the favored mode of city lore.

Yet what by the 1830s was to become reified in Victor Hugo's celebrated formulation of the "book" of architecture in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (196) was in the decades after 1770 a process of exploration, of experiment, and of continuous reinterpretation in seeking to answer the overriding question, How does one make sense of a city that offers no visual or conceptual unity, that seems to offend all the laws of aesthetics and reason, but that nevertheless urgently demands reform? Such modes of literary interpretation inevitably intersected with and influenced older visual and spatial traditions, those concerned with the actual reconstruction and physical rebuilding of the urban fabric, to the extent that the architects themselves would internalize the demand for legibility, calling for an aesthetic that spoke to the eyes, so that each monument, each space, each street might be read by the citizen as denoting its role, nature, and moral status.

Beginning in the 1750s, philosophes from Voltaire to Diderot saw Paris as an affront to Enlightenment values: unhygienic, ill serviced, badly planned, and visually incoherent, it was the very image of disorder and irrationality. Calling for the embellishment of the city, philosophes, critics, and architects offered proposals for street lighting, water supply, vehicular and pedestrian circulation, ventilation, and a host of new institutions, including hospitals, prisons, schools, museums, and libraries. Each monument should, it was argued, be designed with its appropriate character, which, like a character in writing, should be visually accessible to all. The sum of these improvements would add up to a regenerated city, one not only healthy and

functioning but, above all, legible: a city encapsulating the totality of civilized values and demonstrating them in its iconographic form, to be read as a kind of visual book, each of its monumental volumes designed to display its nature and role to the observer.

Beginning in the 1770s and 1780s, with the new Théâtre Français designed by Charles de Wailly and Marie-Joseph Peyre; the project for a new hospital on the Île des Cygnes by Bernard Poyet; and the designs by Étienne-Louis Boullée for a new royal library, an opera, a museum, and a Newton cenotaph-cum-planetarium, a planning policy gradually crystallized. Initially taken up in the revolutionary Plan des Artistes under the guidance of the painter and Republican fête master Jacques-Louis David, ratified in practice by the improvements of Napoleon I and the more radical surgery of the Second Empire under Napoleon III and Haussmann, this policy resulted in the construction of a physical network of triangulated and concentric boulevards, punctuated by new and newly revealed historical monuments, from Charles Garnier's Opera and Victor Baltard's Les Halles to the Tour Saint Jacques. The later demolition of Les Halles, the Beaubourg quarter, and the slaughterhouses of La Villette opened up new opportunities to remake the city, now with commercial, recreational, and cultural monuments, and François Mitterrand's *grands projets* completed the cycle.

Picturing the City: The City as Tableaux

What a book of morality! What public lesson is as powerful, as eloquent, as this row of heroes whose visage, silent but imposing, cries out to everyone that it is useful and great to obtain public esteem?

Quel livre de morale! Quelle leçon publique est aussi forte, aussi éloquente que cette file des héros dont le front muet, mais imposant, crie à tous qu'il est utile et grand d'obtenir l'estime publique! (Mercier, *L'an 2440* 54)

Sébastien Mercier's imaginary celebration of the statues of the great men of France placed on the Pont Neuf (54), rebaptized the Pont Henri IV in the Paris of the year 2440, demonstrated his wish for the city to reveal itself as a veritable school of morals, an encyclopedic environment, instructing its inhabitants in the exemplary history and present virtues of the nation by means of its architecture and spatial layout. In this process of developing a way of reading the city, the writings of Mercier played a double role. On the one hand, his utopian novel *L'an 2440*, published in 1770 as a programmatic summation of Enlightenment ideals, might well be included in the long line of plans for urban renewal leading from Enlightenment embellishment to revolutionary projects, thence to the ameliorations of the Restoration, the Haussmannization of Paris under the Second Empire, the rational spatial orders of twentieth-century modernism, and the more recent *grands projets* initiated by presidents from Pompidou to Mitterand.

On the other hand, his multifaceted account of Paris in the last years of the ancien régime and Revolution, in the *Tableau de Paris* and *Le nouveau Paris*, has served as a model for poetic flâneurs and as a source for connoisseurs and historians of the ancien régime, many of whom were nostalgic for the rapidly disappearing preindustrial city and severely critical of modern city planning. Thus as a philosophical idealist and utopian novelist, Mercier synthesized the different projects advanced by enlighteners and architects in the thirty years before the Revolution, assembling a coherent picture of what, if built, the heavenly city of the Enlightenment might look like, while as a literary observer and critic of social conditions he forged new ways of representing and imaging a complex and incoherent urban reality, in ways that anticipated other literary topographers, from Nodier and Nerval to Baudelaire and Benjamin, and that have provided rich material for historians of *mentalités* from the brothers Goncourt to Daniel Roche (see Roche).

In both these ways, Mercier represented a fundamental transformation in the spatial representation of the modern city. Traditionally the spatial identity of Paris was constituted by the two paradigmatic realms of classical representation: spaces of religious ritual and institution (from the church to the cemetery and hospice) and monuments of royal display. Reified according to the codes of luxury, embellishment, and scale that, incorporated in the "police" of Paris since the late seventeenth century, had guided the theory if not the practice of monumental construction and reception for a century or more, these objects formed, so to speak, a map of authority embedded in the general map of Paris. Through the second half of the eighteenth century this generalized topography of power was gradually challenged by an emerging bourgeois public realm, which, without directly opposing the authority of church and state, increasingly insisted on its own rights to representation and institution.

In this context, Mercier adumbrated a spatial imaginary that combined an enlightened sense of this public sphere with a new sensibility toward popular space, with all its pathological and political significations. These two spatial constructions—bourgeois and popular—were, of course, to be uneasily and often dangerously placed in opposition during the Revolution. In Mercier's discourse, however, they coexisted, in an attempt to project utopia in the midst of rather than above and beyond the real. Here, Mercier succeeded, in ways that were to be profoundly influential on future urban interventions, in restraining utopia to the demands of everyday life—bringing it into the pragmatic, civic domain.

Mercier's *L'an 2440* exhibited a characteristic of eighteenth-century urban utopia not entirely evident beneath the high-flown rhetoric of the genre. In the frame of a dream narrative that was readily dubbed apocalyptic by critics, Mercier described a vision of a new Paris composed of essentially practical

suggestions, most, if not all, entirely realizable by mid-eighteenth-century techniques and many already partially accomplished. As opposed to the traditional site of utopia, “no place,” the Paris of *L'an 2440* was definitively some place—the “eutopia” or “good place” dreamed by Thomas More. No longer an imaginary island or heavenly city, Mercier’s stage was the city itself, and its form, although new, was deliberately constructed as an exemplary model for real town planning, for the *embellissement* of the city. Indeed, *L'an 2440* reads somewhat like a collage of the different set pieces projected or built since the mid-century to embellish the city with the construction of new economic, social, and leisure institutions.² In his text and its numerous footnotes and commentaries, Mercier demonstrated an easy familiarity with the debates among architects and administrators as to the correct programs and architectural forms for new and architecturally unprecedented building types, and he drew liberally from the projects offered by amateurs and professionals in the continuing public debates over the insalubrity of the city—from the replacement of the old Hôtel-Dieu, which would be damaged seriously by fire in 1772, to the moving of the city cemeteries, notably that of the Innocents.³

Thus, by 2440, in Mercier’s imagination, the Louvre has been finally completed; the Hôtel-Dieu removed from the center of the city and replaced by decentralized hospitals; the *hôpital général*, Bicêtre, and all *maisons de force*, torn down; the cemetery of the Innocents closed; and the houses and shops removed from the bridges across the Seine. Street lighting, fire regulations, and police, based on measures developed by Sartine after 1759, have been cleansed of authoritarian taint. Freshwater fountains play on every corner, following the recommendations of the mathematician Antoine Déparcieux in 1763. The street lanterns (*réverbères*) operate perfectly, according to the proposals developed in a competition by the Académie des Sciences

in 1766, a competition for which Lavoisier himself submitted a *mémoire* (see Robinet 26: 470–71): “I saw the streets perfectly lit. The lanterns were fixed to the wall, and their combined light left no shadow” (“Je vis les rues parfaitement éclairées. Les lanternes étaient appliquées à la muraille et leurs feux combinés ne laissent aucune ombre”; Mercier 151). Even the form of the new squares and boulevards is guided by the pattern of the recently completed Place Louis XV with its radiating fan of streets: “These magnificent avenues formed a pleasing semicircle, and he who drew up this plan was not lacking in taste; he has had the merit of anticipating the powerful effect that it one day would have,” wrote Mercier of its architect, Jacques-Antoine Gabriel, who had dedicated Louis XV’s statue in 1763 and was to complete the square nine years later (“Ces magnifiques allées forment une cintre heureux, et celui qui a donné ce plan ne manquait point de goût; il a eu le mérite de pressentir le grand effet que cela devait faire un jour”; 57).

Rousseauesque and physiocratic principles govern a city where circulation—of people, vehicles, air, and light—reigns supreme. Traffic flows evenly: “all those going one way kept to the right and . . . those coming the other way kept to the left,” noted Mercier, wondering at the sight of an entire population “circulating freely, easily, and in an orderly manner” (“tous les allants prenaient la droite, et . . . les venants prenaient la gauche”; “une circulation libre, aisée et pleine d’ordre”; 45). Nature reenters the new Paris, not only through spacious boulevards, parks, and squares but also, in an emulation of the terraces of Babylon, on the new horizontal level formed by the flat roofs of the houses. Mercier, “who loves a view and fresh air” (“[q]ui aime la vue et le bon air”), foresees what Charles Fourier and after him Jules Borie and Le Corbusier will transform into an article of faith, *le toit-jardin*:

[A] terrace furnished with flowerpots and covered with a fragrant trellis. The roof of

each house afforded a similar terrace, in such a way that the roofs, all of equal height, together formed a vast garden, and the city, viewed from the height of a tower, was covered with flowers, fruits, and greenery.

[U]ne terrasse ornée de pots de fleurs et couverte d'une treille parfumée. Le sommet de chaque maison offrait une pareille terrasse, de sorte que les toits, tous d'une égale hauteur, formaient ensemble comme un vaste jardin, et la ville aperçue du haut d'une tour était couronnée de fleurs, de fruits et de verdure.
(58)

The unified aesthetic effect of Mercier's new Paris was influenced by the mid-eighteenth-century movement to return to antiquity and the accompanying nostalgia for classicism, history, and authority. Painters like Hubert Robert and engravers like Billiard de Bellicourt, inspired by Piranesi's Roman capriccios, were fashionably employed in sketching imaginary views of Paris reconstructed as an antique city. Architectural educators such as Jacques-François Blondel elaborated rules of characterization that, derived from Roman and French classical precedents, would endow new public-building types with appropriate form, rules that from the early 1760s were already being transformed under the influence of Julien-David Leroy's publication of Athenian precedents.⁴ By 1770, at least two major public institutions had been completed according to these new precepts: Le Camus de Mézière's Halle au Blé was designed in the form of a Roman amphitheater, or colosseum, while Jacques Gondouin's École de Chirurgie was planned as a replica of an antique school, its auditorium following the descriptions of Vitruvius for ancient amphitheaters or, more directly, following the impressions of recent visitors to the newly discovered theater of Herculaneum.

Similarly, the new institutions of the Paris of 2440—including the Palais de Justice; the Hôtel de Ville, that “temple à la clémence” erected on the site of the old Bastille;

and the new Temple—are all described according to the new principles of architectural characterization, based on the model of those already erected before 1770 and in line with later projects such as the Bourse, the Caisse d'Escompte, the Théâtre Français, the Colisée on the Champs-Élysées, to mention only a few. Echoing Blondel, Mercier notes of the Temple de la Justice that “[t]he architecture of its walls corresponds to the dignity of its purpose” (53). Mercier's Temple, standing at the center of its own square, is a huge single rotunda of columns, entered from four equal porticoes, with a simple altar, “absolument nu” (“absolutely bare”), at its center (110). A memory of Renaissance ideal temples from Bramante to Raphael, revived under the guise of a combination of the temple of truth depicted by François Cochin in his frontispiece to the *Encyclopédie* and the open colonnade then under construction by Soufflot for Sainte Geneviève, this temple anticipates the simple and somber projects of Boullée and Durand after the Revolution.

Mercier's descriptions seem to summarize every enlightened scheme for the embellishment of the capital since Voltaire's barely disguised proposals for the “city of Cachemire.”⁵ Mercier imagines awakening from a nearly two-thousand-year sleep:

Everything had changed. All these neighborhoods that were so familiar to me seemed to be different and recently embellished. I lost myself in the straight, wide, and beautiful streets. I entered spacious crossroads so well ordered that I saw no hint of an obstruction. I heard none of those confusing and bizarre cries that used to hurt my ears. I encountered no vehicles about to crush me. A sufferer from gout could have walked about with ease. The city had an animated air, but without disturbance or confusion.

Tout était changé. Tous ces quartiers qui m'étaient si connus, se présentaient à moi sous une forme différente et récemment embellie. Je me perdais dans des grandes et belles rues

proprement alignées. J'entrais dans des carrefours spacieux où régnait un si bon ordre que je n'y apercevais pas le plus léger embarras. Je n'entendais aucun de ces cris confusément bizarres qui déchiraient jadis mon oreille. Je ne rencontrais point de voitures prêtes à m'écraser. Un gouteux aurait pu se promener commodément. La ville avait un air animé, mais sans trouble et sans confusion. (36)

Published ten years later, Mercier's *Tableau de Paris* may then be read as the logical and strategic development of his utopia, embedding its formerly schematic programs and precepts integrally in the moral, social, and environmental critique of the city as a whole. What in *L'an 2440* took the form of a formulaic unidimensional and philosophical utopia was given three dimensions in the elaborate literary devices of the *Tableau*. It is as if the solid resistance of the city fabric to wholesale change and reconstruction is somehow anticipated in the dense and labyrinthine texture of the *Tableau*'s description, as if the optimistic gaze of the planner is blocked by the thickness of walls and the obscurity of impasses, only to be released and reconstituted at another level. Put in another way, what Michel Foucault characterized as the Enlightenment utopia of "transparent space" was in Mercier's *Tableau* confronted by its apparent opposite, a world of "darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truths" (Foucault 153–54). Hence Mercier's continuous struggle against shadows and obscurity, the drive toward the light:

Before, eight thousand lanterns with badly seated candles, extinguished or melted by the wind, lit [the city] badly, giving out only a pale, flickering uncertain light, cut by shifting and dangerous shadows. Today they have discovered a way to provide greater brightness for the city, joining to this advantage an ease of service. The combined effect of twelve hundred reflectors gives out an equal, strong, and durable light.

Autrefois, huit mille lanternes avec des chandelles mal posées, que le vent éteignait ou faisait couler, éclairaient mal, et ne donnaient qu'une lumière pâle, vacillante, incertaine, entrecoupée d'ombres mobiles et dangereuses. Aujourd'hui l'on a trouvé le moyen de procurer une plus grande clarté à la ville, et de joindre à cet avantage la facilité du service. Les feux combinés de douze cent réverbères, jettent une lumière égale, vive et durable.

But in practice this light was flawed. The irregular operation of the lanterns not lit during clear nights ensured that at such times the streets were plunged into darkness before moonrise; paradoxically, after moonrise the streets were equally darkened by the height of the enclosing buildings; "and Paris is then totally plunged into the most dangerous darkness" ("et Paris alors est totalement plongé dans les plus dangereuses ténèbres"; *Tableau* 175).

Read in aesthetic terms, similar descriptions show Mercier's shift from the Paris of 2440, glowing under luminous and constant light, where characters both personal and monumental are plain to the sight, to a Paris of 1783, a chiaroscuro city of brilliant flashes and darkened alleys. In this city of obscurity, the unseen is as much a challenge to the resources of enlightenment as the seen. From the immoral and hidden vices of the shadows to the fluid and ever-present element of the air, charged with particles and odors, invading the body through orifices and pores, heavy and stagnant as water, the invisible is as much an obstacle to the new social order as the visible. If in the Paris of 2440 vision is preeminent and all-powerful, in the *Tableau* it is challenged and blocked, contextualized and in competition with the other senses. And, as if strengthened by opposition, its strategies and guises are multiple and, if not all-powerful, certainly all-pervasive.

In his articulation of a narrative form that in some way represented the optical and social implications of vision, Mercier was first supported by the common practice of

looking at cities through the lenses of painters and engravers, whose repetitive views in the mid-eighteenth century had taken on the characteristics of set pieces, in a process that insensibly transformed the sites of tourism into readily consumable artifacts. Cities such as Rome or Venice had already been reenvisioned through the mechanism of the capriccios and engraved scenes of Piranesi or Canaletto. Looked at through these stereotypical lenses, the city was seen less as a totality than as a sequence of carefully framed tableaux, of sights of sites, each piquant and contrasting with the next, giving rise to a continuous association of ideas and sensations, for all the world like a natural landscape subject to the gaze of the Rambler or the idler. Guidebooks supported this process, which in a more modern context has been termed “postcarding,” to use Naomi Schor’s term (215), and these in turn were accompanied by the more literary, picaresque descriptions of city walkers, as in the celebrated example of John Gay’s *Trivia; or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London* of 1716.

Mercier obviously derived his interest in urban walking from the extremely numerous examples of this genre; as developed through the twelve volumes of the *Tableau de Paris*, his descriptions have the cumulative effect of constructing a multifaceted and heterogeneous topography of the city. At the same time he resists many of the implications of topographic flânerie—especially those that led, as Charles Nodier was to call it, to the “fetishism” of urban monuments.⁶ Rather than simply continue the practice of translating pictorial views of monuments into guidebooks and topographies, Mercier extended the picaresque vision to embrace the gamut of social experience. Rejecting the already common genres of description—topographies, monumental inventories, catalogs of curiosities, histories—that parceled the city into so many individual and static artifacts, he set out consciously to act as an observer of

the totality. Taking his distance from the numerous seventeenth- and eighteenth-century topographies of Paris, from Corrozet through Piganiol de la Force to Dulaure, Mercier asserted the primary value of moral character over monumental curiosity. “If someone wanted to find in this work a *topographic* description of squares and streets, or a factual history, he would be frustrated in his expectations,” he wrote (“Si quelqu’un s’attendait à trouver dans cet ouvrage une description *topographique* des places et des rues, ou une histoire des faits antérieurs, il serait trompé dans son attente”; *Tableau* 14).

Against pedantic description Mercier thus claimed the value of individual experience, indefatigable inquiry, and the detective work that discovers hidden scenes, “local customs” (“petites coutumes”), work that is accomplished only on foot and personally: “One must see, encounter, and examine all that [the city] contains, to study the mind and the foolishness of its inhabitants . . .” (“Il faut le voir, le parcourir, examiner ce qu’il renferme, étudier l’esprit et la sottise de ses habitants . . .”; 15). Here, the visual imperative is guided not by any preframed vision of the city and its monuments but rather by the swiftly shifting eye of the reporter, always alert to clues to the extraordinary beneath the commonplace, to the general in the particular. Vision is thereby forced into places it does not want to go, to overcome the blindness of the everyday. “The most obvious scenes are, so to speak, no longer to be seen; because the things that we see every day are not those that we know the best,” he noted (“des scènes qu’à force de les voir, ils n’appercevoient pour ainsi dire plus; car les objets que nous voyons tous les jours, ne sont pas ceux que nous connoissons le mieux”; 14), anticipating Benjamin’s characterization of architecture as that art most prone to be viewed in a state of distraction.

“I have sketched according to my views” (“J’ai crayonné d’après mes vues”), Mercier wrote, and he found no better approach to the

depiction of the varied and multiple contrasts presented by the city than that provided by the metaphor of painting: "I have depicted it in many guises; and here it is, traced as it emerges from my pen, as my eyes and my understanding have assembled its elements" ("je l'ai peint sous plusieurs faces; et le voici, tracé tel qu'il est sorti de-dessous ma plume, à mesure que mes yeux et mon entendement en ont rassemblé les parties"; *Tableau 14*). In this way he literally took his cue from painters like Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, who had annotated the volumes of Piganol with hundreds of thumbnail sketches—anticipating Baudelaire's own "painter of modern life," Constantin Guys. Only the rapid sketch or the framed literary vignette might capture these fleeting and rapidly moving impressions.

But in assimilating the painter's practice to his own, Mercier claimed more than a simply picturesque aim. Gaining their aesthetic force by changing contrasts, his tableaux were conceived as counteridealistic; neither satirical nor moralistic, they were in his terms a depiction of the real. If satire or morality was incidentally invoked, it was to be only the direct result of such a realist representation. Thus he would have his readers believe that his representations were traced according to a strict reliance on the accuracy of his vision: "I have wished only to *depict* and not to *judge*" ("je n'ai voulu que *peindre*, et non *juger*"; *Tableau 19*).

Hence his fascination with the visual art of physiognomy. For Mercier the city possessed a face, or rather, it was composed of limitless physiognomies. Taking his cue from Lavater, he saw the streets, views, and scenes of the city as so many meaningful profiles, connected intimately to those belonging to the people they sheltered, represented, and perhaps even shaped. This approach allowed him to draw moral and social conclusions, not only from the aspect of the population but also from the urban fabric.⁷ Buildings and their contexts now became open to interpretation as so many symptomatic, if not pathological, clues to the

morality, health, and happiness of society. In this way Mercier announced that intimate connection between the physiognomies of streets and those of their inhabitants, physiognomies that later would be read by Balzac as signs of destiny and by Zola as proofs of degeneration.

Reading the City: The City as a Book

There are twenty ways to look at Paris. Its antiquities, its monuments, its industry, its mores, its museums, its theaters would call for as many specialized books, and those specialized books that have not yet been written will one day be made. There is one of them that is never mentioned, one that I have always wanted and asked everyone for, one that everyone wants and asks for like me and that they have forgotten to write. This is what has decided me to undertake it.

Il y a vingt manières de voir Paris. Ses antiquités, ses monumens, son industrie, ses mœurs, ses musées, ses théâtres, exigeraient autant de livres spéciaux, et ceux de ces livres spéciaux qui n'ont pas été faits jusqu'ici, le seront un jour. Il en est un dont on ne parle point, que j'ai toujours désiré, que j'ai demandé à tout le monde, que tout le monde desire et demande comme moi, et qu'on a oublié de faire. C'est ce qui m'a décidé à m'en charger. (Nodier, *Introd.* 1)

If Mercier the playwright was concerned with reading the city as a series of visual tableaux and with the development of a narrative form that in a series of tightly written descriptions would stage the episodic nature of the citizens' experience, the notion of the city as a book in and of itself was to be taken to its extreme by the librarian Charles Nodier. Indeed, Nodier envisaged the city of Paris as a giant collection of books: a veritable Babel. After all, he argued, Babel is "the first city, which the Greeks called *Biblos*, alluding to the name of *Biblion*, which they gave to the book" ("la première ville, que les Grecs ont appelée *Biblos*, par allusion au nom de *Biblion*, qu'ils donnaient au livre"; "L'homme" 774). In his

short story “Le bibliomane,” the area around the Arsenal and along the Seine to the Palais Royale is described as a promenade from bookstore to bookstore, the path of the collector through the city—or, as in Nodier’s great but understudied work *Paris historique: Promenade dans les rues de Paris*, the path of the reader of the city. Nodier’s vision of the city is that of what he calls “the fetishist,” who is driven by the principle of “sympathetic curiosity” and collects his views, monuments, and favorite walks like a book collector (“Ce sentiment de curiosité sympathique”; “le principe du *fétichisme*”). Not a house or a street fails to evoke, as “if [it] could speak” or as if it were furnished with signboard, a historic memory (“[s]’ils peuvent parler”; Introd. 2). Sites and houses whose importance was conferred by events or their inhabitants, such as the Gibbet of Monfaucon or the room where Marat was murdered; streets like those surrounding the quarter of Les Halles; monuments that have long since disappeared—all are assembled and depicted with care. Each is treated as if it were a book, to be read and assimilated within the greater book of Paris. The book that results from these promenades, however, refuses to submit Paris and its variety to a predefined order; instead of aestheticizing each individual object of his curiosity, Nodier allows his readers to follow their own paths through the city:

In order to remain faithful to the spirit of our title, and to allow readers the ease of arranging the plates and text of these *Promenades in the Streets of Paris* at will and in their own preferred order, we thought we ought to suppress all pagination.

Pour rester fidèle à l’esprit de notre titre, et laisser aux lecteurs la facilité de faire disposer, à leur gré, et dans l’ordre qu’ils pourront préférer, les planches et le texte de ces *Promenades dans les rues de Paris*, nous avons cru devoir supprimer toute pagination.

(“Table des descriptions contenues dans les Tomes 1 et 2” [*Paris historique*, vol. 1, n. pag.])

Assembled and reassembled according to the reader, the book will eventually return to the city that it read:

Imprisoned within the walls of a great city that my duties do not permit me to leave, I have ceded to the liveliest of my desires and at least traveled within the walls (*intra muros*). I have wandered pencil in hand in the streets of old Paris; I have thrown dates, facts, reflections, and above all feelings at random into my notebooks; these notes became chapters, and from these chapters a book has been made that will disappear tomorrow among the crowd of books. I do not wish it any other fate.

Prisonnier de fait dans l’enceinte d’une grande ville que mes devoirs ne me permettent de quitter, j’ai cédé au plus vif de mes penchans, en voyageant du moins *intra muros*. Je me suis égaré un crayon à la main dans les rues du vieux Paris; j’ai jeté au hasard sur mes tablettes des dates, des faits, des réflexions, et surtout des sentimens; ces notes sont devenues chapitres, et de ces chapitres on a fait un livre qui disparaîtra demain dans la foule des livres. Je ne lui souhaite pas d’autre destin.

(“Conclusion” [*Paris historique*, vol. 2, n. pag.])

With the city a book and the book triumphant over the buildings that it reads, Hugo’s claim in *Notre-Dame de Paris* that printing will kill architecture is taken one step further (193): now, the library, the interior Babel of the librarian, takes the entire city into itself and incorporates it into its own spaces. Only the architecture of the library, it seems, will overcome Hugo’s death knell, but in the metaphoric form of a giant book.

The question of the library was profoundly complicated at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the massive increase in the number of books published. A single statistic will stand for all: while during the years between 1789 and 1814, approximately two thousand titles were published each year, in 1826, twelve years after the defeat of Napoleon, over eight thousand titles appeared.

Writing in 1820, Nodier estimated the effects of this rise in production:

It has been calculated, or rather imagined by approximation, that the number of books produced by printing since its invention has risen to 3,277,764,000 volumes, by estimating that each book has been printed in editions of 300 copies on average and that all these copies exist. According to this hypothesis, and assuming each volume was only an inch thick, placed side by side they would take up a length of 18,207 leagues, which would be a little more than double the circumference of the earth.

On a calculé ou supposé par approximation que le nombre des livres que l'imprimerie a produits depuis son invention, s'élèverait à 3,277,764,000 volumes, en admettant que chaque ouvrage a été tiré à 300 exemplaires pour terme moyen, et que tous les exemplaires existent. D'après cette hypothèse, et en donnant à chaque volume un pouce d'épaisseur seulement, il faudrait, pour les ranger côte à côte sur la même ligne, un espace de 18,207 lieues, qui fait un peu plus du double de la circonférence de la terre. ("Compte")

Nodier knew his subject well. From 1798, when in Besançon he prepared the catalog of the collection of the library of Claude-Antoine Pellier (*Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque de Claude-Antoine Pellier*), he had exercised the métier of librarian, first as assistant to the librarian of the École Centrale, Besançon, then, in 1812, as librarian of Laybach (Ljubljana, Illyria). In 1820, he was four years away from his appointment as librarian of the comte d'Artois at the Arsenal, the functions of which post he performed until his death in 1844. In this context, it is significant that his calculation appears in his review of La Mothe le Vayer's pamphlet *Des moyens de dresser une bibliothèque de cent volumes seulement*—by no means the first or last attempt to draw up a list of the hundred best books as a way of coming to terms with the apparent endlessness of books ("Compte").

The political and cultural forces guiding selectivity among the rapidly enlarging stock of books—first debated on a grand scale by the abbé Grégoire in his attempt to save ancien régime libraries from destruction and vandalism—were paralleled by the call, familiar in the late eighteenth century, for the culling of collections, the eradication of all but the most useful and rational, and the summarizing of others. Mercier had already depicted the results of such a drastic reduction in *L'an 2440*. Entering what used to be the Bibliothèque du Roi, the narrator discovered that "in the place of those four immensely long halls that used to hold thousands of volumes" stood only "a small room where there were many books, seemingly less than voluminous" ("Au lieu de ces quatre salles d'une longueur immense et qui renfermaient des milliers de volumes"; "Un petit cabinet où étaient plusieurs livres qui ne me parurent rien moins que volumineux"). Surprised, he asked whether a fire had destroyed the main part of the collection. "'Yes,' they replied, 'there was a fire, but it was our own hands that set it willingly'":

With unanimous consent we collected all the books we judged useless, frivolous, or dangerous on a vast plain; we built a pyramid out of them that resembled an enormous tower in its height and width: assuredly this was a new Tower of Babel. . . . The flames devoured in waves the stupidity of men, ancient and modern alike.

Oui, me répondit-on, c'est un incendie, mais ce sont nos mains qui l'ont allumé volontairement. . . . D'un consentement unanime, nous avons rassemblé dans une vaste plaine tous les livres que nous avons jugés ou frivoles ou inutiles ou dangereux; nous en avons formé une pyramide qui ressemblait en hauteur et en grosseur à une tour énorme: c'était assurément une nouvelle tour de Babel. . . . Les flammes ont dévoré par torrents les sottises des hommes, tant anciennes que modernes. (163–65)

On his own admission divided between bibliophilia and bibliomania, Nodier was

both an avid collector of books and an ironic fantasist on their tendency to multiply to infinity, often dreaming of the enormous pile of books that would, through the forces of nature or their own instability, self-destruct. Yet he was by no means an enemy of the book: his admiration for Gutenberg is present throughout all his early and many of his late writings, and his passion for collecting, both books and insects, is reflected in his self-confessed bibliophilia and demonstrated by his careful compilation of catalog after catalog of his own and other collections as well as by numerous short stories recounting the adventures of bibliophiles eccentric and otherwise.⁸ Like his celebrated character depicted in “Le bibliomane” (1831–32), Nodier “spent his life surrounded by books and occupied himself only with books” (“Il passait sa vie au milieu des livres, et ne s’occupait que de livres”; 502). Writing “L’amateur de livres” (“The Book Lover”), in *Les français peints par eux-mêmes* (“The French As Seen by Themselves”), published in 1841, he defined the bibliophile as “a man gifted with not a little wit and taste, who takes pleasure in works of genius, imagination, and feeling. He loves that silent conversation of great minds that does not demand repayment in kind” (“Le bibliophile est un homme doué de quelque esprit et de quelque goût, qui prend plaisir aux œuvres du génie, de l’imagination et du sentiment. Il aime cette muette conversation des grands qui n’exige pas de frais de réciprocité”; 92–93).

The ever-present danger was that the cultivated amateur would overstep the bounds of civilized interest into the domain of obsession; the line between the bibliophile and the bibliomane was never quite as firmly drawn as Nodier would have liked: “There is only a single attack of nerves separating the bibliophile from the bibliomaniac” (“Du bibliophile au bibliomane, il n’y a qu’une crise”; 102). The bibliomaniac is indeed sick; the namesake of Nodier’s story, obsessed with the search for the perfect book, lapses into absolute reclu-

siveness; he “no longer spoke, laughed, or ate; his doctor diagnosed *monomania of leather bindings* or *bibliomaniacs’ typhus*” (“*monomanie du maroquin, ou de typhus des bibliomanes*”; “Le bibliomane” 504).

Monomania, the type of disease that included bibliomania, was commonly diagnosed in the 1830s, and Nodier, perhaps a sufferer himself, was eloquent in describing the spatial interiority that such a psychological state induced. I have written elsewhere, in my study of the uncanny in architecture, of the Piranesian fantasy developed by Nodier to depict the space of what he called “reflective monomania” (“monomanie réflexive”) or “morbid sleep,” the “intolerable torture” involved in the monomania of internal reflection, where “all impressions are prolonged without end, where every minute becomes a century” (qtd. in Vidler, *Architectural Uncanny* 38–41). The monomaniacal bibliomaniac, while no doubt sharing this fantastic spatial interiority, was presented with far more tangible evidence of the Babelian results of his mania. As Nodier writes of his mentor, the writer and book collector Henri Boulard (1754–1852), the transition from bibliophile to bibliomane had distinct spatial repercussions:

My dear and honorable master, M. Boulard, had been a delicate and testy bibliophile before amassing in six six-story houses six hundred thousand volumes in all formats, piled up like the stones of cyclopean walls—that is to say, without mortar or cement—but which could from a distance also be mistaken for Gallic tumuli. They were, in effect, veritable “bibliotaphs” or badly seated obelisks, whose verticality had not been ensured by the prudent science of M. Lebas.

Mon cher et honorable maître, M. Boulard, avait été un bibliophile délicat et difficile, avant d’amasser dans six maisons à six étages six cent mille volumes de tous les formats, empilés comme les pierres des murailles cyclopéennes, c’est-à-dire sans chaux et sans ciment, mais qu’on aurait pu aussi prendre de loin pour les

tumuli gaulois. C'était, en effet, de véritables bibliothèques . . . obélisques mal calés, et dont la prudente science de M. Lebas n'avait pas assuré l'aplomb. (*L'amateur* 102–03)

Nodier refers here to the engineer Jean-Baptiste Lebas (1797–1873), who was responsible for the magnificent public spectacle of the erection of the Obelisk of Luxor in the center of the Place de la Concorde in 1836. The implications were clear: not even the most celebrated engineer of the time could ensure the stability of the pyramids of books piled up by bibliomanes or *bibliothécaires* (librarians) alike:

It would be an abuse of words to call these terrifying mountains of books that can be attacked only by undermining and supported only with stanchions “libraries.” “Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum” [“Horrible, unformed, immense monster, which is an offense to the sight” (Vergil, *Aen.* 3.26.59)].

Ce serait abuser des mots que d'appeler bibliothèques ces épouvantables montagnes de livres qu'on ne peut attaquer qu'avec la sape, et soutenir qu'avec l'étau. “Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum.” (103–04)

Such a vision of Babel, repeated in different ways by many of Nodier's contemporaries—notably by Hugo, but in an entirely optimistic light—led Nodier to fantasize its spatial implications, in his celebrated reinterpretation of Thomas de Quincey's fantastic visions of gothic space, significantly entitled “Piranèse, contes psychologiques” (“Piranesi, Psychological Tales”), a passage that served as an amplification of his long discussion of “reflective monomania” (188–89). Investigating what might be termed the space of interiority or of psychological introjection, he compared the monomaniacal subject to one who builds castles in Spain and finds in Piranesi a model of all the convoluted and disturbed spatial characteristics of such interior castles. Fol-

lowing a long and tortuous route up interminable and dangerous stairs, figured through Piranesi's etchings of the *Carceri*, Nodier traces the path of his bibliomane to the very top, where finally Babel has been escaped: his solitary recluse is found lying peacefully on his deathbed, surrounded by a few carefully chosen books, with those he had annotated and composed lying by his bed.

The monomaniac has apparently succeeded in attaining a degree of alienation that is not, Nodier stresses, the madness described by the doctors. Like that distance achieved by another scholar described by Nodier and who, desiring solitude, retreated from the world in an apartment strung with cables on which he balanced farther and farther from the door, this was a “strange alienation that leaves free all the other faculties of high intelligence . . . the fanaticism of perfectibility” (Nodier, “Piranèse” 200). Between the fantasy of perfection and the horror of the void, Nodier's anti-heroes are caught in their understanding of the implications of print culture as no others in their generation. His own circumstances as librarian of the Arsenal were, we have reason to think, no different; the autobiographical overtones of his reflections on mania, his medical and psychological history, leave us in no doubt that we are reading an extended soliloquy on the plight of the librarian.

By contrast to these Babelian nightmares, the physical space of the library as conceived by French architects from the end of the eighteenth century was calm, orderly, and luminous—a fitting frame for the careful classification of the book envisaged by the Enlightenment. Epitomized by the project for the Bibliothèque du Roi by Étienne-Louis Boullée in 1785, the library was envisaged as a kind of Roman amphitheater. Proposing to roof over the courtyard of the existing library, Boullée depicted a barrel-vaulted hall—a kind of perspective extension of Raphael's well-known painted vault in the *School of Athens* in the Vatican. The stacks were ranged on either

side on ascending steps, like the seats in a stadium, and the readers below, dressed in togas, received their books from runners passing them down from step to step. This was a fitting site for the encyclopedic project, which in the imagination of Mercier would end in the utopia of 2440, where children would naturally be sent off to school with Diderot's magnum opus tucked neatly under their arms.

But by the time of Nodier's appointment to the Arsenal library in 1824, such luminosity seemed an impossible dream in the face of the print explosion. Speaking of the development of the collection of the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève after 1619, to a size of some 45,000 volumes and 2,000 manuscripts, Nodier is not sanguine about its transformation into a public library:

The Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève has recently become, following new administrative orders, an immense literary reading room, open to everyone day and night, offering a comfortable and free refuge to the idle poor, whether literate or not. The idea of such an establishment can have its advantages in a century where the most superficial instruction guides everything and where most of our future teachers have need to form themselves by reading; but it is sad to think that so many valuable books, collected for so long and with such great difficulty, are abandoned to the vagaries of the warming room and the coffeehouse. Great libraries are founded to protect the monuments of human intelligence against all vicissitudes and to ease the path of sound studies for elevated and select minds; they have never had the purpose of satisfying the curiosity of good-for-nothings or making a bed for idle stories. This is one of the most useful and profound lessons of *barbarousness* that *progress* has failed to recognize. It has equally disregarded many others.

La Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève est devenue récemment, d'après de nouvelles dispositions administratives, un immense cabinet littéraire, ouvert à tout le monde de jour et de nuit, et qui offre un asile commode et gratuit aux oisifs

sans argent, lettrés ou non lettrés. L'idée d'un établissement pareil peut avoir ses avantages dans un siècle où l'instruction la plus superficielle mène à tout, et où la plupart de nos maîtres à venir ont besoin de se former à la lecture; mais il est douloureux de penser que tant de livres inappréciables, si longuement amassés, sont abandonnés aux chances odieuses du chauffage et de l'estaminet. Les grandes bibliothèques sont instituées pour protéger contre toutes les vicissitudes les monuments de l'intelligence humaine, et pour faciliter la voie des bonnes études à des esprits élevés et choisies; elles n'ont jamais eu pour objet d'amuser la curiosité des fainéants, et de faire une litière de romans à la paresse. C'est une des vues utiles et profondes de *la barbarie* que *le progrès* a méconnues. Il en a méconnu bien d'autres.

(*Mes rêveries* [1800], qtd. in Barrière 28)

Against this image of the public warehouse for the idle, a stockpile of books for those who cannot read, Nodier continuously returned to the image of his childhood room in Besançon, the little library of his bedroom. Its central role in his topography from the literary utopia of "Mes rêveries" written during the Terror to the careful architecture of Maxime's library in "L'amour et le grimoire" ("Love and the Spell") thirty-two years later, marks it as an almost sacred realm (see Barrière 28–31). Whether accommodated in an old castle or in rooms constructed especially for the purpose, the library is constituted by its architecture. Thus, in 1832, beset by fears of monomania and bibliomania, he recalled this childhood retreat as an ideal library, a way to escape the disorderly world of the public collection, in the setting for the magical romance "L'amour et le grimoire" as described by the hero of the story, Maxime:

My father had built this pavilion, in happier times, between his courtyard and his garden. . . . The entire building contained only a long room, rectangular in plan, lit from the east and the west by ogival windows and opening to the south onto a small but well-planned garden.

Mon père avait fait construire ce pavillon, dans des temps plus heureux, entre sa cour et son jardin. . . . Tout le bâtiment ne contenait qu'une longue chambre en parallélogramme, éclairée à l'est par des fenêtres ogives, et qui s'ouvrait au midi sur un jardin de peu d'étendue, mais assez bien conçu dans sa distribution. (530)

This garden formed the only entrance to the library, by way of a double stair leading to a balcony. At the center of the library room itself was a long black table, of the same proportions as the room, with enough space for someone to circulate around it but close enough to the walls of books for a reader to be able to lean back when seated and pull a book off the shelf: "all the rest of the interior of the walls offered nothing to the eye save the back of an old book" ("Tout le reste de l'intérieur des murailles n'offrait rien à l'œil qui ne fût le dos d'un vieux livre"; 531).

Nodier's vision of the perfect private library would soon be realized in the architect Henri Labrouste's library of Sainte-Geneviève of 1843–51, the first public library in Paris. Labrouste's design was based on Boullée's design for the Bibliothèque du Roi. Labrouste emulated his vaulting, but in cast iron and with light streaming from its glazed windows. Unlike Boullée, who had imagined his scholars in Roman togas sitting in a reading room lined with stepped bookstacks as if in an amphitheater, Labrouste seemed more interested in providing Nodier's model of calm seclusion, now for the general public.

The Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, which stands today beside Soufflot's Enlightenment church, is entered on the ground floor through a simulated garden, its painted walls topped by the busts of ancient and modern writers. The reading room itself, served by a double stair, takes the form of a long double vault constructed in iron, a deliberate reference to the project of Boullée but now lit by rows of arched windows and furnished with a long central table. The private retreat of the bibliomaniacal librarian had become the

public resort of the modern scholar. In an extension of this argument, which would involve an examination of the poetic and highly elaborate catalogs hermetically construed by the careful juxtaposition of titles—drawn up by Nodier for various private collections, including his own—we might also find significance in the dramatic demonstration by Labrouste of the library's catalog inscribed on its exterior walls: the catalog is removed from the private fantasies of the monomaniac and placed finally in the public realm.

Drawing on the precedent of both Boullée's and Labrouste's libraries, Dominique Perrault built the Bibliothèque de France between 1989 and 1995. The steps of Boullée's stadium have now been placed outside; the (inaccessible) garden has taken the place of the central reading room, which has been divided in true Enlightenment fashion into four, each part beneath a giant tower of books holding the appropriate collection. The book has finally been neatly bound up by the building; its order of arrangement is reflected in the multiple steps of Boullée's stadium, then reproduced in Labrouste's galleries, then reified in Perrault's towers. The globe (Boullée), the catalog inscribed on the facade (Labrouste), and the four open books (Perrault) symbolized this order in different ways, while the ground of the stadium, the philosophic garden, and the combination of the two at the center of the Bibliothèque de France carried all the associations of an antique tradition of reading and reflection. Philosophers, these spaces implied, from Plato to Rousseau, if not from Bergson to Deleuze, would find their needs for solitary communion with the wisdom of ages and for sociability as academicians in Raphaelesque garb fulfilled within these walls.

Like Boullée's project Perrault's library was not only planned to serve its librarians and patrons usefully but also designed to symbolize its role and place in the culture of the city, the crowning achievement of

Mitterand's series of *grands projets* for Paris. With its four high, L-shaped towers raised up at the corners of a rectangular podium, it seems from a distance to take the form of four huge open books. It is thus an architectural icon, using its shape to establish its meaning according to a clear iconographic reference, a microcosm of the urban civilization it represents. At once an image of its contents and an image of modernity, its glass towers echo the dreams of modernist architects for a radiant city of transparency and light, and their booklike shape echoes the eighteenth-century Enlightenment call for an architecture that speaks to the eyes, communicating its purpose and moral status to the people. The library is also, like many of its predecessors, an icon of modernity, its glass towers echoing the dreams of Le Corbusier for a *Ville Radieuse* of transparency and light.

As such, the Bibliothèque de France marks the place and role of the library in the city of Paris, a visual point of reference taking its place among the full series of Mitterand's projects that were, as a whole, calculated to impress the signs of late-twentieth-century modernity on the fabric of the city and to guide the citizen through the city as if on a full-scale three-dimensional map. The grand arch to the west and the popular Opera to the east; the Parc La Villette, replacing the slaughterhouses to the northeast; and the pyramid of the refurbished Louvre at the center—these projects sought to endow the landscape of Paris with a set of symbolic forms that would not only register the intent of the administration to modernize the city of light but also impose a new readability on a city all too quickly losing the coherence gained by its replanning under Haussmann and, with evident socialist nostalgia, self-consciously recalling the temporary monuments of the revolutionary festivals between 1789 and 1795. In red (La Villette) and white (the Opera of the Bastille), transparent and symbolic in form (the pyramid and the library), and visually framing

(the arch), these emblems of a revived republican socialism were seen as the culmination of a strategy for the modernization of Paris that began with the Enlightenment.

The opposition of Jean-Noël Jeanneney, director of the National Library of France, to recent plans by Google Text to scan the world's collections of books in order to offer them online gives rise to the thought that the enormous new library buildings recently completed in London and Paris have in some way become obsolete even before being fully operational. He cautioned:

Here is taking form, in the short term, the messianic dream that was defined at the end of the last century: all the world's knowledge freely accessible all over the planet. . . . We must nevertheless look at it more closely. And immediately serious concerns emerge. Let's leave aside the mute dismay of librarians who are worried, hardly daring to say so, about the idea of seeing their reading rooms emptying. . . .

Voici que prendrait forme, à court terme, le rêve messianique qui a été défini à la fin du siècle dernier: tous les savoirs du monde accessibles gratuitement sur la planète entière. . . . Il faut pourtant y regarder de plus près. Et naissent aussitôt de lourdes préoccupations. Laissons de côté la sourde inquiétude de certains bibliothécaires préoccupés, sans trop oser le dire, à l'idée de voir se vider leurs salles de lecture. . . .

The idea of a virtual Babel, a commonplace of twentieth-century utopia and till now defeated by the impermanence of successive kinds of media, from microfilm to CD-ROM, seems closer to realization. The corresponding vision of empty reading rooms replaced by ubiquitous and decentralized terminals leads to the fear, not unjustified, that the big national libraries, like the centers of the cities in which they stand, are despite themselves rapidly being transformed into museums. The future of such monuments, rapidly being outmoded as nothing but Nodier's warehouses,

will emerge with the expansion of Google, the Gutenberg Project, and many other concerns dedicated to the preparation and delivery of online books. In this process, as Jason Epstein noted in the *New York Review of Books*, the virtual book will once more enter the city, spread ubiquitously through the literary equivalent of ATM machines, in Wal-Marts and pharmacies, that receive digital files, print them out, and bind them in a low-cost paperback: a city as library once more, one no longer read but simply a conduit for reading.

NOTES

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1. "[J]e rêve parfois que je marche dans une rue de Paris dont les façades haussmanniennes se transforment peu à peu en rayons de livres superposés et alignés à l'infini, chaque étage devenant un rayon, chaque fenêtre un dos de livre. Je cherche une adresse, et ne trouve qu'une cote" (Genette 38). Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

2. For a discussion of the attempts to define new types of public buildings, see Vidler, *Writing*.

3. For the debates over the Hôtel-Dieu, see Rondonneau de la Motte; Tenon; and, more recently, Fortier et al.

4. The return to Greek rather than Roman examples was supported by antiquarian research and travel accounts after 1750, notably by the first publication of measured drawings of the Acropolis prepared by Leroy between 1754 and 1755.

5. Voltaire, in his two essays on Parisian urbanism, "Des embellissements de la ville" and "Des embellissements de Paris," called for the opening up of the city to air, light, and circulation.

6. "This feeling of sympathetic curiosity is suited to less enlightened minds. It is one of the most universal instincts of the human heart. This is the principle of *fetishism*" ("Ce sentiment de curiosité sympathique est propre aux esprits les moins éclairés. C'est un des instincts les

plus universels du cœur humain. C'est le principe du *fétichisme*"; Nodier, *Introd.* 2).

7. Johann Kaspar Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* were published in Leipzig between 1775 and 1778 in four volumes and translated into French almost immediately, as *Essai sur la physionomie destiné à faire connoître l'homme et à le faire aimer* (Paris and The Hague, 1781–1803).

8. As Jean-Rémy Dahan notes, Nodier moves only gradually from an admiration of Gutenberg to perceiving a threat from the book.

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