

fiction of the city
class, culture and mass housing
in london and paris



MATTHEW TAUNTON

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Fictions of the City

**Class, Culture and Mass Housing
in London and Paris**

Matthew Taunton

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Introduction – Fictions of the City

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the exponential growth of both London and Paris created unprecedented social formations. The attempt to make sense of the complexity of modern urban life – or alternatively to testify to its incomprehensibility – became a key function of fictional narrative. To make an urban fiction is to make assumptions about the nature of the city in question and the ways in which it functions. Often, it will also involve a critical engagement with the structures, institutions and mechanisms that shape the city's social life. Fictions of the city thus frequently contain projections about the ways in which that city could be improved or perfected, or go to wrack. In this regard novels and films about urban life form a continuum with treatises on urban planning, architectural manifestoes and social reform tracts. The relationship between the real city and the novels and films that use that city as a setting is complex and heavily mediated by other cultural forms. This book investigates representations of urban life that are embedded in a discourse about the interrelation of class, culture and mass housing in the modern metropolis, taking London and Paris as its test cases.

Fictions of the City proposes that the home should be placed at the centre of a new understanding of metropolitan life. With this in mind, certain key novels and films that bear on the issue of mass housing are subjected to critical analyses that put them into relation with contemporaneous debates in urban planning, architecture and state housing. Focussing on four key developments, two in London and two in Paris, I develop a comparative approach to the two cities that enables an exploration of their very different geographies of class. These are: Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris in the 1850s, 60s and 70s; the two waves of growth of the London suburbs in the late nineteenth

century and the 1930s; the development of the HLM *Grands ensembles* in the Parisian *banlieue*; and the rise of the council estate in London in the post-war period. By examining fictions of mass housing – from the novels of Zola and H. G. Wells to films like *La Haine* and *Nil By Mouth* – this book will demonstrate that housing is one of the key mechanisms by which economic relations are transformed into lived experience and cultural practice.

My main argument can be summarised as three interconnected propositions which are expounded, elaborated and tested through analyses of novels and films. The first is that the home is vitally important in shaping urban experience and subjectivity, and that studies of literary and filmic representations of the city have often failed to take this into account. In part, this can be understood as part of a tendency to overstate the importance of the city's public spaces – its boulevards, plazas and parks – at the cost of a failure to give proper attention to the development of new patterns of urban dwelling and metropolitan domesticity. This has sometimes been motivated by a moral preference for the dynamic and mobile over the fixed and immobile. But whether commentators wish to celebrate the urban wanderer's ability to 'move freely and untrammelled over the surface of mundane things' (Park 1967: 156) or deplore the perceived rootlessness of modern life, the basic analysis remains the same. Urban experience is too often assumed to be characterised by the experience of losing oneself wandering in a crowd: it is indicative that the itinerant figure of the *flâneur* has come to serve in some quarters as the ultimate symbol of modernity. Yet city dwellers are not usually freewheeling nomads lost in a maze of streets. They are often powerfully attached to certain locations, whether by their own inclinations or by some coercive geographical or economic logic. These locations include offices, libraries, cinemas, pubs and the like, but above all houses and flats. The analyses of novels and films put forward in this book reposition housing as the central term in the political discourse of urbanisation.

The second proposition is that class in the urban context is more tied to place than many theories of the city – particularly those which took *flânerie* to be the defining feature of the metropolis – have allowed. In opposition to theories of urban life that have celebrated (or deplored) the mingling of social classes in the city's public spaces, I claim that there is a determinate geography of class in the city that shapes and is shaped by the distribution of housing types and tenures. This has been subject to manipulation by governments and planners for a variety of reasons and it is here that the extensive literature around the planning

of the modern city comes into play. Governments have often attempted to apply the ideas of architects and urban planners in the interests of the preservation of social stability. Certain types of mass housing have at various times been considered dangerous and others conducive to social harmony. Whether or not given forms of housing promote a stable family life has often been key to such considerations. Novelists and filmmakers have often used fictional representations of the city to explore such issues: this book investigates areas of overlap in their thinking about urban housing. Some of the texts under discussion – like H. G. Wells's *The Sleeper Awakes* or Jean-Luc Godard's *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* – see writers and filmmakers grappling at close quarters with contemporary debates over the future planning of the city and its housing. In other cases – such as Jeunet and Caro's *Delicatessen* or Gary Oldman's *Nil By Mouth* – the engagement with ideas from architecture or town planning is less explicit, but they are nevertheless enriched by viewing their explorations of the conditions of urban domesticity in these terms.

The third and final proposition derives in part from the examination of two very different capital cities in London and Paris. Adopting a comparative approach to two cities – rather than focussing on just one or drawing arbitrarily on salient examples from any number of cities – makes easy generalisations about 'the city' impossible. This book asserts the geographical specificity of London and Paris, resisting a certain tendency in critical theory that in its eagerness to rail against the international capitalist economy has overstated the extent to which that economy has homogenised cultures and obliterated distinct geographical locations. Thinkers such as Paul Virilio – who hails the 'death of geography' in *The Information Bomb* – would have us believe that developments in communication and transportation have effectively abolished space (Virilio 2000: 9). Marc Augé's conviction that a previously heterogeneous world has been swallowed up by supermarkets, airport lounges, and travelodges – 'non-places' – is one theoretical manifestation of the popular notion that urban life is becoming increasingly homogenised on a global scale (Augé 1995). London and Paris arguably have more in common with each other than with most world cities, yet by comparing representations of mass housing in these cities it can be seen that – the *ennui* of supermarkets notwithstanding – a high degree of geographical and cultural specificity persists. I contend that fundamental differences exist between the two cities in terms of the relationship between city and country, the relationship between centre and periphery, the distribution of housing types and tenures,

geography of class and characteristic dwelling patterns. Certain accounts of the development of capitalist modernity – Marxist ones in particular – have tended to paper over these differences in the interests of producing a schematic model. Indeed Marx and Engels explicitly rely on an imperfect fusion of the histories of England and France for their theoretical formulations: ‘for the economical development of the bourgeoisie, England is here taken as the typical country; for its political development, France’ (Marx & Engels 1985: 81). Novelists and filmmakers have often proved to be more sensitive to specifics and it is for this reason that fictions of the city prove to be such a potent resource in addressing these issues.

The first chapter deals with Haussmann’s rebuilding of Paris in the nineteenth century, and the lasting prevalence of the Haussmannian *immeuble* as a standard housing type in Paris. The first section sets Haussmann in his political context as the servant of the Second Empire, and considers a selection of responses to Haussmannisation. It is in the context of Second Empire Paris that the figure of the *flâneur* first emerges, and the overall emphasis in critical assessments of Haussmannisation has generally been on the streets, squares and boulevards of the Nouveau Paris. I argue that the Haussmannian *immeuble* has had a more profound effect on urban experience, which – seen in this light – is less fluid and itinerant than theorists such as Simmel and Benjamin had thought. By taking Zola’s *L’Assommoir* as its focus instead of the street poetry of Baudelaire, the second section demonstrates that the apartment building provides a powerful alternative to the boulevard as a matrix through which to view the political meanings of Haussmannisation. The following section is concerned with Georges Perec’s *Life: A User’s Manual*, which dissects the *immeuble* and invites us to rethink the dominant narratives of Haussmannisation in terms of the crucial role played by urban domesticity in shaping the experience of the city. Similarly, in Section 1.3, three films – *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*, *The Tenant* and *Delicatessen* – are analysed as ways of thinking through the political potentials of the apartment block, again demonstrating that at least some of the fundamental social questions posed by urbanisation are played out in the home, and not in the streets.

Chapter Two switches to London, where there was no analogous centrally orchestrated plan to rationalise and restructure the city in the nineteenth century. There did emerge, however, in this period, a kind of typical dwelling that we still recognise today as such: the suburban home. The first section explains the different relation of centre to periphery in London and Paris, drawing on a variety of historical and

literary sources to show how class aspiration in London was directed centrifugally, toward the countryside, and then demonstrating that this went hand in hand – through the growth of suburbia – with the emergence of a geography of class that was fundamentally different to that in Paris. This is put into relation with the emergence of the – initially virulently anti-suburban – Garden City movement and, in Section 2.2, with the planning ideas of H. G. Wells. By making these ideas the context for a reading of certain of his novels, I show how Wells sees the home as having a vital role in sustaining the family, and by extension the stability of society and the prospects for socialism. This required low density, suburban-type dwellings, and a redistribution of the people across the land. Orwell, whose *Coming Up for Air* is the principal focus of Section 2.3, represents the opposite argument that the relentless sprawl of the suburbs – fuelled by Garden City propaganda – was threatening to completely engulf the countryside, as it dissolved the city. A high density, urban solution was required: the Englishman was going to have to learn to live in flats.

In Chapter Three – which focuses on *grands ensembles* of state subsidised, HLM housing in the Parisian *banlieue* built in the post-war period – the difference between the two cities in respect of the relation between centre and periphery becomes still more pronounced. The London suburbs had attracted the English middle classes with their propensity for bucolic fantasy, but in Paris – where the immaculate Haussmannian centre was the ideal – the *banlieue* was little more than a dumping ground for undesirables. Christiane Rochefort's novel *Les Petits enfants du siècle*, the subject of Section 3.2, engages with the first wave of development, exploring the very specific form of alienation and ennui that the author associates with a constellation of modernist architectural ideals and social exclusion. The next part deals with Godard's *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, a quasi-sociological treatise on the intentions and effects of Paul Delouvrier's Schéma Directeur which links the emerging urban forms with the authoritarianism of the Gaullist state. Godard follows Bazin in his belief in a cinema that is uniquely capable of laying bare realities, and his use of the new Delouvrian landscape in a tale of prostitution and *ennui* is powerfully suggestive. *La Haine*, I argue in Section 3.4, gives us reason to hold Delouvrier's housing policies responsible for the later social discontent of the *banlieue*. The placement of social housing far from the amenities and the life of the city – the creation of a geographical matrix that excludes immigrants and the poor from the urban scene – must be seen as a key factor in understanding the very real social problems the film depicts.

The final chapter plots the parallel history of the development of social housing in post-war London. The consensus of the post-war period saw a solution to the housing crisis – and specifically the provision of quality homes for the working class – as crucial to social-democratic hopes of creating a more equal Britain. Section 4.2 shows how Ken Loach's *Cathy Come Home* articulates a critique of the welfare state in its own terms, employing imagery – particularly of the family under threat – that was familiar to the proponents of social housing, and Loach's film is intended to spur them into further action. The typical London council estate as we now know it – its hard, angular concrete, with a mixture of deck-access and high-rise blocks – arose from the adoption of industrial building techniques by local authorities keen to meet the vast demand for new dwellings. The borders of the council estate have now become the frontier of a class divide that is difficult to traverse. In Sections 4.3 and 4.4, I compare two films – *Nil By Mouth* and *Wonderland* – in which council estates form a key part of the *mise en scène*. *Nil By Mouth* sees the estate as fundamentally confining, a ghetto which has come to symbolise the decline of the traditional working class and the emergence of a new lumpenproletariat. A more optimistic view is taken by *Wonderland*, which seeks to reconnect the estate and its inhabitants with the city as a whole. In this reading – which is not without its problems – the situation in London is partially redeemed because unlike in Paris, social housing is distributed throughout the city, and not placed outside it.

Overall, these four case studies demonstrate that it is both necessary and fruitful to rethink the issue of class in the urban context with a new focus on the issue of housing. This is to be seen from the dual perspective of planning on the one hand, and the subjective experience of the home on the other, a dialectic that is dramatised in literature and film.

1

Haussmann's Paris and the *immeuble*

1.1 Rethinking Haussmannisation

Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris in the nineteenth century is a defining moment in the history of the metropolis. In certain ways, it would be possible to trace the history of urban planning back to antiquity, but the manner and scale of Haussmann's intervention make it the point of origin for a particular conception of modern urban planning. Under the Second Empire, the state made a concerted effort to bring the whole city under its bureaucratic control, and to reshape it in the name of efficiency and modernity. As Françoise Choay puts it, 'Paris was the object of the first perfected plan for regularization of a city in the industrial age' (1969: 15). Much has been written about the process of Haussmannisation, and its effects. And a great deal of this has followed the lead of Walter Benjamin's writings about the *flâneur*, and focussed upon the creation of the boulevards and the role of the public, or external, spaces of the city. For many, the most significant effect of Haussmann's renovations on the art and culture of Paris is that they open up a variety of public spaces for walking (Forgione 2005: 664). This chapter takes the *immeuble* as its object rather than the boulevards, streets and plazas that have preoccupied so many critics.

Baron Georges Haussmann was the right hand man and 'demolition artist' of Napoleon III, under instruction to cement imperial power in a capital that had generated several revolutions in the preceding century (Horne 2002: 265). The Second Empire is best understood as a return to the heroic, Napoleonic politics of the First Empire, and as the reaction of a resurgent conservative rearguard to the 1848 revolution. Since 1789, Paris had been the site of an extraordinary procession of revolutions, power struggles and class conflicts. Karl Marx realised that

an understanding of the failure of the 1848 revolutions was of central importance to his own political project, and in 1852 he set out to describe this failure in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

For Marx, the most troubling aspect of the 1848 revolution was that the radical and liberal impulses that inspired it were so easily won over to the forces of despotism. Given his reputation as a dictatorial emperor, it is perhaps surprising that Napoleon III is the first ruler of a large state outside America to be elected by universal male suffrage (Hobsbawm 1999: 125). But 'Louis Napoleon's election signified that even the democracy of universal suffrage, that institution identified with revolution, was compatible with the maintenance of social order' (Hobsbawm 1999: 40). Marx and his fellow radicals had to face the fact that one of their major weapons against the despotism of the July monarchy – the idea of universal suffrage – was, barring a huge and unlikely swing in popular opinion, useless. Napoleon III realised that the peasantry could be won over with land reforms, that they vastly outnumbered the industrial proletariat and that they were inherently conservative. He knew that he had nothing to fear from the popular vote and was duly elected on 2 December 1848 with a majority of 5.5 million out of a total 7.4 million votes cast (Hobsbawm 1999: 39). In 1851, he used this mandate, and the allies he had made in the military, to stage his *coup d'état*. Marx writes: 'On December 2 the February Revolution is conjured away by a cardsharp's trick, and what seems overthrown is no longer the monarchy but the liberal concessions that were wrung from it by centuries of struggle' (1984: 13). Incredibly, Marx argued, the revolution had been hijacked by a man whose political programme was rather to the conservative side of the monarchy he displaced and yet he had managed to do it all in the name of the people. France 'escaped the despotism of a class only to fall back beneath the despotism of an individual, and, what is more, beneath the authority of an individual without authority' (Marx 1984: 106). The lesson of 1848 for Europe's ruling elites, therefore, was that they 'had to determine what concessions to the new forces could be made without threatening the social system [...] to whose defense they were committed' (Hobsbawm 1999: 91). Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris – and the resulting transformations in urban housing – must be seen in the context of these concessions.

Much of the Second Empire's power was derived from 'a compromise with the new capitalist economic forces' (Van Zanten 1994: 199). Both Haussmann and Napoleon would give speeches outlining the purposes of their grand plan at large-scale inauguration ceremonies on the

completion of new boulevards (Van Zanten 1994: 207). Napoleon's addresses were carefully poised, alluding on the one hand to the absolute power of the Empire over the geography of Paris, and on the other hand pointing out that this authoritarian restructuring of Paris was intended to liberalise trade. In a contradiction that is a familiar aspect of the rhetoric of free-market liberalism, liberty – which here means no more than the free market – is guaranteed by an aggressively authoritarian state, whose main function is to prevent society from interfering with the economy. Napoleon III said at the opening of the Boulevard de Sebastopol:

The municipal council thus has a multiple task to accomplish: it must first of all insure the financial resources of the nation, [then] support new construction to lodge the sudden increase in population, so that, on the other hand, it must demolish in order to create new streets which permit light and air to penetrate the unhealthy quarters and build great arteries helping the development of the city, linking the center to the extremities.

(Quoted Van Zanten 1994: 207)

The salient feature of the discourse in which Napoleon and Haussmann explicate the renovations is the medicalizing emphasis on circulation. The various districts of the city are to be linked by a series of boulevards and roads, making the city into a single organism with a system of veins and arteries enabling the free circulation of goods and labour. The new boulevards were referred to as *percées* – cuts – or even as *éventrements* – disembowelments or eviscerations – reinforcing the metaphors of pathology by envisioning Haussmann's boulevards as surgical incisions (Kostof 1992: 266).

The key role of Haussmann's boulevards was to link different zones of the city to form a new unity. This process of interlinking and unification went further in 1860 when the legal limits of the city were extended up to the 1841 Thiers fortifications (Loyer 1988: 104) to establish the twenty *arrondissements* that remain today, a zone clearly demarcated by the city wall. By annexing built up areas within the wall and bringing them under the same planning logic that governed central Paris Haussmann enlarged the urban zone and 'stamped a new urban identity on these quasi-rural settlements by purposely obliterating their former structure' (Kostof 1992: 58). This also emphasised the role of the Thiers fortifications – which marked the administrative limits of the city until the post-1945 restructuring of the Paris region – as an absolute cut off point at the edge of the city. The modern day *périphérique* follows

the path of these fortifications and continues to demarcate the area of central Paris.

The sharp distinction between the city and its surroundings suggested by the city wall is a lasting legacy of Haussmannisation. As Anne Power puts it, Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris 'set in train a characteristic pattern of French urban development, a well-preserved, attractively planned centre with marginal housing around the edges in poorly planned developments, badly served by the urban infrastructure and lacking a longer-term vision' (Power 1993: 25). Paris remained a walled city long after London had burst its banks, and as well as acting to the detriment of the housing projects in the *banlieue* (discussed in Chapter 3) this is a significant factor in Haussmannisation:

For the spontaneous urbanization of the industrial era the Old World had two types of cities to offer: the open city, like London, which was free for unlimited expansion, and the closed city, like Paris, bounded by ancient walls. It is not surprising that the most elaborate and precocious plan originated in an enclosed city, where the disorder created by spatial limitation was more shocking and hopeless.

(Choay 1969: 15)

The growth of Paris in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was given its particular character by this spatial limitation of the city. The expanding population had been forced to live within the legal limits of the city, which were demarcated by the wall until 1840. This impacted upon the development of Parisian housing.

The available housing was quickly filled up. Houses then began to be subdivided into multiple dwellings; when this new breakup of space became insufficient, upper stories were added to the old buildings.

(Sennett 1986: 134)

Rather than spreading outwards like London, Paris developed by housing a greater number at greater density in the same area. The Haussmannian *immeuble* was thus prefigured by this subdivision of houses into multiple dwellings.

In poorer areas, the compressed nature of the city made for particularly abject conditions, and the desire to eliminate Paris's 'unhealthy quarters' was a subtext of Haussmann's plan. Napoleon insists on the need to 'lodge the sudden increase in population'. This was a subplot, however: Haussmann's scheme was one in which '[p]roblems of

traffic flow were given a priority' (Choay 1969: 17), and there was no systematic effort to provide alternative dwellings for the urban poor. Insofar as it was concerned with addressing the housing problem, moreover, the plan was inadequate. It was Engels who pointed out, in *The Housing Question*, that Haussmann's supposed cure for the awful living conditions of the Parisian poor was in effect simply to relocate the slums rather than to abolish them. Moreover, for Engels, this becomes the pattern for subsequent bourgeois solutions to the housing question:

[T]he result is everywhere the same: the scandalous alleys and lanes disappear to the accompaniment of lavish self-praise from the bourgeoisie on account of this tremendous success, but they appear again immediately somewhere else and often in the immediate neighbourhood.

(Engels 1942: 71)

While Haussmannisation might appear to do away with the slums, it does so 'in such a way that the solution continually reproduces the question' (Engels 1942: 70). As slums were destroyed and replaced with wide streets of bourgeois apartments, slum dwellers simply decamped to areas that had not yet been developed, or to the areas beyond the city wall.

The fact that Haussmann was himself relatively uninterested in housing, emphasising circulation instead, must in part account for the tendency of subsequent literature on Haussmannisation to focus on the transformations that were enacted on the public spaces of the city: on streets, squares and parks, rather than homes and offices. This is also perhaps partly an effect (and elsewhere a cause) of the popularity of Walter Benjamin's notion of the *flâneur*, which gained its fullest expression in his work on Baudelaire, as a characteristic 'type' of modernity. The *flâneur* requires the context of the boulevard – as a wide, public and urban space – in order to wander among strangers noticing things and encountering otherness. Baudelaire had flagged his interest in his essay 'The Painter of Modern Life' (Baudelaire 1995: 1–41) and Benjamin proposed a highly influential reading of his poetry with this figure of the urban wanderer at its heart (Benjamin 1973: 35–66; Benjamin 1992). For Benjamin, Baudelaire's poem 'À Une passante' (Baudelaire 1996: 133–4) – in which a chance encounter in a crowded street kindles in the poet 'a love which only a city dweller experiences' (Benjamin 1992: 166) – is paradigmatic of urban experience. 'Far from experiencing

the crowd as an opposed, antagonistic element, this very crowd brings to the city dweller the figure that fascinates' (Benjamin 1992: 165–6). Metropolitan life, for Benjamin, is fundamentally defined by the relationship between individual and crowd, and the street is the stage for this encounter.

Alongside Baudelaire, the influence of Georg Simmel on Benjamin is pronounced. Simmel's work was instrumental in developing the vocabulary of urban sociology that Benjamin works with. The concepts of the primacy of the visible, 'shock', the importance of fashion and so on, were articulated by Simmel in his essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'. For Simmel, metropolitan experience is characterised by an 'intensification of nervous stimulation' (1997: 175). Thrown into a vast and swirling crowd, the individual psyche must find a way of coping with 'the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions' (Simmel 1997: 175). Simmel's analysis is in many ways very acute and he captures something essential about the city that still applies today. Anyone who has walked down Oxford Street on a Saturday will know what it means to be bombarded with onrushing sensory impressions. But the familiarity of such an experience should not deceive us: Simmel's account of urban life is focussed on the crowds and the chaos that fill its public spaces. I want to question the idea that these are the loci of the defining subjective experience of urban life.

One of the reasons for doing this is that the emphasis on 'public space' in readings of the effects of Haussmannisation tends to promote a certain limited spectrum of interpretations as to the political content of the renovations. For example, Marxist critics like Marshall Berman and T. J. Clark have proposed that there is a kind of dialectic at work in Haussmann's renovations. To be sure, it is argued, Haussmannisation was undertaken in the service of an authoritarian and aggressively pro-capitalist state, but the important thing is that the modernisation of the city produces the conditions under which the contradictions of capitalism become apparent. Drawing on Benjamin's figure of the *flâneur*, and, like Benjamin, on the poetry of Baudelaire, Marshall Berman provides an optimistic analysis of the widening of the boulevards. His account of Baudelaire's prose poem 'Les Yeux des pauvres' is instructive. In the poem, the bourgeois narrator and his lover are found sitting in a café on a new boulevard when they see a poor family staring in at the luxury from which they are excluded. The narrator immediately feels sympathy for them, and guilt about his own affluence, but when he

looks to his lover for the same reaction, he is disgusted by her callous reaction when she says: 'I can't stand these people with their eyes wide open like entrance gates! Can't you ask the headwaiter to send them away?' (Baudelaire 1997: 61).

Berman interprets the poem thus:

The physical and social transformations that drove the poor out of sight now bring them back directly into everyone's line of vision. Haussmann, in tearing down the old medieval slums, inadvertently broke down the self-enclosed and hermetically sealed world of traditional urban poverty. The boulevards, blasting great holes through the poorest neighborhoods, enable the poor to walk through the holes and out of their ravaged neighborhoods, to discover for the first time what the rest of their city and the rest of life is like. And as they see, they are seen: the vision, the epiphany, flows both ways. In the midst of the great spaces, under the bright lights, there is no way to look away. The glitter lights up the rubble, and illuminates the lives of the people at whose expense the bright lights shine.

(Berman 1982: 153)

In Berman's reading the fact that these bourgeois lovers are forced to react to seeing the poor – whether with sympathy or contempt – contains within it an inherently progressive impulse. The narrator who sympathises with their plight is now ideologically allied to it, and – with the poor also being confronted with the visible luxuries of their historical enemy – the battle lines are drawn. Baudelaire's lovers, who had been happily enjoying the pleasures of public life on the boulevards, are polarised politically by an inevitable by-product of the very space they are enjoying. 'Should the barricades go up on the boulevard ...' Berman writes, 'the lovers could well find themselves on opposite sides' (1982: 154). For Berman, the fact that the barricades did go up in 1871 is evidence that the intermixing of social classes in the boulevards generated this surge of egalitarian energy. Yet the causal link is a tenuous one, and it ignores the fact that the commune failed. Furthermore, Berman places too much faith in the idea of a completely fluid public sphere. Certainly, many of the case studies in this book tend to suggest that – while the segregation of classes within a city can exacerbate the problems of the poor – situations where different classes mix, or live in the same area, do not necessarily spark social revolutions.

T. J. Clark's account of Haussmannisation and the painting of Manet and his circle works with similar assumptions, but arrives at a rather different conclusion. 'The typical scene – this new painting certainly suggested – was likely to be one in which the classes coexisted but did not touch ... Class exists, but Haussmann's spaces allow it to be overlooked' (Clark 1999: 73). For Clark, the Haussmannian city presents radical opportunities, but modern painting posited a kind of reconciliation between social classes based on the idea that they could coexist in the same spaces while simply ignoring each other. What Clark and Berman share, though, is the conviction that the most fundamental social, cultural and even psychological shifts associated with urbanisation – and with Haussmannisation in particular – take place in the public realm. This leads them to ignore developments in the private, domestic sphere that are arguably more significant, and which should also give us cause to doubt the conclusions that they arrive at with regard to the development of urban class relations.

If both Berman and Clark have seen in Haussmann's boulevards the potential for a kind of liberation – however problematic – then the emphasis on the new exterior spaces of the city, and the lines of sight that they opened up, has also spawned a breed of more pessimistic ruminations, ranging from suspicion to paranoia. Walter Benjamin writes in *The Arcades Project*:

The true goal of Haussmann's projects was to secure the city against civil war. He wanted to make the erection of barricades in the streets of Paris impossible for all time. [...] Widening the streets will make the erection of barricades impossible, and new streets will connect the barracks in straight lines with the workers' districts.

(1999: 23)

On this account – which has a long heritage – Haussmann's Paris is designed with the intention of giving the state an insurmountable military advantage over its citizens. The boulevards are widened to prevent the downtrodden urban proletariat and their leaders in the radical section of the bourgeoisie from achieving their political ends. Now, this may well have been part of the plan. After so many years of revolutionary insurrection and political turmoil, stability was the watchword of the new regime and if this was partly to be achieved through a compromise with the forces of democracy and the extension of the franchise, the state also sought to extend and consolidate

its authority through the violent exercise of power. The problem with Benjamin's observation, however, is that it overstates the efficacy of such a tactic.

The idea that the modern state's involvement in architecture and planning is primarily about disciplining the citizenry perhaps has its roots in the early responses to Haussmannisation, and is still current today. David Van Zanten notes, for example, that Victor Fournel's *Paris Nouveau, Paris Futur* (1865) was driven by such fears, imagining 'an étoile of boulevards spreading from the Hôtel de Ville, panoptically maintaining perfect discipline both in building mass and in social conduct' (1994: 131). In invoking the Panopticon in this context, Van Zanten is thinking as much of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* as of Bentham's prison. And in more recent years, Foucault has been a key figure for those seeking to articulate a strong version of the thesis that social control is a primary function of architecture. For Foucault, Bentham's Panopticon – a prison carefully designed so that every prisoner is potentially under observation at all times – is both a metaphor and a formula for the architecture of the modern state. It 'programmes, at the level of an elementary and easily transferable mechanism, the basic functioning of a society penetrated through and through with disciplinary mechanisms' (Foucault 1995: 209). As Van Zanten's allusion suggests, visibility is the crucial concept in linking Bentham and Haussmann. For Foucault – and in this sense his position is the very opposite of the kinds of argument represented here by Berman and Clark – visibility has no positive connotations, but is simply the instrument of state control.

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.

(Foucault 1995: 202–3)

Foucault's work looms large in the study of the politics of urban forms, and it is unsurprising that this aspect of his work has influenced accounts of Haussmannisation. By replacing the narrow lanes of the old city with wide boulevards, the argument goes, Haussmann exposed the citizenry to new forms of surveillance. The feeling of being watched inspires obedience, and the citizen of Paris 'becomes the principle of his own subjection'.