The Policing of Street Lighting

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The Policing of Street Lighting*

In the medieval community, all connections with the surrounding world were thoroughly severed after sunset. The City gates which had been opened at sunrise were closed and the individual houses shut tight—their doors locked, their windows shuttered. The town as a whole, as well as the individual houses, prepared for the night not unlike a ship that prepares for a storm. Doesn't the night-guard patrol the empty streets just as the night-watch patrols the ship while the rest of the crew (or citizens) are safely asleep under deck? Indeed, in mythological imagination, darkness and water are usually seen as the same original force, emanating from a state of the world before the Creation.

The period between sunset and sunrise was called by the same name that in present time is reserved for situations of civil unrest: CURFEW. In the middle ages no one was allowed to be outside his home, unless he was making himself clearly visible and identifiable. The means of identification was a light. "And no man walke after IX of the belle streken in the nyght without lyght or without cause reasonable in payne of empresonment."[1] There were similar provisions all over Europe. Parisians in the sixteenth century had to carry a lantern, if not they risked being arrested by the bourgeois police patrols and sent to prison.[2]

This state of affairs gradually began to change in the sixteenth century, when the first attempts were made to introduce a fixed public lighting system—i.e. a system in which light was displayed in a fixed

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1. English ordinance no. 1463, quoted in G. T. Salsbury Jones, *Street Life in Medieval England* (1939; Brighton: Harvester Press, rpt. 1975), 139.

2. Auguste Philippe Herlaut, "L'Éclairage des rues à Paris à la fin du XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècles" in *Extraits des Mémoires de la Société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France* (Paris: P. Renouard, 1916), vol. 43. Except where otherwise indicated, all the English translations were done by the editors.

position rather than in motion. Citizens still carried a light with them while moving outdoors, but house owners now had to put up some sort of light on their premises.

This obligation represented a first attempt to establish orientation points of light in the dark city, thereby structuring what hitherto had been totally chaotic. (One might compare this luminous structuring of the dark city to that of the absolute prince, who, by means of fireworks, inscribed his powers onto the dark sky.)

Early ordinances to light the private houses were accompanied by other measures taken to create order and lawful conditions in the streets, such as pavement, prohibitions to dump garbage and anything else that might inhibit traffic. Through these reforms emerged the street, in its modern sense: a public place for the flow of traffic. In other words, the street ceased to be primarily an extension of the space of the people who lived in the houses adjoining it. This appropriation of the street by the modern state can be paradigmatically described in stages by looking at the different spheres of influence that can still be detected in it today. The sidewalk is the responsibility of the adjoining house-owner who has to clear it of snow and ice, whereas the bordering area of the street proper concerns only the municipality.

The early process of introducing law and order in the streets—as in so many other developments of this nature—can most clearly be observed in the capital of classical European absolutism, Paris. It was in Paris, at the end of the seventeenth century, that administrative public lighting was introduced. No longer were private premises ordered by the authorities to expose lights. Instead a truly public, state owned and state run lighting system was installed. This occured fourteen years after the defeat of the Fronde by Louis XIV, in 1667. It was also a direct result of the organization of police the year before through the appointment of the first police chief, La Reynie. "Police" in that period still had the old function of general administrators, but soon, and particularly in France, they were to be seen as the executors of absolutist power, control, and repression. Thus all the "technical" measures taken by the police to create hygienic and orderly conditions in the city became as closely associated in the popular mind with the repressive function of the police as did the police repression of other kinds of popular traditions. Public lighting service as conducted by the police soon became one of the symbols of the new state. This becomes clear if we look at the density, position, and capacity of the lanterns about which, sadly enough, there exists only dim and controversial information. According to Eugène Defrance, there were 2,736 lanterns distributed over the 912 streets in Paris, one at each end of the street, with an additional lantern in the middle if the street superseded a certain length.[3] This seems to be an improbably even distribution. It is

3. Eugène Defrance, *Histoire de l'éclairage des rues de Paris* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1904).

more likely that lanterns in this early period were installed only in the busiest streets, but in greater density. According to Herlaut, who has provided the most reliable account of early Paris street lighting, the first phase of installation consisted of one thousand lanterns in intervals of ten *toises* (ca. twenty yards) apart from each other.[4] The actual means of lighting consisted of a simple candle enclosed in the glass cage of the lantern. The position of the lanterns in relation to the street and the houses was curious. As Martin Lister, an English visitor, described them in 1698, the lanterns "hang down in the very middle of all the streets, about twenty paces distance, and twenty foot high."[5] This position in the middle of the street is noteworthy because it represents a radical departure from the former "private" position lights of the houses. If we turn to the way public lighting emerged in London, we see that there, the old form of providing lights from the houses was effectively preserved in the position of their public successors. These were installed as extensions of the houses—on poles, or hanging from little gallows from the house walls. If the English lantern can be described as an extension of the old house light into the street, the French version must be understood as an extension of royal representation in the street. A symbolic presence of the *roi soleil* incorporated in the artificial "sun," a lantern, the French light exposes the street to control by making it visible in the dark.

Having observed how public lighting slowly emerged from the originally "private" position lights of the houses, let us now see how the lighting density increased in the course of time.

The first generation of lanterns installed in Paris consisted of nothing but candles that were placed in the glass cages of the lanterns. These candles were lit at nightfall and simply burned down within the next few hours. About midnight, when the flame tapered off, darkness spread out again. Apart from this brief period of light, there were other limitations. The lanterns were not lit at all during the periods of a full moon or during the summer months. The lighting period lasted only from October to April.

If we take all these limitations together—the weak source of one candle every twenty yards, the few hours it actually burned, the very limited time period during the year that these lanterns were lighted—we can hardly regard this system as an effective way of actually illuminating space. Despite the many enthusiastic poems and other statements celebrating the new lanterns as a kind of artificial sun rising over the city, these should not be taken literally as realistic descriptions. The fact is that the older mobile form of street illumination survived until the arrival of gas lighting well into the nineteenth century. This was the institution of the torchbearer, who was stationed at most street corners in the

4. Herlaut, op. cit.

5. Martin Lister, *A Journey to Paris in the Year 1689* (1890; New York: Arno, rpt. 1971), 17.

city and whose services could be rented. The purpose of these mobile light sources shifted from identifying its bearers to actually illuminating their way down the street. Identification, on the other hand, was now the function of the fixed public lanterns, more useful for revealing selected spots than for illuminating real spaces. Lanterns became beacons in the city, representing law and order. The night walker still needed a torch in order to avoid holes or other obstacles, but at least he was able to orient himself in the dark labyrinth of streets on the basis of these position lights.

After this basic system was established, subsequent development consisted in an expansion of these points of orientation into wholly lighted spaces. Obviously, that necessitated light technologies which were more powerful and efficient than candles. Gas and electric lighting carried out this task during the nineteenth century. The tendency towards a light-flooded space could already be seen in the eighteenth century with the emergence in Paris of the *lanterne à réverbère* (approximately 1760). With the introduction of the concave reflector, we witness the direction or management of light in a way quite different from the one described above. This new type of lantern collected light, making previously unused light available, and thus disciplined light into heretofore inconceivable functions. Lavoisier, a participant in the contests for new lanterns that were organized by the Academy and initiated by the police chief, gives the following definition of the reflector:

> A concave metal mirror, of whatever shape, placed in order to capture that part of the light which would have been lost without it, and in order to direct it toward the scheme or object one wants to light up. In this way all the rays emanating from the light source favor that object; none of them are dissipated or turned toward another.[6]

In addition to the improvement brought about by the reflector, the replacement of the candle by the oil lamp represented a substantial improvement of the burner or actual light source. But there is one curious thing about the use of these new highly improved lanterns. Their increased lighting power was not used to increase the amount of light in the street. Rather, the number of *réverbères* was reduced by approximately the same degree by which their intensity had increased. Instead of the 6,000 to 8,000 lanterns there were now only about 1,200 *réverbères* installed, and instead of the distance of 20 yards between each one, the distance now became about 60 yards. In other words, the lighting intensity had tripled in inverse proportion to the actual number of lanterns. One is tempted to see in this a confirmation of the original function of public lighting—at least in Paris—to be more a symbolic representative than a realistic light source.

6. Antoine Laurent Lavoisier, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1865, rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1965), vol. 3, 86.

As we have argued above, public lighting was closely connected with the police. Surveillance and light, visibility and control: these pairs complement each other, as much as crime/conspiracy and darkness/night are paired in myth and psychology. Further clues show with greater specificity how closely public light was linked in the popular mind of the ancien régime with the increasingly hated police. One of these is the fact that the commercial torchbearers in the eighteenth century often served simultaneously as police informants.[7] Another one has to do with the service duty of lighting the lanterns. Well into the eighteenth century this was the responsibility of the citizens of each street, who assembled each year to elect someone to perform the duty. Since this duty was highly unpopular, the petty bourgeois usually elected a person of rank, a decision that frequently was reversed by the police commissioner of the precinct upon the request of that person. This in turn aroused the anger and protests of the petit-bourgeois. On the basis of this frequent class friction, public lighting was increasingly looked at as something unpleasant and unnecessary to the simple people. From a pamphlet in the year 1749:

> If there were anyone for whom that public task could be of little interest it would be the artisan: the day's exhaustion doesn't allow him to enjoy nightime comforts.[8]

The skepticism, hostility, and anger with which public lighting was regarded in the eighteenth century, assumed a new quality during the revolutionary periods of the nineteenth century. Eighteenth-century accounts testify to the attraction that smashing a burning lantern, hearing the satisfying noise of breaking glass, and feeling the power of extinguishing the light of authority and creating darkness had always held for night people. (Such acts committed in England resulted in minor fines, whereas they were punishable by the galleys in France—as though the destruction of a French lantern were tantamount to a crime against His Majesty.) But in the rebellions and revolutions in the nineteenth century, smashing lanterns became a landmark ritual.

A prelude to the role the lantern plays in nineteenth-century Paris rebellions can be seen in its use in the 1789 revolution. Before revolutionary executions became routinely mechanized through the guillotine, justice took place by popular lynching. Its instrument was the lantern. In July of 1789, two of the most unpopular representatives of the old regime, Foulon and Berthier, were killed by being hanged on the lantern at the Place de Grève, the traditional execution square in Paris. The lantern's physical shape made it useful as a gallow, while other pieces of public furniture available for that purpose—trees, shop signs, and inn signs—went unused. There is some proof for the assumption that to "lantern-

7. Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (Paris: Dentu, 1889).
8. Pamphlet quoted by Herlaut, op. cit.

ize" the victims—as it became known—was an act of symbolic revenge: the inversion of an instrument of police control into an instrument of revenge. The revolutionary song "Ça ira" contains in its refrain the line: "Les aristocrates à la lanterne." And it is hardly by chance that one of Desmoulins's decisive addresses of the early days of the revolution was published and widely circulated under the title of "Discours de la lanterne aux Parisiens," referring to that same lantern at the Place de Grève.

For specific acts of destroying lanterns in the nineteenth century, let us listen to Maxime du Camp's summary of this popular action, given in retrospect during the Second Empire:

> Pendant les jours d'émeute—ils furent nombreux sous la Restauration et le gouvernement de Louis-Philippe—les réverbères étaient le point de mire de tous les incorrigibles gamins qu'on cherche à poétiser aujourd'hui, qui ne méritent que le fouet, et qui bourdonnent autour des émotions populaires comme des mouches autour d'un levain de fermentation. A coups de pierre ils cassaient les verres des lanternes; les plus lestes grimpaient sur les épaules de leurs camarades, coupaient la corde, et se sauvaient ensuite à toutes jambes pour éviter les patrouilles qui arrivaient au bruit de la lourde machine rebondissant et se brisant sur le pavé. Il suffisait parfois d'un quart d'heure à ces drôles pour mettre une rue dans l'obscurité.[9]

> During the days of the rioting—which were numerous under the Restoration and the government of Louis-Philippe—the reflector lanterns were the focal point for all the incorrigible street kids that people try to romanticize today, who only deserve the whip and who buzz around popular emotions like flies around fermenting yeast. They broke the lanterns' glass with stones; the most agile climbed on their comrades' shoulders, cut the cords, and ran away as fast as their legs could carry them to avoid the patrols who arrived when they heard the heavy machines toppling over and breaking on the pavement. Sometimes it only took fifteen minutes for those rascals to reduce a street to darkness.

From a German eyewitness account of the July revolution in 1830, we hear that "the people raged through the streets, smashing the lanterns, calling upon the citizens to take part in the fight, swearing revenge."[10] A little later in the same account a description of the scenery after these rampages: "All the lanterns were broken, the streets with their pavement torn out were covered with the dead and the wounded." In another German observation of the same events by Schnitzler, the

9. Maxime Du Camp, *Paris, ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1875), vol. 5, 285.

10. *Briefe aus Paris Geschrieben während der grossen Volkswoche im Juli 1830, von einem deutschen Augenzeugen an seinem Freud in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Hoffman and Sonn, 1831), 47, trans. author.

routine of revolutionary street fighting includes "the barricading of streets with wooden objects, planks and stones as well as the removal and destruction of the lanterns."[11] This desecration has a practical and a symbolic meaning. The phrase "since the lanterns were broken and darkness occurred, the royal troops were ordered to withdraw from the insecure streets," clearly states the practical purpose of the recreated darkness. A contemporary French author explains it as follows:

> Along with the reflector lanterns all the other emblems of the treacherous king were smashed—no one wanted to put up with even one effigy of him any longer.[12]

Schnitzler's account mentions a remarkable encounter of two kinds of representative symbols of the regime against which the revolution was directed: "Royal crests after having first been draped with black flour, were then removed or smashed and hoisted to the lanterns." On the other side of the revolutionary confrontation, the old guard tried to preserve law and order against this assault by upholding order with identification using lights. Whenever lanterns were smashed, there was a return to the state of public lighting as we remember it from the sixteenth century, i.e. the lighting of the individual premise by its owner. From an ordinance by the Paris police prefect in the days of July 1830: "People of Paris! keep away from those criminal elements . . . stay in your houses and during the night put a light in the window in order to light the street. . . ."[13]

Let us now turn to a literary treatment of this phenomenon because it further develops motives in the historical accounts and, so to speak, concludes them. Hugo develops lantern destruction and its meaning in *Les Misérables* in several scenes. In a chapter entitled "Gavroche the enemy of lamps," the perpetrator is the street boy or *gamin* Gavroche; the context is the uprising of 1830. During the uprising, Gavroche encounters a lantern that is still intact, and the following dialogue begins:

> —Tiens, dit-il, vous avez encore vos lanternes ici. Vous n'êtes pas en règle, mes amis. C'est du désordre. Cassez-moi ça.
>
> Et il jeta la pierre dans le réverbère dont la vitre tomba avec un tel fracas que des bourgeois, blottis sous leurs rideaux dans la maison d'en face, crièrent: "Voilà Quatre-vingt-treize!"
>
> Le réverbère oscilla violemment et s'éteignit. La rue devint brusquement noire.

11. Johann Heinrich Schnitzler, *Ausführlicher Bericht eines Augenzeugen über die letzten Auftritt der französischen Revolution während der zwei Wochen vom 26. Juli bis zum 9 August 1830* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1830), 37, trans. author.

12. J. P. R. Cuisin, *Les Barricades immortelles du peuple de Paris, relation historique* . . . (Paris: Chez le roi, 1830), 130.

13. Author's personal archives.

—C'est ça, la vieille rue, fit Gavroche, mets ton bonnet de nuit.[14]

"Hey," he said, "you still have your lanterns on here. That's against the rules, my friends. That's unruly. Break that one for me."

And he threw the stone at the reflector lamp; its glass fell with such a fracas that some townspeople pressed up against their curtains in the house across the way yelled out "'93 all over again!"

The reflector lamp swayed violently and went out. Suddenly the street was dark.

"Now here," offered Gavroche, "is the old street. Put on your nightcap."

Light being the representative of law and order in well-policed civil society, darkness thus becomes the medium of the counterorder of the rebellion. This is the thesis in *Les Misérables*, distilled from the revolutionary experience as seen in the empirical accounts. In another night scene in Hugo's novel, the hero Marius walks from a section of town which has not been part of the uprising, to the seditious area. As he walks, a lit landscape slowly gives way to darkness. Lights become ever scarcer, until "at the corner of the rue de la Bourdonnais, the lanterns ceased": that is to say, a no man's land and then a rebellious area begins. The area controlled by the rebels is totally dark. Hugo presents it from his favorite perspective, the bird's eye view. To a bat or an owl sweeping overhead, that neighborhood would have looked:

. . . comme un énorme trou sombre creusé au centre de Paris. Là le regard tombait dans un abîme. Grâce aux réverbères brisés, grâce aux fenêtres fermées là cessait tout rayonnement, toute vie, toute rumeur, tout mouvement. L'invisible police de l'émeute veillait partout, et maintenait l'ordre, c'est-à-dire la nuit. Noyer le petit nombre dans une vaste obscurité, multiplier chaque combattant par les possibilités que cette obscurité contient, c'est la tactique nécessaire de l'insurrection. A la chute du jour, toute croisée où une chandelle s'allumait avait reçu une balle. La lumière était éteinte, quelquefois l'habitant tué. Aussi rien ne bougeait. Il n'y avait rien là que l'effroi, le deuil, la stupeur dans les maisons; dans les rues une sorte d'horreur sacrée.[15]

. . . like an enormous dark hole dug in the center of Paris. There the eyes plunged into an abyss. Thanks to the broken reflector lanterns and the shut windows, all glimmer, all life, all noise, all movement had ended. The invisible guardians of the riot maintained their watch everywhere and safeguarded order—that is to say, the night. The tactic required for

14. Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (Paris: Editions Rencontre, 1967, rpt. of 1865 edition), vol. 4, book 15, chapter 2, 105.

15. Hugo, vol. 4, book 13, chapter 2, 58.

> insurrection was to drown small numbers in a vast darkness and to enhance each fighter with the possibilities that darkness contains. At dusk, every corner with a lit candle had been shot at. The lights were out, and sometimes the person who lived near them killed. So nothing budged. There was nothing but fright, grief, stupor in the houses; in the streets there was a kind of sacred horror.

Compare this fictional text with another real eyewitness account of such darkness in the rebellious city:

> On se peindrait difficilement l'obscurité sepulchrale que produisit la destruction de tout éclairage de cette ville immense; les portes des magasins, des boutiques, des hôtels fermés, les persiennes de toutes les fenêtres, faisaient ressembler Paris à une cité désertée, dévastée par la peste; un silence effrayant achevait de rendre ce tableau horrible et douloureux.[16]

> It would be difficult to depict the sepulchral darkness brought about by the destruction of all the lighting of that immense city; the closed doorways of stores, of boutiques, of hotels, shutters on all the windows, made Paris look like a deserted city devastated by the plague; a frightening silence completed this tableau of horror and pain.

It would be tempting to chart out the political psychology of the middle classes against those of the lower classes on the basis of different attitudes towards lighting. After all, it is the same Victor Hugo who sympathized politically with the revolutionaries of 1848 whom we see here in abhorrence of the darkness created by the lower orders of society. The abolishment of public light is an act by which the real popular upheaval separates itself from the enlightened fathers of the revolution and their bourgeois background.

Let us now procede to the next Paris revolution, 1848, eighteen years after the 1830 revolution. At first glance, the same kind of lantern destruction seems to occur.

> Au centre de Paris, le peuple brise les réverbères et les lanternes du gaz. Les boutiques sont fermées; aucune lumière n'en sort. L'obscurité est complète; elle couvre l'invasion des magasins d'armes et facilite les barricades.[17]

> In the center of Paris the people break reflectors and gas lanterns. The shops are closed; no light shines from them. The darkness is complete; it conceals people breaking into gun stores and facilitates barricades.

16. Cuisin, p. 130.

17. Louis Antoine Garnier-Pagès, *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1861–7?), vol. 4:305–06.

And Victor Hugo, now an autobiographical observer of events writes:

> L'aspect du Marais est lugubre. . . . Les réverbères sont brisées et éteints sur le boulevard fort bien nommé *le boulevard noir.*[18]

> The Marais has a lugubrious air. . . . The reflector lamps, extinguished, have been smashed on the boulevard so appropriately called *black boulevard.*

On closer examination however, lantern destruction in 1848 is no longer such a constituent action as it was in 1830. At least, it is not as routinely reported as it was eighteen years earlier. Whereas we find smashed lanterns mentioned in almost every account of the 1830 events, the two from 1848 quoted above have been the only ones I was able to find out of a great number of accounts of the events in 1848.

If we look for an explanation of this remarkable change in rebellious behavior, what comes to mind is the technical change in public illumination that occurred in the period between 1830 and 1848. In 1830 public lighting was still largely based on the traditional *réverbères* system, i.e. oil lamps. It was only in the 1830s—and then very slowly—that gaslight was introduced in Paris. In 1835 there were only 203 gas candelabres in Paris as against several thousand oil lanterns, and it was only in the '40s that the gas lanterns outnumbered the oil lamps. What does this technical change mean in terms of possible popular attitudes? An oil lamp is a self-sufficient light machine feeding itself from its own fuel reservoir, while a gas light is only an extension or an outlet of a large system that comprises the gas works and the pipe-systems network. An English gas engineer describes the difference in an 1849 account: "A gas-work, like a railway, must be viewed as one entire and indivisible machine; the mains in one case being analogous to the rails in the other."[19] In terms of destruction, this technical difference may well have a meaning. A lamp that is an autonomous unit may be more attractive and rewarding to smash than the mere outlet of a system. The individual that acts as the destroyer acts against an "individual" lamp. Gaston Bachelard has stressed this quality of the lamp in his psychological poetics. Man will either perceive the lamp as a mirror of his inner self, or he will suspect it as a threatening agent of surveillance. Bachelard describes the first situation of identification taking place through a reverie in front of the lamp:

> Avec une rêverie de la petite lumière, le rêveur se sent chez soi, l'inconscient du rêveur est un chez soi pour le rêveur.[20]

18. Victor Hugo, "23 février 1843" in *Choses vues* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1913), vol. 2:33.

19. John Obadish Newell Rutter, *Gas Lighting: Its Progress and Its Prospects . . .* (London: J. W. Parker, 1849), 54.

20. Gaston Bachelard, *La Flamme d'une chandelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 7.

> With the dim light reverie, the dreamer feels at home, the dreamer's unconscious is a home for the dreamer.

According to Bachelard, electric light no longer has this magic ability to evoke a reverie:

> L'ampoule electrique ne nous donnera jamais les rêveries de cette lampe vivante qui, *avec de l'huile,* faisait de la lumière. Nous sommes entrés dans l'ère de la lumière administrée. Notre seul rôle est de tourner un commutateur. Nous ne sommes plus que le sujet mécanique d'un geste mécanique.[21]

> The electric bulb will never provide the same reveries as this living lamp, which used to produce light *out of oil.* We've entered the era of administered light. Our only role is to turn on the switch. We are but the mechanical subjects of a mechanical gesture.

It is the oil in the fuel container that makes the lamp an individual entity rather than an administered producer of administered light.

Because the gas light system centralized services that had formerly been technologically autonomous, gas light required different forms of destruction. We are, with gas light, at the dawn of new forms of revolutionary tactics: no more are individual acts of destruction sufficient; it is incumbant upon the revolutionary to occupy the *centers* of those collective technological systems. Originally this meant the gasworks, later the electric power stations, railway stations, radio and tv stations. If 1848 still witnessed acts of lantern destruction, these were no longer part of the tactics of revolution so much as ritualistic residues from 1830. That the 1848 revolution also indicated the arrival of a modern form of urban revolutionary tactics is stated here by an American observer:

> Great anxiety was felt as night fell, relative to the gas, which it was feared would be cut off by the insurrection; but by the concentration of a large military force around the works this fear was removed, and the lamps were all lit, with the exception of those on the Champs Elysées, which had been broken by the rioters.[22]

So far we have only looked at the events in Paris. If we now turn to other European centers of insurrection in the revolutionary year 1848, we find that nowhere is the practice of lantern destruction performed, or at least we find no recorded information on this subject. This can in part be explained by what we have already said about the 1830 revolution in Paris: the dependence of lantern destruction on the state of lighting technology at that time. Since there were no comparable insurrections in the year 1830 in other cities, it is hard to tell what might have happened to

21. Bachelard, 90. The emphasis is the author's.

22. Percy Bolinbroke St. John, *French Revolution in 1848: The Three Days of February* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1848), 90.

lanterns in Vienna and Berlin, had there been rebellions there. Certainly of some significance is the revolutionary tradition or practice of the Parisians, whose experience in urban upheaval was totally missing from the streets and populations in Berlin and Vienna. It is due to this ignorance of how to organize an effective resistance that a scene like the following was possible in Berlin in the March events in 1848:

> About half past nine P.M. the windows were illuminated in all the streets where one expected the military to attack. This illumination, aggravated by the additional light of a full moon, was extremely disadvantageous to the insurgents. Due to it nobody escaped the shots of the soldiers.[23]

Note that these windows were not illuminated by peaceful and orderly bourgeois trying to demonstrate their loyalty to the military (as had been demanded of townspeople by the Paris police prefect in 1830), but by the insurgents themselves. Their seemingly foolish motives remain unknown. On the other hand, illuminations *after* the revolutionary victory (however short-lived a victory and however illusory it was) became much more frequent an occurence.

In these latter light displays we can see a popular revival of the bonfires of archaic and medieval times, as well as of the illuminations once conducted in honor of festive events such as royal weddings, entries of princes into towns and the like. The illumination of this old type, emerging from the bonfire, marks a kind of saturnalia in light. The popular illumination celebrating the victory of the revolution distinguishes itself from the supervised illumination of the ancien régime by its disorder. There is a whole scale of degrees of anarchism displayed in these events. Let us look at a few recorded examples. An Austrian witness writes of March 1848 in Vienna, "today the city was illuminated as never before. The people celebrated its victory by marching along with torches and illuminating brilliantly. There was no window in the city nor in the suburbs that was not illuminated."[24]

Such exhibitions were enforced by popular demand, often against the will of those officially in charge of lights. Valentin, historian of the 1848 Revolution, writes, "There was no end to the rejoicing. The masses enforced the illumination of all houses." He reports the same from Berlin, where the Russian embassy was made to take part in the popular light fest:

> In the evening the masses celebrated their victory with a great illumination. . . . A group of citizens and workers showed up at the Russian embassy and demanded that it be illuminated. Meyendorff (the ambas-

23. Adolf Wolf, *Berliner Revolutions-Chronik* (Berlin, 1851), vol. 1: 169.

24. Friedrich Unterreither, *Die Revolution in Wien vom März und Mai 1848* (Vienna: Gedruckt bei C. Ueberreuter, 1848), vol. 1: 43.

> sador) finally had to agree—had he declined, the consequences would have been considerable.[25]

If these illuminations were of an apparently traditional character (putting candles in windows, etc.), revolutionary only in that they involved coercion by the masses, other kinds of illumination were more obviously anarchistic in character. Paris gave birth to the phenomenon of lantern destruction in order to create revolutionary darkness, but it was in Vienna that the new generation of lantern destruction emerged. For example: "Everywhere on the Glacis the iron lamp poles were torn out and destroyed, releasing gigantic jets of burning gas flames."[26] Or: "The gas pipes between the Kaeruten gate and the Burg were destroyed, releasing the gas in flames as thick as a man's arm, uncannily illuminating the night."[27] An illustration of the latter scene is accompanied by the following text: "Many people, mostly of the lower classes, had assembled on the Glacis, smashing the gas lanterns, destroying the lantern poles. . . . Out of the pipes came the gas and produced gigantic red columns of fire."

We do not know what the motives were for this way of dealing with gas candelabres. Was it the direct continuation of the old practice of lantern destruction—the will to create darkness—resulting in an unexpected outburst of light? Or was this gigantic outburst of flame and light intended to "liberate" the normally regulated fire of the gas system, and with it, the people who were regimented into work and other structures of domination? Since there are no recorded descriptions of what these people had in mind, we don't know.

We don't have accounts from the Paris '48 revolution of "liberated" gas lanterns. What we have instead are accounts of the kind of illumination that took place in Paris after the victory—however illusory—of the insurgents there. Much like the German ones quoted earlier, these accounts describe traditional illuminations of buildings. With a dramatic difference. The illumination of Paris after the three days of fighting in February was the second part of a double movement that began with the destruction of lanterns. It was the same clan of people that had first destroyed the public lighting who now enforced the revolutionary illumination: the street kids or *gamins* we met in Hugo's novel.

> Des bandes, composées en majeure partie de gamins, circulaient dans tous les quartiers, dans toutes les rue, et forçaient les habitants à illuminer sur-le-champ, devant elles. Les uns s'y prêtaient de bonne grâce, les autres avec colère. Ce cri connu *'Des lampions! Des lam-*

25. Veit Valentin, *Geschichte der deutschen Revolution von 1848–49* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1930–31; reprint Cologne, 1970), vol. 1: 448.

26. Adolf Pichler, *Aus den März- und Oktobertagen zu Wien 1848* (Innsbruck: Wagner'schen buchhandlung, 1850), 8.

27. Valentin, loc. cit.

> *pions!*" retentissait sur tous les tons devant les croisées rebelles, jusqu'à ce qu'une clarté quelconque vint donner satisfaction.[28]
>
> Street gangs, mostly young kids, stalked each neighborhood, each street, and forced the inhabitants to rekindle the lamps right then and there. Some went about it willingly, others angrily. This well-known cry "*Des lampions! Des lampions!*" rang out in every key at the rebellious crossroads, until some sort of light came on to give satisfaction.

Extinguished and relit by the same people, public lighting underwent a kind of revolutionary ellipsis.

28. Garnier-Pagès, vol 6: 299–300.