M

[The Flâneur]

A landscape haunts, intense as opium.

—Mallarmé ‹"Autrefois, en marge d'un Baudelaire," in *Divagations*›

To read what was never written.

—Hofmannsthal[1]

And I travel in order to get to know my geography.

—A madman, in Marcel Réja, *L'Art chez les fous* (Paris, 1907), p. 131

All that can be found anywhere can be found in Paris.

—Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables,* in Hugo, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1881), novels, vol. 7, p. 30, from the chapter "Ecce Paris, Ecce Homo"[2]

But the great reminiscences, the historical shudder—these are a trumpery which he (the flâneur) leaves to tourists, who think thereby to gain access to the genius loci with a military password. Our friend may well keep silent. At the approach of his footsteps, the place has roused; speechlessly, mindlessly, its mere intimate nearness gives him hints and instructions. He stands before Notre Dame de Lorette, and his soles remember: here is the spot where in former times the *cheval de renfort*—the spare horse—was harnessed to the omnibus that climbed the Rue des Martyrs toward Montmartre. Often, he would have given all he knows about the domicile of Balzac or of Gavarni, about the site of a surprise attack or even of a barricade, to be able to catch the scent of a threshold or to recognize a paving stone by touch, like any watchdog. [M1,1]

The street conducts the flâneur into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward—if not to the mythical Mothers, then into a past that can be all the more spellbinding because it is not his own, not private. Nevertheless, it always remains the time of a childhood. But why that of the life he has lived? In the asphalt over which he passes, his steps awaken a surprising resonance. The gaslight that streams down on the paving stones throws an equivocal light on this double ground. [M1,2]

An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever weaker grow the temptations of shops, of bistros, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next streetcorner, of a distant mass of foliage, of a street name. Then comes hunger. Our man wants nothing to do with the myriad possibilities offered to sate his appetite. Like an ascetic animal, he flits through unknown districts—until, utterly exhausted, he stumbles into his room, which receives him coldly and wears a strange air. [M1,3]

Paris created the type of the flâneur. What is remarkable is that it wasn't Rome. And the reason? Does not dreaming itself take the high road in Rome? And isn't that city too full of temples, enclosed squares, national shrines, to be able to enter *tout entière*—with every cobblestone, every shop sign, every step, and every gateway—into the passerby's dream? The national character of the Italians may also have much to do with this. For it is not the foreigners but they themselves, the Parisians, who have made Paris the promised land of the flâneur—the "landscape built of sheer life," as Hofmannsthal once put it. Landscape—that, in fact, is what Paris becomes for the flâneur. Or, more precisely: the city splits for him into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room. [M1,4]

That anamnestic intoxication in which the flâneur goes about the city not only feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes but often possesses itself of abstract knowledge—indeed, of dead facts—as something experienced and lived through. This felt knowledge travels from one person to another, especially by word of mouth. But in the course of the nineteenth century, it was also deposited in an immense literature. Even before Lefeuve, who described Paris "street by street, house by house," there were numerous works that depicted this storied landscape as backdrop for the dreaming idler. The study of these books constituted a second existence, already wholly predisposed toward dreaming; and what the flâneur learned from them took form and figure during an afternoon walk before the apéritif. Wouldn't he, then, have necessarily felt the steep slope behind the church of Notre Dame de Lorette rise all the more insistently under his soles if he realized: here, at one time, after Paris had gotten its first omnibuses, the *cheval de renfort* was harnessed to the coach to reinforce the two other horses. [M1,5]

One must make an effort to grasp the altogether fascinating moral constitution of the passionate flâneur. The police—who here, as on so many of the subjects we are treating, appear as experts—provide the following indication in the report of a Paris secret agent from October 1798(?): "It is almost impossible to summon and maintain good moral character in a thickly massed population where each individual, unbeknownst to all the others, hides in the crowd, so to speak, and blushes before the eyes of no one." Cited in Adolf Schmidt, *Pariser Zustände während der Revolution,* vol. 3 (Jena, 1876). The case in which the flâneur com-

pletely distances himself from the type of the philosophical promenader, and takes on the features of the werewolf restlessly roaming a social wilderness, was fixed for the first time and forever afterward by Poe in his story "The Man of the Crowd." [M1,6]

The appearances of superposition, of overlap, which come with hashish may be grasped through the concept of similitude. When we say that one face is similar to another, we mean that certain features of this second face appear to us in the first, without the latter's ceasing to be what it has been. Nevertheless, the possibilities of entering into appearance in this way are not subject to any criterion and are therefore boundless. The category of similarity, which for the waking consciousness has only minimal relevance, attains unlimited relevance in the world of hashish. There, we may say, everything is face: each thing has the degree of bodily presence that allows it to be searched—as one searches a face—for such traits as appear. Under these conditions even a sentence (to say nothing of the single word) puts on a face, and this face resembles that of the sentence standing opposed to it. In this way every truth points manifestly to its opposite, and this state of affairs explains the existence of doubt. Truth becomes something living; it lives solely in the rhythm by which statement and counterstatement displace each other in order to think each other.[3] [M1a,1]

Valery Larbaud on the "moral climate of the Parisian street." "Relations always begin with the fiction of equality, of Christian fraternity. In this crowd the inferior is disguised as the superior, and the superior as the inferior—disguised morally, in both cases. In other capitals of the world, the disguise barely goes beyond the appearance, and people visibly insist on their differences, making an effort to retain them in the face of pagans and barbarians. Here they efface them as much as they can. Hence the peculiar sweetness of the moral climate of Parisian streets, the charm which makes one pass over the vulgarity, the indolence, the monotony of the crowd. It is the grace of Paris, its virtue: charity. Virtuous crowd . . ." Valery Larbaud, "Rues et visages de Paris: Pour l'album de Chas-Laborde," *Commerce,* 8 (Summer 1926), pp. 36–37. Is it permissible to refer this phenomenon so confidently to Christian virtue, or is there not perhaps at work here an intoxicated assimilation, superposition, equalization that in the streets of this city proves to carry more weight than the will to social accreditation? One might adduce here the hashish experience "Dante und Petrarca,"[4] and measure the impact of intoxicated experience on the proclamation of the rights of man. This all unfolds at a considerable remove from Christianity. [M1a,2]

The "colportage phenomenon of space" is the flâneur's basic experience. Inasmuch as this phenomenon also—from another angle—shows itself in the mid-nineteenth-century interior, it may not be amiss to suppose that the heyday of flânerie occur in this same period. Thanks to this phenomenon, everything potentially taking place in this one single room is perceived simultaneously. The space

winks at the flâneur: What do you think may have gone on here? Of course, it has yet to be explained how this phenomenon is associated with colportage.[5] □History□ [M1a,3]

A true masquerade of space—that is what the British embassy's ball on May 17, 1839, must have been. "In addition to the glorious flowers from gardens and greenhouses, 1,000–1,200 rosebushes were ordered as part of the decoration for the festivities. It was said that only 800 of them could fit in the rooms of the embassy, but that will give you an idea of the utterly mythological magnificence. The garden, covered by a pavilion, was turned into a *salon de conversation.* But what a salon! The gay flower beds, full of blooms, were huge *jardinières* which everyone came over to admire; the gravel on the walks was covered with fresh linen, out of consideration for all the white satin shoes; large sofas of lampas and of damask replaced the wrought-iron benches; and on a round table there were books and albums. It was a pleasure to take the air in this immense boudoir, where one could hear, like a magic chant, the sounds of the orchestra, and where one could see passing, like happy shadows, in the three surrounding flower-lined galleries, both the fun-loving girls who came to dance and the more serious girls who came to sup." H. d'Almeras, *La Vie parisienne sous ‹le règne de› Louis-Philippe* ‹Paris, 1925›, pp. 446–447. The account derives from Madame de Girardin. □Interior□ Today, the watchword is not entanglement but transparency. (Le Corbusier!) [M1a,4]

The principle of colportage illustration encroaching on great painting. "The reports on the engagements and battles which, in the catalogue, were supposed to illuminate the moments chosen by the painter for battle scenes, but which failed to achieve this goal, were usually augmented with citations of the works from which these reports were drawn. Thus, one would find at the end, frequently in parentheses: *Campagnes d'Espagne,* by Marshal Suchet; *Bulletin de la Grande Armée et rapports officiels; Gazette de France,* number . . . ; and the like; *Histoire de la révolution française,* by M. Thiers, volume . . . , page . . . ; *Victoires et conquêtes,* volume . . . , page . . . ; and so forth and so on." Ferdinand von Gall, *Paris und seine Salons* (Oldenburg, 1844), vol. 1, pp. 198–199. [M2,1]

Category of illustrative seeing—fundamental for the flâneur. Like Kubin when he wrote *Andere Seite,* he composes his reverie as text to accompany the images. [M2,2]

Hashish. One imitates certain things one knows from paintings: prison, the Bridge of Sighs, stairs like the train of a dress. [M2,3]

We know that, in the course of flânerie, far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment. When the authentically intoxicated phase of this condition announces itself, the blood is pounding in the veins of the happy flâneur, his heart ticks like a clock, and inwardly as well as outwardly things go

on as we would imagine them to do in one of those "mechanical pictures" which in the nineteenth century (and of course earlier, too) enjoyed great popularity, and which depicts in the foreground a shepherd playing on a pipe, by his side two children swaying in time to the music, further back a pair of hunters in pursuit of a lion, and very much in the background a train crossing over a trestle bridge. Chapuis and Gélis, *Le Monde des automates* (Paris, 1928), vol. 1, p. 330.[6] [M2,4]

The attitude of the flâneur—epitome of the political attitude of the middle classes during the Second Empire. [M2,5]

With the steady increase in traffic on the streets, it was only the macadamization of the roadways that made it possible in the end to have a conversation on the terrace of a café without shouting in the other person's ear. [M2,6]

The laissez-faire of the flâneur has its counterpart even in the revolutionary philosophemes of the period. "We smile at the chimerical pretension [of a Saint-Simon] to trace all physical and moral phenomena back to the law of universal attraction. But we forget too easily that this pretension was not in itself isolated; under the influence of the revolutionizing natural laws of mechanics, there could arise a current of natural philosophy which saw in the mechanism of nature the proof of just such a mechanism of social life and of events generally." ‹Willy› Spühler, *Der Saint-Simonismus* (Zürich, 1926), p. 29. [M2,7]

Dialectic of flânerie: on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man. Presumably, it is this dialectic that is developed in "The Man of the Crowd." [M2,8]

"Theory of the transformation of the city into countryside: this was . . . the main theme of my unfinished work on Maupassant. . . . At issue was the city as hunting ground, and in general the concept of the hunter played a major role (as in the theory of the uniform: all hunters look alike)." Letter from Wiesengrund, June 5, 1935. [M2,9]

The principle of flânerie in Proust: "Then, quite apart from all those literary preoccupations, and without definite attachment to anything, suddenly a roof, a gleam of sunlight reflected from a stone, the smell of a road would make me stop still, to enjoy the special pleasure that each of them gave me, and also because they appeared to be concealing, beneath what my eyes could see, something which they invited me to approach and take from them, but which, despite all my efforts, I never managed to discover." *Du Côté de chez Swann* ‹(Paris, 1939), vol. 1, p. 256.›[7]—This passage shows very clearly how the old Romantic sentiment for landscape dissolves and a new Romantic conception of landscape emerges—of landscape that seems, rather, to be a cityscape, if it is true that the city is the

properly sacred ground of flânerie. In this passage, at any rate, it would be presented as such for the first time since Baudelaire (whose work does not yet portray the arcades, though they were so numerous in his day). [M2a,1]

So the flâneur goes for a walk in his room: "When Johannes sometimes asked for permission to go out, it was usually denied him. But on occasion his father proposed, as a substitute, that they walk up and down the room hand in hand. This seemed at first a poor substitute, but in fact . . . something quite novel awaited him. The proposal was accepted, and it was left entirely to Johannes to decide where they should go. Off they went, then, right out the front entrance, out to a neighboring estate or to the seashore, or simply through the streets, exactly as Johannes could have wished; for his father managed everything. While they strolled in this way up and down the floor of his room, his father told him of all they saw. They greeted other pedestrians; passing wagons made a din around them and drowned out his father's voice; the comfits in the pastry shop were more inviting than ever." An early work by Kierkegaard, cited in Eduard Geismar, *Sören Kierkegaard* (Göttingen, 1929), pp. 12–13. Here is the key to the schema of *Voyage autour de ma chambre*.[8] [M2a,2]

"The manufacturer passes over the asphalt conscious of its quality; the old man searches it carefully, follows it just as long as he can, happily taps his cane so the wood resonates, and recalls with pride that he personally witnessed the laying of the first sidewalks; the poet . . . walks on it pensive and unconcerned, muttering lines of verse; the stockbroker hurries past, calculating the advantages of the last rise in wheat; and the madcap slides across." Alexis Martin, "Physiologie de l'asphalte," *Le Bohême*, 1, no. 3, (April 15, 1855)—Charles Pradier, editor in chief. [M2a,3]

On the Parisians' technique of *inhabiting* their streets: "Returning by the Rue Saint-Honoré, we met with an eloquent example of that Parisian street industry which can make use of anything. Men were at work repairing the pavement and laying pipeline, and, as a result, in the middle of the street there was an area which was blocked off but which was embanked and covered with stones. On this spot street vendors had immediately installed themselves, and five or six were selling writing implements and notebooks, cutlery, lampshades, garters, embroidered collars, and all sorts of trinkets. Even a dealer in secondhand goods had opened a branch office here and was displaying on the stones his bric-à-brac of old cups, plates, glasses, and so forth, so that business was profiting, instead of suffering, from the brief disturbance. They are simply wizards at making a virtue of necessity." Adolf Stahr, *Nach fünf Jahren* (Oldenburg, 1857), vol. 1, p. 29.[9]

Seventy years later, I had the same experience at the corner of the Boulevard Saint-Germain and the Boulevard Raspail. Parisians make the street an interior. [M3,1]

"It is wonderful that in Paris itself one can actually wander through countryside." Karl Gutzkow, *Briefe aus Paris* (Leipzig, 1842), vol. 1, p. 61. The other side of the motif is thus touched on. For if flânerie can transform Paris into one great interior—a house whose rooms are the *quartiers,* no less clearly demarcated by thresholds than are real rooms—then, on the other hand, the city can appear to someone walking through it to be without thresholds: a landscape in the round. [M3,2]

But in the final analysis, only the revolution creates an open space for the city. Fresh air doctrine of revolutions. Revolution disenchants the city. Commune in *L'Education sentimentale.* Image of the street in civil war. [M3,3]

Street as domestic interior. Concerning the Passage du Pont-Neuf (between the Rue Guénégaud and the Rue de Seine): "the shops resemble closets." *Nouveaux Tableaux de Paris, ou Observations sur les mœurs et usages des Parisiens au commencement du XIX^e^ siècle* (Paris, 1828), vol. 1, p. 34. [M3,4]

The courtyard of the Tuileries: "immense savannah planted with lampposts instead of banana trees." Paul-Ernest de Rattier, *Paris n'existe pas* (Paris, 1857). □ Gas □ [M3,5]

Passage Colbert: "The gas lamp illuminating it looks like a coconut palm in the middle of a savannah." □ Gas □ *Le Livre des cent-et-un* (Paris, 1833), vol. 10, p. 57 (Amédée Kermel, "Les Passages de Paris"). [M3,6]

Lighting in the Passage Colbert: "I admire the regular series of those crystal globes, which give off a light both vivid and gentle. Couldn't the same be said of comets in battle formation, awaiting the signal for departure to go vagabonding through space?" *Le Livre des cent-et-un,* vol. 10, p. 57. Compare this transformation of the city into an astral world with Grandville's *Un Autre Monde.* □ Gas □ [M3,7]

In 1839 it was considered elegant to take a tortoise out walking. This gives us an idea of the tempo of flânerie in the arcades. [M3,8]

Gustave Claudin is supposed to have said: "On the day when a filet ceases to be a filet and becomes a 'chateaubriand,' when a mutton stew is called an 'Irish stew,' or when the waiter cries out, '*Moniteur,* clock!' to indicate that this newspaper was requested by the customer sitting under the clock—on that day, Paris will have been truly dethroned!" Jules Claretie, *La Vie à Paris 1896* (Paris, 1897), p. 100. [M3,9]

"There—on the Avenue des Champs-Elysées—it has stood since 1845: the Jardin d'Hiver, a colossal greenhouse with a great many rooms for social occa-

sions, for balls and concerts, although, since its doors are open in summer too, it hardly deserves the name of winter garden." When the sphere of planning creates such entanglements of closed room and airy nature, then it serves in this way to meet the deep human need for daydreaming—a propensity that perhaps proves the true efficacy of idleness in human affairs. Woldemar Seyffarth, *Wahrnehmungen in Paris 1853 und 1854* (Gotha, 1855), p. 130. [M3,10]

The menu at Les Trois Frères Provençaux: "Thirty-six pages for food, four pages for drink—but very long pages, in small folio, with closely packed text and numerous annotations in fine print." The booklet is bound in velvet. Twenty hors d'oeuvres and thirty-three soups. "Forty-six beef dishes, among which are seven different beefsteaks and eight filets." "Thirty-four preparations of game, forty-seven dishes of vegetables, and seventy-one varieties of compote." Julius Rodenberg, *Paris bei Sonnenschein und Lampenlicht* (Leipzig, 1867), pp. 43–44. Flânerie through the bill of fare. [M3a,1]

The best way, while dreaming, to catch the afternoon in the net of evening is to make plans. The flâneur in planning. [M3a,2]

"Le Corbusier's houses depend on neither spatial nor plastic articulation: the air passes through them! Air becomes a constitutive factor! What matters, therefore, is neither spatiality per se nor plasticity per se but only relation and interfusion. There is but one indivisible space. The integuments separating inside from outside fall away." Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich* ‹Berlin, 1928›, p. 85. [M3a,3]

Streets are the dwelling place of the collective. The collective is an eternally unquiet, eternally agitated being that—in the space between the building fronts—experiences, learns, understands, and invents as much as individuals do within the privacy of their own four walls. For this collective, glossy enameled shop signs are a wall decoration as good as, if not better than, an oil painting in the drawing room of a bourgeois; walls with their "Post No Bills" are its writing desk, newspaper stands its libraries, mailboxes its bronze busts, benches its bedroom furniture, and the café terrace is the balcony from which it looks down on its household. The section of railing where road workers hang their jackets is the vestibule, and the gateway which leads from the row of courtyards out into the open is the long corridor that daunts the bourgeois, being for the courtyards the entry to the chambers of the city. Among these latter, the arcade was the drawing room. More than anywhere else, the street reveals itself in the arcade as the furnished and familiar interior of the masses. [M3a,4]

The intoxicated interpenetration of street and residence such as comes about in the Paris of the nineteenth century—and especially in the experience of the flâneur—has prophetic value. For the new architecture lets this interpenetration become sober reality. Giedion on occasion draws attention to this: "A detail of

anonymous engineering, a grade crossing, becomes an element in the architecture" (that is, of a villa). S. Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich* ‹Berlin, 1928›, p. 89. [M3a,5]

"Hugo, in *Les Misérables*, has provided an amazing description of the Faubourg Saint-Marceau: 'It was no longer a place of solitude, for there were people passing; it was not the country, for there were houses and streets; it was not a city, for the streets had ruts in them, like the highways, and grass grew along their borders; it was not a village, for the houses were too lofty. What was it then? It was an inhabited place where there was nobody, it was a desert place where there was somebody; it was a boulevard of the great city, a street of Paris—wilder at night than a forest, and gloomier by day than a graveyard.'"[10] ‹Lucien› Dubech and ‹Pierre› d'Espezel, *Histoire de Paris* (Paris, 1926), p. 366. [M3a,6]

"The last horse-drawn omnibus made its final run on the Villette–Saint Sulpice line in January 1913; the last horse-drawn tram, on the Pantin-Opéra line in April of the same year." Dubech and d'Espezel, *Histoire de Paris*, p. 463. [M3a,7]

"On January 30, 1828, the first omnibus began operation on the line running along the boulevard from the Bastille to the Madeleine. The fare was twenty-five or thirty centimes; the car stopped where one wished. It had eighteen to twenty seats, and its route was divided into two stages, with the Saint-Martin gate as midpoint. The vogue for this invention was extraordinary: in 1829, the company was running fifteen lines, and rival companies were offering stiff competition—Tricycles, Ecossaises ‹Scots Women›, Béarnaises ‹Gascon Women›, Dames Blanches ‹Ladies in White›. Dubech and d'Espezel, *Histoire de Paris*, p. 358–359. [M3a,8]

"After an hour the gathering broke up, and for the first time I found the streets of Paris nearly deserted. On the boulevards I met only unaccompanied persons, and on the Rue Vivienne at Stock Market Square, where by day you have to wind your way through the crowd, there wasn't a soul. I could hear nothing but my own steps and the murmur of fountains where by day you cannot escape the deafening buzz. In the vicinity of the Palais Royal I encountered a patrol. The soldiers were advancing single file along both sides of the street, close to the houses, at a distance of five or six paces from one another so as not to be attacked at the same time and so as to be able to render mutual aid. This reminded me that, at the very beginning of my stay here, I had been advised to proceed in this manner myself at night when with several others, but, if I had to go home alone, always to take a cab." Eduard Devrient, *Briefe aus Paris* (Berlin, 1840), p. 248. [M4,1]

On the omnibuses. "The driver stops and you mount the few steps of the convenient little staircase and look about for a place in the car, where benches extend lengthwise on the right and the left, with room for up to sixteen people. You've hardly set foot in the car when it starts rolling again. The conductor has once more pulled the cord, and, with a quick movement that causes a bell to sound, he