

The Glory That Was Paris

The French talk a great deal about civilization. One may expect vandalism in New York—but not in Paris. One expects the French to be civilized.

There is nothing civilized about the impending demolition of Les Halles. It will be an anti-urban act of destruction by a government that has already succeeded in destroying the beauty of food at the desolate new market at Rungis. For the French, that's quite a feat. The eye and the heart are traditionally close to the stomach in France and Les Halles was the heart of Paris. Frenchmen have always known that there is more to a city—and to civilization—than formal monuments.

The Fifth Republic has shown a singular insensitivity to esthetic and urban values. It is busy destroying Paris. Parks are being dug up for garages. Quais have been turned into roads. If present plans go through the automobile will take over both banks of the Seine, with a highway 100 yards from Notre Dame. Ill-considered skyscrapers insult classic views.

Since the market moved out of Les Halles, its six superb glass-and-iron pavilions have become an impromptu and highly successful setting for politics, theater, exhibitions, entertainment and art—a lively example of spontaneous adaptive use of historic structures for a genuine urban and cultural mix. But neither this lesson nor public petitions to keep this touchstone of Parisian character have moved city officials. Les Halles has refused to die. Therefore it will have to be killed.

Unless protest prevails, the government will send in the bulldozers on July 1. The *vastes parapluies* built for Napoleon III will be shattered to shards. Their replacement will be the predictable monuments of commercialism, pragmatism, greed and bureaucratic *bétise*: developers' schemes and subway stations.

Onion soup and Orlando Furioso in the Métro, anyone?