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Stephane Kirkland, *Paris Reborn: Napoléon III, Baron Haussmann, and the Quest to Build a Modern City*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013. 327 pp. Illustrations, notes, and index. \$29.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-312-62689.

Review by David P. Jordan, University of Illinois at Chicago.

Paris is the most written about, painted, and photographed city in the world. Those of us who remember their first visit will understand why: it is the beauty of the place and the life publicly lived there. Books about Paris tend to be personal, evocative, affectionate, and often eccentric, as their authors struggle to fit their feelings into the restraints of historical or confessional writing.[1] Yet there is something that eludes one's grasp, a central conundrum, in studying the city's history. Paris is a seductress yet the makers of modern Paris, Napoleon III and his Prefect of the Seine, Georges-Eugène Haussmann, seem unequal or unworthy of the achievement. Neither of these men had an aesthetic dimension (although Haussmann would deny the accusation). Both were very much men of their times, so brilliantly depicted by Zola and Flaubert as crass, materialistic, corrupt, often degenerate, even depraved, and driven by money. The emperor was uninterested in details, which consumed Haussmann. The extraordinary city they created rested not only upon a nasty and bloody *coup d'état* followed by a long parade of unscrupulous politics and an unending series of urban depredations that destroyed medieval Paris, gutted the boulevard life so evocatively recreated in Marcel Carné's *Les Enfants du Paradis*, drove the poor to the periphery and shaped the central city to fit the bourgeoisie. But Louis Napoleon and Haussmann were not just an authoritarian government and a ruthless prefect. There have been other autocratic rulers and their minions seemingly unfit for creative work, but none of them made a Paris.

Stephane Kirkland sees the paradox but cannot make up his mind about an explanation. He begins by deploring the focus on Haussmann "without understanding the fundamental role of Napoléon III," arguing that most past writers have missed what is essential (p. 2). Thus does he underline the paradox: "Today, the universal phrase is not 'the Paris of Napoléon III,' but 'the Paris of Haussmann'" (p. 272). He evokes the American, Charles Mulford Robinson, who swam against the tide of bedazzled admirers of Paris and sought to explain its success. What gave Second Empire Paris its homogeneity, which has a lot to do with its beauty, was the emperor's "willingness to impose restrictions on private rights in the interest of the quality of the shared space," something Americans refused to do.[2] Kirkland adds to this the obscure architects and engineers who toiled in the city's administration "to make every park bench and streetlight as elegant as Second Empire society desired" (pp. 290-291) thus creating and maintaining so stunning a city. Before he gets to this interesting hypothesis he tells a number of familiar stories about the emperor, Haussmann, and the making of modern Paris.

Kirkland was determined, or so it appears until page 141 when he quotes Pierre Pinon, to cite only contemporaries of the *grands travaux*. His notes contain maybe a dozen modern scholars and there is no bibliography, although there has been a considerable amount of work on transforming Paris.[3] Kirkland borrows freely and very selectively from this work, without acknowledgement. He insists Louis Napoleon is the principle creator of modern Paris (p. 63), which is true in the sense that nothing could have been done without his explicit support and approval. There have been many would-be Haussmanns, but without a Louis Napoleon they have sunk into oblivion. Yet his presentation of the

emperor consists largely of familiar anecdotes, especially those about his sexual appetites: “As his subsequent behavior would confirm, monogamy was not particularly his thing,” he snickers (p. 53).

Much of his brief for Louis Napoleon centers on a celebrated map, actually a mere sketch, of the new streets the emperor wanted to create. The map itself has disappeared, but from the descriptions we have by those who saw it, Haussmann among them, it hardly constitutes a visionary new city.^[4] Almost the entire west end of Paris (part of the eighth and much of the seventeenth *arrondissements*), the land developed by the Pereire brothers, is missing. So is a new water supply and sewers, the incorporation of the near *banlieues* into the city, and a couple of the significant urban systems, principally on the Left Bank, designed to quarantine urban rebellion. There is also nothing in the sketch map to indicate what kinds of buildings are to line the new streets. Kirkland repeats the familiar argument that Louis Napoleon returned from English exile smitten with the urbanization of London which was his inspiration. In fact a very good case can be made for the preponderant influence of his uncle’s urbanization, much of which Louis Napoleon continues, along with Napoleon’s sense of enlightened progress, urban order, and security. The best example is the continuation of the rue de Rivoli to the Place de la Bastille. Napoleon began the street with elegant arcaded buildings across from the Tuileries gardens. He intended it to be both a ceremonial and a strategic highway crossing Paris from west to east. The transformation work began here, not with the quest for a Parisian Hyde Park.

Kirkland chides historians for valuing Haussmann’s work too highly. He is a “great urban planner...as good as they come,” but only in the sense of “action and dealing with what is there” with a keen, “even cynical skill for navigating the political and financial obstacles” (p. 274). Among the best parts of Kirkland’s book is his ability to untangle the skein of Haussmann’s financial dealings. Louis Napoleon refused to raise taxes to transform Paris. The regular grants to the city in the national budget were inadequate, but Haussmann improvised brilliantly on the edge of legality, now and then falling over that edge. Kirkland has an excellent section on the Pereire brothers, the Sephardic Jews who became the bankers of significant parts of the *grands travaux*, and infuriated the more conventional bankers by shutting them out, until their bank went belly up (pp. 98-104). They introduced new modes of banking and borrowing (pp. 156-160) and Haussmann plunged the city into enormous debt. Along the way, he illegally sold bonds which were traded and discounted on the stock exchange since their value would not be realized until work currently underway was completed. Holders were betting on the enhanced value urbanization would bestow. The total cost of the *grands travaux*, from 1853 to 1870, when Haussmann fell and the Empire collapsed, “was 2.5 billion francs—more than the annual national budget of France” and this did not include the projects that were finished by the Third Republic, or the “the Opéra and the Palais de Justice, the restoration of Notre-Dame, or the embankments and bridges along the Seine...nor did it include...the Palais du Louvre” (pp. 269-270).

For all his dislike of Haussmann, who was and remains a difficult man to like—his strengths are so often unappetizing, uninteresting, or repellant—Kirkland grasps him better than the elusive Louis Napoleon, one of history’s great phlegmatic personalities. Haussmann disliked architects, foolishly flattering himself able to judge their work. He quarreled with Jacques Ignace Hittorff, who designed the Place de la Concorde, one of the most beautiful urban spaces in the world (pp. 107-110). He quarreled with all the architects, usually over aesthetic matters. He preferred to work with engineers, men who had no pretensions to creating beautiful buildings or spaces. These were men who spoke Haussmann’s language. So much of his most celebrated, or condemned work—often improvised to fit into the labyrinth of old Paris—Kirkland ignores. Everywhere above ground, except in western Paris which was largely not urbanized, he encountered obstacles that could not be demolished. At the Place du Châtelet, his first attempt at a city center, he had to move a fountain, raise the tower St. Jacques to street level, and cut a new street only a block long to balance the Boulevard de Sébastopol. He built the Cour des Comptes on the Ile de la Cité, modeled on the Palazzo della Loggia in Brescia, which the emperor admired. But he had the architect, Antoine-Nicolas Bailly, place the dome off center so it would perfectly bisect the Boulevard de Sébastopol (p. 218). The *trompe l’œil* of a street that leads nowhere is

repeated at the Place St. Michel to balance the Boulevard St. Michel. He made the Pont de Sully the only bridge over the Seine not parallel with the others to create a straight sight line along the Boulevard Henri IV from the river to the Place de la Bastille. Haussmann's mania for the rectilinear, shared with the emperor, is best seen in his sewer system. Below ground there were no intrusive landlords, no historic monuments, and no torturous medieval streets to deal with. Here engineering prevailed: the galleries run true.

Kirkland's discussion of the beauty of Paris, for he is an architect and an art historian, is curiously short and disappointing. He argues vaguely that a "tremendous energy devoted to art...defined important societal values" but he says nothing about the École des Beaux-Arts which trained the majority of those who transformed Paris (pp. 22-23). He mentions, but only in passing, the "cultural consensus" identified by Pierre Pinon that led builders, developers, and architects voluntarily to observe "a set of design principles" that gave Paris its remarkable harmony (p. 141). The many restrictions of height, façade decoration, building materials, and setback from the new streets needed little enforcement by Haussmann. Transformed Paris is not distinguished by unique buildings of genius, with the exception of Charles Garnier's Opéra. Rather, the city is celebrated for its uniformity of taste, proportion, ornamentation, and building materials. Paris was and remains comfortable to look at, walk around in, and often see one's destination identified by an old or new monument. One's assumptions about beauty are not challenged by this urban harmony. Even the many boring streets and the *anomie* they engender—which Gustave Caillebotte has painted—are easier to take than some radical departure from the familiar aesthetic of the *beaux-arts* tradition.

Kirkland's is not an historian's book. Much of the historical detail is anecdotal, familiar, or superficial. He has done a good deal of reading, is obviously emotionally engaged with the subject, and he has presented the best brief account in English of how the transformation of Paris was financed, as well as shrewd portraits of some of the leading architects. His hostile analysis of Haussmann is good and convincing. His treatment of Louis Napoleon less so. But so much is left out or glossed over that *Paris Reborn* can serve only as an invitation to a vast and fascinating subject.

NOTES

[1] A few examples will suffice. In English, Patrice Higonnet, *Paris, Capital of the World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Edmund White, *The Flâneur: A Stroll Through the Paradoxes of Paris* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2001); and Colin Jones, *Paris, The Biography of a City* (London: Penguin, 2004). In French, Julien Green, *Paris* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 1989); Eric Hazan, *L'Invention de Paris* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004); and Jean Favier, *Paris, deux mille ans d'histoire* (Paris: Fayard, 2001).

[2] Robinson was a journalist and theorist of urban planning. He was the first professor for civic design at the University of Illinois.

[3] Again a few examples will suffice. The work of David Van Zanten is significant on the *beaux-arts* tradition. Pierre Pinon is similarly worthwhile, most recently his *Paris détruit* (Paris: Parigramme, 2011). For Haussmann Michel Carmona's *Haussmann* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), has recently been translated into English as *Haussmann, His Life and Times and the Making of Modern Paris* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002) and David P. Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (New York: The Free Press, 1995). And this is not to mention the exceptional amount of work on the social, cultural, and economic history of Second Empire Paris.

[4] The original map was drawn by the emperor in two colors to indicate 1) the streets created by his orders and at his initiative, and 2) the streets he had wanted built but that were not done during his reign. This was shown to Haussmann in 1853. There are two reconstructed versions, one given to

Wilhelm I of Prussia in 1867, the other obtained by Charles Merruau from the dying emperor in 1873. The latter is reproduced in my *Transformation of Paris* and is missing a number of streets, especially in western Paris.

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