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Hollis Clayson and André Dombrowski, eds. *Is Paris Still the Capital of the Nineteenth Century? Essays on Art and Modernity, 1850-1900*. London: Routledge, 2016. 67 B/W illustrations. Bibliography and index. xviii + 306 pp. \$165 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781472460141.

Review by Masha Belenky, The George Washington University.

Is Paris still the capital of the nineteenth century? This question, both provocative and playful, is at the heart of a collection of essays seeking to cast a fresh eye on the well-explored terrain of modern art and visual culture of nineteenth-century Paris. Referring, of course, to Walter Benjamin's famous formulation in his study of Parisian urban culture, capitalist aesthetics, and commodity culture, the volume arose from a Clark Art Institute Symposium by the same name, held in Williamstown, MA, in October 2009. Edited by art historians Hollis Clayson and André Dombrowski, who also organized the symposium, the volume contains thirteen essays (mostly by art historians), an introduction, and an afterward. Bringing together diverse disciplinary and ideological perspectives, the volume doesn't offer a monolithic answer to the question in its title: while some contributors express a "healthy uncertainty" (p. 4) about the centrality of Paris as a "capital of the nineteenth century," others reaffirm this claim. Most importantly, the volume as a whole makes it clear that the question is worth asking, and that an examination of different forms of art expression from nineteenth-century Paris, and their imbrication in other cultural networks, can yield new insights about modernity and modernism.

Drawing on a broad range of visual media, from paintings and prints to photography and illustrations, the volume seeks to test the notion of the centrality of Paris in art and visual and material culture of the second half of the nineteenth century from a variety of methodological perspectives. At the center of these inquiries is not so much Paris as an empirical place, but "Paris" as a mythical construct. As the editors state in their afterward, "we sought [...] to find some of the more surprising and innovative work being done about art, architecture, and material culture produced in response (in diverse ways) to Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century, as a place but more importantly as a concept" (p. 286).

The 2009 conference and the volume, the authors note, "mark and critically engage" (p. 288) the publication anniversaries of several key texts that form essential points of departure or contestation for the essays in the volume, as well as for any study of French modernity and modernism: 150 years since Baudelaire began writing *The Painter of Modern Life*, 25 years since the publication of T.J. Clark's seminal *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris and the Art of Manet and his Followers*, and 70 years since Walter Benjamin's field-defining exposé that lent its title to the volume, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century."

The volume is divided into three sections, each prefaced by an introduction from one of the editors. The opening section, “Modernity,” features a disciplinarily diverse set of essays that maintain the Paris-centric focus. According to Dombrowski’s introduction, the essays in this section “provide further evidence for the claim that Paris was both the original place of modernity and the original site of a critical engagement with modernity” while at the same time they “prioritize the fissures and contradictions of the city’s legacy” (p. 17). Architecture historian Charles Rice offers a rethinking of Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* and its implications for architectural practices. In “How Haussmann’s Hegemony Haunted the Early Third Republic,” historian Peter Soppelsa explores the complex legacies with which urban planners, administrators and thinkers grappled in the years after Hausmann’s death. Marc Gotlieb, in “The Guillotine sublime,” offers a reading of the imagery of severed heads, as well as the discourse related to the actual practice of decapitation, to propose it as the most “emblematic and culturally meaningful imagined experience of French modernity” (p. 16). Paul Smith, in “Victorine’s Secret: Baudelaire and the Ambiguity of Commodities,” revisits “the dialectical account of modern commodity culture” (p. 16) in Baudelaire and Benjamin. Finally, Margaret Werth’s article focuses on Manet’s depictions of Polichinelle; she argues that these depictions were not merely caricatures of authority figures, but “were part of a more complex oppositional phenomenon, figurations of both the artist and his enemies, or ironic self-consciousness and comic derision” (p. 99). Polichinelle also stood for Manet’s fraught relationship with artistic institutions such as the Salon. The essay then turns to Mallarmé’s defense of the artist.

The four essays in section two, “Geography,” constitute perhaps the most unexpected and provocative part of the volume, in that they challenge the hegemony of Paris as the capital of modernity and revisit the center-periphery paradigm. As Clayson writes in the section’s introduction, they “wrench nineteenth-century Paris out of its confines by taking its art and artists on the road where they often went, but rarely go in most scholarship” (p. 112). Rather than arguing for the centrality of the “periphery,” these essays put Parisian cultural expression into a productive dialogue with other centers. Tamar Garb’s essay, “Revisiting the 1860s: Race and Place in Cape Town and Paris” (arguably a true standout in this collection) looks at the question of centrality from the vantage point of the Global South and, more specifically, Cape Town. Garb traces the complex connections between Edouard Manet’s 1864 painting *The Battle of the “Kearsage” and the “Alabama,”* a British expatriate watercolorist Thomas Bowler’s canvas, contemporary South African artist Berni Searle, and a popular Africaaner folk song “Alibama.” In her richly textured essay, she explores what she calls “the connective tissue of history, demonstrating the mutual imbrication of stories and experiences” (p. 126). In “Osman Hamdi Bey and Ottoman Aestheticism,” Mary Roberts looks at the work of the leading Ottoman artist of his generation and the ways in which he engaged with and transformed conventions of French academic painting. Roberts argues that Osman Hamdi’s art was characterized by a “cross -cultural aesthetics” that productively engaged Ottoman and European traditions. Ting Chang’s “Paris, Japan, and Modernity: A Vexed Ratio” focuses on Émile Guimet, founder of the museum of Asian art in Paris, artist Félix Régamey, and the politics of travel. Focusing on representations of Westerners’ experience of travel in Japan, Chang reconsiders the relationship of modernity, mobility and masculinity: “The Europeans who journey to Asia took part in global expansion, but they also participated in unsettling normative depictions of East and West” (p. 165). Hélène Valance, in “White City vs. *La Ville Lumière*: Electrical Displays and the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago (1893),” places Paris’s famed World’s Fairs in conversation with Chicago’s 1893 exposition, with a particular

focus on electricity and lighting technologies. Valance argues that the White City was “one of the first materializations of the American capitalist hegemony that was to broaden over the next century” (p.183).

Section three contains four essays united around the theme of “circulation,” defined here as a network of crossovers and connections among different genres and artistic media. This group of essays returns to the centrality of Paris as a cultural capital of the nineteenth century. In “Manet and the Multiple,” Anne Higonnet studies Manet’s 1868 *Portrait of Emile Zola* as a palimpsest of different kinds of reproductions made possible through modern technologies such as lithography, wood engraving, and photography. Higonnet argues that this well-studied painting is a web of art-historical quotations represented in the painting through reproductions. Such “aesthetic potential of exchangeability” (p. 209) was, in fact, at the heart of this painting. This imbrication of art media was made possible because of Paris: “Parisian patterns of intellectual sociability fostered emulation and competition, comparison and reference” (p. 209). Jacob W. Lewis considers Charles Nègre’s genre photography and the interplay of the practices of photography, theatrical directions and studio painting. He explores what he calls photographic “instantaneity” as a specific phenomenon of mid-nineteenth-century Paris: “Nègre not only employed the camera to represent a sense of movement and instantaneity; he also attempted to simulate the optical and physiological effects of seeing the city at a glance with a camera lens of his own devising” (p. 223). In “Living on Manet’s *Balcony*, or the Right to Privacy,” André Dombrowski revisits the well-studied painting of Parisian modern life that has long presented critics and scholars with more questions than answers about its ambiguous narrative. Dombrowski offers a Foucauldian reading of the painting, as he sets out to situate the narrative ambiguity of *The Balcony* within the specific socio-cultural context of the Second Empire. He traces this context to a recently adapted press law of 1868 according to which publishing facts about private life was a punishable offence. This law “brought into focus the ethics and partisan nature of both speech and vision the late Second Empire.” More broadly, Dombrowski argues for the significant role social norms, laws and customs played in the development of “painting of modern life.” The final essay in the volume is Hollis Clayson’s “Mary Cassatt’s Lamp,” in which she offers a fascinating analysis of the “connection between two developments that helped create modern Paris: new urban lighting and innovative printmaking, a paradigmatic if quirky instance of a link between technological modernity and pictorial modernism.” (p. 257). Clayson argues that the two phenomena, the innovative modernist print techniques and the new street lighting, didn’t merely coexist but were imbricated with one another. Taking as her case study the lamps in Mary Cassatt’s intaglio prints made between 1879 and 1882, Clayson examines both the technical aspects and the socio-cultural meanings of these representations. The volume concludes with an afterward by Clayson and Dombrowski that returns to the scope and rationale behind the book, picking up some of the themes already announced in the introduction. They remind us that in this volume they “sought to demote the centrality of empirical Paris, in order to promote the interrogation of the mythical French capital” (p. 286).

As is often the case with edited volumes, some essays stand out. I particularly appreciated the contributions by Soppelsa, Garb, Higonnet and Lewis. Others, while strong on their own terms, seem to only have a tenuous relationship to the volume’s topic (as is the case with Marc Gotlieb’s article on the guillotine), and their inclusion undermines the volume’s cohesion. This reviewer would have also preferred to see an afterward by someone other than the editors, who already authored a general introduction to the volume, a mini introduction to each of the three

sections, and contributed an essay each. A different voice and perspective at the conclusion of the book would have enhanced its overall strength and would have avoided some repetition. Despite these minor blemishes, the volume overall is a successful project that will be a good resource for scholars of art history and of nineteenth-century French culture in general. Whether Paris is or isn't still the capital of the nineteenth century, this book demonstrates that the city and the artistic production it engendered and inspired, and the cultural networks with which it engaged, continue to be a fruitful terrain for scholars to explore.

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Charles Rice, "Architecture's Capital? Revisiting Benjamin's Paris"

Peter Soppelsa, "How Haussmann's Hegemony Haunted the Early Third Republic"

Marc Gotlieb, "The Guillotine sublime"

Paul Smith, "Victorine's Secret: Baudelaire and the Ambiguity of Commodities"

Margaret Werth, "A Laughter of the Look: Manet, Mallarmé, Polichinelle, and the Salon Jury in 1874."

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Section III: Circulation

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Jacob W. Lewis, "Gesture, Pose, Practice: Charles Nègre and the Image of Instantaneity"

André Dombrowski, “Living on Manet’s *Balcony*, or the Right to Privacy”

Hollis Clayson, “Mary Cassatt’s Lamp”

Hollis Clayson and André Dombrowski, “Afterward”

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