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Esther da Costa Meyer, *Dividing Paris: Urban Renewal and Social Inequality, 1852-1870*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022. x + 400 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$49.95 U.S./£ 40.00 U.K. (hb). ISBN 9780691162805; (eb). ISBN 9780691223537.

Review by Masha Belenky, The George Washington University.

Architectural historian Esther da Costa Meyer's monumental and well-researched book sheds new light on a familiar story of the radical reconstruction of Paris during the years of the Second Empire under Napoleon III. Her aim is to move beyond architectural history's exclusive focus on monuments and "buildings of aesthetic worth" to include the stories of the populations who were affected by Haussmannization (p. 5). "What did urban renewal mean to the hundreds of thousands of workers who resided in the anomic outskirts, and swept in and out of the historical city center every day, on their way to and from work?" (p. 5) is one of the main guiding questions of da Costa Meyer's study. She draws on a rich archive of nineteenth-century documents and builds on a voluminous body of scholarly literature on Paris by social and cultural historians, art historians, and literary scholars who have considered different social aspects of Haussmannization over the past three decades. [1] While the overarching story this book is telling is not new—a story of how the reconstruction of Paris was both overdetermined by class interests and how it impacted all social classes in different ways—the book nevertheless has much to recommend itself. Written in a lively and engaging style, it presents a comprehensive story of Haussmannization, addressing seemingly every aspect of this complex multifaceted phenomenon, and paints a vivid picture of how social hierarchies were expressed spatially during this period and beyond. Numerous beautifully reproduced illustrations (mostly of maps, photographs, and lithographs) make the book a pleasure to behold.

Each of the seven richly researched chapters focuses on a specific aspect of Haussmannization. Throughout the book, da Costa Meyer pays particular attention to how each element of this process affected different social classes, and in particular, the effect the changes had on the working classes. Chapter one, "The President, the Emperor, and the Prefect," tells the story of Napoleon III and Haussmann's engagement with the city and provides a clear exposé of how the rebuilding of Paris was planned and executed. The chapter analyses the role each of these men played in rebuilding Paris. She stresses that Haussmannization was a "collaborative effort" (p. 30). Da Costa Meyer highlights to what extent Haussmann's—and Napoleon III's—policies were "answerable to the needs and aspirations of the prosperous entrepreneurial bourgeoisie" (p. 37). One example is particularly evocative: to make room for new boulevards and Place de Château d'Eau (now Place de la République), Haussmann ordered the destruction of several popular theaters on the Boulevard du Temple catering to a working-class audience. Instead of rebuilding,

he replaced them with a theater for the more affluent audience (pp. 41-42). As a result, “the map of the city’s social geography was redrawn” (p. 42), political and class divides were sharpened, and “by 1870 Paris’s arrondissements were much more sharply identified by class than was the case in 1848” (p. 43).

Chapter two, “Requiem”, focuses on the massive work of destruction undertaken during this period and its impact on both the city and its inhabitants. Da Costa Meyer deftly tells the story of “slum clearing” that wiped out much of the capital’s architectural heritage and left in its wake a devastation only comparable to the “shelling of Northern France during World War Two” (p. 80). Haussmann’s zeal in razing sizable parts of the city to make room for his master plan went beyond necessity. Rather, he took pleasure in erasing large parts of the city: “For good and for ill, he left a modern city equipped with boulevards and streets that can more or less cope with automobiles he could not have foreseen. But his inelastic approach needlessly condemned a sizable portion of the city’s architectural heritage that he destroyed to a greater extent than either his predecessors or his successors. Haussmann was all nouns; nuance was virtually unknown to him” (p. 65). The brunt of the demolition concentrated in the poorer parts of the city, resulting in the displacement of nearly 10,000 people. The demolition project carried undeniable ideological undertones, as Haussmann erased sites associated with popular history, revolutions, revolts, and social unrests, such as, for example, rue Transnonain, site of the insurrection of 1834, or Canal St. Martin, associated with working-class resistance, that was covered with a new boulevard (p. 70). In addition to tearing through the social fabric of the city, the demolition project irrevocably changed the face of the city. The lone structures spared the destruction lost their meaning when deprived of context: “The invention of the historical monument, this ambivalent creation of modernity, has changed the spectator’s relation to architectural landmarks” (p. 58).

The second part of this chapter relays cultural responses to Haussmann’s project of demolition and rebuilding, revisiting familiar writings by Baudelaire, Fournel, Hugo, and others. At this time, Paris becomes mediated through the works of writers and artists overcome by nostalgia and obsessed with preserving through representation the Paris that no longer existed.

Chapter three, “Streets and Boulevards,” charts the creation of roads and their social implications during Haussmannization. The main guiding principle was the creation of a “new concept of urban space that gave primacy to the circulation of people, capital, goods, and information, providing a suitable incentive to consumption.” (p. 97). This chapter then leads the reader through a series of subsections, each addressing a particular aspect of spatial reorganization: walking, sound, artificial illumination, street furniture, and transportation. In the next chapter, “Water,” da Costa Meyer focuses on what she calls “hydro-politics” during the Second Empire and details Haussmann’s approach to the intractable water problem that plagued Paris well into the nineteenth century (p. 175). Although it is widely understood that Haussmann revolutionized water delivery in Paris and improved sanitation in the wake of several devastating cholera epidemics, this book adds nuance to our understanding of the water policy, highlighting its decidedly classed nature. Water access depended entirely on class and income: “Water was never simply a given. It was socially produced, as were the technologies that made it possible” (p. 174). While water for public use was publicly owned, water for private use was owned by private enterprises (eventually consolidated into one *Compagnie générale des eaux*) who charged for water home delivery. Those Parisians who could not afford this service had to carry water from fountains and carry it back home on their shoulders. Nevertheless, Haussmann’s policies were

forward-looking, presiding over the conversion of water “from a favor due to the generosity of rulers to a commodity bought and sold over the market” (p. 175). Chapter five, “De Profundis,” tells the story of Paris underground, with sections on catacombs, sewers, quarries, cemeteries, wells, and canals, charting how Haussmann sought to recreate underground the order that now reigned above ground. Particularly fascinating is the section on paleontology (“Before Paris”, pp. 216-221), detailing discoveries of fossilized remains and advances in prehistory, as well as the work of Cuvier, Saint-Hilaire, and others.

In chapter six, “Disenchanted Nature,” da Costa Meyer examines the paradox of urban nature. The chapter provides a detailed history of the major Parisian parks built or refurbished during the Second Empire, followed by a discussion of squares and royal gardens. Particularly fascinating is the section on how this urban nature was “mediated by technology” (p. 224): many aspects of urban parks were, in fact, artificial and manufactured. From concrete grottoes and lakebeds to prosthetic rocks and faux-wood balustrades (p. 274), much of what one saw in the Parisian urban parks was man-made and reproducible: “Reproductive technologies enabled both the commodification of nature and the commodification of place” (p. 274). Like other aspects of Haussmannization, the parks were spaces deeply inflected with considerations of social class: on the one hand, “Parks and squares made room for leisure available to different social classes...but they also reproduced and sustained the ideologies that undergirded the regime” (p. 276). Moreover, urban nature was created to respond to the “political and economic exigencies of the Second Empire. Local industries and commercial enterprises received a boost from parks and squares where everything was a commodity that promoted their products and services. Real estate speculators saw earnings rise from the sale of properties bordering greenery” (p. 276). The final chapter, “The Periphery,” focuses on the Parisian outskirts, where scores of workers were relocated when they were displaced by Haussmann’s urban works. In this chapter, da Costa Meyer argues for the inseparability of the celebrated Parisian center and its often-neglected periphery.

Dividing Paris is at its best when dealing with detailed architectural history, some of which is perhaps less well known to students and scholars of nineteenth-century France. For each topic, da Costa Meyer meticulously traces the history of reforms to the earlier parts of the nineteenth century, placing Haussmann’s project in its proper context, and her reconstruction of each aspect of Haussmann’s work is satisfyingly textured and comprehensive. Moreover, she introduces the readers to a delightful cast of characters who were instrumental in rebuilding Paris: Eugene Belgrand, “le grand maître du Paris souterrain” (p. 181), the engineer in charge of work on underground Paris, or Jules Prat, who collaborated—but never got proper credit—with Alphand on the celebrated *Les promenades de Paris*.

While the book is beautifully produced, the puzzling absence of a bibliography (presumably the publisher’s and not the author’s choice) makes it difficult to navigate, especially given the extensive research upon which it relies. Relegating all research to footnotes also makes it difficult to parse the author’s engagement with previous scholarship. It is also unfortunate that the Princeton University Press editors didn’t catch mistakes such as a reference to the fate of descendants of prominent Jewish owners of mansions around Parc Monceau: “Under the Third Republic many of their descendants would be sent to their deaths in German concentration camps” (p. 250). It was not, of course, the Third Republic—which fell on July 10, 1940—but rather *L’État Français* or Vichy France that deported Jews to death camps. While the inclusion of numerous lovely images—photographs, maps, lithographs, and some paintings—is admirable and

certainly makes the book very attractive, I wish da Costa Meyer had engaged more deeply with them. Instead of being used as mere illustration, a meaningful analysis of the fascinating images would have enriched the book considerably.

Overall, *Diving Paris* is a welcome addition to the rich corpus of scholarship on Haussmannization and nineteenth-century Paris. Although the book's central claims about the ideological and class motivations and implications of Haussmann's works are not new, the lively prose, deep research, the abundance of fascinating details and gorgeous illustrations make it a worthy contribution not only to architectural history but to the study of nineteenth-century Paris as a whole.

NOTES

[1] Some books exploring the social aspect of Haussmann's project and its different facets, as well as their representation in literature and art, include David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Victoria E. Thompson, "Telling 'Spatial Stories': Urban Space and Bourgeois Identity in Early Nineteenth-Century Paris," *Journal of Modern History* 75 (2003): 523-556; and T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

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