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**David Harvey**, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York & London: Routledge, 2003, xi + 372 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$30 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-415-94421-X.

Review by Bertrand Taithe, University of Manchester.

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In 1985, the historical geographer David Harvey published a major collection of essays in two volumes entitled *Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. The two volumes were respectively entitled *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* and *The Urbanization of Capital*.<sup>[1]</sup> These books were crucial in the developments of Marxist urban history and each essay has inspired an entire historiography of its own. A little short of twenty years later, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* is in effect a new edition of the central essays in *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, better produced and much more lavishly illustrated, with 116 illustrations. There is, however, a clear shift of emphasis visible at first glance between the orthodox and arid Marxist title of 1985 and the obviously Benjaminian title of 2003. The Harvard translation of Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* has obviously led to this shift. His unfinished work, the *Arcades Project*, was published in the form left to Bataille in 1940 as a compilation of notes organised in stacks or konvoluts. Recent readings of this book have led to a reappraisal of the understanding of modernity and of the role of the *flâneur*. In 1985, Benjamin appeared thrice in the text, and only fleetingly as a source of quote. In 2003, he is discussed at length and appears thirteen times. This does not mean that the entire book has been revised in light of a Benjaminian revelation. Indeed, much of the argument of the book's new sections stems from an attempt to debunk the notion of modernity as nothing other than a myth.

The book is composed of a new but very short introduction, a recent chapter on Balzac, which while published twice before, might have escaped notice, a new chapter entitled "Dreaming the Body Politic" and the re-publication of the central sections of *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*. Having both copies in hand, I have failed to spot many differences even though I enjoyed the fact that this long unavailable key text is being offered to us again. The critical apparatus and bibliography of these sections showed that very little of the recent historiography had made its way into the few revisions that did take place.

David Harvey thus faces us with a very composite book, some of which dates in fact from the late 1970s, and some of which represents recent thinking. It does not make for a completely coherent text. Small issues such as the number of victims of the Commune thus fluctuate between 20,000 and 30,000 depending on the vintage of the chapters. Yet, in spite of these reservations and in spite of the regret that David Harvey thought it unnecessary to engage more forcefully and comprehensively with much of the recent scholarship, this book deserves to be taken very seriously indeed. Compared with his mid-80s incarnation, it is clear that Harvey now emphasizes 1848 more than hitherto. The haughty figure of Haussmann correspondingly declines as Haussmannisation appears a century-long project of an imagined modernity dreaming its radical breaks with the past. Marxist explanatory patterns are still paramount in this text, but with a more sustained engagement with discursive forms of representation and which nevertheless stops short of 'endless deconstruction'. This mode of operation gives to the whole book a flavour more like traditional social history than most recent texts published on similar issues (for instance, Thompson's work on gender and the stock exchange, *The Virtuous Marketplace*).

The discursive forms do not, nevertheless, involve class or gender, subjects with which Harvey seems less comfortable and engaged. Some of his discussion of women, for instance, are framed in gender terms of another age. Attempting to emulate Carl Schorske's *Fin-de-siècle Vienna*,<sup>[3]</sup> Harvey seeks to give a panoptic representation of the "totality of what the city was about" (p.18) and recognizes in Benjamin, perhaps erroneously in this respect, another seeker of the same ultimate goal.

Of the new sections, the piece on Balzac is undoubtedly the strongest. Benjamin focussed relatively little on Balzac compared with Baudelaire, in spite of the fact that Balzac was the real contemporary of the *Arcades Project*. Harvey chooses to read Balzac as an urbanist. This reading entails a breaking down of Balzacian modes of narration of the city, the unpacking of his utopian ideals and an admiring dissection of the Balzacian gaze into Parisian interiors.

This is also the piece which mostly clearly follows Marxist and Benjaminian cultural themes: the *flâneur* and the bourgeoisie's commodity fetish, while recasting these themes for an earlier age than Beaudelaire's. The second chapter is devoted to revolutionary politics and the utopian schemes of the 1830s and 1848. It covers many themes which are familiar by now and which similarly fascinated Benjamin, particularly in Konvolut U of the *Arcades Project*. This chapter is both an attempt to explain the developments in utopian socialist thinking and to map them onto Paris. The nostalgia is palpable, as is the denunciation of the evil of capitalistic appropriations of the urban space. Flaubert is thus 'reduc[ing] the city as a stage set' (p.88). From a living organism alive in Balzacian narratives, the bourgeois aesthetics have reduced it to a mere "backdrop to the human action that proceeds in and upon it. The city becomes a dead object," Harvey argues (p.88). Such dramatic statements are thought-provoking. It is strange to me that Flaubert's friend, the arch-conservative Maxime du Camp, continued to use body metaphors or, at the other opposite of the political spectrum, that Jules Vallès should also have maintained the metaphoric representations of Paris well after 1848. It is more than a little troubling that an author so prompt to denounce the notion of a radical break as mythical should be so focussed on the epistemological importance of the June Days.

Where Harvey is weaker is probably in his political narratives, as they are often dated and almost caricatures. The rightful indignation at the massacre of Communards recurs like a mantra, but is treated in isolation from the brutalising siege of Paris and the recent history of political culture of the late Second Empire and early Third Republic, robbing it of impact.

The second part of the book, a re-publication of the 1985 text, has all the qualities and weaknesses of this canonical text. Beyond a brief and somewhat dismissive attack on Gould's interpretation of class and neighbourhood solidarities in post-1860 Paris (p. 242), it does not fully address much of the recent literature, either on Parisian politics or urbanisation.[4] It remains the classic Marxist interpretation of the modernisation of Paris. The categories of analysis thus tend to be essentially economic and the emphasis remains the circulation of goods, people and capital. Many of the most peremptory statements seem debatable now. To argue, for instance, that mass education had a minimal impact by 1870 flies in the face of the research of the last twenty years, while measures such as a 20 percent illiteracy rate in 1872 Paris are given without context or discussion (p.203). The Coda on the siege of Paris and the building of the Sacré Coeur is similarly outdated. On most points of detail, a similar criticism could be made. Insofar as it attempts to present this work as new, this book is a disappointment. As a new edition, on the other hand, it plays an important role by making available to newer generations of scholar a work which ranks with those of Chevalier and Gaillard as one of the most important explorations of Paris.

Finally, as a text within the text, the illustrations, mostly taken from Marville's exploration of 1860 Paris and from Daumier's caricatures, would have deserved a fuller discussion. They give this new edition the feel of a coffee table book, something to give to Paris lovers. It is to be hoped, as the publishers probably did, that this beautiful book will reach a readership untouched by much scholarly writing. To introduce someone to Parisian urban history for the first time through David Harvey's work would be a wondrous gift indeed.

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## NOTES

[1] David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Harvey, *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

[2] Victoria E. Thompson, *The Virtuous Marketplace: Women and Men, Money and Politics in Paris, 1830-1870* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

[3] Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).

[4] Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago University Press, 1995).

Bertrand Taithe  
University of Manchester  
bertrand.taithe@man.ac.uk

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