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Eric Hazan. *The Invention of Paris: A History Told in Footsteps.* Translated by David Fernbach. New York: Verso, 2010. 400 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84467-411-4.

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The Anti-Nostalgic Nostalgia for Old Paris

Near the end of *The Invention of Paris*, Eric Hazan extends Jules Michelet's observation that every historical era dreams its successor: "it is even more clear that each epoch lives in nostalgia for its predecessor, above all in a period when this sentiment, promoted like a washing-powder, fits marvelously into an ideological scaffolding, the strategy of ends–of history, of the book, of art, of utopias" (p. 360). Is this sort of hegemonic nostalgia hastening the end of Paris? Hazan adds the French capital to this list of nostalgia's victims even as he sets out to rescue it. During the past three decades, the heart of Paris has been "renovated-museumified," he writes, partly as a result of the bureaucratic and commercial prerogative to paper over the more divisive elements of Paris's past. An "official history" that underplays conflict is the bugbear of this eminently readable book, which plumbs countless neighborhoods for the revolutionary ghosts, ruptures, and dreams that would shake present-day Paris into wakefulness.

The book is divided into three parts, the first two of which deal with spatial-temporal categories: the abstractions of Old Paris, New Paris, and Red Paris are charted with specific historical reference to the development of the quartier, faubourg, village, and the suburb. Part 3 revisits the theme of modernist culture as a critique of bourgeois modernity. Ranging comfortably from the seventeenth century to the present, Hazan draws from the vast historiography on Paris, but with neither a pretension to first-hand research nor any substantive challenge to existing scholarship. Rather, as the book's subtitle suggests, this an unabashedly subjective appropriation of modern Paris–aimed at readers who already know the city very well–that wanders freely in terms both of genre and geography. Hazan borrows his "psychogeographical" approach, discussed in the first chapter, from the Situationists. The use of this method is based on the hope that the city may be reclaimed through an embodied exploration of its contentious past. Hazan is not content merely to analyze the familiar urban practices of *flânerie* and *la dérive*, however. He turns these into history-writing techniques that allow him to put present and past into direct dialogue. Like any history only more explicitly so, this book says much about the present, and will be of interest to readers who study the relationship between historical knowledge and the politics of urban space.

In part 1, "Walkways," Hazan places the theme of boundaries, spatial and symbolic, at the center of his discussion of historical division. Since the medieval period, when the first of Paris's several concentric fortification walls appeared, Parisian expansion has left remnants of these punctuation marks of political ambition and social realignment. The evidence presented here is not new, but it serves nonetheless as a reminder of the history of spatial exclusion in Paris, a city still clinging to the distinction between *intra* and *extra muros*. The twentieth-century replacement of the last fortification wall with a multi-lane expressway becomes distinctly less visionary when thus considered. Hazan rethinks other traditional spatial divisions (Left Bank vs. Right Bank, East vs. West, etc.) with smart, on-the-terrain readings of the urban landscape. As the boundary between "Old Paris" and "New Paris," for instance, he proposes Louis XIV's great peripheral avenue, which helped bring the term *boulevard* into usage as an enduring form of Parisian boundary (p. 15). There is also careful attention paid to the idiosyncrasies of the quartier, the character of which is

particularly sensitive to changes in activities, population, and architecture. The quartier is, of course, the space of human-scale experience, of emotion. Nowhere is this more evident than in forays through the author's native Left Bank. A retired physician in his mid-sixties as he wrote this–his first book–Hazan regrets that the Saint-Germain area has "fallen into the sterility of a museum." Its social and racial homogeneity is surely plain to anyone who has walked the length of the Rue de Grenelle, the Rue de Rennes, or any of the tiny streets in the neighborhood where, as Hazan remarks, "the Blacks are street sweepers, the Arabs are grocers, the police are rarely seen and the historic streets are as clean as in the pedestrianized zones of the provinces" (p. 6).

Social diversity can be an indicator of an area's liveliness, yet Hazan's lament in this connection that "nothing happens anymore on the Left Bank, whereas in my youth we hardly needed to cross the Seine," seems inspired less by history than nostalgia-tinged recollection (p. xi). Elsewhere we are informed that Hazan no longer gets coffee in a favorite haunt on the Place Saint-Sulpice due to the social makeup of its clientele in recent years: "smart tourists and elegant ladies taking a rest … after doing their shopping in the haute-couture boutiques nearby" (p. x). But for a long time now the Place Saint-Sulpice has known celebrity, as well as steady crowd overflows from the touristy Jardin du Luxembourg, the Boulevard Saint-Germain, and parts in between, where a galaxy of chic hotels and shopping locales beckon the global bourgeoisie. Even leaving aside the accelerated embourgeoisement of this and other Left Bank neighborhoods since the 1990s, the omnipresence of these social types is hardly recent. Indeed, the matter of Hazan's idealized historical Left Bank suggests something paradoxical about the project he has undertaken: to write against Parisian nostalgia from the viewpoint of a Parisian nostalgist.

It was during the nineteenth century that nostalgia evolved from a medical condition into a Parisian tradition, remarkable for its compatibility with a wide range of political temperaments, but also for its connection to urban development. The city's frenetic construction and growth–residents more than quadrupled in number between 1789 and 1914–combined with bloody revolutions to provoke the disgust, shock, regret, rage, and longing that have shaped the history of nostalgia since. "Alas, Old Paris is disappearing at terrifying speed," wrote Honoré de Balzac amid the rubble required by Baron Haussmann's mid-nineteenth-century plans for the city (p. 17). Haussmannization's subsequent critics helped launch the first urban conservationist movements into political action, with Victor Hugo and a raft of municipal associations taking the lead.

Less than a century later, the Situationist Guy Debord–who dated the loss of Old Paris "from 1970 onwards"–railed against the tendency to "museumify" the city, that is, to repackage neighborhoods as historical spectacles for touristic consumption.[1] Not coincidentally, Debord abhorred the extensive building and renovation projects undertaken in the 1950s and 60s, which were in certain respects the logical conclusion of Haussmannization.[2] Longing for a specific Old Paris, his generation's sense of foreboding stemmed as much from modern urbanism's destructive conservation as from its creative destruction. Hazan's own nostalgia for an era in which museumification was not an organizing principle of urban life–his anti-nostalgic nostalgia–is not his alone. Concerns about museumification have been voiced more often during the past couple of decades, most provocatively by Patrice Higonnet (like Debord and Hazan, a Parisian born in the 1930s) who has asked: "Is Paris merely a vast museum? "[3]

Higonnet's answer, a qualified "yes," may be the premise of Hazan's project, but the latter holds out more hope for a New Paris alive today in the northern and eastern areas, where immigrant groups have resisted gentrification. In fact, Immigrant Paris emerges as an interesting inspiration for Hazan's clever meanderings. To Parisians who would complain about an abundance of döner kebab joints in today's Latin Quarter, Hazan offers the following passage from Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris*, published in the 1780s: "The Turks who arrived in the train of the last Ottoman ambassador found nothing more agreeable in the whole of Paris than Rue de la Huchette, on account of the rotisseries there and the succulent smoke they exhaled…. Cooked fowl could be obtained there at any hour of the day; the spits were constantly on an ever-burning fire" (p. 105, n. 175). Where possible, Hazan emphasizes the role of immigrants in key historical developments, from nineteenth-century revolutions to the Sentier's textile trade. Walking eastward from the Sentier he pauses, amid the arcades of the Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis, to reflect on this neighborhood's remarkable trajectory from nineteenth-century Romantic bohemia to twenty-first-century "South Asia colony" of splendor: "Here you can buy saris, jewelry, spices, cloth, videocassettes, tin-plate cutlery and luminous sandals. You can sample the cuisines of Kashmir, Pakistan, Tamil Nadu, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Singapore" (p. 136). Such Beaudelairean flourishes, plentiful

in this stunning book, revivify the nostalgist's Old Paris while rewarding readers in search of the present.

Notes

[1]. Harold Pinder, " 'Old Paris is no more': Geographies of Spectacle and Anti-Spectacle," *Antipode* 32, no. 4 (2000): 359.

[2]. Rosemary Wakeman has shown how urbanist visions of the "Paris of Tomorrow" tended to combine historicism and renovation, beginning in the interwar years. Wakeman, "Nostalgic Modernism and the Invention of Paris in the Twentieth Century," *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 1 (2004): 120-121.

[3]. Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 434.

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