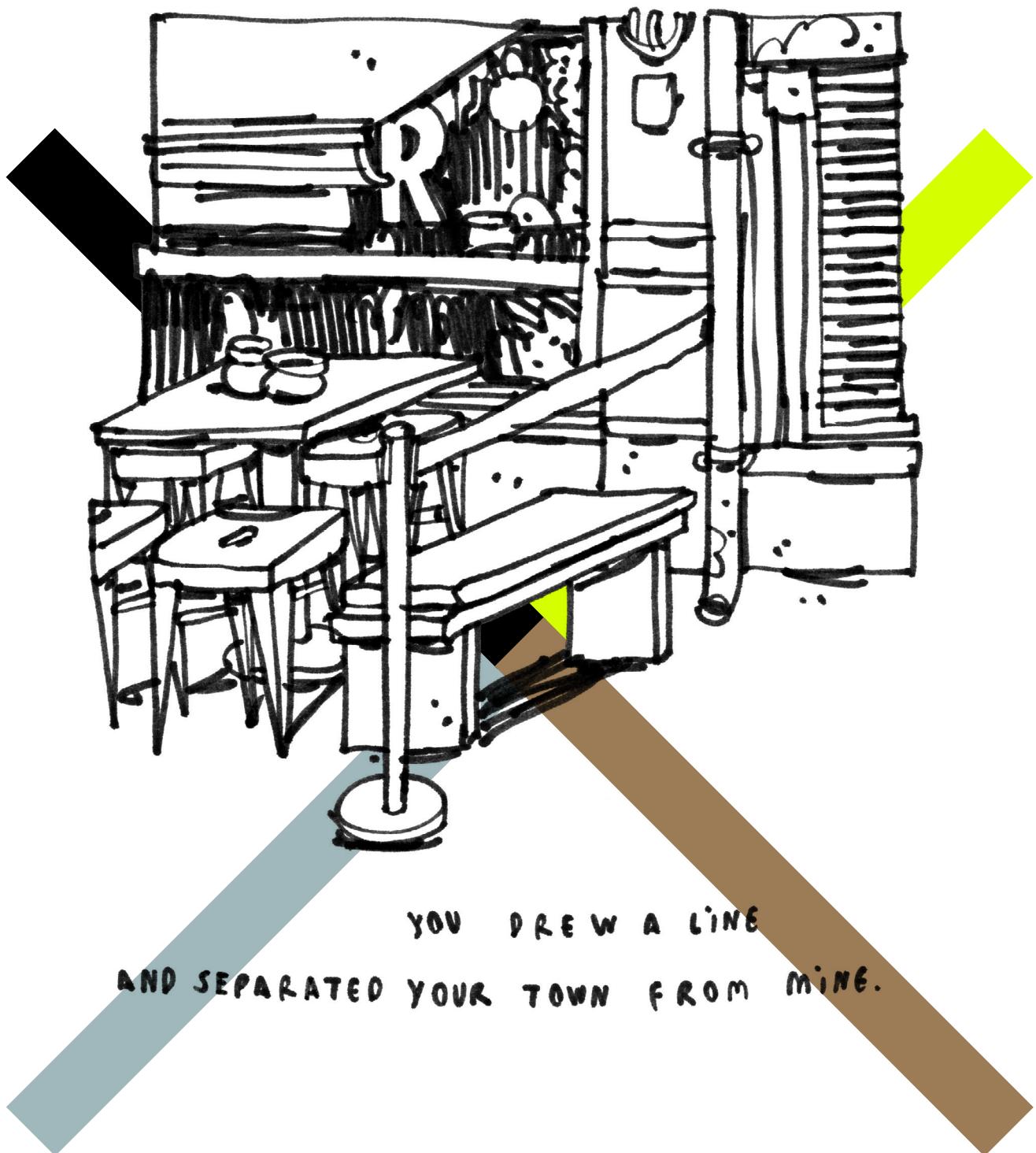


The Visual Essay

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Capturing Gentrification

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Capturing Gentrification: The roles of Charles Marville and Eugène Atget in Capturing the Transformation of Paris in the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

Between 1853 and 1914, Paris (France), 'the city of art', underwent enormous changes due to the urban development plans of Baron Georges Haussmann. Although gentrification was coined in the 1960s by Ruth Glass, this '*Haussmannization*' of Paris shows multiple convincing similarities with contemporary forms of gentrification.

Artists have been ascribed a rather ambivalent role in the gentrification process, as their presence in old, decayed, abandoned, or low-income neighborhoods was and is often seen as the first step towards gentrification. However, artists have also used their art to reflect on or even question gentrification. Especially photographers, whose discipline allows them to consciously curate and depict real life situations, have played an important role in capturing gentrification and its ramifications. Photographer *Charles Marville* (1813-1879) was commissioned by the state to document the neighborhoods that were demolished during the '*Haussmannization*'. Some forty years later, *Eugène Atget* (1857-1927) began photographing Parisian quarters that would be lost in urban planning. In this visual essay, the agency of photographers in (de)constructing gentrification is researched through an analysis of the work of Marville and Atget, discussing their objectives and styles and how these reflect the radical changes in Paris. The motivation of photographers seems to determine in what way their works represent gentrifying processes.

Artists and Gentrification

Between the 1850s and 1920s, Paris underwent a huge transformation. Emperor Napoléon III (1808-1873) wished to establish a 'modern Paris', and he appointed Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809-1891) to execute this project. Haussmann demolished huge parts of the old city center to be replaced with grand boulevards; and put canals to dry in order to install a sewage system. Besides the idea that this would benefit the Parisian economy and politics, the modernization project was meant to uplift Paris' international status and promote the idea of Paris as a prestigious city (Chapman 1953). Haussmann's plans would determine the fate of urban developments in Paris. In retrospect, we can even call Haussman's work in Paris a process of gentrification, mainly because of its social impact.

Guided by Ruth Glass in the 1960s, academics started to use the word 'gentrification' as a means to translate urban changes to papers and essays (Osman 2016). Gentrification was defined as a process with two characteristics: (1) The "*inflow of affluent residents and investment (also referred to as capital)*" and the (2) the "*outflow of the low-income population from the same neighborhood*" (Yeom and Mikelbank 2019). Artists have been ascribed a rather ambivalent role in the process of gentrification, as their presence in old, decayed, abandoned or low-income neighborhoods was and is often seen as the first step towards gentrification (Metaal 2007). They move to neighborhoods that are deemed decayed and poor because they can afford the low rents and it allows them to escape the traditional city life. Because of the presence of artists, the otherwise neglected neighborhoods become associated with creativity and authenticity, and this results in a sudden new interest from wealthier residents and entrepreneurs, which ultimately leads to the replacement of the original, lower income residents by new, affluent homeowners. However, this is not always the case and past and present artists have also used their profession to reflect on gentrification. Especially photographers, whose discipline allows them to consciously curate and depict real life situations, have played an important role in capturing gentrification.

In this visual essay, the agency of photographers in (de)constructing gentrification is researched through an analysis of the work by Charles Marville (1813-1879) and Eugène Atget (1857-1927). The visual essay, presented as a 'printed exhibition', was made possible by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Paris Musées: Museums of the city of Paris.

“We could therefore define the urban space as a place where conflicts are expressed, reversing the separation of places where expression disappears, where silence reigns, where the signs of separation are established.”

Henri Lefebvre, quoted by Jacques Ranciere in *Disagreement* (1999)

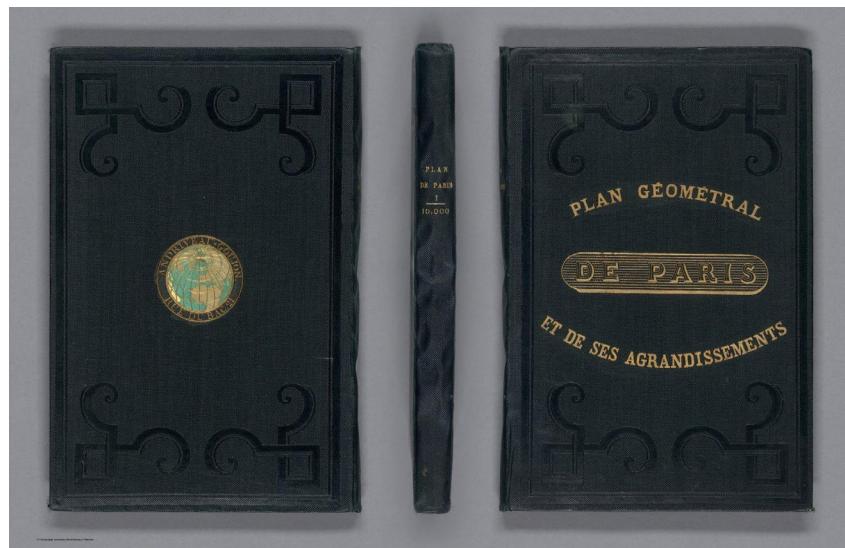
Haussmannization

In 1853, Haussmann was named the '*Prefect of the Seine*', which he remained until 1870 (Chapman 1953). His influence on the Parisian landscape would later be called '*Haussmannization*', which means urban renewal by demolition (Jordan 2004). To refer to the urban planning in 19th century Paris as gentrification might be considered premature, since the term was coined in the 1960s and usually refers to more recent changes in urban landscapes (Metaal 2007). However, it must be clarified that the actual manifestations of gentrification predate their academic title (Osman 2016). Several scholars, such as Andy Merrifield, have concluded that Haussmann's activities in Paris could be referred to as *proto-gentrification* because Haussmann commodified space and banned the working class to the city's periphery (Paccoud 2023).

Haussmann is often referred to as the '*monster of demolition*' because the removal of great parts of Paris was fundamental to his work (Chapman 1953, 191). This included the vanishing of neighborhoods that housed the economically weak residents of Paris, forcing the poor out of the city and into what we now call *banlieues* or suburbs (Nasir 2023). Both the lack of rehousing for the people that were pushed out of their homes and the increase in rents in the neighborhoods that were upgraded "*set the city on the unequal course decried today*" (Paccoud 2023, 277). This reflects the modern definition of gentrification, which requires actions of both people and capital (Zukin 2016). In 19th century Paris, the people inhabiting the old parts of Paris were deemed not important enough to maintain the neighborhoods' state at the time and the government's capital was used to move them away.

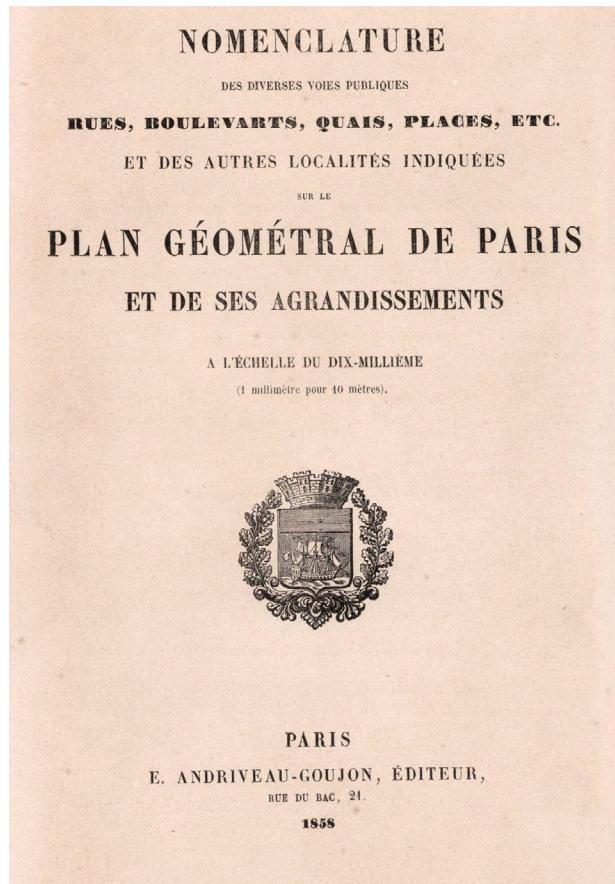
Plans for Paris

In this book from 1858, Haussmann's urban renewal plans for Paris are illustrated. As can be read on the title page, Haussmann's project was to be materialized through the construction of streets, boulevards, quarters, and squares. With his alterations to Paris, Haussmann literally "cut through the plans of the ancient city" (David Rumsey Map Collection).

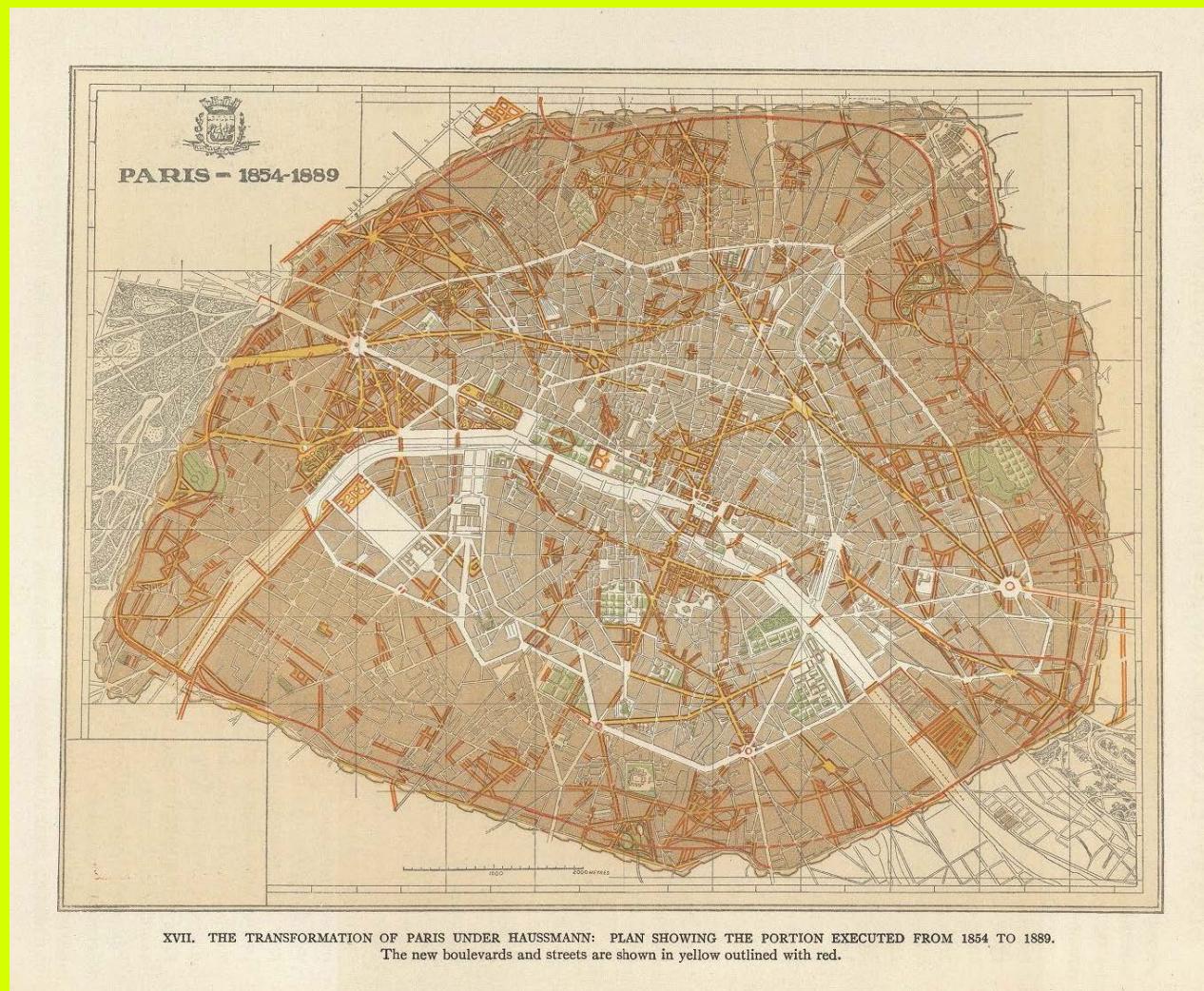


Object 1: Covers: *Plan Géométral De Paris et de Ses agrandissements* (*Geometrical plan of Paris and its enlargements*), 1858 (Andriveau-Goujon)

Object 2: Title page: *Plan Géométral De Paris et de Ses Agrandissements*, 1858 (Andriveau-Goujon).



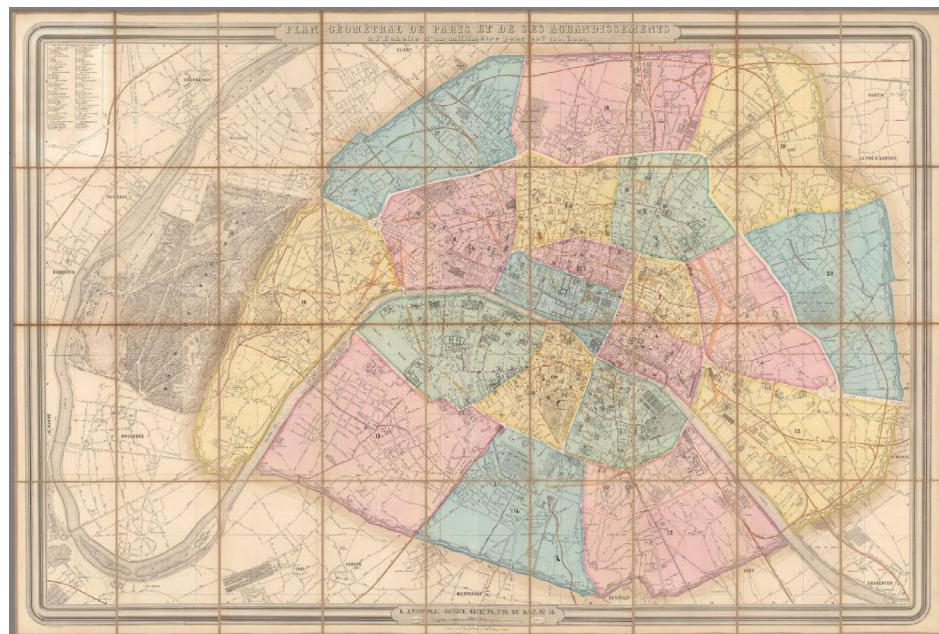
Object 3 XVII. *The transformation of Paris under Haussmann: Plan showing the portion executed from 1854 to 1889, 1909* (Burnham).



Mapping Urban Transformations

Napoléon III was keen to change Paris to streamline the economy, safeguard his military agenda and improve Paris' international reputation (Chapman 1953). These underlying motivations for the renovation of Paris are made clear in object 3, as it highlights all the streets and boulevards that were constructed to meet Napoléon's demands. The economic development of the city required a better infrastructure with easy connections between the city center and the outside world. This of course only benefited the wealthy Parisians whose economies were actually improving. Also, to naturally enforce the citizens' obedience, Haussmann removed all narrow streets and small courts as these intimate areas allowed revolutionaries to have secret meetings and plot uprisings. But those narrow streets were the result of a densely populated city, and their removal equaled the demolition of hundreds of homes. As a consequence of the new city structure, 350.000 people were forced to move (Nasir 2023). Object 4 dates back to 1860 and shows Haussmann's plans for urban renewal with some small adjustments by architect Alfred Pitoquet. The image illustrates the division of Paris in twenty arrondissements that were all divided into four quarters; creating a total of eighty Parisian neighborhoods. The orange marks represent the envisioned boulevards that Haussman proposed; they cut right through the traditional plans of Paris. Imagine all the houses that had to be demolished for these roads to be built.

Object 4 *Plan géométral de Paris et de ses agrandissements (Geometrical plan of Paris and its enlargements)*, 1860 (Andriveau-Goujon and Potiquet).



Curating the Day to Day

Photography is a form of storytelling in which photographers hold the power to control the narrative (Meadows 2020). This grants them the ability to carefully curate what their picture includes and excludes. As such, photographers contribute to the imagery of cultural discourses. Rather than being the instigator of gentrifying processes, photography allows artists to comment on gentrification and express their concerns.

In the context of the 19th century, when photography was just emerging as a technique, the repercussions of a photograph cannot be underestimated. At the time, photography was seen as a tool “*to make accurate and reproducible pictorial records of visual experience*” and as such it was not regarded as an art form (Osterman & Romer 2007, 3). It could be argued that the fact that people saw photography as a form of documenting, gave photographers even more power, because to document means to record the truth. Furthermore, documentation implies neutrality. The works of both Charles Marville and Eugène Atget are able to hide under a claim of objectivity, but research into their motivations and styles, exposes two unique underlying narratives that help to (de)construct gentrification in Paris at the turn of the century.

Charles Marville (1813-1879)

Charles Marville – born as Charles-François Bossu – was an illustrator of books and magazines before he became a photographer in the 1850s (The Met 2014). His main focus lay on capturing architecture, landscapes, and the urban environment (MoMa 2024). Marville’s work is characterized by his centering of technical elements and architectural particularities. Although his pictures seem to target one thing in particular, Marville showed objects in relation to their surroundings.

In addition to selling his work to architects and artists, Marville took on state commissioned assignments on a regular basis (Barberie 2008). From 1862 onwards he proudly called himself “*the photographer of the city of Paris*” (Locke 2019, 252). This title required him to document all areas that would disappear with the modernization of the city. Consequently, Marville is often associated with the Haussmannization of Paris. This association is twofold: on the one hand, some critics see Marville’s photos as “*potent tools for urban planning and architecture*” (Barberie 2008, 34), while others have discovered a hidden agenda of the photographer himself.

“The works of both Charles Marville and Eugène Atget are able to hide under a claim of objectivity, but research into their motivations and styles, exposes two unique underlying narratives that help to (de)construct gentrification in Paris at the turn of the century.”

Object 5 Countertype of a photograph showing the perspective of the Cité d'Antin, 9th arrondissement
by Charles Marville. Date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Illuminating Modernization and Looking into the Future

Marville's role as photographer of the city not only required him to photograph the parts of Paris that were destined to disappear, occasionally it also included capturing the modern facilities Haussman installed, such as the street lanterns featured in object 7 (The Met 2024). Their influence on Paris cannot be underestimated, as their presence transformed the otherwise dark, bleak and dangerous evenings in the city into charming moments. This picture illustrates how Marville's work quite literally illuminates how Haussmann upgraded Paris.

Object 8 also shows one of the modernizing facilities Haussmann brought to Paris. The intersection of Rue du Contract-Social and Rue de la Tonnellerie; a shopping area where people went to buy household goods. Both streets would soon be removed as part of the urban development Haussmann introduced. Although the picture is named after the two streets, its alternate focus goes to *Les Halles*, the market building in the background. Between 1854 and 1866 Haussmann turned the existing market into an indoor market that fitted into his plans. This project became one of Haussmann's most famous additions to Paris. As seen in all of these pictures, Marville's work does not encourage any lingering over a building, street, or object. He always captured things in such a manner that their relation to their surroundings was highlighted (Light and Paper 2023). If Marville took a photo of a street, he made sure that both sides were clearly visible and that the street was leading to something else. It is almost as if he wanted to illustrate improvement by reminding people that their horizon was being broadened.

Object 6 *Cloud Study over Paris* by Charles Marville, 1856-1857. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Object 7 *Arts et Métiers (Ancien Modèle)* by Charles Marville, 1864. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Object 8 *Rue du Contrat-Social, de la rue de la Tonnellerie* by Charles Marville, 1864-1865.
Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Object 9 *Rue Traversine (from the Rue d'Arras)* by Charles Marville, 1868. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Object 10 *Impasse Briare (de la Cité Coquenard)* by Charles Marville, 1860s. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Violent Renovations

While some say that Marville's work clearly follows the political agenda of Napoléon III and Haussmann, others find that underneath what seems to be a glorification of modernization, hides a silent protest. When appointed *Prefect of the Seine*, Haussmann promised the Parisian citizens that his alterations to the city would be far from radical and revolutionary, merely modernizing and regenerative (Rexer 2023). Because of the chaotic political past of France, the citizens needed some calm and quiet and Haussmann claimed to act accordingly. But with their demolishing nature, his urban renewal plans proved to be the opposite of calm.

According to Raisa Rexer, an expert in French Studies, with photos like these, Marville showcased that Haussmann's actions were violent indeed and they would change the city drastically. The buildings in objects 11 and 12 are surrounded by bricks and the pavement and construction of the buildings prove that an upgrade is needed. Object 13 and 14 might have also fitted into the previous section, as both photographs present a view towards another street, which situates them in the urban context. But a closer look at object 13 reveals some serious damage to the pavement and in the background of object 14 we find piles of what seems to be sand and wheelbarrows, suggesting a more serious intention of the photographer. Could it be that with these works, Marville wanted to warn the Parisian citizens that Haussmann was being more drastic than he promised? Or is that a romanticization of the artist's intentions?

Object 11 East End, Troyes Cathedral under Restoration by Charles Marville, 1863. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Object 12 Countertype of photograph showing Jean-sans-Peur tower. 2nd arrondissement by Charles Marville, date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 13 Countertype of a photograph depicting the rue de Breteuil, from the rue Réaumur [panorama]. 3rd arrondissement, by Charles Marville. Date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 14 Countertype of a photograph of the Passage Tivoli. 8th or 9th arrondissement by Charles Marville. Date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Eugène Atget (1857-1927)

Eugène Atget started his career as an actor touring France (Gautrand 2016). In the 1890s he settled in Paris, where the artists who lived in Montparnasse taught him the value of photography as a form of documenting. This inspired Atget to capture the elements of Paris that would soon disappear from the street view because of the execution of the urban renewal plans Haussmann instigated.

Atget never called himself an artist, although he did sell his work to anyone who could use it as a source for their own profession, including painters (Rizov 2021). It could be said that with his work Atget saved “*for historical memory the image of a whole architectural and social heritage that was in danger of disappearing*” (Gautrand 2016, 38). This could be the reason why Atget’s photos have a nostalgic essence, characterized by a focus on details that represent the human aspects of the Parisian streets.

Object 15 *Les Fortifications* [translation: 'The Fortifications'] Porte d'Arcueil by Eugène Atget. June 1899. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Street Professions

A common thread in Atget's work is the depiction of age-old professions. Street vendors, market traders, shoe shiners, and laborers alike play an important role in his documentation of the Parisian street view. Isolated, Atget's depiction of street vendors is not that extraordinary; to this day and age, photographers feel attracted to depicting the practice of traditional occupations. But when compared to Atget's other works and his motivations for photographing Paris, his series of 'workers' gains a more complex meaning.

Chances are that the male workers he photographed – women were not allowed to go out on the streets unaccompanied – were well known by residents of the areas they worked in. In other words, they belonged to the neighborhood. As Atget's main objective was to document all that was going to vanish, he must have realized that just like the shops, houses, parks, canals, and courts, these professions might lose their function in modern Paris. The Haussmannization of Paris coincided with the emergence of the first department stores, which undeniably contributed to the new prestige of the city Napoléon III wanted (Delhaye 2008). This made the presence of street vendors redundant and consequently, nowadays, street vendors have been reduced to tokens of the authentic Paris; instead of catering to the needs of actual Parisians, they cater to those of tourists. Thus, although the street vendors have never really left the Parisian street view, they now take on a different role that answers to one of the signifiers of modern gentrification: consumers and new residents seeking the experience of "*authentic urban life*" (Ji 2021, 222).

Object 16 Jardin des Plantes- Marchand de jouets
[translation: 'Toy Merchant'] by Eugène Atget. 1898.
Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 17 Marchand [translation: 'merchant'] on Rue Lepic, Montmartre by Eugène Atget. 1899. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 18 Petit Marché [translation: 'Little Market'] at Place St Médard by Eugène Atget. 1898.
Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 19 *Marchand de parapluies* [translation: 'merchant of umbrellas'] on Place Saint-Médard, 5ème arrondissement by Eugène Atget. 1899-1900. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 20 *Marchand de paniers à salade et casiers à bouteilles* [translation: ‘merchant of salad baskets and bottle crates’] by Eugène Atget. 1899-1900. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



The Devil is in the Details

As part of his fascination for details and craftsmanship, Atget made numerous pictures of the peculiar details of Parisian street decors. He even made an ensemble called *vues du vieux Paris* [translation: 'sights of old Paris']: objects 21, 22, and 23 are part of this collection. The title of object 21 even refers to the Haussmannization of Paris, as *démoli* translates to 'demolished'. Atget presumably realized that all of the small tokens in the city should be remembered, because they too did not fit into the 'modern Paris' Napoléon III envisioned. An important feature of gentrification as we know it now, is that the transformation of the things we take for granted, like mailboxes, street poles, and trash cans may have a crucial effect on those who are used to the old ones.

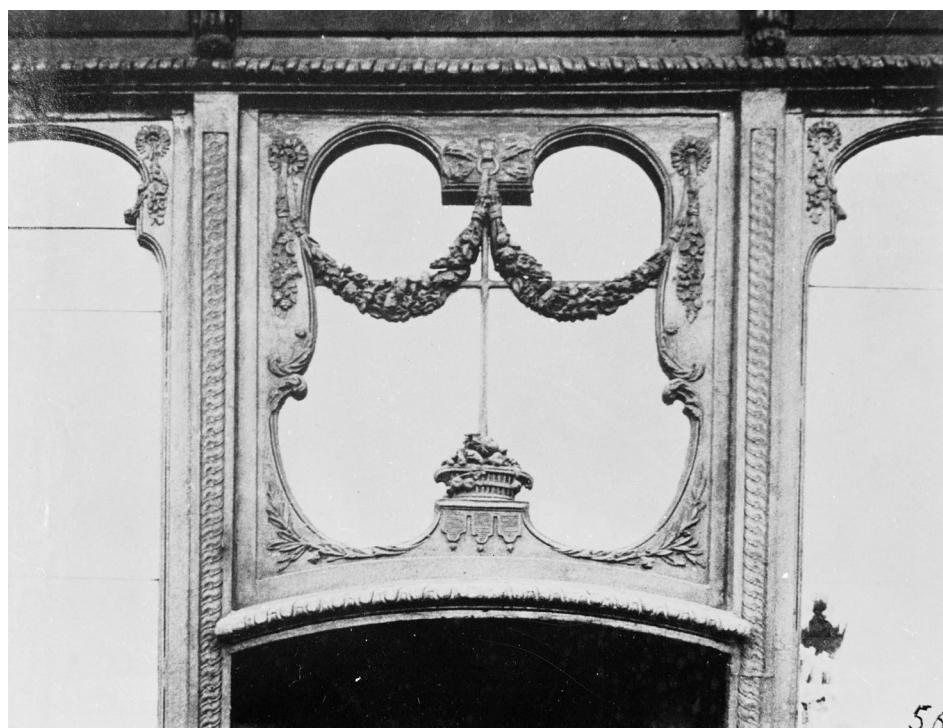
Object 21 *Au Bon Puits 36 rue Michel Le Comte (démoli)*, *Vues du vieux Paris* by Eugène Atget. 1908. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 22 *Hôtel des Ambassadeurs de Hollande 47 Rue Vieille du Temple, 4e arrondissement* by Eugène Atget. 1900. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 23 *Boutique Louis XVI, 3 quai Bourbon, Vues du vieux Paris* by Eugène Atget. 1910. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Presence and Absence

One of the most pressing differences between the works of Marville and Atget is the agency of people. Marville's photos rarely feature people and when they do these people are depicted as part of the decor rather than individuals with a particular purpose. Atget did the exact opposite with his work. Even in the photos that do not show actual persons, there is always a small sign of human activity, giving you the feeling that someone could walk back into the frame at any moment. In Marville's work, similar human utensils are present, but in a more deserted way, as if they have not been used in years and nobody would mind if they disappeared.

Marville's work shows the old, neglected parts of Paris and it could be used by the government to argue that the modernization of the city was necessary. Atget's work on the other hand shows the vibrant sides of neighborhoods that were about to be destroyed. This can be understood as a way to show that the urban developments affected the social and economic elements of city life. It must be mentioned however, that some critics consider Marville's work a warning for the 'dehumanizing city' (Rexer 2023).

Object 24 Countertype of photograph showing *La place d'Italie, façades sur rue pavée. 13ème arrondissement* by Charles Marville, date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 25 *Fête du 14 juillet. Un orchestre* [translation: 'Feast of the 14th of July. An Orchestra'] on Place Piznel by Eugène Atget. 1898. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 26 *Rue Estienne, de la rue Boucher* by Charles Marville. 1862-1865. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Object 27 *Hôtel d'Isaac de Laffemas, lieutenant civil au châtelet, 14 rue Saint Julien le Pauvre, 5ème arrondissement* by Eugène Atget. 1899. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 28 Countertype of a photograph depicting rue du Mail (from rue de Cléry), 2nd arrondissement by Charles Marville. Date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 29 Foire des Invalides by Eugène Atget. June 1899. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 30 *Rue du Chat-qui-Pêche* (from the *Rue de la Huchette*) by Charles Marville. ca. 1868.
Property of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Object 31 Entrée de l'hôtel de Juigné Rue de Thorigny by Eugène Atget. 1901.
Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 32 *Rue de Constantine* by Charles Marville. 1866.

Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Rue de Constantine, 1866

This is one of the few works of Marville in which people play a significant role. It is, however, important to note that they are street pavers and therefore part of the modernization project. Like most street views captured by Marville, this one vanished not long after the picture was taken. The Rue de Constantine was located on the *Île de la cité*, one of the most prominent examples of Haussmannization. Between 1850 and 1870, the number of residents on this city island went from 15.000 to 5.000, because Haussmann transformed the area into an open-air museum full of monuments and government buildings (Jordan 2004). Most of its residents were part of a so-called “radical working class” (McCaughay 2014, 18). Presumably, they had to move to the banlieues. Historian René Héron de Villefosse even went so far as to say that Haussmann “caused more damage than a hundred bombings”, all in the name of Parisian prestige (Glancey 2022). And this prestigious city would no longer house the thousands of working-class residents it used to.

The Body and Soul of 19th Century Paris

While no one spoke of gentrification in the 19th century, what happened in Paris at the time can certainly be seen as one of the earlier forms of the process and it set the tone for all the architectural, geographical, and social changes that were to happen in Paris in the time to come. Just like in current gentrifying processes, neighborhoods that were considered poor, decayed, and worthless by the government were demolished and rebuilt in order to cater to the needs of more affluent residents and economies that Napoléon III wanted his modern Paris to house. And while the modernizing of Paris sounds like a noble and necessary objective, with Haussmann's demolitions and reconstructions, a great part of the Parisian population was treated as worthless as their former homes. They were banned to the outskirts of the city, and as such Haussmann did not only construct a modern city, but he also constructed a modern, geographical class divide.

If anything, the photography of Charles Marville and Eugène Atget serves as a historiography of the so-called Haussmannization of their city. But their pictures are far from objective and show the potential influence that photographers can have on people's views on gentrification. Although at first glance both Marville and Atget seem to have delivered neutral documentations on a specific period in time, their characteristic styles reveal underlying objectives.

By taking pictures of architectural innovations, neglected spaces, and modern facilities, Marville captured Paris' body, while by documenting people, professions, personal belongings, and craftsmanship, Atget captured Paris' soul. When combined, Marville and Atget's photos serve as a nuanced documentation of how urban renewal resulted in an early form of gentrification in Paris at the turn of the century. Marville shows us that after all, modernization is undeniably necessary and Atget reminds us of the price it comes with.

“By taking pictures of architectural innovations, neglected spaces, and modern facilities, Marville captured Paris' body, while by documenting people, professions, personal belongings, and craftsmanship, Atget captured Paris' soul.”

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