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Charles Baudelaire:
A Lyric Poet in
the Era of High Capitalism

Verso

Translated from the German by Harry Zohn

constitutes the most inestimable substance, is primarily a matter of filling up lines; and a literary architect whose mere name does not promise a profit must sell at any price.⁶³ To his end Baudelaire remained in a bad position on the literary market. It has been calculated that he earned no more than 15,000 francs from his entire work.

'Balzac is ruining himself with coffee, Musset is dulling himself by drinking absinthe. . . . Murger is dying in a sanatorium, as is now Baudelaire. And not one of these writers has been a Socialist!'⁶⁴ Thus wrote Sainte-Beuve's private secretary, Jules Troubat. Baudelaire surely deserved the recognition intended by the last sentence. But this does not mean that he lacked insight into the true situation of a man of letters. He frequently compared such a man, and first of all himself, with a whore. His sonnet to the venal muse – 'La Muse vénale' – speaks of this. The great introductory poem, 'Au Lecteur', presents the poet in the unflattering position of someone who takes cold cash for his confession. One of his earliest poems, among those which were not included in the *Fleurs du mal*, is addressed to a streetwalker. This is its second stanza:

Pour avoir des souliers, elle a vendu son âme;
Mais le bon Dieu rirait si, près de cette infâme,
Je trenchais du tartufe et singeais la hauteur,
Moi qui vends ma pensée et qui veux être auteur.⁶⁵

(In order to have shoes she has sold her soul; but the Good Lord would laugh if, close to that vile person, I played the hypocrite and mimicked loftiness, I who sell my thought and want to be an author.)

The second stanza, 'Cette bohème-là, c'est mon tout', nonchalantly includes this creature in the brotherhood of the *bohème*. Baudelaire knew what the true situation of the man of letters was: he goes to the marketplace as a *flâneur*, supposedly to take a look at it, but in reality to find a buyer.

63. II, 385.

64. Quoted in Eugène Crépet, *Charles Baudelaire*, Paris, 1906, pp. 196ff.

65. I, 209.

II. The *Flâneur*

Once a writer had entered the marketplace, he looked around as in a diorama. A special literary genre has preserved his first attempts at orienting himself. It is a panorama literature. It was not by chance that *Le Livre des cent-et-un*, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, *Le Diable à Paris*, *La Grande Ville* enjoyed the favour of the capital city at the same time as the dioramas. These books consist of individual sketches which, as it were, reproduce the plastic foreground of those panoramas with their anecdotal form and the extensive background of the panoramas with their store of information. Numerous authors contributed to these volumes. Thus these anthologies are products of the same belletristic collective work for which Girardin had procured an outlet in the *feuilleton*. They were the salon attire of a literature which fundamentally was designed to be sold in the streets. In this literature, the modest-looking, paperbound, pocket-size volumes called 'physiologies' had pride of place. They investigated types that might be encountered by a person taking a look at the marketplace. From the itinerant street vendor of the boulevards to the dandy in the foyer of the opera-house, there was not a figure of Paris life that was not sketched by a *physiologue*. The great period of the genre came in the early forties. It was the *haute école* of the *feuilleton*; Baudelaire's generation went through it. The fact that it meant little to Baudelaire himself indicates the early age at which he went his own way.

In 1841 there were seventy-six new physiologies.¹ After that year the genre declined, and it disappeared together with the reign

1. cf. Charles Louandre, 'Statistique littéraire de la production intellectuelle

of the citizen-king Louis-Philippe. It was a basically petty-bourgeois genre. Monnier, its master, was a philistine endowed with an uncommon capacity for self-observation. Nowhere did these physiologies break through the most limited horizon. After the types had been covered, the physiology of the city had its turn. There appeared *Paris la nuit*, *Paris à table*, *Paris dans l'eau*, *Paris à cheval*, *Paris pittoresque*, *Paris marié*. When this vein, too, was exhausted, a 'physiology' of the nations was attempted. Nor was the 'physiology' of the animals neglected, for animals have always been an innocuous subject. Innocuousness was of the essence. In his studies on the history of caricature, Eduard Fuchs points out that the beginning of the physiologies coincided with the so-called September Laws, the tightened censorship of 1836. These laws summarily forced a team of able artists with a background in satire out of politics. If that could be done in the graphic arts, the government's manoeuvre was bound to be all the more successful in literature, for there was no political energy there that could compare with that of a Daumier. Reaction, then, was the principle 'which explains the colossal parade of bourgeois life which . . . began in France. . . . Everything passed in review. . . . Days of celebration and days of mourning, work and play, conjugal customs and bachelors' practices, the family, the home, children, school, society, the theatre, types, professions.'²

The leisurely quality of these descriptions fits the style of the *flâneur* who goes botanizing on the asphalt. But even in those days it was not possible to stroll about everywhere in the city. Before Haussmann wide pavements were rare, and the narrow ones afforded little protection from vehicles. Strolling could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades. 'The arcades, a rather recent invention of industrial luxury,' so says an illustrated guide to Paris of 1852, 'are glass-covered, marble-panelled passageways through entire complexes of houses whose proprietors have combined for such speculations. Both sides of these passageways, which

en France depuis quinze ans', in *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 November 1847, pp. 686ff.

2. Eduard Fuchs, *Die Karikatur der europäischen Völker*, Munich, 1921, vol. 1, p. 362.

are lighted from above, are lined with the most elegant shops, so that such an arcade is a city, even a world, in miniature.' It is in this world that the *flâneur* is at home; he provides 'the favourite sojourn of the strollers and the smokers, the stamping ground of all sorts of little *métiers*',³ with its chronicler and its philosopher. As for himself, he obtains there the unfailing remedy for the kind of boredom that easily arises under the baleful eyes of a satiated reactionary regime. In the words of Guys as quoted by Baudelaire, 'Anyone who is capable of being bored in a crowd is a blockhead. I repeat: a blockhead, and a contemptible one.'⁴ The arcades were a cross between a street and an *intérieur*. If one can speak of an artistic device of the physiologies, it is the proven device of the *feuilleton*, namely, to turn a boulevard into an *intérieur*. The street^{4a} becomes a dwelling for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enamelled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done. That life in all its variety and inexhaustible wealth of variations can thrive only among the grey cobblestones and against the grey background of despotism was the political secret on which the physiologies were based.

These writings were socially dubious, too. The long series of eccentric or simple, attractive or severe figures which the physiologies presented to the public in character sketches had one thing in common: they were harmless and of perfect bonhomie. Such a view of one's fellow man was so remote from experience that there were bound to be uncommonly weighty motives for it. The reason was an uneasiness of a special sort. People had to adapt themselves to a new and rather strange situation, one that is peculiar to big cities. Simmel has felicitously formulated what was involved here. 'Someone who sees without hearing is much more uneasy than someone

3. Ferdinand von Gall, *Paris und seine Salons*, Oldenburg, 1845, vol. 2, pp. 22ff.

4. II, 333.

[4a. In the preceding sentence, the original word 'street' was later replaced by 'boulevard'. Editorial note in the German edition.]

who hears without seeing. In this there is something characteristic of the sociology of the big city. Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation. Before the development of buses, railroads, and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in a position of having to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another.⁵ This new situation was, as Simmel recognized, not a pleasant one. In his *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton orchestrated his description of big-city dwellers with a reference to Goethe's remark that every person, the best as well as the most wretched, carries around a secret which would make him hateful to all others if it became known.⁶ The physiologies were designed to brush such disquieting notions aside as insignificant. They constituted, so to speak, the blinkers of the 'narrow-minded city animal' which Marx wrote about.⁷ A description of the proletariat in Foucaud's *Physiologie de l'industrie française* shows what a thoroughly limited vision these physiologies offered when the need arose: 'Quiet enjoyment is almost exhausting for a workingman. The house in which he lives may be surrounded by greenery under a cloudless sky, it may be fragrant with flowers and enlivened by the chirping of birds; but if a worker is idle, he will remain inaccessible to the charms of solitude. However, if a loud noise or a whistle from a distant factory happens to hit his ear, if he so much as hears the monotonous clattering of the machines in a factory, his face immediately brightens. He no longer feels the choice fragrance of flowers. The smoke from the tall factory chimney, the booming blows on the anvil, make him tremble with joy. He remembers the happy days of his work that was guided by the spirit of the inventor.'⁸ An entrepreneur who read this description may have gone to bed more relaxed than was his wont.

It was indeed the most obvious thing to give people a friendly

5. Georg Simmel, *Soziologie*, 4th edn, Berlin, 1958, p. 486.

6. cf. Bulwer-Lytton, *Eugene Aram. A Tale*, Paris, 1832, p. 314.

7. Marx and Engels on Feuerbach, in *Marx-Engels-Archiv, Zeitschrift des Marx-Engels-Instituts*, edited by David Riazanov, Frankfurt, 1926, vol. 1, pp. 271ff.

8. Edouard Foucaud, *Paris inventeur. Physiologie de l'industrie française*, Paris, 1844, pp. 222ff.

picture of one another. Thus the physiologies helped fashion the phantasmagoria of Parisian life in their own way. But their method could not get them very far. People knew one another as debtors and creditors, salesmen and customers, employers and employees, and above all as competitors. In the long run it did not seem very likely that they could be made to believe their associates were harmless oddballs. Therefore these writings soon developed another view of the matter which rang true to a far greater extent. They went back to the physiognomists of the eighteenth century, although they had little to do with the more solid endeavours of the latter. In Lavater or in Gall there was, next to the speculative and the visionary, genuine empiricism. The physiologies lived on the credit of this empiricism without adding anything of their own. They assured people that everyone was, unencumbered by any factual knowledge, able to make out the profession, the character, the background, and the life-style of passers-by. In these writings this ability appears as a gift which a good fairy bestows upon an inhabitant of a big city at birth. With such certainties Balzac, more than anyone else, was in his element. His predilection for unqualified statements was served well by them. 'Genius,' he wrote, 'is so visible in a person that even the least educated man walking around in Paris will, when he comes across a great artist, know immediately what he has found.'⁹ Delvau, Baudelaire's friend and the most interesting among the minor masters of the *feuilleton*, claimed that he could divide the Parisian public according to its various strata as easily as a geologist distinguishes the layers in rocks. If that sort of thing could be done, then, to be sure, life in the big city was not nearly so disquieting as it probably seemed to people. Then these questions by Baudelaire were just empty phrases: 'What are the dangers of the forest and the prairie compared with the daily shocks and conflicts of civilization? Whether a man grabs his victim on a boulevard or stabs his quarry in unknown woods – does he not remain both here and there the most perfect of all beasts of prey?'¹⁰

For this victim Baudelaire uses the expression '*dupe*'; the word refers to someone who is cheated or fooled, and such a person is the

9. Honoré de Balzac, *Le cousin Pons*, Paris, 1914, p. 130.

10. II, 637.

antithesis of a connoisseur of human nature. The more uncanny a big city becomes, the more knowledge of human nature – so it was thought – it takes to operate in it. In actuality, the intensified struggle for survival led an individual to make an imperious proclamation of his interests. When it is a matter of evaluating a person's behaviour, an intimate acquaintance with these interests will often be much more useful than an acquaintance with his personality. The ability of which the *flâneur* likes to boast is, therefore, more likely to be one of the idols Bacon already located in the marketplace. Baudelaire hardly paid homage to this idol. His belief in original sin made him immune to a belief in a knowledge of human nature. He sided with de Maistre who, for his part, had combined a study of dogma with a study of Bacon.

The soothing little remedies which the physiologists offered for sale were soon passé. On the other hand, the literature which concerned itself with the disquieting and threatening aspects of urban life was to have a great future. This literature, too, dealt with the masses, but its method was different from that of the physiologies. It cared little about the definition of types; rather, it investigated the functions which are peculiar to the masses in a big city. One of these claimed particular attention; it had been emphasized by a police report as early as the turn of the nineteenth century. 'It is almost impossible,' wrote a Parisian secret agent in 1798, 'to maintain good behaviour in a thickly populated area where an individual is, so to speak, unknown to all others and thus does not have to blush in front of anyone.'¹¹ Here the masses appear as the asylum that shields an asocial person from his persecutors. Of all the menacing aspects of the masses, this one became apparent first. It is at the origin of the detective story.

In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in a situation where he has to play detective. Strolling gives him the best prospects of doing so. Baudelaire wrote: 'An observer is a *prince* who is everywhere in possession of his incognito.'¹² If the *flâneur* is thus turned into an unwilling detective,

11. Quoted in Adolphe Schmidt, *Tableaux de la révolution française, publiés sur les papiers inédits du département et de la police secrète de Paris*, vol. 3, Leipzig, 1870, p. 337.

12. II, 333.

it does him a lot of good socially, for it accredits his idleness. He only seems to be indolent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant. Thus the detective sees rather wide areas opening up to his self-esteem. He develops forms of reaction that are in keeping with the pace of a big city. He catches things in flight; this enables him to dream that he is like an artist. Everyone praises the swift crayon of the graphic artist. Balzac claims that artistry as such is tied to a quick grasp.¹³

Criminological sagacity coupled with the pleasant nonchalance of the *flâneur* – that is the outline of Dumas' *Mohicans de Paris*. The hero of this book decides to go forth in search of adventure by following a scrap of paper which he has given to the wind to play with. No matter what trail the *flâneur* may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime. This is an indication of how the detective story, regardless of its sober calculations, also participates in fashioning the phantasmagoria of Parisian life. As yet it does not glorify the criminal, though it does glorify his adversaries and, above all, the hunting-grounds where they pursue him. Messac has shown how an attempt has been made to bring in reminiscences of Cooper.¹⁴ The most interesting thing about Cooper's influence is that it is not concealed but displayed. In the above-mentioned *Mohicans de Paris* this display is in the very title; the author promises the reader that he will open a tropical forest and a prairie for him in Paris. The woodcut used as a frontispiece in the third volume shows a bushy street which was little frequented at that time; the caption under this picture reads: 'The tropical forest in the Rue d'Enfer.' The publisher's leaflet for this volume outlines the connection in a magnificent phrase in which one may see an expression of the author's enthusiasm for himself: 'Paris – the Mohicans . . . these two names clash like the *qui vive* of two gigantic unknowns. An abyss separates the two; through it flashes a spark of that electric light which has its source in Alexandre Dumas.' Even

13. In his *Séraphita* Balzac speaks of 'a quick look whose perceptions in rapid succession placed the most antithetical landscapes of the earth at the disposal of the imagination'.

14. cf. Roger Messac, *Le 'Detectif novel' et l'influence de la pensée scientifique*, Paris, 1929.

earlier, Féval had involved a redskin in the adventures of a metropolis. This man is named Tovah, and on a ride in a fiacre he manages to scalp his four white companions in such a way that the coachman does not notice anything. At the very beginning, the *Mystères de Paris* refers to Cooper in promising that the book's heroes from the Parisian underworld 'are no less removed from civilization than the savages who are so splendidly depicted by Cooper'. But Balzac in particular never tired of referring to Cooper as his model. 'The poetry of terror of which the American woods with their hostile tribes on the warpath encountering each other are so full – this poetry which stood Cooper in such good stead attaches in the same way to the smallest details of Parisian life. The pedestrians, the shops, the hired coaches, or a man leaning against a window – all this was of the same burning interest to the members of Peyrade's bodyguard as a tree stump, a beaver's den, a rock, a buffalo skin, an immobile canoe, or a floating leaf was to the reader of a novel by Cooper.' Balzac's intrigue is rich in forms ranging from stories about Indians to detective stories. At an early date there were objections to his 'Mohicans in spencer jackets' and 'Hurons in frock coats'.¹⁵ On the other hand, Hippolyte Babou, who was close to Baudelaire, wrote retrospectively in 1857: 'When Balzac breaks through walls to give free rein to observation, people listen at the doors. . . . In short, they behave, as our English neighbours in their prudery put it, like *police detectives*.'¹⁶

The detective story, whose interest lies in a logical construction that the crime story as such need not have, appeared in France for the first time in the form of translations of Poe's stories 'The Mystery of Marie Roget', 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', and 'The Purloined Letter'. With his translations of these models, Baudelaire adopted the genre. Poe's work was definitely absorbed in his own, and Baudelaire emphasizes this fact by stating his solidarity with the method in which the individual genres that Poe embraced harmonize. Poe was one of the greatest technicians of modern literature. As Valéry pointed out,¹⁷ he was the first to attempt the

15. cf. André Le Breton, *Balzac*, Paris, 1905, p. 83.

16. Hippolyte Babou, *La vérité sur le cas de M. Champfleury*, Paris, 1857, p. 30.

17. cf. Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, Paris, 1928; introduction by Paul Valéry.

scientific story, a modern cosmogony, the description of pathological phenomena. These genres he regarded as exact products of a method for which he claimed universal validity. In this very point Baudelaire sided with him, and in Poe's spirit he wrote: 'The time is not distant when it will be understood that a literature which refuses to make its way in brotherly concord with science and philosophy is a murderous and suicidal literature.'¹⁸ The detective story, the most momentous among Poe's technical achievements, was part of a literature that satisfied Baudelaire's postulate. Its analysis constitutes part of the analysis of Baudelaire's own work, despite the fact that Baudelaire wrote no stories of this type. The *Fleurs du mal* have three of its decisive elements as *dissecta membra*: the victim and the scene of the crime ('Une Martyre'), the murderer ('Le Vin de l'assassin'), the masses ('Le Crépuscule du soir'). The fourth element is lacking – the one that permits the intellect to break through this emotion-laden atmosphere. Baudelaire wrote no detective story because, given the structure of his instincts, it was impossible for him to identify with the detective. In him, the calculating, constructive element was on the side of the asocial and had become an integral part of cruelty. Baudelaire was too good a reader of the Marquis de Sade to be able to compete with Poe.¹⁹

The original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual's traces in the big-city crowd. Poe concerns himself with this motif in detail in 'The Mystery of Marie Roget', the most voluminous of his detective stories. At the same time this story is the prototype of the utilization of journalistic information in the solution of crimes. Poe's detective, the Chevalier Dupin, here works not with personal observation but with reports from the daily press. The critical analysis of these reports constitutes the rumour in the story. Among other things, the time of the crime has to be established. One paper, *Le Commercial*, expresses the view that Marie Roget, the murdered woman, has been done away with immediately after she has left her mother's apartment. Poe writes: 'It is impossible that a person so well known to thousands as this

18. II, 424.

19. 'One always has to go back to Sade . . . to explain evil' (II, 694).

young woman was, should have passed three blocks without some one having seen her." This is the idea of a man long resident in Paris – a public man – and one whose walks to and fro in the city have been mostly limited to the vicinity of the public offices. . . . He passes to and fro, at regular intervals, within a confined periphery, abounding in individuals who are led to observation of his person through interest in the kindred nature of his occupation with their own. But the walks of Marie may, in general, be supposed discursive. In this particular instance it will be understood as most probable that she proceeded upon a route of more than average diversity from her accustomed ones. The parallel which we imagine to have existed in the mind of *Le Commercial* would only be sustained in the event of the two individuals traversing the whole city. In this case, granting the personal acquaintances to be equal, the chances would be also equal that an equal number of personal *rencontres* would be made. For my own part, I should hold it not only as possible, but as far more than probable, that Marie might have proceeded, at any given period, by any one of the many routes between her own residence and that of her aunt, without meeting a single individual whom she knew, or by whom she was known. In viewing this question in its full and proper light, we must hold steadily in mind the great disproportion between the personal acquaintances of even the most noted individual in Paris, and the entire population of Paris itself. If one disregards the context which gives rise to these reflections in Poe, the detective loses his competence, but the problem does not lose its validity. A variation of it forms the basis of one of the most famous poems in the *Fleurs du mal*, the sonnet entitled 'A une passante'.

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l'ourlet;

Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan,
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

Un éclair . . . puis la nuit! – Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité?

Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici! trop tard! *jamais* peut-être!
Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
O toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais!²⁰

To a Passer-by

Amid the deafening traffic of the town,
Tall, slender, in deep mourning, with majesty,
A woman passed, raising, with dignity
In her poised hand, the flounces of her gown;
Graceful, noble, with a statue's form.
And I drank, trembling as a madman thrills,
From her eyes, ashen sky where brooded storm,
The softness that fascinates, the pleasure that kills.

A flash . . . then night! – O lovely fugitive,
I am suddenly reborn from your swift glance;
Shall I never see you till eternity?

Somewhere, far off! too late! *never*, perchance!
Neither knows where the other goes or lives;
We might have loved, and you knew this might be!

translated by C. F. MacIntyre

This sonnet presents the crowd not as the refuge of a criminal but as that of love which eludes the poet. One may say that it deals with the function of the crowd not in the life of the citizen but in the life of the erotic person. At first glance this function appears to be a negative one, but it is not. Far from eluding the erotic in the crowd, the apparition which fascinates him is brought to him by this very crowd. The delight of the city-dweller is not so much love at first sight as love at last sight. The *never* marks the high point of the encounter, when the poet's passion seems to be frustrated but in reality bursts out of him like a flame. He burns in this flame, but no Phoenix arises from it. The rebirth in the first tercet reveals a

view of the occurrence which in the light of the preceding stanza seems very problematical. What makes his body twitch spasmodically is not the excitement of a man in whom an image has taken possession of every fibre of his being; it partakes more of the shock with which an imperious desire suddenly overcomes a lonely man. The phrase *comme un extravagant* almost expresses this; the poet's emphasis on the fact that the female apparition is in mourning is not designed to conceal it. In reality there is a profound gulf between the quatrains which present the occurrence and the tercets which transfigure it. When Thibaudet says that these verses 'could only have been written in a big city',²¹ he does not penetrate beneath their surface. The inner form of these verses is revealed in the fact that in them love itself is recognized as being stigmatized by the big city.²²

Since the days of Louis-Philippe the bourgeoisie has endeavoured to compensate itself for the inconsequential nature of private life in the big city. It seeks such compensation within its four walls. Even if a bourgeois is unable to give his earthly being permanence, it seems to be a matter of honour with him to preserve the traces of his articles and requisites of daily use in perpetuity. The bourgeoisie cheerfully takes the impression of a host of objects. For slippers and pocket watches, thermometers and egg-cups, cutlery and umbrellas it tries to get covers and cases. It prefers velvet and plush covers which preserve the impression of every touch. For the Makart style, the style of the end of the Second Empire, a dwelling becomes a kind of casing. This style views it as a kind of case for a person and embeds him in it together with all his appurtenances, tending his traces as nature tends dead fauna embedded in granite. One should not fail to recognize that there are two sides to this process. The real or sentimental value of the objects thus preserved

21. Albert Thibaudet, *Intérieurs*, Paris, 1924, p. 22.

22. The motif of love for a woman passing by occurs in an early poem by Stefan George. The poet has missed the important thing: the stream in which the woman moves past, borne along by the crowd. The result is a self-conscious elegy. The poet's glances – so he must confess to his lady – have 'moved away, moist with longing/before they dared mingle with yours' ('feucht vor sehnen fortgezogen/eh sie in deine sich zu tauchen trauten') (Stefan George, *Hymnen. Pilgerfahrten. Algabal*, seventh edn, Berlin, 1922, p. 23). Baudelaire leaves no doubt that he looked deep into the eyes of the passer-by.

is emphasized. They are removed from the profane eyes of non-owners, and in particular their outlines are blurred in a characteristic way. It is not strange that resistance to controls, something that becomes second nature to asocial persons, returns in the propertied bourgeoisie.

In such customs it is possible to see the dialectical illustration of a text which appeared in many instalments in the *Journal officiel*. As early as 1836 Balzac wrote in *Modeste Mignon*: 'Poor women of France! You would probably like to remain unknown in order to carry on your little romances. But how can you manage to do this in a civilization which registers the departure and the arrival of coaches in public places, counts letters and stamps them when they are posted and again when they are delivered, which provides houses with numbers and will soon have the whole country down to the smallest plot of land in its registers.'²³ Since the French Revolution an extensive network of controls had brought bourgeois life ever more tightly into its meshes. The numbering of houses in the big cities may be used to document the progressive standardization. Napoleon's administration had made it obligatory for Paris in 1805. In proletarian sections, to be sure, this simple police measure had encountered resistance. As late as 1864 it was reported about Saint-Antoine, the carpenters' section, that 'if one asks an inhabitant of this suburb what his address is, he will always give the name of his house and not its cold, official number'.²⁴ In the long run, of course, such resistance was of no avail against the endeavour to compensate by means of a multifarious web of registrations for the fact that the disappearance of people in the masses of the big cities leaves no traces. Baudelaire found this endeavour as much of an encroachment as did any criminal. On his flight from his creditors he went to cafés or reading circles. Sometimes he had two domiciles at the same time – but on days when the rent was due, he often spent the night at a third place with friends. So he roved about in the city which had long since ceased to be home for the *flâneur*. Every bed in which he lay down had become a *lit 'hasardeux'*²⁵ for

23. Balzac, *Modeste Mignon*, Editions du Siècle, Paris, 1850, p. 99.

24. Sigmund Engländer, *Geschichte der französischen Arbeiter-Associationen*, 4 parts, Hamburg, 1863–4, III, p. 126.

25. I, 115.

him. Crépet has counted fourteen Paris addresses for Baudelaire between 1842 and 1858.

Technical measures had to come to the aid of the administrative control process. In the early days of the process of identification, whose present standard derives from the Bertillon method, the identity of a person was established through his signature. The invention of photography was a turning point in the history of this process. It is no less significant for criminology than the invention of the printing press is for literature. Photography made it possible for the first time to preserve permanent and unmistakable traces of a human being. The detective story came into being when this most decisive of all conquests of a person's incognito had been accomplished. Since then the end of efforts to capture a man in his speech and actions has not been in sight.

Poe's famous tale 'The Man of the Crowd' is something like the X-ray picture of a detective story. In it, the drapery represented by crime has disappeared. The mere armature has remained: the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man who arranges his walk through London in such a way that he always remains in the middle of the crowd. This unknown man is the *flâneur*. That is how Baudelaire interpreted him when, in his essay on Guys, he called the *flâneur* 'l'homme des foules'. But Poe's description of this figure is devoid of the connivance which Baudelaire had for it. To Poe the *flâneur* was, above all, someone who does not feel comfortable in his own company. That is why he seeks out the crowd; the reason why he hides in it is probably close at hand. Poe purposely blurs the difference between the asocial person and the *flâneur*. The harder a man is to find, the more suspicious he becomes. Refraining from a prolonged pursuit, the narrator quietly sums up his insight as follows: 'This old man . . . is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd.*'

The author does not demand the reader's interest in this man alone; his description of the crowd will claim at least as much interest, for documentary as well as artistic reasons. In both respects the crowd stands out. The first thing that strikes one is the rapt attention with which the narrator follows the spectacle of the crowd. This same spectacle is followed, in a well-known story by E. T. A. Hoffmann, by the 'Cousin at his corner window'. But this man, who

is installed in his household, views the crowd with great constraint, whereas the man who stares through the window-panes of a coffee-house has penetrating eyes. In the difference between the two observation posts lies the difference between Berlin and London. On the one hand there is the man of leisure. He sits in his alcove as in a box in the theatre; when he wants to take a closer look at the market-place, he has opera glasses at hand. On the other hand there is the anonymous consumer who enters a café and will shortly leave it again, attracted by the magnet of the mass which constantly has him in its range. On the one side there is a multiplicity of little genre pictures which in their totality constitute an album of coloured engravings; on the other side there is a view which would be capable of inspiring a great etcher – an enormous crowd in which no one is either quite transparent or quite opaque to all others. A German petty bourgeois is subject to very narrow limits, and yet Hoffmann by nature belonged to the family of the Poes and the Baudelaires. In the biographical notes to the original edition of his last writings we read: 'Hoffmann was never especially fond of Nature. He valued people – communication with them, observations about them, merely seeing them – more than anything else. If he went for a walk in summer, something that he did every day toward evening in fine weather, there was hardly a wine tavern or a confectioner's shop where he did not stop in to see whether people were there and what people were there.'²⁶ At a later date, when Dickens went travelling, he repeatedly complained about the lack of street noises which were indispensable to him for his production. 'I cannot express how much I want these [the streets],' he wrote in 1846 from Lausanne while he was working on *Dombey and Son*. 'It seems as if they supplied something to my brain, which it cannot bear, when busy, to lose. For a week or a fortnight I can write prodigiously in a retired place . . . and a day in London sets me up again and starts me. But the toil and labour of writing, day after day, without that magic lantern, is *immense*. . . . *My* figures seem disposed to stagnate without crowds about them.'²⁷

26. E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 15: *Leben und Nachlass* by Julius Eduard Hitzig, vol. 3, Stuttgart, 1839, pp. 32ff.

27. Franz Mehring, 'Charles Dickens', in *Die Neue Zeit*, 30 (1911–12),

Among the many things that Baudelaire found to criticize about hated Brussels, one thing filled him with particular rage: 'No shop-windows. Strolling, something that nations with imagination love, is not possible in Brussels. There is nothing to see, and the streets are unusable.'²⁸ Baudelaire loved solitude, but he wanted it in a crowd.

In the course of his story, Poe lets it grow dark. He lingers over the city by gaslight. The appearance of the street as an *intérieur* in which the phantasmagoria of the *flâneur* is concentrated is hard to separate from the gaslight. The first gas-lamps burned in the arcades. The attempt to use them under the open sky was made in Baudelaire's childhood; candelabra were placed on the Place Vendôme. Under Napoleon III the number of gas lanterns in Paris increased rapidly.²⁹ This increased safety in the city made the crowds feel at home in the open streets even at night, and removed the starry sky from the ambience of the big city more reliably than this was done by its tall buildings. 'I draw the curtain behind the sun; now it has been put to bed, as is proper; henceforth I shall see no other light but that of the gas flame.'³⁰ The moon and the stars are no longer worth mentioning.

In the heyday of the Second Empire, the shops in the main streets did not close before ten o'clock at night. It was the great period of *noctambulisme*. In the chapter of his *Heures parisiennes* which is devoted to the second hour after midnight, Delvau wrote: 'A person may take a rest from time to time; he is permitted stops and resting places; but he has no right to sleep.'³¹ On the Lake of Geneva, Dickens nostalgically remembered Genoa where he had two miles of streets by whose light he had been able to roam about at night. Later, when the disappearance of the arcades made stroll-

vol. 1, pp. 621ff. [*The Letters of Charles Dickens*, edited by Walter Dexter, vol. 1: 1832-1846, London, 1938, p. 782.]

28. II, 710.

29. cf. *La transformation de Paris sous le Second Empire. Exposition de la Bibliothèque et des travaux historiques de la ville de Paris*, edited by Marcel Poëte, E. Clouzot and G. Henriot, Paris, 1910, p. 65.

30. Julien Lemer, *Paris au gaz*, Paris, 1861, p. 10. The same image may be found in 'Crépuscule du soir': the sky slowly closes like a big alcove (cf. I, 108.)

31. Alfred Delvau, *Les heures parisiennes*, Paris, 1866, p. 206.

ing go out of style and gaslight was no longer considered fashionable, it seemed to a last *flâneur* who sadly strolled through the empty Colbert Arcade that the flickering of the gas-lamps indicated only the fear of the flame that it would not be paid at the end of the month.³² That is when Stevenson wrote his plaint about the disappearance of the gas lanterns. He muses particularly on the rhythm with which lamplighters go through the streets and light one lantern after another. At first this rhythm contrasted with the uniformity of the dusk, but now the contrast is-with a brutal shock caused by the spectacle of entire cities suddenly being illuminated by electric light. 'Such a light as this should shine only on murders and public crime, or along the corridors of lunatic asylums, a horror to heighten horror.'³³ There is some indication that only latterly was such an idyllic view of gaslight taken as Stevenson's, who wrote its obituary. The above-mentioned story by Poe is a good case in point. There can hardly be a weirder description of this light: 'The rays of the gas-lamps, feeble at first in their struggle with the dying day, had now at length gained ascendancy, and threw over every thing a fitful and garish lustre. All was dark yet splendid - as that ebony to which has been likened the style of Tertullian.'³⁴ 'Inside

32. cf. Louis Veuillot, *Les odeurs de Paris*, Paris, 1914, p. 182.

33. Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Plea for Gas Lamps', in *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers. Works*, Tusitala Edition, vol. 25, London, 1924, p. 132.

34. There is a parallel to this passage in 'Un Jour de pluie'. Even though this poem bears another man's name, it may be ascribed to Baudelaire (cf. Charles Baudelaire, *Vers retrouvés*, edited by Julius Mouquet, Paris, 1929). The analogy between the last stanza and Poe's mention of Tertullian is all the more remarkable because the poem was written in 1843 at the latest, at a time when Baudelaire did not know Poe.

Chacun, nous coudoyant sur le trottoir glissant,
Egoïste et brutal, passe et nous élabousse,
Ou, pour courir plus vite, en s'éloignant nous pousse.
Partout fange, déluge, obscurité du ciel:
Noir tableau qu'eût rêvé le noir Ezéchiël! (I, 211.)

(Each one, elbowing us upon the slippery sidewalk, selfish and savage, goes by and splashes us, or to run the faster, gives us a push as he makes off. Mud everywhere, deluge, darkness in the sky. A sombre scene that Ezekiel the sombre might have dreamed.)

a house,' wrote Poe elsewhere, 'gas is definitely inadmissible. Its flickering, harsh light offends the eye.'

The London crowd seems as gloomy and confused as the light in which it moves. This is true not only of the rabble that crawls 'out of its dens' at night. The employees of higher rank are described by Poe as follows: 'They had all slightly bald heads, from which the right ears, long used to pen-holding, had an odd habit of standing off on end. I observed that they always removed or settled their hats with both hands, and wore watches, with short gold chains of a substantial and ancient pattern.' In his description Poe did not aim at any direct observation. The uniformities to which the petty bourgeoisie are subjected by virtue of being part of the crowd are exaggerated; their appearance is not far from being uniform. Even more astonishing is the description of the way the crowd moves. 'By far the greater number of those who went by had a satisfied business-like demeanour, and seemed to be thinking only of making their way through the press. Their brows were knit, and their eyes rolled quickly; when pushed against by fellow-wayfarers they evinced no symptom of impatience, but adjusted their clothes and hurried on. Others, still a numerous class, were restless in their movements, had flushed faces, and talked and gesticulated to themselves, as if feeling in solitude on account of the very denseness of the company around. When impeded in their progress, these people suddenly ceased muttering, but redoubled their gesticulations, and awaited, with an absent and overdone smile upon the lips, the course of the persons impeding them. If jostled, they bowed profusely to the jostlers, and appeared overwhelmed with confusion.' One might think he was speaking of half-drunken wretches. Actually, they were 'noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, stock-jobbers'. Something other than a psychology of the classes is involved here.³⁵

35. The image of America which Marx had seems to be of the same stuff as Poe's description. He emphasizes the 'feverishly youthful pace of material production' in the States and blames this very pace for the fact that there was 'neither time nor opportunity . . . to abolish the old spirit world' (Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, op. cit., p. 30). In Poe there is something demonic even about the physiognomy of the businessmen. Baudelaire describes how as darkness descends 'the harmful demons' awaken in the air 'sluggish as a bunch of businessmen' (I, 108). This passage in 'Le Crépuscule du soir' may have been inspired by Poe's text.

There is a lithograph by Senefelder which represents a gambling club. Not one of those depicted is pursuing the game in the customary fashion. Each man is dominated by an emotion: one shows unrestrained joy; another, distrust of his partner; a third, dull despair; a fourth evinces belligerence; another is getting ready to depart from the world. In its extravagance this lithograph is reminiscent of Poe. Poe's subject, to be sure, is greater, and his means are in keeping with this. His masterly stroke in this description is that he does not show the hopeless isolation of men in their private interests through the variety of their behaviour, as does Senefelder, but expresses this isolation in absurd uniformities of dress or conduct. The servility with which those pushed even go on to apologize, shows where the devices which Poe employs here come from. They are from the repertoire of clowns, and Poe uses them in a fashion similar to that later employed by clowns. In the performance of a clown, there is an obvious reference to economy. With his abrupt movements he imitates both the machines which push the material and the economic boom which pushes the merchandise. The segments of the crowd described by Poe effect a similar mimicry of the 'feverish . . . pace of material production' along with the business forms that go with it. What the fun fair, which turned the little man into a clown, later accomplished with its dodgem cars and related amusements is anticipated in Poe's description. The people in his story behave as if they could no longer express themselves through anything but a reflex action. These goings-on seem even more dehumanized because Poe talks only about people. If the crowd is jammed up, it is not because it is being impeded by vehicular traffic – there is no mention of it anywhere – but because it is being blocked by other crowds. In a mass of this nature the art of strolling could not flourish.

In Baudelaire's Paris things had not come to such a pass. Ferries were still crossing the Seine at points where later there would be bridges. In the year of Baudelaire's death it was still possible for an entrepreneur to cater to the comfort of the well-to-do with a fleet of five hundred sedan chairs circulating about the city. Arcades where the *flâneur* would not be exposed to the sight of carriages that did not recognize pedestrians as rivals were enjoying undiminished

popularity. There was the pedestrian who wedged himself into the crowd, but there was also the *flâneur* who demanded elbow room and was unwilling to forego the life of a gentleman of leisure. His leisurely appearance as a personality is his protest against the division of labour which makes people into specialists. It is also his protest against their industriousness. Around 1840 it was briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk in the arcades. The *flâneurs* liked to have the turtles set the pace for them. If they had had their way, progress would have been obliged to accommodate itself to this pace. But this attitude did not prevail; Taylor, who popularized the watchword 'Down with dawdling!' carried the day.³⁶ Some people sought to anticipate coming developments while there was still time. Rattier wrote in 1857 in his utopia, *Paris n'existe plus*: 'The *flâneur* whom we used to encounter on the sidewalks and in front of the shop-windows, this nonentity, this constant rubberneck, this inconsequential type who was always in search of cheap emotions and knew about nothing but cobblestones, fiacres, and gas lanterns . . . has now become a farmer, a vintner, a linen manufacturer, a sugar refiner, and a steel magnate.'³⁷

On his peregrinations the man of the crowd lands at a late hour in a department store where there still are many customers. He moves about like someone who knows his way around the place. Were there multi-storied department stores in Poe's day? No matter; Poe lets the restless man spend an 'hour and a half, or thereabouts' in this bazaar. 'He entered shop after shop, priced nothing, spoke no word, and looked at all objects with a wild and vacant stare.' If the arcade is the classical form of the *intérieur*, which is how the *flâneur* sees the street, the department store is the form of the *intérieur*'s decay. The bazaar is the last hangout of the *flâneur*. If in the beginning the street had become an *intérieur* for him, now this *intérieur* turned into a street, and he roamed through the labyrinth of merchandise as he had once roamed through the labyrinth of the city. It is a magnificent touch in Poe's story that it includes along with the earliest description of the *flâneur* the figuration of his end.

Jules Laforgue said about Baudelaire that he was the first to speak

36. cf. Georges Friedmann, *La crise du progrès*, Paris, 1936, p. 76.

37. Paul Ernest de Rattier, *Paris n'existe plus*, Paris, 1857, pp. 74ff.

of Paris 'as someone condemned to live in the capital day after day.'³⁸ He might have said that he was the first to speak also of the opiate that was available to give relief to men so condemned, and only to them. The crowd is not only the newest asylum of outlaws; it is also the latest narcotic for those abandoned. The *flâneur* is someone abandoned in the crowd. In this he shares the situation of the commodity. He is not aware of this special situation, but this does not diminish its effect on him and it permeates him blissfully like a narcotic that can compensate him for many humiliations. The intoxication to which the *flâneur* surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers.

If the soul of the commodity which Marx occasionally mentions in jest existed,³⁹ it would be the most empathetic ever encountered in the realm of souls, for it would have to see in everyone the buyer in whose hand and house it wants to nestle. Empathy is the nature of the intoxication to which the *flâneur* abandons himself in the crowd. 'The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being himself and someone else as he sees fit. Like a roving soul in search of a body, he enters another person whenever he wishes. For him alone, all is open; if certain places seem closed to him, it is because in his view they are not worth inspecting.'⁴⁰ The commodity itself is the speaker here. Yes, the last words give a rather accurate idea of what the commodity whispers to a poor wretch who passes a shop-window containing beautiful and expensive things. These objects are not interested in this person; they do not empathize with him. In the sentences of the significant prose poem 'Les Foules' there speaks, with other words, the fetish itself with which Baudelaire's sensitive nature resonated so powerfully; that empathy with inorganic things which was one of his sources of inspiration.⁴¹

38. Jules Laforgue, *Mélanges posthumes*, Paris, 1903, p. 111.

39. cf. Marx, *Das Kapital*, edited by Karl Korsch, Berlin, 1932, p. 95 [English edition, op. cit., p. 84].

40. I, 420ff.

41. The second 'Spleen' poem is the most important addition to the documentation for this that was assembled in the first part of this essay. Hardly any poet before Baudelaire wrote a verse that is anything like 'Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées' (I, 86) ('I am an old boudoir full of faded roses'). The poem is entirely based on empathy with material that is dead in a

Baudelaire was a connoisseur of narcotics, yet one of their most important social effects probably escaped him. It consists in the charm displayed by addicts under the influence of drugs. Commodities derive the same effect from the crowd that surges around and intoxicates them. The concentration of customers which makes the market, which in turn makes the commodity into a commodity, enhances its attractiveness to the average buyer. When Baudelaire speaks of 'the big cities' state of religious intoxication',⁴² the commodity is probably the unnamed subject of this state. And the 'holy prostitution of the soul' compared with which 'that which people call love is quite small, quite limited, and quite feeble'⁴³ really can be nothing else than the prostitution of the commodity-soul – if the confrontation with love retains its meaning. Baudelaire refers to 'that holy prostitution of the soul which gives itself wholly, poetry and charity, to the unexpected that appears, to the unknown that passes' (*cette sainte prostitution de l'âme qui se donne tout entière, poésie et charité, à l'imprévu qui se montre, à l'inconnu qui passe*).⁴⁴ It is this very *poésie* and this very *charité* which the prostitutes claim for themselves. They had tried the secrets of the open markets; in this respect commodities had no advantage over them. Some of

dual sense. It is inorganic matter, matter that has been eliminated from the circulation process.

Désormais tu n'es plus, ô matière vivante!
Qu'un granit entouré d'une vague épouvante,
Assoupi dans le fond d'un Sahara brumeux;
Un vieux sphinx ignoré du monde insoucieux,
Oublié sur la carte, et dont l'humeur farouche
Ne chante qu'aux rayons du soleil qui se couche (I, 86).

(Henceforth, O living matter, you are nothing more
Than the fixed heart of chaos, soft horror's granite core,
Than a forgotten Sphinx that in some desert stands,
Drowsing beneath the heat, half-hidden by the sands,
Unmarked on any map, – whose rude and sullen frown
Lights up a moment only when the sun goes down.)

translated by Edna St Vincent Millay

The image of the Sphinx which concludes the poem has the gloomy beauty of unsaleable articles such as may still be found in arcades.

42. II, 627.

43. I, 421.

44. I, 421.

the commodity's charms were based on the market, and they turned into as many means of power. As such they were registered by Baudelaire in his 'Crépuscule du soir':

A travers les lueurs que tourmente le vent
La Prostitution s'allume dans les rues;
Comme une fourmilière elle ouvre ses issues;
Partout elle se fraye un occulte chemin,
Ainsi que l'ennemi qui tente un coup de main;
Elle remue au sein de la cité de fange
Comme un ver qui dérobe à l'Homme ce qu'il mange.⁴⁵

(Against the lamplight, whose shivering is the wind's,
Prostitution spreads its light and life in the streets:
Like an anthill opening its issue it penetrates
Mysteriously everywhere by its own occult route;
Like an enemy mining the foundations of a fort,
Or a worm in an apple, eating what all should eat,
It circulates securely in the city's clogged heart.)

translated by David Paul

Only the mass of inhabitants permits prostitution to spread over large parts of the city. And only the mass makes it possible for the sexual object to become intoxicated with the hundred stimuli which it produces.

Not everyone found the spectacle offered by the people in the streets of a big city intoxicating. Long before Baudelaire wrote his prose poem 'Les Foules', Friedrich Engels had undertaken to describe the bustle in the streets of London. 'A town such as London, where a man might wander for hours together without reaching the beginning of the end, without meeting the slightest hint which could lead to the inference that there is open country within reach, is a strange thing. This colossal centralization, this heaping together of two and a half millions of human beings at one point, has multiplied the power of this two and a half millions a hundredfold. . . . But the sacrifices which all this has cost become apparent later. After roaming the streets of the capital a day or two, making headway with difficulty through the human turmoil and the

45. I, 108.

endless lines of vehicles, after visiting the slums of the metropolis, one realizes for the first time that these Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature, to bring to pass all the marvels of civilization which crowd their city. . . . The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels. The hundreds of thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past each other, are they not all human beings with the same qualities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy? . . . And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is the tacit one, that each keep to his own side of the pavement, so as not to delay the opposing stream of the crowd, while it occurs to no man to honour another with so much as a glance. The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest, becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space.⁴⁶

The *flâneur* only seems to break through this 'unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest' by filling the hollow space created in him by such isolation, with the borrowed – and fictitious – isolations of strangers. Next to Engels's clear description, it sounds obscure when Baudelaire writes: 'The pleasure of being in a crowd is a mysterious expression of the enjoyment of the multiplication of numbers.'⁴⁷ But this statement becomes clear if one imagines it spoken not only from a person's viewpoint but also from the viewpoint of a commodity. To be sure, insofar as a person, as labour power, is a commodity, there is no need for him to identify himself as such. The more conscious he becomes of his mode of existence, the mode imposed upon him by the system of production, the more he proletarianizes himself, the more he will be gripped by the chill of the commodity economy and the less he will feel like empathizing with commodities. But things had not reached that point with the class of the petty bourgeoisie to which Baudelaire belonged. On the scale with which we are dealing here, this class was only at the

46. Engels, *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England*, Leipzig, 1848, pp. 36ff. [Original (1887) English translation, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Britain*, Moscow, 1962, pp. 56–7.]

47. II, 626.

beginning of its decline. Inevitably, one day many of its members had to become aware of the commodity nature of their labour power. But this day had not as yet come; until that day they were permitted, if one may put it that way, to pass their time. The very fact that their share could at best be enjoyment, but never power, made the period which history gave them a space for passing time. Anyone who sets out to while away time seeks enjoyment. It was self-evident, however, that the more this class wanted to have its enjoyment *in* this society, the more limited this enjoyment would be. The enjoyment promised to be less limited if this class found enjoyment *of* this society possible. If it wanted to achieve virtuosity in this kind of enjoyment, it could not spurn empathizing with commodities. It had to enjoy this identification with all the pleasure and the uneasiness which derived from a presentiment of its own destiny as a class. Finally, it had to approach this destiny with a sensitivity that perceives charm even in damaged and decaying goods. Baudelaire, who in a poem to a courtesan called her heart 'bruised like a peach, ripe like her body, for the lore of love', possessed this sensitivity. To it he owed his enjoyment of this society as someone who had already half withdrawn from it.

In the attitude of someone with this kind of enjoyment he let the spectacle of the crowd act upon him. The deepest fascination of this spectacle lay in the fact that as it intoxicated him it did not blind him to the horrible social reality. He remained conscious of it, though only in the way in which intoxicated people are 'still' aware of reality. That is why in Baudelaire the big city almost never finds expression in the direct presentation of its inhabitants. The directness and harshness with which Shelley captured London through the depiction of its people could not benefit Baudelaire's Paris.

Hell is a city much like London,
A populous and a smoky city;
There are all sorts of people undone,
And there is little or no fun done;
Small justice shown, and still less pity.⁴⁸

48. Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Peter Bell the Third Part', *Complete Poetical Works*, London, 1932, p. 346. [Benjamin quoted this verse in a German version by Bertolt Brecht.]

For the *flâneur* there is a veil over this picture. This veil is the mass; it billows in 'the twisting folds of the old metropolises'.⁴⁹ Because of it, horrors have an enchanting effect upon him.⁵⁰ Only when this veil tears and reveals to the *flâneur* 'one of the populous squares . . . which are empty during street fighting'⁵¹ does he, too, get an unobstructed view of the big city.

If any proof were needed of the force with which the experience of the crowd moved Baudelaire, it would be the fact that he undertook to vie with Hugo in this experience. That Hugo's strength lay here, if anywhere, was evident to Baudelaire. He praises a '*caractère poétique . . . interrogatif*'⁵² in Hugo and says that Hugo not only knows how to reproduce clear things sharply and distinctly but also reproduces with the requisite obscurity what has manifested itself only dimly and indistinctly. One of the three poems of the *Tableaux parisiens* which are dedicated to Hugo begins with an invocation of the crowded city: 'Teeming city, city full of dreams.'⁵³ Another follows old women in the 'teeming tableau'⁵⁴ of the city, right through the crowd.⁵⁵ The crowd is a new subject in lyric poetry. Of the innovator Sainte-Beuve it was said appreciatively, as something fitting and appropriate for a poet, that 'the crowd was unbearable'⁵⁶ for him. During his exile in Jersey, Hugo opened this subject up for poetry. On his walks along the coast, this subject took shape for him, thanks to one of the enormous antitheses that were indispensable to his inspiration. In Hugo the crowd enters literature as an object of contemplation. The surging ocean is its model, and the thinker who reflects on this eternal spectacle is the true explorer of the crowd in which he loses himself as he loses himself in the roaring of the sea. 'As the exile on his lonely cliff looks out towards the great, fateful countries, he looks down into the past of the peoples. . . . He carries himself and his destiny into the fullness of events;

49. I, 102

50. cf. I, 102.

51. II, 193.

52. II, 522.

53. I, 100.

54. I, 103.

55. The third poem of the cycle, 'Les Petites vieilles', underlines the rivalry by following the third poem in Hugo's cycle, *Fantômes*, verbatim. Thus there is a correspondence between one of Baudelaire's most perfect poems and one of Hugo's weakest.

56. Sainte-Beuve, *Les consolations. Pensées d'août*, Paris, 1863, p. 125. (The remark, published by Sainte-Beuve from the manuscript, is by Farcy.)

they become alive in him and blend with the life of the natural forces – with the sea, the crumbling rocks, the shifting clouds, and the other exalted things that are part of a lonely, quiet life in communion with nature.⁵⁷ 'The ocean itself got bored with him' ('*L'océan même s'est ennuyé de lui*'), said Baudelaire about Hugo, touching the man brooding on the cliffs with the light-pencil of his irony. Baudelaire did not feel inclined to follow the spectacle of nature. His experience of the crowd bore the traces of the 'heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks' which a pedestrian suffers in the bustle of a city and which keep his self-awareness all the more alert. (Basically it is this very self-awareness that he lends to the strolling commodity.) To Baudelaire the crowd never was a stimulus to cast the plummet of his thought down into the depths of the world. Hugo, on the other hand, writes, 'The depths are crowds' ('*Les profondeurs sont des multitudes*'),⁵⁸ and thereby gives an enormous scope to his thinking. The natural-supernatural which affected Hugo in the form of the crowd presents itself in the forest, in the animal kingdom, and by the surging sea; in any of those places the physiognomy of a big city can flash for a few moments. 'La Pente de la rêverie' gives a splendid idea of the promiscuity at work among the multitude of living things.

La nuit avec la foule, en ce rêve hideux,
Venait d'épaississant ensemble toutes deux,
Et, dans ces régions que nul regard ne sonde,
Plus l'homme était nombreux,
plus l'ombre était profonde.⁵⁹

(In that hideous dream, night arrived together with the crowd, and both grew ever thicker; indeed, in those regions which no look can fathom, the more numerous were the people, the deeper was the darkness.)

57. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Versuch über Victor Hugo*, Munich, 1925, p. 49.

58. Quoted in Gabriel Bounoure, 'Abîmes de Victor Hugo', in *Mesures*, 15 July 1936, p. 39.

59. Victor Hugo, *Oeuvres complètes. Edition définitive. Poésie II: Les Orientales, Les Feuilles d'automne*, Paris, 1880, pp. 365ff.

And:

Foule sans nom! chaos! des voix, des yeux, des pas.
Ceux qu'on n'a jamais vu, ceux qu'on ne connaît pas.
Tous les vivants! – cités bourdonnantes aux oreilles
Plus qu'un bois d'Amérique ou une ruche d'abeilles.⁶⁰

(Nameless mob! chaos! voices, eyes, steps. Those one has never seen, those no one knows. All the living! – cities buzzing in our ears louder than an American forest or a beehive.)

With the crowd, nature exercises its fundamental right on the city. But it is not nature alone which exercises its rights in this way. There is an astonishing place in *Les Misérables* where what goes on in the forest appears as the archetype of mass existence. 'What had happened on this street would not have astonished a forest. The tree trunks and the underbrush, the herbs, the inextricably intertwined branches, and the tall grasses lead an obscure kind of existence. Invisible things flit through the teeming immensity. What is below human beings perceives through a fog that which is above them.'⁶¹ This description contains the characteristics of Hugo's experience with the crowd. In the crowd that which is below a person comes in contact with what holds sway above him. It is this promiscuity that includes all others. In Hugo the crowd appears as a bastard which shapeless, superhuman powers create from those below human beings. In the visionary strain that is contained in Hugo's conception of the crowd, social reality gets its due more than it does in the 'realistic' treatment which he gave the crowd in politics. For the crowd really is a spectacle of nature – if one may apply the term to social conditions. A street, a conflagration, or a traffic accident assemble people who are not defined along class lines. They present themselves as concrete gatherings, but socially they remain abstract – namely, in their isolated private interests. Their models are the customers who, each in his private interest, gather at the market around their 'common cause'. In many cases, such gatherings have only a statistical existence. This exist-

60. *ibid.*, p. 363.

61. Hugo, *op. cit.*, Roman VIII, *Les Misérables*, Paris, 1881.

ence conceals the really monstrous thing about them: the concentration of private persons as such by the accident of their private interests. But if these concentrations become evident – and the totalitarian states see to it by making the concentration of their clients permanent and obligatory for all their purposes – their hybrid character clearly manifests itself, and particularly to those who are involved. They rationalize the accident of the market economy which brings them together in this way as 'fate' in which 'the race' gets together again. In doing so they give free rein to both the herd instinct and to reflective action. The peoples who are in the foreground of the Western European stage make the acquaintance of the supernatural which confronted Hugo in the crowd. Hugo, to be sure, was not able to assess the historical significance of this force. However, it left its imprint on his work as a strange distortion, in the form of spiritualistic protocols.

Hugo's contact with the spirit world which, as we know, had an equally profound effect on his life and his production in Jersey, was, strange though this may seem, primarily a contact with the masses which the poet necessarily missed in exile. For the crowd is the spirit world's mode of existence. Thus Hugo saw himself primarily as a genius in a great assembly of geniuses who were his ancestors. In his *William Shakespeare*, he devoted one rhapsodic page after another to the procession of those aristocrats of the intellect, beginning with Moses and ending with Hugo. But they constitute only a small group in the tremendous multitude of the departed. To Hugo's chthonian mind, the *ad plures ire* [dying] of the Romans was not an empty phrase.

The spirits of the dead came late, as messengers of the night, in the last séance. Hugo's Jersey notes have preserved their messages: 'Every great man works on two works – the work he creates as a living person and his spirit-work. A living man devotes himself to the first work. But in the deep still of night the spirit-creator – oh horror! – awakens in him. What?! – cries the person – isn't that all? No, replies the spirit; arise. The storm is raging, dogs and foxes are howling, darkness is everywhere, nature shudders and winces under the whip of God. . . . The spirit-creator sees the phantom idea. The words bristle and the sentence shudders . . . the windowpanes get fogged and dull, the lamp is seized by fright. . . . Watch out, living

person, man of a century, you vassal of an idea that comes from the earth. For this is madness, this is the grave, this is infinity, this is a phantom idea.⁶² The cosmic shudder during the experience of the invisible which Hugo preserves here has no similarity to the naked terror which overcame Baudelaire in the *spleen*. Also, Baudelaire mustered only little understanding for Hugo's undertaking. 'True civilization,' he said, 'does not lie in table-turning at séances.' But Hugo was not concerned with civilization. He felt truly at home in the spirit world. One could say that it was the cosmic complement of a household of which horror was an integral part. His intimate acquaintance with the apparitions removes much of their frightening quality. It is not without fussiness and brings out the threadbare nature of the apparitions. As pendants to the nocturnal ghosts there are meaningless abstractions, more or less ingenious embodiments that may be found on the monuments of the time. In the Jersey protocols, 'Drama', 'Poetry', 'Literature', 'Thought', and many things of that type may freely be heard next to the voices of chaos.

For Hugo the immense throngs of the spirit world are – and this may bring the riddle closer to a solution – primarily a public. It is less strange that his work absorbed motifs of the talking table than that he customarily produced it in front of the table. The acclaim which the beyond gave him unstintingly while he was in exile gave him a foretaste of the immeasurable acclaim which was to await him at home in his old age. When on his seventieth birthday the population of the capital pressed toward his house on Avenue d'Eylau, this meant the realization of the image of the wave surging against the cliffs as well as the realization of the message of the spirit world.

In the final analysis, the impenetrable obscurity of mass existence was also the source of Victor Hugo's revolutionary speculations. In the *Châtiments* the day of liberation is circumscribed as

Le jour où nos pillards, où nos tyrans sans nombre
Comprendront que quelqu'un remue au fond de l'ombre.⁶³

(The day on which our pillagers, our tyrants without

62. Gustave Simon, *Chez Victor Hugo. Les tables tournantes de Jersey*, Paris, 1923, pp. 306ff.

63. Hugo, op. cit., *Poésie IV: Les Châtiments*, Paris, 1882 ('La Caravane IV').

number, will understand that there is someone stirring deep in the darkness.)

Could there be a reliable revolutionary judgment in keeping with this view, based on the crowd, of the suppressed masses? Was not this view, rather, clear evidence of the limitation of this judgment, no matter what its origin? In the Chamber debate of 25 November 1848, Hugo had inveighed against Cavaignac's barbaric suppression of the June revolt. But on 20 June, in the discussion of the *ateliers nationaux*, he said: 'The monarchy had its idlers, the republic has its loafers.'⁶⁴ Hugo reflected the superficial views of the day as well as a blind faith in the future, but he also had a profound vision of the life that was forming in the womb of nature and of the people. Hugo never succeeded in fashioning a bridge between these two. He saw no need for such a bridge, and this explains the tremendous pretensions and scope of his work and presumably also the tremendous influence of his life-work on his contemporaries. In the chapter of *Les Misérables* which is entitled 'L'argot', the two conflicting sides of his nature confront each other with impressive harshness. After a bold look into the linguistic workshop of the lower classes, the poet concludes by writing: 'Since 1789 the whole people has unfolded in the purified individual. There is no poor man who does not have his rights and thus the light that falls upon him. A poor wretch bears the honour of France inside him. The dignity of a citizen is an inner bulwark. Anyone who is free is conscientious; and everyone who has the vote rules.'⁶⁵ Victor Hugo saw things the way the experiences of a successful literary and

64. Pélin, a characteristic representative of the lower *bohème*, wrote about this speech in his paper *Les boulets rouges. Feuille du club pacifique des droits de l'homme*: 'The citizen Hugo has made his début in the National Assembly. As had been expected, he turned out to be a declaimer, a gesticulator, and a phrase-monger. In the vein of his latest crafty and defamatory poster he spoke of the idlers, the poor, the loafers, the *lazzaroni*, the praetorians of the revolution, and the *condottieri* – in a word, he wore out metaphors and ended with an attack on the *ateliers nationaux*' (*Les boulets rouges*, First year, June 22–24). In his *Histoire parlementaire de la Seconde République*, Eugène Spuller writes: 'Victor Hugo had been elected with reactionary votes. . . . He had always voted with the Rightists, except for one or two occasions in which politics did not matter' (Paris, 1891, pp. 111 and 266).

65. Hugo, op. cit., *Les Misérables*, p. 306.

political career presented them to him. He was the first great writer whose works have collective titles: *Les Misérables*, *Les Travailleurs de la mer*. To him the crowd meant, almost in the ancient sense, the crowd of clients – that is, the masses of his readers and his voters. Hugo was, in a word, no *flâneur*.

For the crowd which went with Hugo and with which he went there was no Baudelaire. But this crowd did exist for Baudelaire. Seeing it caused him every day to plumb the depth of his failure, and this probably was not the least among the reasons why he sought this sight. The desperate pride which thus befell him – in bursts, as it were – was fed by the fame of Victor Hugo. But he was probably spurred on even more strongly by Hugo's political creed, the creed of the *citoyen*. The masses of the big city could not disconcert him. He recognized the crowd of people in them and wanted to be flesh of their flesh. Laicism, Progress, and Democracy were inscribed on the banner which he waved over their heads. This banner transfigured mass existence. It shaded a threshold which separated the individual from the crowd. Baudelaire guarded this threshold, and that differentiated him from Victor Hugo. However, he resembled him in that he, too, did not see through the social aura which is crystallized in the crowd. He therefore opposed to it a model which was as uncritical as Hugo's conception of the crowd. This model was the hero. When Victor Hugo was celebrating the crowd as the hero in a modern epic, Baudelaire was looking for a refuge for the hero among the masses of the big city. Hugo placed himself in the crowd as a *citoyen*; Baudelaire sundered himself from it as a hero.

III. Modernism

Baudelaire patterned his image of the artist after an image of the hero. From the beginning, each is an advocate of the other. In the 'Salon de 1845' he wrote: 'Will-power has to be well developed, and always very fruitful, to be able to give the stamp of uniqueness even to second-rate works. The viewer enjoys the effort and his eye drinks the sweat.'¹ In the *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs* of the following year there is a fine formula in which the '*contemplation opiniâtre de l'oeuvre de demain*'² appears as the guarantee of inspiration. Baudelaire knows the '*indolence naturelle des inspirés*';³ Musset – so he says – never understood how much work it takes 'to let a work of art emerge from a daydream'.⁴ He, on the other hand, comes before the public from the very first moment with his own code, precepts, and taboos. Barrès claimed that he could recognize 'in every little word of Baudelaire a trace of the toil that helped him achieve such great things'.⁵ 'Even in his nervous crises,' writes Gourmont, 'Baudelaire retains something healthy.'⁶ The most felicitous formulation is given by the symbolist Gustave Kahn when he says that 'with Baudelaire, poetic work resembled a physical effort'.⁷ Proof of this may be found in his work – in a metaphor worth closer inspection.

1. II, 26. 2. II, 388. 3. II, 531.

4. Albert Thibaudet, *Intérieurs*, Paris, 1924, p. 15.

5. Quoted in André Gide, 'Baudelaire et M. Faguet', in *Nouvelle revue française*, 1 November 1910, p. 513.

6. Rémy de Gourmont, *Promenades littéraires. Deuxième série*, Paris, 1906, pp. 85ff.

7. Preface by Gustave Kahn in Baudelaire, *Mon coeur mis à nu et Fusées*, Paris, 1909, p. 6.

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