

FRANCE
in the
ENLIGHTENMENT

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England
1998

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Printed in the United States of America

First published in France as *La France des Lumières*

©Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1993

Published with the assistance of the French Ministry of Culture.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Roche, Daniel.

[France des Lumières. English]

France in the Enlightenment / Daniel Roche ; translated by Arthur Goldhammer.

P. cm. — (Harvard historical studies ; 130)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-674-31747-5 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Enlightenment—France. 2. France—Intellectual life—18th century.

3. France—Politics and government—18th century. 4. France—Civilization—17th century.

5. France—History—Louis XIV, 1643-1715. I. Title. II. Series.

DC33.4.R61515

1998

944'.034—dc21

97-42550

To Fanette

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The City, Crucible of Change

THE CLASH BETWEEN peasant France and the France of trade revealed the difference and superiority of the urban world. "The urban superstructure was a system perched upon, and explained by, the underlying peasant society, which was condemned to carry it on its shoulders," wrote Fernand Braudel.¹ In the eighteenth century this ancient relationship took on a new meaning, as once again the new was about to emerge from the old: within the fabric of urban France the features of an urban and industrial nation had begun to appear, even though persistent old hierarchies became entrenched and older cities maintained their preeminence.

The period has bequeathed to historians three main criteria for defining a city: architectural, legal, and demographic. (The relative importance of these criteria shifted over the course of the century.) Jaucourt alludes to all three in the *Encyclopédie*, in which we see that for a man of the Enlightenment, a city was first of all a matter of topography coupled with civil and military architecture, an "assemblage of a number of houses arranged by streets and enclosed by a common barrier ordinarily consisting of walls and moats. More precisely, a city is a space enclosed by walls, within which one finds various neighborhoods, streets, public squares, and buildings."²

What created the city, first and foremost, was its enclosure, which separated it from the rest of the world. This could be a physical barrier of walls and moats, once required as military defenses, or it could be

defined by law. The Encyclopedist went on to enumerate various legal aspects of urban status, some defined by custom, others by the fiscal authorities. Within a city's limits the law was different: Jaucourt's focus accordingly shifts from topography to law.

The citizens of a city enjoyed certain privileges that rustics did not, and various institutions were required to see to it that these rules were enforced. Public law classified cities according to the extent of their privileges. For example, *villes abonnées* were cities in which the *taille* (tallage) was set at a certain annual sum: this was a fiscal privilege, which was an enormous benefit because it authorized cities to shift the tax burden onto the surrounding countryside. In topographical terms, this privilege was translated into boundary markers and tollhouses. A *ville d'arrêt* was a city whose inhabitants enjoyed the privilege of securing, without a formal court judgment, a warrant for the arrest and seizure of the property of any foreign debtor. This was an economic privilege (embodied in article 173 of the customary law of Paris, for example), which allowed urban businessmen to seize goods from their debtors, thus strengthening their hand in case of dispute and guaranteeing their economic autonomy. The list of privileges is a lengthy one: there were privileges for so-called *bonnes villes*, successors of the ancient *communes* recognized by the king as entitled to magistrates, juries, and *bourgeois*; *villes chartées*, recognized by charters of emancipation; *villes jurées*, with elected administrations and guilds run by wardens; and *villes de loi*, such as Lille in Flanders, which enjoyed special liberties and franchises. Two features stand out: first, city dwellers enjoyed a right of inspection that helped them manage their business affairs, and this right posed an obstacle to any extension of royal oversight; and second, citizens were as jealous of their city limits as they were of their fiscal, military, and economic privileges.

In the area of social representation, urban citizens enjoyed a variety of guarantees. Laws and practices were as varied as traditional cities themselves. In order to understand this variety, one has to be aware of the hierarchy that distinguished village from town (*Bourg*) and town from city. Each type of city or town had a different function and fostered a different type of relationship between residents and inhabitants of the surrounding countryside. Cities were able to play a transformative role and to spread both cultural and economic aspects of the new civilization

of trade only because they did not cut themselves off from the hinterland. City dwellers and peasants thought of themselves as different, and what they saw with their own eyes corroborated this belief. Some city folk envied the peasantry: "Happy is the peasant who knows how fortunate he is," Virgil had said. But everywhere the youthful energy of the enlightened city kindled enthusiasm for change.

City and country cannot be understood in isolation. Yet in the eighteenth century the relation between them was in the process of change: cities were bustling, fortunes were being made, and old prestige was on the wane. A primary reason for (and excellent index of) change was the growing size of the urban population. In Jaucourt's definition, population was the third fundamental criterion of urbanity (and what was novel about his definition was the way it moved from urban architecture to urban function). Urban growth worried both traditional administrators and new demographers; some, from Necker to the officials who conducted Napoleon's census, tried to specify the minimum population needed to constitute a city. At one time or another the figure ranged from 1,500 to 2,000. Such debates are interesting because they shed light on contemporary thinking. The debate on population paralleled the rethinking of the traditional idea of the city that took place in the second half of the eighteenth century, a rethinking that led to a more functional view of urban phenomena.³

Urbanization, Density, Population

How did the image of the city change over the course of the eighteenth century, and how did that change in image relate to the underlying reality? The map of urban France changed little: urban sites and contours had long been settled, and the last major wave of construction ended in the seventeenth century with the building of Versailles, the classical era's model of the new city; Richelieu, an abortive utopian dream of the cardinal's; Lorient, which flourished as the *Compagnie des Indes* prospered; Rochefort; and Sète, which lived on seafaring activities. Along the northeastern and eastern borders of France, the cities that Vauban had created along with some three hundred fortresses stagnated within their walls. The Enlightenment built few new cities, but it altered the status quo in many existing ones. The key problem of urban development was how to accommodate the growing population that came with economic

change without sacrificing social stability. What encouraged people to move, what held them back, and what could be changed?

Counting People

Urban population figures are plentiful, but most are based on estimates rather than regular census data. City people were hard to count: this was one of their privileges, for the fiscal exemptions or *abonnements* that most cities enjoyed cast suspicion on any attempt to count the population. Urban France learned statistical rigor with difficulty, and administrative surveys invariably ran up against the suspiciousness of residents and the opposition of magistrates and notables. Census surveys supplanted estimates only at a relatively late date and in conjunction with projects of various kinds—military, administrative, political, economic—which were not always compatible. Still, the census figures from 1791 to 1806 do not prevent us from attempting to supplement earlier, inadequate data, whether based on estimates or calculated by demographers such as Mon-tyon, Moheau, and the academic arithmeticians.

The history of urban demography is the history of a discipline that tried to evaluate law-like regularities in what it saw as a scientific manner despite a variety of social and political pressures.⁴ The calculations, comparisons, and classifications in Moheau's *Recherches et considérations sur la population de la France* (1778), for example, yielded hard numbers that served as a basis for speculation on the laws of social progress. "The political machine cannot run smoothly, nor can administration be enlightened, in a country whose population is unknown." The future of both peasant France and urban France was at stake. To ponder either, one relied on actual counts (based on parish registers of baptisms, marriages, and deaths) as the basis for calculated extrapolations. The figures were published in economic journals and academic memoirs and used by the administration when, for example, it became necessary to convoke the Estates General.

"What is the number of inhabitants of the cities and countryside?" Moheau asked in the third question of his study. For our purposes we can safely ignore the debate about the paternity of the *Recherches*: Was the author Montyon, a philanthropic *intendant*, or his secretary Moheau, who accompanied him on his journeys? What interests us is the fact that the

work was administrative in origin and yielded certain kinds of information:

The inhabitants of cities and the inhabitants of the countryside constitute two different species of men. The former are more industrious and lead less unhappy lives. The latter are more robust and hardworking, more subject to custom, and have more children. Agriculture spreads and disperses men in the countryside; commerce and the arts concentrate them in the cities. . . . Since agriculture requires more hands than any other kind of employment, all our provinces count a larger number of inhabitants in villages than in cities. But the superiority of their number is more or less marked according to the quantity and quality of manufactured goods, the facility and needs of commerce, the abundance of riches and variety of pleasures. Finally, it is of the essence of cities to recruit new citizens in the countryside and drain its population, although there is no corresponding desire to return that would drive the children of city dwellers to repopulate the countryside.⁵

Here, urbanity and rurality are contrasted both in terms of a complex, antagonistic definition (based on economic, social, and cultural considerations) and in a relation of exchange that is a factor in a larger social transformation. How was this long-term, steady, partially hidden population movement to be measured, given the threat it posed to stability in all its forms? Moheau followed his definition with examples: the *généralités* of Tours, Poitiers, and Alençon; Franche-Comté, Lorraine; the *généralités* of Rouen and La Rochelle; Flanders; the Artois. With the minimum population of a city taken to be 2,500, the proportion of the population living in cities varied from one-fifth to one-quarter depending on the region, but what these figures showed, even with their variability taken into account, was the growing conflict of interest between city and country. Hence, "after examining the population that is being absorbed by the cities, legislation should either encourage or halt further growth and promote either increase or decrease in the number of inhabitants."⁶

Other demographic studies corroborated these findings: in 1725, towns of more than 2,000 inhabitants accounted for some 4 million out of 24 million French subjects; in 1789 they accounted for more than 5 million out of nearly 29 million. Depending on the method of calculation, the urbanization rate ranged from 15 to 20 percent. On the eve of the Revolution, nearly one Frenchman in five lived in a city or small town.

From 1700 to 1750, urban growth remained slow as the countryside caught up with the cities and its population expanded. This was a period of "agricultural revenge" and the tail end of a depressed phase of the urban economy that began in the seventeenth century. But from 1740 until perhaps 1775, urban growth accelerated rapidly, after which it slowed again as cities felt the effects of the prerevolutionary crisis that marked the reign of Louis XVI.

These shifts can be related to two other sets of phenomena. The first of these was regional differentiation, which was accentuated by the urbanization of plains and valleys, of the developed regions of the north and east, and of the coastal regions, along with the overurbanization of southern France—phenomena that reflect geographic conditions and the influence of the past. Traditions of housing played a key role: southern cities stood out from cities elsewhere because of their strong traditions of sociability. Social and functional differences were also important because they established clear distinctions and separated cities into groups: the Paris basin extended its influence into Flanders, Alsace across the Rhine, and the cities of Normandy across the channel into England. Growth itself implied regionalization, because the larger the city, the larger the production and population basin on which it drew.

Second, urban growth was highly differentiated: stagnant cities coexisted with flourishing ones. In 1720 Marseilles, Toulon, Aix, Arles, and Avignon were ravaged by the plague, and afterward growth resumed at a different pace in each. Rouen grew slowly, as did Beauvais, Angers, and Chartres. Valenciennes, whose population was 19,000 under Louis XIV, had slipped to perhaps 18,000 under Louis XVI. Caen grew until 1775, after which expansion slowed. What did not change was the conception of urban power or the picture of the ideal city, which in this case was in harmony with the vision of traditional France. The source of urban power was not production but unearned income (*rentes*) and the administration; the city's power over its rural hinterland was mediated by commerce and taxes.⁷ The beginnings of change were apparent in areas of dramatic growth, whether regular or irregular, including ports great and small such as Bordeaux, Le Havre, Marseilles, Nantes, Brest, Lorient, and Sète; industrial cities such as Saint-Étienne and Nîmes, which grew from a population of 20,000 in 1730 to 50,000 in 1789; great regional capitals such as Lyons, whose population exceeded 150,000; and of course Paris, which may have doubled in size from 400,000–500,000 inhabitants in 1700

to 700,000–800,000 under Louis XVI. A hierarchy developed among cities depending on whether the “urban motor” could accelerate sufficiently to attract people and goods.

The Urban Network and Standardization of Behavior

The urban network and hierarchy were highly stable. If one city was reclassified, the overall pattern did not change much, because it reflected long-standing equilibria and the relationship of cities to the all but static rural landscape. The geography of urban functions captures not only this relationship but also the relationship among zones of unequal development, trans-European trade patterns, and urban locations. The maps established by Bernard Lepetit show the changes that took place north of the Nantes-Lyons line as well as the relative backwardness of the south and southwest (except for port-related occupations). Nationally, three things stand out: the overwhelming importance of Paris, the more or less marked feebleness of the provincial capitals, and the flourishing of middle-sized cities (whose number increased from 65 in 1750 to 88 in 1780 and 95 in 1794). This may serve as a generalized demographic index of the increasing density of economic and cultural exchange. The primacy of Paris—with 7.6 percent of the urban population in 1750 but only 6.5 percent in 1790 (though unstable populations are drastically underestimated in these calculations)—diminished overall as well as in relation to the leading regional capitals: Bordeaux, Lille, Lyons, Marseilles, Nantes. This delay can be interpreted as marking the triumph of the kingdom of exchange over the *royaume profond*, the increase of revenue from urban commerce and industry as opposed to ground rents and tax income. The exchange economy surged into the lead over the monarchy’s peasant-centered political economy, and a society open to the world replaced the enclosed territorial society of old.⁸

The advent of the open society established a system whose key variables were behavioral: increased migration into the cities intensified division of labor between cities and countryside. Cities grew, but in order to sustain themselves they needed a regular influx of men and women from all walks of life. In fact, as we can now see, things were not as simple as they once appeared: the relation between natural demographic factors (births and deaths) and social ones (migration rate) was complicated, influenced as it was by descriptions of the city as burial ground and

sinkhole of poverty. The coin had two sides, but the dark side was not exactly the negation of the bright side: urban mortality was real, but what drew people to the cities was not reality but hope. The triumph of the urban can of course be read in the gap between the descriptive and the normative, a gap that is reflected in the “galloping statistics” concerning urban population and economic development. In fact, it is much easier to estimate the influx of new residents than the outflow of both the native-born and former immigrants. Yet calculating these flows and relating them to birth and death rates is the only way to understand the new cultural relationship between villagers and city folk.

Urban Realities and Rural Hopes

In Caen, which has been studied by Jean-Claude Perrot, calculations of population changes due to natural causes and migration show that the city fell out of favor as rapidly as its fortunes had risen: between 1775 and 1790, when the population dropped from 40,858 to 37,795, departures accounted for six times as many lost residents as did the excess of the death rate over the birthrate. Over the course of the eighteenth century, moreover, the nature of migration changed. Initially it was young people who moved, while married couples and the elderly stayed where they were. Socially, moreover, most migrants were wage earners. This fact reflects both the influence of the labor market and the city’s role in training apprentices for new tasks. By the end of the eighteenth century, when census figures showed that 51.8 percent of the population consisted of nonnative residents, migration clearly affected categories other than wage earners and small peasants from the *boycage* country: it affected all social and occupational groups and had its own motivations. Those who came to seek their fortunes in the city were bolder than those who stayed home as well as better educated and for the most part young, even though more than 20 percent of them were now over thirty (compared with just 6 percent a century earlier). Every year some of the newcomers left, mostly young women following their husbands or their abandoned children. But others left, too, mostly in the wake of failure but occasionally on account of success. Two conclusions can be drawn from this preliminary analysis. First, the cities that flourished were those that managed to hold on to their immigrants. This was true of Rouen,¹⁰ Bordeaux,¹¹ Lyons,¹² and many other places. Second, those who left were not entirely equivalent to those

who arrived: the urban dream did not always come true, but even when it did not, there is reason to believe that some part of it remained intact: those who departed left with new skills, judgments, and views of the world. By encouraging immigration, cities transformed the rest of the society.

The effects of immigration will become even clearer if we focus on a particular case: immigration from the Limousin to Paris, a small part of the overall influx into the capital. The Limousin immigrants formed an ill-defined, temporary group within the city's population. For our purposes such a group may be the most interesting of all, but it is not easy to study because Ancien Régime officials never analyzed it in detail. New-comers to Enlightenment Paris rubbed shoulders with people from all parts of the social spectrum. Students mingled with the poor in the hospitals; military men sat next to functionaries; harried travelers sat down with idle tourists, wanderers, vagabonds, and rootless individuals. Repression of vagrancy intensified as the economy declined and demands for law and order began to be heard in the cities. At the same time, however, the undeniable growth of the population reminds us of the crisis years 1770-1790. Public opinion was aware of it, and so were the police, who surveyed the mounting peril with alarm.

Workers constituted a less agitated, more ordinary portion of this carefully scrutinized migrant population.¹³ They were attracted to the capital by the wage differential: the same worker who could earn twenty-five sols per day in Limoges in 1750 could earn as much as two livres in Paris. At midcentury some ten thousand made the trip every year, and by 1790 the figure may have been as high as twenty thousand. Migration was spurred at the point of departure by scarcity of food and land and at the point of arrival by the need for skilled workers. They left home in groups, intending to stay for only a few months and finding lodging in furnished rooms kept by *marchands de sommeil*, or "sleep merchants." Hard times at home and a construction boom in Paris kept up the flow of migrant workers, who were not rootless individuals but people trying to help out their families. A mason from the Limousin who returned home from Paris could pay off his family's tax obligations and debts, marry, and augment his patrimony. People who owned small amounts of property were likely to leave home in search of temporary resources in order to hold on to the land needed to support and raise a family.

In migration there were risks, however: not everyone returned home.

There were also opportunities: many came home transformed, and some settled into new roles as craftsmen or small-time entrepreneurs. People came back from the city with more than just money in their pockets. They changed in other ways, which affected tastes and even customs. If as many as a quarter or even a third of urban immigrants picked up stakes again and returned home, it was not simply because they failed to make a go of it in the city. Such instability reflected the allure of freedom as well as the fear of poverty and crime. The problem for the historian is that the sources that tell us about this migration, sources produced by agencies concerned with the associated social problems, tell us more about crime than about expectations of cultural advantages ardently desired and painfully acquired. Immigrants lived in a social system that extended all the way from the point of departure to the point of arrival. On the way from his parish in the Limousin to Paris, the young mason's apprentice acquired new habits: he tasted new wines, saw new shows, and discovered a world in flux. All these novelties stayed with him even if he later returned to the provinces. The city taught him about freedom, initiating him into a new world of consumption and new kinds of social relations. Even if he was confined to a hospital or locked up in a jail, his experience changed him. The issue of punishment, of the appropriate sentence for various crimes, was of intense topical interest. In hard times, when cities were besieged by armies of the penniless, harried urban authorities had to contend with a chaotic situation. Their response was not always to exclude, to ward off a potential peril; philanthropy and charity sometimes welcomed those in need and offered them help in finding new homes. Cities were both a laboratory for public assistance and a breeding ground for poverty.

Those who came, whether to stay or to return home, had to learn how to behave in a new demographic setting and how to deal with a more complex set of social relations than they were used to. Recall the essential features of eighteenth-century urban demographics. First, the proportion of unmarried men and women was high, in part because cities attracted young people (particularly to work as domestic servants and unskilled laborers) and in part because of the disproportionate numbers of clergy-men and other celibate groups. The age of marriage was relatively high everywhere, twenty-seven for women and twenty-nine for men, but immigrants in Lyons married even later than natives: they might not wait until their fortunes were made, but they did wait until they had "dowry in

hand." In Nantes, Reims, and Rouen, prudence and calculation made headway as the century progressed; some notables set an example by marrying very young girls.

For everyone, the city multiplied the contraceptive effects of celibacy and delayed marriage. It also accelerated the spread of techniques such as coitus interruptus and other "dark secrets" of which confessors complained. Prostitutes, of whom there were more than forty thousand in Paris, risked using pessaries. Dominant groups took steps to plan their families and improve the upbringing of children, thereby setting an example if not establishing a norm. The urban birthrate was stabilized or even reduced: it was 32.5 per thousand in Bordeaux in 1788 but 39 in Lyons. In Rouen families had an average of four to five children in 1700 but only three to four by 1780. The decline in the birthrate matched the hierarchy of wealth and status. It also extended beyond the city walls, because geographic mobility together with less common social mobility, facilitated cultural change. Infant mortality did not decline much, and the number of abandoned children increased (often resulting in unintended deaths). Together with other signs such as increased illegitimacy and frequency of broken families, especially among the urban poor, at least in Paris, these statistics show that the demographic situation was unstable and liable to change.

City ways were different from rural customs: infants were put out to nurse, for example. If women in Paris, Lyons, Reims, and Rouen gave up their infants, presumably temporarily, it was because they had a different conception of what it meant to live and work alongside their husbands. *Le Retour de nourrice*, painted by Greuze and engraved by Hubert, shows that bourgeois families had no compunctions about sending their children out to nurse, even though 40 percent of urban babies dispatched to live with their wet nurses never returned. Yet the painting was intended to be a picture of progress and optimism: innovations in parenting represented new opportunities for the urban bourgeoisie.¹⁴ Although urban mortality rates remained high for people of all classes, things began to change in the eighteenth century. Changes of which few people dreamed when they left their native villages were becoming possible.¹⁵

The perception of new social relations therefore turned out to be of the utmost importance. The city seemed to be a good place from which to observe society and learn about the whole range of human relations. Louis-Sébastien Mercier made this point in his *Tableau de Paris*: "A man

... who knows how to think has no need to go beyond its [i.e., the city's] walls. . . . He can learn about the entire human race by studying the individuals huddled together in this immense capital."¹⁶ Although urban growth also meant difficulties and dangers, the city made social relations apparent to observers and residents alike. As in the village, newcomers learned the various value systems that people used to understand society. Urban society had its orders, of course: nobility, clergy, commoners. But the social fabric became increasingly complicated in the city, where daily life revealed the importance of alliances and reputation and the influence of talent and money. Fiscal classifications, which were rudimentary in the countryside, were more sophisticated in the society and familiarized people with the idea of wealth as an element of social status. In the city people of different conditions mixed, and everyone took note of the external marks of success, which no longer simply confirmed the ancient order of things. As a result, the prevailing value system changed. The complicated, confusing urban status hierarchy began to replace the simpler rural one. Meanwhile, the ancient "processional" representation of the French social hierarchy could still be seen on holidays.

The manner in which urban space was organized helped to change people's outlook. Two structures were emphasized. Occupational divisions were still reflected in street names as well as in work and recreational patterns. In addition, there was vertical stratification of living space, with the wealthy occupying the so-called noble floors of buildings and the poor relegated to garrets and basements. Rich and poor therefore met daily. It was not until the end of the century that horizontal segregation by neighborhood made its appearance, especially in Paris. This did not exclude concentrations of immigrants, which were also social groupings. Immigrants were not quick to blend into the population at large. Mixing jeopardized traditional allegiances, although other kinds of associations could be established. Nevertheless, the city offered access to a new culture, whose potential benefits depended on the migrant worker's energy and ambition.

From Functions to Culture

We still have to measure the psychological and social effects of these new urban social relations. For the first time in history, the old solidarity among those who lived off the land was challenged by new solidarities

among those who lived on profits and wages. The speed with which people adapted to these new realities and the potential of urbanization to bring about change cannot be studied in isolation from the various sources on which urban life drew, along with its organization, history, and manner of inculcating social deference. Change depended on a city's ability to enter in one way or another the circuit of economic growth.

Two models will help us not so much to explain the extraordinary diversity of urban France as to orient our thinking. Consider, then, two ideal types: the "Ancien Régime city," defined by a wall and privileges and home to rentier notables, and the "commercial city," the city of the future, characterized by economic development and its associated instabilities. Obviously the two were not different in every respect: there was of course a certain continuity of urban function. In the eighteenth century, however, the growing intensity of economic activity gave rise to a new kind of urban life. Indeed, this history can be interpreted as the "genesis" of the modern city, as Jean-Claude Perrot showed in his remarkable study of Caen.

Historians have noted two important developments. First, there was a shift in the analysis and description of urban life from terms of superiority and privilege to terms of role and function. Space was henceforth organized not in terms of historically justified privileges but in relation to activities that integrated urban and rural life at various levels. Second, instability was frankly recognized. What counted was not the founding event, whether repeated or not, but success or failure. The new urban image emerged at the same time as the economic concept of urban functions. Between the two the relation was, as one might expect, dialectical.¹⁷

The Continental and Maritime Models and the *Bonnes Villes*

The ideology of the capital dominated representations of the relations between city and country and city and city. The urban tradition was essentially based on the idea of the city as a gathering place for landed elites, a place for the exercise of power, and a nexus of social interaction. Call this the "continental model" of the city, in which the role of the city was to transmit power outward from the central authorities; in this role cities played an important part in the development of the European

nation-state. Despite the advent of a competing "maritime commercial model," the continental model continued to define the urban hierarchy and the idea of interurban relations. Cantillon has shown how cities can be classified in this respect on the basis of three variables: the presence of landowners, spending their income from the land in the urban setting; the presence of magistrates and other agents of the central government; and the presence of entrepreneurs and wage earners engaged in production and trade to meet the needs of consumers. The fate of any given city was determined by the distribution of these various sources of revenue, which were also sources of power. Using factor analysis, we can compare major cities on the basis of institutions reflecting various types of activity. In cities of the Ancien Régime type we expect to find *intendance*, *subdélégations*, courts of justice, administrative offices, ecclesiastical institutions, and military garrisons; in commercial cities we expect to find schools and cultural institutions (an index to the circulation of knowledge and information), post offices, shipping offices, facilities for river and ocean shipping, consulates, chambers of commerce, fairs, and businesses of various kinds.

Having examined these variables for a hundred French cities, Bernard Lepetit was able to show that the urban network was organized in terms of functional complementarity rather than stark opposition between continental and maritime cities. Often one finds aspects of both models: most of the twenty-eight territorial capitals were also local market towns. The analysis confirms the existence of two models of urbanization, sometimes in combination (as in Paris and Bordeaux), sometimes not (as in Marseilles, which had neither a *parlement* nor an *intendance*). Note, moreover, that manufacturing was not a key variable in determining the urban hierarchy: it was a factor in increasing economic specialization and in attracting additional population, but a dependent variable determined most notably by a dynamic commercial economy.

At the top of the urban hierarchy stood thirty or so governmental and commercial metropolises, all cities of twenty thousand or more inhabitants, with the exception of Poitiers, Perpignan, and La Rochelle. These thirty-odd cities, which covered the entire country, including central France, were quite diverse in character: they included Montpellier, Rouen, Toulouse, Besançon, Lille, Lyons, Strasbourg, Aix, Nancy, and Orléans. What earned them their status was the way in which France had

grown, by progressive annexation of new territory to the original kernel of the kingdom. As a result, the old urban hierarchy had survived a series of historical, economic, and social changes.

The base of the urban pyramid consisted of a hundred or so cities in which the tertiary sector predominated: administrative and cultural institutions and trade (as opposed to production) were central. Territorial administration meant success in other areas as well. What distinguished these cities from the metropolises at the top of the hierarchy was that they administered smaller regions. On the urban map we find an unequal density of these smaller regional centers: one group clustered around Paris, from Châlons to Amiens and Chartres to Beauvais; another, oriented toward the south, penetrated the Massif Central via the Loire and Allier and included Nevers, Riom, Moulins, and Clermont; a third reached into the southwest. In the east and south, Ancien Régime-type cities were rare, because here the logic was one of *bonnes villes* attached to the royal domain. These were *pays d'élection* rather than *pays d'États*, in which the cities were centers of royal power and as such dominated by royal institutions. What was novel about the eighteenth century was that it imposed a logic of change on these areas of "solidified time." We caught a glimpse of this earlier when we looked at urbanization rates and regional distributions. During the eighteenth century, the relative importance of Paris decreased while the great multifunctional commercial metropolises triumphed. At the same time there was confirmation of the role of many smaller cities whose development and prosperity were linked to the state, "consumer cities" as opposed to "producer cities."¹⁸

Thus, the presence of administrative agencies exerted a strong influence on urban development. The administration did not compete with commerce, however, and in the early stages of commercial development even encouraged it. It is therefore difficult to define a completely satisfactory typology of the total or even the active population in terms of social differentiation. Over the past few decades historians have looked at tax records and notarial archives to evaluate the number of people in each social group and estimate their wealth and ability to pay taxes. Nevertheless, we do not yet possess sufficiently homogeneous data for the hundred-odd cities that constitute the urban network to allow us to understand the relation between socioprofessional structure and growth, which did not so much destroy the older network of interurban relations as superimpose a new one on it. Growth also made urban institutions

themselves less stable, more permeable to mobility, and therefore more difficult to evaluate.

Within the urban network we find two types of social organization, cities in which the degree of segregation was low, and cities in which it was high. Cities of the former type tended to be smaller administrative towns. In places like Guérande and Châteaudun, Guingamp (in Brittany) and Tulle, social differences existed but within relatively narrow limits: there were neither too many rich nor too many poor. Nor were differences of wealth reflected in residential patterns. The hierarchy was defined by relationships with the nobility and clergy and by networks of patronage. In cities where the population was growing and where social and economic differentiation, reflected in the proliferation of socioprofessional categories, was high, social relations and residential patterns were more complex and status differences increased. In cities dominated by administrative institutions and where economic activity was weak, the privileged classes and the rentier bourgeoisie dominated. Examples included Châlons-sur-Marne and Valence, to take two academic towns notorious for "the indolence of [their] traders and manufacturers." In cities where the bourgeoisie was more energetic and aggressive, where, for example, the "*Verlag* system" flourished and merchants were bent on extending their city's influence, more resources were available. This made the city more attractive, but the hierarchy of notables was such that new and old business activities clashed. Dominated groups became caught up in shifting but confining circuits of dependence where the iron law of wages and profits was in effect. At the very top of the urban hierarchy, dominating all other cities, were the great metropolises, the nodal points of all the lower-level networks. Here all the social hierarchies coexisted: ecclesiastical, judicial, economic, and administrative. And then as now, Paris dominated everything. To illustrate how all this worked, I shall focus on four examples: Ussel, Angers, Caen, and Lyons. But one could just as easily cite any number of other examples from the rich literature about provincial cities.¹⁹

Ussel, Angers, Caen, and Lyons: From Stalemate to Progress

Ussel was the center of the world for people who lived in its corner of lower Limousin. "Lo país d'Ussé," as this region of mountains cut by streams was known in the local patois, revolved around the city, which

was linked to a host of surrounding towns and villages. With its tottering ramparts, beautiful churches, two convents (Ursulines and Recollets), one- and two-story houses, narrow streets, shops, stalls, cellar-entrepôts, inns and taverns, Ussel was Jerusalem to hardworking shepherds and pastors. It drew people from twenty miles around—a distance that meant a day's walk via rudimentary footpaths. An influx of men (33 percent of marriages involved men from outside the city) and women (18 percent) compensated for deaths and departures. The city employed its new citizens in stores and workshops: there were forty-six small businesses whose inventories seldom exceeded a thousand livres. Neither commerce nor craft work sustained an economy dynamic enough to stimulate a large volume of trade. Merchants served as distributors of agricultural produce. They sold grain, livestock, wine, wax, and wool and imported goods of all kinds for those who could afford them, especially wines and luxury items. But the volume of trade was not large, and what drew people into the city was the work for craftsmen created by the consumption of noble and bourgeois notables.

The social hierarchy was defined in part by land: the city controlled 30 percent of the farmland in the *sénéchaussée*. Tax rolls show that different social groups owned roughly equal amounts of land but that nobles and bourgeois enjoyed a marked advantage in income because their land included pastures. Income and status also influenced the social hierarchy. At the bottom of the ladder were tenants who rented their homes and usually owned no land, day laborers without hope of advancement, and domestic servants, some of whom were clever and enjoyed certain advantages. In the middle were merchants and artisans who had to pay the tax known as the *vingtième* on their gross income, which ranged from nine to three hundred livres, two-thirds above twenty livres. And at the top were the notables, the clergy with benefices, the noble magistrates associated with the courts of the *sénéchaussée*, a small group of professionals (doctors, surgeons, notaries), and eleven bourgeois families, of whom the upper crust aped the manners of the five families of the *noblisse de robe*, who did not mingle with the bourgeoisie. Such was the society of this stagnant backwater town, which slumbered on undisturbed throughout the century. With 491 households in 1715 and 409 in 1775, Ussel was the very type of the "Ancien Régime city," not totally closed to the outside world but not really open either, and barely touched by growth.²⁰

With Angers we move to a larger scale but find a city no less somno-

lent or parasitic, a city in hibernation. In 1770 it was found to have 25,000 citizens (16,879 of whom lived inside the walls). The city maintained an active if predatory relationship with a prosperous agricultural region. Boats and barges plying the Loire and the Maine brought produce from the rich farming areas to the west and south. External mobility was limited (grooms in only 25 percent of marriages and brides in only 10 percent came from outside the city), as was upward mobility, while downward mobility was unknown (or at any rate unverifiable). The city was growing slowly at the end of the eighteenth century, with perhaps as many as 27,000 to 30,000 people at the time of the Revolution (but this was 5,000 less than in 1650). The capital of Anjou had little to do with industry. The muslin, stockings, and knit goods that had replaced the fabrics of the seventeenth century did not make it a great textile center. Sugar refineries survived thanks to provincial markets, and by 1789 there were as many as four, but Angers was caught in a squeeze between Nantes and Orléans. Slate quarries languished for want of entrepreneurs. Development efforts (spurred by Pierre Boreau and Danton Moreau) that affected all sorts of businesses bogged down. There was no shortage of cash, but wealthy people were anxious and preferred the security of real estate and fixed-income investments. The *receveur général des finances* of Tours apparently had every reason to offer this judgment: "The residents of Angers prefer the indolence in which they were raised to the diligence and hard work required for major undertakings and bold speculation. Short of energy [the word was new at the time], the current generation is vegetating as did the generation that preceded it and as will the generation to follow."

The society of the city reflected this assessment. Among the 21,567 inhabitants counted in the census of 1769, the active work force of 9,371 included a substantial number of domestics (25 percent). Most workers were employed by small shops making either textiles or clothing, yet spinners found themselves in a precarious situation. There was also a fair number of notables, including bourgeois rentiers and professionals, minor nobles, and clergymen. The tax burden on the lower and middle levels of taxpayers was heavy: 78 percent of the assessed paid less than twenty livres yet bore nearly half of the total tax burden. The city worked primarily for itself and secondarily for the region. The tone was set by well-to-do bourgeois and nobles who lived modest but regular lives with one foot in the country and the other in the city. Many spent a part of the

year living on their estates, from which they derived an appreciable portion of their income in cash or in kind. Overshadowing all of this was the clergy, with its churches, bishopric, convents, monasteries, canons, schools, seminaries, and university. Angers was a clerical city, which over the centuries had evolved a tranquil, stable way of life based on ecclesiastical privilege and tradition.²¹ Its calendar was primarily the church calendar, with holidays marked by the ringing of bells and the spectacle of religious processions. If Angers had a history in the eighteenth century, it was a history of missing the significant changes that marked the century as one of openness to the outside world.

In short, Angers was a model of the sleepy mid-sized city of which one could easily cite dozens of other examples. Its officeholders, landowners, nobles, bourgeois, and clergymen led comfortable lives, but the bulk of the population had at best a dreary existence, living precariously on the edge.²² Yet the memoirs of François-Yves Besnard show how it was possible for at least one man living in this environment to broaden his cultural ken.²³ Born in 1752, he was in his thirties when he discovered how much the world was changing outside this closed provincial society. The son of a wealthy merchant and farmer, Besnard had trained for the clergy at a time when customs were stable and fashions changed slowly. Yet already Angers, though barely affected by economic growth elsewhere, was gradually transforming people who in one way or another came into contact with the winds of change.

Those winds also blew in Caen, though not steadily. Surrounded by fertile farmland, Caen was a city of many artisans and a bustling port, whose population grew from 26,500 in 1700 to 40,858 in 1775, only to decline somewhat thereafter. It stood somewhere between hibernation and openness. Its stability was abetted by its domination of the surrounding countryside, which supplied most of its needs for food. From produce to wheat and meat to drink, the Caen region proved to be a Norman cornucopia. Bread was never in short supply, and indeed almost always in excess of what the city needed. The *actroi* records show that supplies flowed in from a number of different areas, and merchants earned handsome profits. Drugs, groceries, dry goods, sugar, coffee, fabrics, and luxury items came from Le Havre and Rouen, while many less costly goods were purchased from suppliers along the banks of the Loire and as far off as the border with Brittany:

This was a region in which industrial products were traded more than foodstuffs, and it is not surprising that a modest urban commercial demand made itself felt, facilitated by the existing commercial network for textiles and already proven by the periodic fairs in Gubray and Caen. Indeed, it was predictable that these marginal, composite products, for which demand was quite elastic, would already give rise to a commercial structure similar to the industrial economy in which the city ceased to be what Loesch classically described as a purchasing center surrounded by a continuous supply belt and became instead part of a loose network of trade centers and axes of exchange.²⁴

The city, situated at the center of its own food supply, was thus able to afford a welcome to industry, which came in four waves: luxury fabrics, caps and bonnets, linen, and finally lace. Each new wave brought its share of entrepreneurs, who were almost immediately replaced by others. The conditions necessary to attract labor were all present: there was a decent supply of capital, and except at the end of the period, the economic climate was generally favorable. Of course the very agricultural richness of the region was not without difficulties. It did not provide an adequate supply of raw materials for the textile industry, since there was more money to be made in supplying food. The success of agriculture in the region drew capital and a portion of the labor supply. Investment in land therefore yielded good profits, but it dampened economic development.²⁵ Despite calls for innovation by local economists, Caen was slow to awaken; initiative came in waves. And the local economists being Physiocrats, their predilection was of course to invest in land. But there were also administrators, a few traders, lawyers, and engineers who became involved in both improving the economy and thinking about the consequences of change such as usury and pauperism. The focus of their thought shifted from the rural economy not to the industrial economy but to questions of moral economy and economic philosophy. In Caen the guilds did not impede change. It was the culture of the city itself that posited land as the primary value and preached caution, inaction, and suspicion of risk.

The social hierarchy reinforced this tendency: it was dominated by the nobility and rentiers, a small but active group of traders, and a fair number of artisans and shopkeepers who had done well supplying local

needs. Between 1750 and 1760, the number of people working was only 8,932, compared with 20,000 who were idle (including rentiers). Throughout France the working population averaged 37 percent of the total population. The figure for Caen was lower (32 percent of the population was active in 1792 and only 28 percent in 1760), primarily because of the concentration there of the idle rich. The gap between those with economic capital and those with intellectual capital grew wider owing to the development of a semi-proletariat of wage earners paid by the job. The city employed laborers drawn from the surrounding countryside under "the impression that the only possibility was to hold their own" rather than to invest in growth.²⁶

Circulation and trade not only stimulated economic development but also encouraged architectural innovation. This had a profound impact on the city, which became an instrument of instruction, a source of information that changed the people who lived or came to do business in it. It also exacerbated conflicts of interest and antagonism between professional and cultural groups. Utilitarian values began to take hold even before the transformation of society by the industrial age. New demographic factors emerged, and attitudes toward space changed. People waited longer to get married. Hygiene and medicine began to have an impact on daily life in Caen as elsewhere. The city's historian notes the importance of the city as a cultural mediator in linking economic change to demographic evolution.

With Lyons we come to the summit of the urban pyramid: 97,000 inhabitants in 1700, 146,000 in 1785, with a notable acceleration after 1750. With support from outside, the growing city drew population primarily from the parishes of its *généralité* and to a lesser extent from beyond. This dramatic growth was countenanced and supervised by the authorities. Necessity imposed its laws. The silk factories and related industries of Lyons required two quite different types of worker: male apprentices who would someday replace the master craftsmen in their specialties, and female workers, girls and women, whose participation in the silk trade, where their contribution was essential, was not subject to regulation. The hiring of apprentices had a direct bearing on the future of the sons of the master craftsmen of Lyons. Lyons had become the European silk capital. Its prosperity depended on the market for luxury goods, and this depended in part on finding talented designers and in part on changing fashions. Unskilled peasants had to serve a long apprentice-

ship, and they also had to compete for jobs with the sons of well-to-do artisans and burghers eager for work in Lyons's better ateliers.

Newcomers to Lyons settled down and got married. The proportion of immigrants varied with type of work: only 40 percent of ordinary silk workers were born in the city, compared with 80 percent of master *fabricians* and 75 percent of traders. Unmarried young women came to work as servants, which was a dangerous profession, and were continually replaced, as the records of the Hôtel-Dieu indicate. Lyons was thus a city with a mobile population, and that mobility was a response to economic demand. It was primarily driven by a desire to settle down, a hope of trading rural misery for a somewhat better life in the city, or by the idea that more was possible in the city. Louis Tolozan, the last *prévôt des marchands*, was the son of a man from the Dauphiné and was himself ennobled after the birth of his own son. It was thus possible, if rare, to rise to nobility in just two generations. But what was important was the amplitude of the movement and the fact that by the end of the century there were more immigrants than native Lyonnais in nearly all strata of society. The total number of immigrants, four-fifths of whom came from the Lyonnais, Bugey, and the Dauphiné, may have exceeded 120,000, and even more people may have left the city than arrived. This turnover had an important cultural consequence: populations of diverse backgrounds lived together in the city and its streets and houses.

This melting pot effect can be seen in the data for one street, the rue de la Barre, from a late eighteenth-century census. A tavern at the head of the street was kept by two winners from Millery. The next shop belonged to a used-clothing dealer from the Dauphiné. The landlord, who lived on the entresol, had come to Lyons from Bugey sixty years earlier. Proceeding up the staircase, one met a man from Franche-Comté married to a Swiss woman, a metal turner from Bugey, a carter from Saint-Etienne, day laborers from various villages in the Lyonnais, a hairdresser from Nevers, a cabinetmaker from Vesoul, a mason from Auvergne, and a peddler from Guéret. On the fifth floor lived a hatmaker from the Lyonnais, a craftsman from Forez, and another hatmaker from the Dauphiné. Thirty-six households and only six natives of Lyons! This mixing of the population turned the city into a place where anything could happen. Despite the reshuffling, however, the cards were not always equitably distributed. Tax records reveal the growing gap between poor and rich neighborhoods. Notarial records disclose widening social disparities: day

laborers, domestics, and women constituted the bottom 15 to 20 percent; silk workers made up the next 25 percent; artisans about a third. The remaining 20 to 25 percent consisted of wealthy and titled notables, traders, magistrates, professional men, and ecclesiastics. The average *capitation* was two to three livres for the first three groups, nine livres for the artisans, and fifty livres for the notables.

Factories, ateliers, shops, and trading rooms employed many citizens of Lyons. Because the city depended so heavily on trade, this diverse population was necessary. More than two-thirds of the total population (and a higher proportion of the working population) made its living directly from trade. Yet the social hierarchy also reaffirmed traditional privileges: the nobility led all other groups in both income and expenditure. In many respects it remained the group to emulate, despite the fact that many titles in Lyons were of recent origin and many nobles were connected either directly or through marriage to the world of commerce. In a city that lived on business, prosperity deepened the gap between the wealthy minority and the masses of poor workers. Within each specialty, master craftsmen and others who controlled the promotion of journeymen grew wealthy. In manufacturing, stable wages meant increased profits for merchants. Because of this bourgeois monopoly, Lyons society was largely closed despite the rapid turnover of population. The bourgeois economy and class society became established in Lyons through a process different from that which we saw at work in a growth-oriented Ancien Régime city such as Caen. Yet here as elsewhere, the crucial change was the transformation of peasants into city dwellers.²⁷

To sum up, let us consider once more the relationship between city and countryside—a relationship of solidarity as well as conflict. The exploitation of rural society was at once the motor of development, without which nothing could be done, and the brake on that same development. The old bonds between city and country endured and continued to influence behavior, even as literature made fun of the rustic and bestowed nobility on the city dweller. The urban calendar continued to mark the wheat and grape harvests, despite the city's walls. Even with those walls, the city invaded the country every day and vice versa. The closing of the gates, which forced men such as the young Jean-Jacques Rousseau to spend the night outside, reflected continuing anxiety and a determination to control entries and exits. The stasis of the countryside gradually

succumbed to the expansion of proto-industry and commerce, while the very existence of the city depended on the productive capacity of the countryside (agricultural at first, industrial later). The city drew its growing population from the rural population, and complaints about this were heard only in hard times, when vagabondage was prohibited. At the same time, however, urban charity and wealth attracted vagabonds. Thus the city simultaneously fabricated failure and success. It antagonized as well as attracted. Some new arrivals married and settled down, others failed to marry and left. Economists have translated such phenomena into their own jargon: "pull factor" and "push factor." Employment and adaptation were one possible outcome, unemployment and deviance were another.

Unlike rural France, urban France was both a buyer and a seller. Cities owned part of the countryside and helped themselves to part of the peasant's income. The rest returned in the form of wages and advances to the countryside, but not before the city deducted taxes from the amount available for redistribution. Those taxes financed facilities and roads, but the countryside paid a disproportionate share for these infrastructural developments. Rural labor paid for the progress of nonrural France. The city-country relationship was one of growing imbalance and unequal exploitation on the one hand and reduced inequalities and economic and cultural development on the other hand. One cannot neglect the stimulus effect of urban consumption, which made it possible to break out of the circle of stagnation. The demand for goods from Paris and the regional metropolises helped to transform the rural economy, diversify taste, and spur further demand for more sophisticated products. The urban network was where it all began, before towns and villages were affected. The cities also gave rise to processes of acculturation about which I shall have more to say later on.

Features of Urban Change

If the city was effective in transforming human beings, that was because it offered a new kind of space for living and culture and a new way of organizing life. The city had its own dimensions, its own rhythms, its own sense of the normal and abnormal. Its principal characteristic was that people lived in close proximity and became mutually involved with one another. Hence the cities fostered a range of new forms of sociability that

allowed individuals to enter into discussion with their fellows. City dwellers became estranged from the countryside and from nature: as populations grew, buildings proliferated and city limits expanded, the pace of life changed, and people lost touch with nature, plants, and animals. As the countryside receded, people began to imagine it in a new way, and the relation of city to countryside was stood on its head. But this happened only after the urban way of life had come to be seen as superior to the rural way because less dependent on hard labor and less impervious to change. The city meant development. It was a nerve center where energies for transforming the material, spiritual, and intellectual worlds came together: "The air of the city makes you free!" In the eighteenth century three things lent credence to this ancient belief: the city's cultural advantages, attested to by its taste for reading; a shift in the literary image of the city from an ancient ideal of civilization to a more functional, and at the same time more controversial, representation; and the perpetuation of old municipal political practices that provided an arena in which new conflicts could emerge.²⁸

The City and the Press

Earlier I discussed the growth of the rural readership. In provincial cities as well as Paris, reading made still more rapid progress. Schools were better in the cities, and it was also easier for people to learn how to read outside of school. Cities harbored a public of virtual readers, people who did not buy books or read assiduously but who became accustomed to reading printed matter of various kinds readily accessible in an urban setting. Scholars have for too long focused on book reading and neglected other forms of printed matter associated with a range of social and cultural practices. What organized the circulation and appropriation of printed matter (which in the eighteenth century proceeded at an accelerated pace) was the central tension between private activities and the definition of collective spaces and customs. Over the course of the century the equilibrium between the two shifted. Two different styles of reading emerged, one individualized, the other related to social intercourse in the family, at the workplace, or in literary societies. City dwellers not only had greater access to printed matter than did country people but also through reading learned about various possibilities for social change.

Private Ownership of Books

Numerous studies, for the most part based on estate inventories, allow us to measure the increase in book ownership, although what the indices tell us is not always clear. Take for example the percentage of estates including at least one book: in the cities of western France (Angers, Brest, Caen, Le Mans, Nantes, Quimper, Rennes, Rouen, Saint-Malo) it was 33.7 percent in the eighteenth century, compared with 22 percent in Paris in 1750. How can we explain that fewer than a quarter of Parisians owned at least one book at a time when a far higher percentage of provincials could make the same claim? It may be that the Parisian notaries who compiled estate inventories were more biased about books, or it may be that Paris had already moved to a culture in which books were just one form of printed matter among others: broadsheets, lampoons, signs, and posters. Ownership of books increased but not steadily: in the west the rate was the same in 1788 as in 1728, namely, 35 percent. It varied, moreover, with the extent of transformation of the urban population and level of literacy. In the eighteenth century the culture of print jumped one major hurdle, but its subsequent history was not without setbacks.

In addition to inequalities between cities and periods, there were also inequalities of condition. In Paris in 1700, the proportion of book ownership was 13 percent for wage earners, 32 percent for magistrates, and 26 percent for nobles of the sword. By the second half of the century these figures had risen to 35, 58, and 53 percent, respectively. Two rules with few exceptions governed this growth. The first rule was that the higher the average wealth of a given social group, the greater the percentage of its members who owned books. And the second was that within each group, book ownership again varied with wealth. These rules were corroborated in Paris, Lyons, and the west of France. Books made deep inroads everywhere, reaching ordinary workers and artisans. At the same time, the average size of book collections increased. There were more readers, more homes with a single book, and larger libraries. The number of texts on sale also increased, a change that was not without effects on the ways in which people read.

Another aspect of urban practice in this period was a shift in the reading habits of different sociocultural groups. Take the urban clergy. There were important differences between Paris and the provinces as to size of collections and above all range of contents. The overall homoge-

neity of clerical reading was a result of religious teaching. That teaching was in turn dictated by a program of reform, which in Paris had had to compromise with other traditions. Parisian canons and priests were less conservative than their provincial counterparts. Noble privilege also existed in this area, but it tolerated numerous infractions for those who were less wealthy, younger sons, and widows. What is striking everywhere is the strong contrast between the *noblesse de robe* and the *noblesse d'épée* in regard to reading. Over the course of the century, the size of book collections increased for both groups but especially for the magistrates, although their rivals later sought to make up the ground they had lost. A gap remained, however, a gap that was reinforced by differences in content with respect to religious and historical matters. Female bourgeois readers also exhibited differences depending on whether they belonged to the world of professionals or to the world of trade. In the former case professional books dominated, but a growing number of collections included works of history, plays, and novels. In the latter group, books on commerce and economics were collected for business purposes, while novels, poems, and travel literature fed the need for escape. Among the lower classes works of religion were most prevalent, particularly where there was only one book in the house, although signs of broader tastes can be found in Paris, Lyons, and the urban west. What counted most of all was the accumulation and comparison of different styles and choices. Reading became a regular and familiar practice.

Public Access and Practical Changes

In the city even people who did not own books had greater access to reading matter than in the country. One could read a book without owning it, and institutions and practices that made this possible proliferated in the eighteenth century. Books could be borrowed from friends and relatives and often passed through many hands. We have evidence for this in correspondence of the period and indeed in libraries themselves, which often contained more than one copy of a book in order to facilitate loans. Public libraries served an even broader public. A list of these may be found in the *France littéraire* for 1784. Paris led the way with eighteen collections, primarily religious but some secular as well. Some twenty-odd cities had at least one public library: in Lyons the *collège* had one, in Rouen the academy, in other cities a convent or monastery. The opening

of major religious collections such as that of Sainte-Genève in Paris further encouraged reading. So did the libraries of major collectors, for whom the king set an example, and the civic spirit of those who bequeathed their private libraries to municipal institutions. Lyons, for example, inherited the collections of Aubert, Brossette, and Adamoli.

Libraries served mainly men of letters. They were supplemented by a second network of *cabinets de lecture* and bookshops with "reading rooms" where browsers could read without purchasing in the hope that reading would eventually create new clients. Other reading rooms were created by private initiative, especially in mercantile towns. People who paid a small fee to join could use these rooms to read, discuss books, and exchange information in an informal setting. By the end of the Ancien Régime such reading rooms were quite common, usually found in conjunction with cultural societies of one kind or another. People avid for reading matter and learning got together and created them. These were the kind of readers who rented books by the day and virtually devoured best-sellers such as Rousseau's *Héloïse* and who also borrowed newspapers and magazines and read texts aloud to others. The breadth of this movement led some people to reflect on ways to reform public reading. Two reforms were frequently proposed. One was that some sort of oversight be imposed on reading, which was proliferating for better and for worse. We find this, for instance, in Louis-Sébastien Mercier's utopian writing. The other was a call for a sacred repository in which all books would be collected. We find echoes of this in the plans of architects such as Boullée. Such a library-temple was envisioned as occupying a central place in each city, where knowledge would be available to anyone who wanted it.

Urban reading practices changed as the availability of books increased. Reading was an intimate, private act, depicted in paintings by artists such as Fragonard, Baudouin, and Hubert Robert as a symbol of intense investment. Reading became a symbol in portraiture, where it was generally represented as an activity to be enjoyed in comfort and leisure. In contrast to the gratuitousness and frivolity of urban ways, reading was a serious matter in which readers participated actively; it changed their thinking. So said Rousseau to his readers and correspondents, male and female alike. In opposition to this view, writers and artists such as Nicolas Rétif de la Bretonne and Jean-Baptiste Greuze proposed scenes in which a mediator, usually the father in a rural household, relays the content of

the printed work to illiterate or semiliterate listeners. This representation offered a transparent, communal counterimage to the representation of urban reading as a silent, individual, elitist practice.

In the cities countless intermediaries gave voice to the written word and caused it to circulate among the populace: songsters, poster hangers who read their texts out loud before posting them for all to see, and authors of the seditious texts that appeared in abundance in times of political and religious crisis. Even societies of the wealthy and learned made room for public readings. Texts were read aloud in homes as well as in academic meetings and friendly gatherings. City people read collectively in workshops, apartments, and public places. There was a growing volume of circumstantial writing, pious and utilitarian images, broadsheets, almanacs, and yearbooks to choose from. The reading public grew and accommodated new readers who read relatively little. Meanwhile, institutions proliferated. Over time, however, printed matter began to circulate from the cities into the countryside, so that the difference between the two diminished. The effects of this wider diffusion may have been contradictory: on the one hand, it made it possible to teach new disciplines in matters of religion, manners, and work, but on the other hand, it opened people's minds, bringing them new information or imaginative fiction that allowed them to escape from the dull daily round. In so doing, printed matter lost its symbolic value even as it gained in utilitarian efficacy. As printed material became more common, ways of appropriating it tended to become more and more differentiated as people sought new forms of distinction.

Images of the City, Metaphors of Change

The increase in urban reading also points up changes in representations of the city both in the culture at large and in economic thinking. Marx saw the fate of Western society as bound up with the division of labor between city and country: "The division of labor within a nation first entails the separation of industrial and commercial labor on the one hand from agricultural labor on the other, and this leads to the separation of the city from the countryside and to an opposition of their interests."²⁹ This process separated cultural practices as much as forms and spaces of labor. The eighteenth century witnessed a shift from a cultural discourse to a functional one. The transformation of rhetorical images and themes

reflects the degree to which public opinion saw the city and its functions in terms of a new interpretive framework.³⁰

The seventeenth-century city was above all a locus of civilization, warmed by the breath of spirit. According to literary sources (which expressed themselves in the same terms as administrators), the city was a mirror, a microcosm in which what mattered was beautiful architecture, pleasant society, and erudite learning. From the Renaissance on, rhetoric of all orders received exalted advancement—collective as well as individual—through urbanity. Enlightened minds lived in cities, to whose revival they gave voice. The words "pagan" and "peasant" frequently referred to the same backwardness. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, the old unified cultural vision was already giving way to a multiplicity of points of view: the city was a variety of histories, a plurality of destinies. It was an economic center as well as a place of awakening. Definitions proliferated.

Men of letters and scholars began to focus on themes relating to urban functions. In Caen, Father Charles Gabriel Porée, the brother of Voltaire's teacher, wrote for the *Nouvelles littéraires a Discours sur la naissance et le progrès des sciences* in 1744, in which he developed an analogy between the beauty and symmetry of the urban organism and the canons of the human body. A city was supposed to possess the "beauty of utility," and to make cities attractive without harmful, corrupting side effects would, it was argued, take thinking. At the same time Rousseau was already mulling over ideas that he would develop later in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*: he couped an apology for the city of modest size, close to nature, with a critique of corrupting capitals such as Paris, which were undermining morals and destroying the human race. Echoes of these changes can be heard in the poetry submitted to a competition organized by the University of Caen, a contest that had counterparts in the academies. From 1666 to 1792 a thousand poems were submitted: 25,000 lines representing 278 authors, mostly (71 percent) from Caen, expressed the attitudes of the well-to-do classes, which had been restructured by the process of urban development. Until 1740 Caen identified with Athens and saw itself as the capital of the Muses. After that date a variety of new themes began to appear: the government of the city, its public works projects, its growing prosperity, the obligation to assist the poor; at the same time poems began to be submitted in praise of nature and in criticism of overpopulated cities. Two kinds of rhetoric were attached to

the city: an organic, biological rhetoric that made systematic use of traditional bodily metaphors for describing the world (a development that reflects the rise of the medical community), and a rhetoric of the rediscovery of nature, cultivated by elites eager to flee the new problems created by urban growth, problems that were the focal point of a moral and economic debate that developed around the unavoidable reality of persistent poverty. In Paris moralistic commentators such as Rétif and Mercier, disciples of Rousseau, attest to a similar diversification. Both were fascinated by the urban organism, suspicious of the separation of rich and poor, obsessed with the dehumanized dreghs of society, and possessed of a new vision for the future: in a rural Arcadia lay the salvation of mankind.

Even pamphleteers joined in the debate. A hundred or so pamphlets, some dating back to the seventeenth century, were reprinted again and again. These featured a series of representations of the city that were duly transmitted to the countryside. The city appeared as a stage on which different social groups expressed their "troubles," "difficulties," "pain," and "misery." The pamphlets presented kaleidoscopic images of a city such as Paris or Rouen in the throes of progress, portrayed in a series of impressionistic scenes. Their purpose was didactic: the city's monuments recalled the glories of civilization; its trade and industry served useful ends. Such pamphlets inspired dreams even in the minds of those villagers who would never make the journey to the big city. They gave people reason to hope and believe, and for those who were ready to make the leap they gave encouragement. Popular pamphlets were read by everyone, but mainly by the poor, and they thus made urban values a part of the general culture, the fantasy life of mankind. Individuals interpreted their social experiences in terms of what they read in pamphlets.

Increasingly, however, there was also emphasis on the troubles of urban life: instability, social stalemate, conflict, poverty, and degradation of standards of morality and dress as described in the superb series of *Cris de Paris*.³¹ The annoyances of urban life became not only the butt of humor but also food for thought. When pamphlets discussed cities, they wondered about their future. They noted that people not only learned new rules but also learned how to break them. The pamphlet literature was not static. Its themes changed over time and according to the audience it addressed. Readers also read the pamphlets in different ways. Whereas some saw the dream of a better world, others saw the specter of

decay. By the end of the eighteenth century, there was no single popular vision of the city but many diverse visions.

A similar shift took place in the interpretation of the urban economy, which inspired the work of city planners and reformers, including government officials, medical doctors, engineers, and architects. The functionalism prevalent in these disciplines stemmed from a grasp of the city's unique role in redistributing wealth, concentrating population, and spurring consumption and development—in short, from a view of the city as economic "multiplier."³²

This view originated with Cantillon, whose *Essai sur la nature du commerce en général* was written between 1720 and 1730 but not published until 1755. The argument was pursued by Condillac (*Le Commerce et le gouvernement considérés relativement l'un à l'autre*, 1776) and taken to its logical conclusion by Adam Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations* was immediately translated and soon given wide currency by the use made of it in the article entitled "Ville" in the political economy section of Panckoucke's *Encyclopédie méthodique* (1788): the city, it was argued, was a consequence of the division of labor and of man's natural propensity to engage in trade. This idea stemmed from a spatial theory of production, in which labor and capital sought the most advantageous employment, the emerging urban hierarchy reflected capital accumulation, not all cities were equally productive, and commercial cities were contrasted with rentier cities. Where rentier income predominated, idleness was the rule; where capital and productive investment dominated, industry and development followed.³³ Condillac stood Smith's analyses on their head: for the Frenchman the key was not production but consumption and circulation, which led to an organic functional theory in which infrastructure fostered increased trade. Boerhaave's disciple Quesnay used this "medicalized" view to describe the "urban obstruction" caused by accumulation of wealth without redistribution into agriculture and natural reproduction.³⁴

The city was thus obliged to protect its role by promoting an optimistic economic view of its function. Modern thinking rejected isolation, and one segment of urban thinking shifted responsibility for communication from the cultural to the economic sphere. In this connection the culture of print took on an even more novel significance: its role was not simply to accumulate knowledge in books but to create new connections between ideas. The mission of the city was to bring one form of knowledge in contact with another in order to make things happen. Commerce sprang

up where two kinds of thinking came together: just as conversation was an outgrowth of sociability and culture, exchange of labor and commodities was an outgrowth of political economy in which the city was to play the role of economic accelerator. Against the Physiocrats, Cantillon and Condillac argued that the city transferred wealth, created new value, and ensured redistribution of profits, thus giving rise to a "revolution in lifestyles." For Condillac, two factors were at work. First, the pleasures of consumption made cities more attractive and led to further diversification of consumption; and second, rural output gravitated toward the cities, and increased demand accelerated agricultural production, increasing farm incomes and ground rents, which in turn stimulated further growth.

Urban economic thinking accordingly rejected the idea of economic space as consisting of adjacent, isolated districts interacting only at their mutual boundary and replaced it with a new spatial vision. Within the economic circuit, price variations spurred production and stimulated successive waves of development. According to the new view, the economy was driven by demand and not, as in the mercantile tradition or the Christian, moral view of the economy, by supply. Relations between cities were built from the top down, by function.³⁵

Urban Authorities, Cohesion, and Conflict

The administration of the city had to deal with conflict in a context of liberalism. The urban administration became the very symbol of the city. Its interventions fostered social cohesion and development. But the urban nobility and bourgeoisie fought for control of the government and therefore of development. Types of municipal government varied widely. Broadly speaking, responsibility for government was shared among three bodies: a general assembly of residents (which as time went by tended to exclude all but notables and representatives of parishes, guilds, and other corporate bodies); the councils; and the *corps de ville*, or city corporation. Although cities had been under royal tutelage since the seventeenth century, they did still enjoy some measure of liberty. When the government clamped down on the diversity of urban institutions in 1764-65, it merely recognized the existence of quasi-republican traditions controlled by urban elites. The urban authorities enjoyed prestige and power: they collected taxes while at the same time defending the fiscal privileges of their

citizens; they maintained food supplies if necessary by taxing rural parishes; they managed ordinary courts of law, regulated commerce, administered the guilds, oversaw urban planning, accepted or rejected the poor and sick, monitored teaching, and supervised public health and morals. In short, municipal governments handled a wide range of matters which in the eighteenth century fell under the head of *la police* (public order), as discussed in a long tradition of *traités de police*. Delamare's *traité* provided a model for France and Europe. The work was essentially a treatise on moral economy, seen in terms of managing space and social groups.

Clashes over urban policy were therefore serious matters. Usually they pitted the privileged against the oppressed, but sometimes the nobility vied with the bourgeoisie. In Caen the nature of the confrontation was not always clear because the different social groups did not always act in accordance with what we take to be their own interests. The conflict over development there has already been discussed. The city corporation, dominated by a noble mayor and six aldermen, two of whom were nobles, two bourgeois living in noble style, and two traders, generally opposed the initiatives of the active bourgeoisie and the royal administrators who supported them. The municipal government, with support from its citizens, was able to slow the expansion of trade in defense of its landed interests. The municipality won backing by conceding portions of its estate to individuals who supported its conservative policies. It waged war against the *intendance* and the Ponts et Chaussées on major as well as minor issues. The conflict was one of independence versus dependence, status quo versus change, and vested interests versus zealous entrepreneurs. The issues were most clearly posed in debates over development projects and above all in discussions of taxes, especially after the nobility joined forces with those in favor of development and public works.

The blockages that one finds at the municipal level in Caen did not exist everywhere to the same degree. In Nantes, Bordeaux, and Rouen, municipal elites and traders shared a desire to "change the city" and, as long as special interests did not get in the way, often acted jointly in everyday matters of maintenance and management. In the great Norman port, for example, cooperation was more apparent than conflict. Thus, there was nothing to stop construction of new docks, improvements to warehouses and entrepôts, and clearing of passages for new streets that showcased the importance of the city as a driving force for change. And there was also agreement about erecting prestigious monuments, prome-

nades, squares, fountains, theaters, and concert halls—places where older social networks could make contact with people involved in the newer modes of circulation.

Among the cities of Flanders studied by Philippe Guignet, we find numerous examples of an urban civilization at the crossroads of development.³⁶ We also see the role of urban oligarchies in the controversial management of development issues. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, the municipalities of Flanders subsisted in an urban civilization based on oligarchical rule by the *senior pars* (representatives of privilege) and on the economic and religious principles of the Counter-Reformation. Charitable organizations and guilds took care of social needs, and competition was limited. Increased central control and the transformation of the economy plunged this system into belated but lingering crisis. The traditional, conservative, interventionist spirit survived because municipal elites took in new members without losing their cohesiveness, which was reinforced by the domination of social groups that lived on income from land and bonds and owed nothing to trade or industry. Large-scale trade circumvented the authorities because in Lille, Valenciennes, Douai, and Cambrai, aldermen largely refused to accept changes in the nature of manufacturing. The urban environment was constricting and ill adapted to innovation, even if traders still found ways to make profits.

This conflict brings us back to the question raised at the outset. The interests of traders were not always compatible with the interests of fixed-income investors. The new economic logic frequently undermined the existing basis of urban solidarity. Repeated incidents occurred in the early 1760s. Static France, the France of "the three orders," was forced to confront change in the form of new networks of circulation and new modes of communication. In the resulting conflict not all cities were on the same side. We can explain the ensuing tensions. For the moderns, the city was a tool, and the goal was calculated profit. The ancients, by contrast, opted for a nostalgic, old-fashioned pastoral and rural philosophy. "All phases of urbanization were accompanied by one form or another of an apologia for nature."³⁷ This dictum certainly applied to the period in which cities became the motor of economic development.

7

The Regulated Kingdom: Paris and the Provinces

IN THE ORGANIZATION of space, the opposition between trade and land, city and country, is not sufficient to characterize what was distinctive about the changes that occurred in eighteenth-century France. Another dimension existed, a dimension that played a central role in intellectual debate and literary representation and had a direct effect on the routine practices of government: namely, the contrast between Paris and the provinces. Montesquieu put it well in his *Pensées*: "In the provinces, Paris is a North Pole that attracts you, the *intendant* a South Pole that repels you."³⁸ In the tug of war between the provincials, whom Montesquieu can reasonably be taken to represent, and the Parisians (the *intendants* being the local representatives of royal power), it was the role of the capital that was at issue—or should I say *capitals*, for the problem was not uniquely French. It arose throughout Europe in conjunction with the genesis of the modern state and the development of its institutions. Montesquieu elaborated his thinking in a text entitled "The Grandeur of the Capital":

In a republic, a city that is too large is extremely pernicious, because morals always become corrupt there. When you bring a million men together in one place, the best you can do by way of keeping order is to make sure that each citizen receives some bread and needn't worry about having his throat slit. Put men where there is work and not where there is lust. In despotic states the capital necessarily grows . . .

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