

was in motion. One saw wool refined, cloth twisted, yarn clipped, grain threshed, coal extracted, chocolate refined and on and on.<sup>51</sup>

The international character of the exhibitors gave a global feel to the show too: 'Jules Verne dreams of travelling around the world in eighty days,' the official guide to the 1889 Exposition pronounced; 'on the Champ de Mars, you can do it in six hours.'<sup>52</sup>

In some respects, however, the prime exhibit at this international event was something altogether more home-grown, namely Paris itself, now a Haussmannian landscape of power. The city which had been transformed almost beyond recognition proudly put itself on show in a way that none of its rivals could emulate. No other state invested so heavily in this kind of event or used the event so effectively to improve urban infrastructure. The tramway had been inaugurated for the 1855 show, and a *bateaux-mouches* service specially laid on in 1867. In 1878 the first experiments with electric street-lighting were initiated.

On the eve of the 1878 Exposition the Anglo-American man of letters Henry James, visiting Paris, marvelled at the 'amazing plasticity of France': despite the destructive violence of the Commune and its aftermath, 'Paris is today,' he reckoned, 'in outward aspect as radiant [and] as prosperous . . . as if her sky had never known a cloud.'<sup>53</sup> The international Expositions played an important role in the persistence of the notion of an eternal Paris, despite all its troubles, the resiliently radiant city of modernity—the 'focal point of civilization', as Victor Hugo put it, 'the microcosm of general history'.<sup>54</sup> The Italian visitor Edmondo De Amicis in 1878 also marvelled at the new cultural experience of being an individual in Haussmannian Paris, overwhelmed by sensations and almost drowned in the spectacular excess of the modern city:

[One] thinks with amazement of those solitary, silent little cities from which we started, called Turin, Milan and Florence, where every one stands at the shop door and all seem to live like one great family. Yesterday we were rowing on a small lake, today we are sailing on the ocean.<sup>55</sup>

'Europe has gone off to view the merchandise,' the historian Ernest Renan commented drily on the 1855 Exposition, 'and to compare products and materials.'<sup>56</sup> Renan's asperity in fact highlights the increasing congruence between the Expositions and the experience of shopping. What impressed the crowds was not simply the display of technology and raw productive power, but also the way in which these seemed increasingly attuned to individual consumer needs and personal comforts. Thus the Singer sewing machine,

Symptomatically, Third Republic governments also continued Napoleon III's policy of using international exhibitions to showcase Paris as a world capital. Napoleon had been captivated by the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Crystal Palace, London, and determined to convert the more restrained tradition of French industrial fairs—which went back to François de Neufchâteau's inspiration in 1798<sup>50</sup>—into something altogether grander. The Expositions held in 1855 and 1867 were massive successes, confirming Paris's reputation as the city of light. Paris's share of France's foreign exports, for example, rose sharply in their wake. The 1855 Exposition, held largely on the Champs-Élysées, attracted some five million visitors, including legions of heads of states and other international dignitaries. The 1867 Exposition was even bigger: it occupied much of the Champ de Mars, and attracted seven million people. Not to be outshone, and ardently wishing to demonstrate the nation's recovery from the humiliations of 1870–71, the Third Republic ensured that the 1878 Exposition was even more extensive. It covered land from the Champ de Mars through to the Trocadéro on the Right Bank of the Seine, and along the Left Bank to the Invalides. The 1889 Exposition—forever memorable for the inauguration of the Eiffel tower—attracted no fewer than 32 million visitors, double that in 1878.

The Expositions celebrated the cult of technology and industrial production, both through the impressive iron architecture in which the exhibits were displayed, and the almost demonic energy of the machines and installations in place, which so impressed contemporaries: 'Four locomotives were guarding the hall of machines,' one visitor later recalled,

like the sphinxes to be seen at the entrance to Egyptian temples. This hall was a land of iron and fire and water, the ears were deafened, the eyes dazzled . . . All

photographs and domestic uses of electricity were among the biggest hits in 1855, as were the refrigerator, the typewriter, the telephone, the lift and an embryonic version of the phonograph in 1878. These were all objects soon on sale in Paris.

### 9.3: The Eiffel Tower

The Eiffel tower, which even money-grubbing America, we can be certain, would not want, is the dishonour of Paris. Everyone knows that, everyone says it, and everyone is profoundly upset—and we are only the weak echo of the universal public opinion, which is rightly alarmed. One has only to imagine a vertiginously ridiculous tower dominating Paris like a gigantic black factory chimney, crushing by its barbarous massiveness Notre-Dame, the Sainte-Chapelle, the Saint-Jacques tower, the Louvre, the dome of the Invalides, the Arc de Triomphe, etc.

The public petition from which this passage is taken was signed in 1887 by a starry cast of around fifty intellectuals including writers Alexandre Dumas, Leconte de Lisle and Guy de Maupassant, architect Charles Garnier, composers Gounod and Massenet, playwright Victorien Sardou and numerous architects. These avowed 'passionate lovers of beauty' put themselves forward as representatives of all who loved historic Paris yet despised the thought that it should be desecrated by 'the odious shadow of this hollowed-out column of sheet metal' on which building was just starting.

For a construction which was so comprehensively condemned by a substantial part of the literary and artistic intelligentsia before a single one of the 2.5 million rivets it would require had been hammered in place, the Eiffel tower has worn astonishingly well. Gustave Eiffel, the Burgundian engineer who was responsible for the tower's construction—though it was actually designed by his associates Nouguiet and Koechlin—wrote a spirited reply, pleading a new kind of beauty for a construction which, he held, transcended rather than transgressed both artistic canons and historical precedent.

Is it because of their artistic value that the Pyramids have so powerfully struck men's imaginations? . . . The Tower will be the highest edifice which men have ever built. So why should what is admirable in Egypt become hideous and ridiculous in Paris?

The tower has had its intractable haters: J. K. Huysmans, for example, attacked it as a 'hollowed-out candlestick', a 'solitary suppository, riddled with holes'. Yet Eiffel's contemporaries—and just about all of subsequent posterity—rallied to the tower's cause. It had two million visitors in the year of its construction for the 1889 Exposition, and distinguished guests who trudged up the 1,710 steps to the summit of the thousand-foot structure included the Prince of Wales, eight African kings, Thomas Edison, Sarah Bernhardt and Buffalo Bill. The *Au Printemps grand magasin* secured a marketing scoop (and launched an enduring tourist industry) by acquiring scrap metal left over from the site and converting it into miniature Eiffel tower mementoes. The tower's image saturated French society. By the turn of the twenty-first century, total visitor numbers were approaching 200 million.

Though Pissarro was famously anti, most painters rallied to it almost at once: Seurat as early as 1889, for example, and Douanier,

Rousseau and Signac in 1890, with Chagall, Delaunay, Utrillo, Dufy, Cocteau and a legion of others following in their train. So did poets. Guillaume Apollinaire, who served at the front in the First World War, composed a resistance poem against the Germans with typography set in such a way as to resemble the tower. Apollinaire's gesture highlighted a fact which was already very apparent, namely that the Eiffel tower was an unmatched memento of the city of Paris. None of the prestigious *lieux de mémoire* with which Paris was filled could match this level of representativeness. Notre-Dame—which the tower also resembled in being the product of an army of highly skilled but wholly anonymous workers—ran it closest in this respect, although the cathedral's religious function put it beyond the pale for the serried ranks of Parisian anti-clericalists. Eiffel himself talked of his tower as a 'three-hundred metre flagpole', topped by the tricolore. The image of the Eiffel tower—from paintings and poems through to photographs, films and tawdry souvenirs—evoked Paris rather than France as a whole. Indeed, for most people it *meant* Paris.

The tower transcended artistic canons; it also transcended any notion of practical function. Purposes were eventually found for it: a wireless mast was erected in 1908, and one for television followed later, and the top also served as a military observation site. It has also been used as a giant advertising hoarding and as a meteorological station. But each of these mundane ends could have been achieved in other ways. For all intents and purposes the tower is sublimely useless. It is a supreme engineering achievement—but then so is Britain's Forth Bridge, which opened at around the same time and which at least took traffic from one side of an estuary to the other (though at greater human cost: around a hundred men died in its construction, while there was only one serious injury on Eiffel's building site).

A tourist location par excellence, the tower also transcends mundane notions of the touristic. As the tower's shrewdest commentator Roland Barthes noted, there is no inside into which the tourist penetrates: the tower is effectively contentless. In a way there is nothing to see in the tower—except Paris. The site which gives the most comprehensive panorama of the city is also an unavoidable skyline presence throughout Paris. No wonder Guy de Maupassant ate in the tower's restaurant: it was, he claimed, 'the only spot in Paris in which one doesn't see *it*'!

The tower's lack of utility has stimulated a compensatory quest to

imbue it with meaning. Eiffel prided himself on having overcome considerable odds to construct what stood as a profound human achievement. The challenge of the tower has stimulated more idiosyncratic challenges. Individuals have sought to fly an aeroplane through its legs (1926, unsuccessful; 1945), to make a parachute descent (1912), to come down by bicycle (1923), to have a foot race to the top (1905), to climb using mountaineering techniques (rather than the lifts) (1954), a motorcycle (1983), a mountain bike (1987), and so on. Several of these attempts have ended tragically—and indeed the tower's death-toll, ranging from adventurers through to the rather different challenge of suicide, is around 350.

Early in the twentieth century the sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon called the tower 'a dream of super-human exaltation', and its lack of obvious utility has boosted this fantasy element. The tower has been compared to a firework, a derrick, a lightning conductor, an insect and much, much else. The fantasy has often taken an erotic turn. The tower's manifestly priapic dimension (highlighted by Cendrars, Aragon and the Surrealists) has in fact been mixed rather strangely with a sense, drawn out in a poem by Apollinaire, that it also stands like a shepherdess tending over its Parisian lambs (a comparison which in fact evokes the city's patron saint, Geneviève, who was sometimes represented tending sheep). Moreover, viewed from beneath—especially by poets—the tower's first level resembles a monstrous pelvic floor. This shows that the Eiffel tower transcends gender just as it transcends beauty, utility, history, vision and just about everything else.

## The Anxious Spectacle

1889–1918

The history of Paris as it approached the beginning of the twentieth century might be told as a tale of two exhibitions—the international Expositions of 1889 and 1900. Both were modelled on the style of 1855, 1867 and 1878; both were centred on the Champ de Mars; both yet again highlighted Paris as ‘the City of Light’ (and indeed both were illuminated by electric lighting); and both were brilliant successes. The 1889 Exposition attracted 32 million visitors—double the 1878 figure—while the 51 million who visited the 1900 show made it the most frequented international exhibition in the world until Osaka in Japan pipped it in 1970. The 1889 show had been timed to coincide with the centenary of the French Revolution, specially envisioned as the inaugural moment of the modern age, while the theme of the 1900 Exposition was ‘Paris, Capital of the Civilized World’. Putative birthplace of democracy, then, and leading edge of modern civilization, Paris put its spectacular self on show in this two-edged period of *fin de siècle* and *belle époque*.

It took panache, certainly, to stage such massive shows, considering the troubled political and social atmosphere which had distinguished the Third Republic since its inception. Both Expositions sought to offer a unified image of a political regime which remained bitterly divided, and which had not entirely shaken off the Commune hang-over. For much of the 1870s the monarchist party had been on the point of regaining power, and the Republic looked fragile. Indeed in 1873 the regime was little more than a hair’s breadth away from a royalist restoration. The Bourbon pretender the comte de Chambord, grandson of Charles X, who had lived in France only since 1871, even came to Versailles in order to seek the Assembly’s ratification of his candidature. His stubborn refusal to abandon the white flag for the tricolore as national emblem sank his chances. The gesture revealed an Ultra sensibility which would probably not have lasted well anyway.

It was only in 1879 that government, its flirtation with monarchy over, moved back to Paris from Versailles where it had been since the dark days of

the Commune. In the same year the first batch of released Communard prisoners was allowed to re-enter city precincts. (The authorities sneaked them into the Gare d’Orléans at 4 A.M., only to find some 40,000 workers arm in arm in comradely welcome.) In 1880 the fourteenth of July was inaugurated as a national holiday, demonstrating the Republic’s progressive accommodation with its historic anti-monarchical legacy. In the mid- to late 1880s, however, this moment of relative calm in Parisian politics was overturned by a political shooting star, General Boulanger, a kind of intellectually challenged Napoleon. His call for constitutional revision and a war of revenge against the German empire won a good deal of electoral support among working- as well as middle-class Parisians. By 1891, however, the general had shot his bolt (and indeed himself, on his mistress’s tomb),<sup>1</sup> but the 1890s would see the emergence of new sources of political instability. The high level of financial corruption in political circles engendered a series of scandals which alienated a substantial section of public opinion. There were sex scandals too, not least the death of President Félix Faure in mid-sexual congress with his mistress in 1899. Although in 1892 the pope urged French Catholics to support the republican regime, the latter was sometimes aggressively anticlerical. There was still a good deal of clerical anti-republicanism too; the aristocratic Faubourg Saint-Germain, whose ranks were finely analysed by Marcel Proust, remained one of its hotspots.

The Third Republic’s constitution had extended the vote to all adult males, and the regime consequently consecrated the emergence of what Léon-Michel Gambetta, one of the heroes of the 1870 Prussian siege, called ‘new social strata’. Yet this widening of the social base of French politics seemed only to stimulate new perceptions of entitlement—and new anxieties about where mass politics might lead. On the Left a Socialist movement had begun to emerge from the ashes of the Commune, and by the middle of the 1890s had established a parliamentary presence. In addition the pacifist wing of the Socialist movement maintained a critique of the colonial expansionism to which the Third Republic had become committed. Working-class political engagement was growing apace. On 1 May 1890 more than 100,000 workers celebrated the first Labour Day in Paris—in contravention of the law. In 1895, the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT) was formed: it would grow into France’s most powerful trade union confederation and was at once involved in agitation for an eight-hour working day. In addition the most militant section of left-wing groups launched a campaign of anarchist violence in the wake of the Boulanger episode. A number of Parisian hotels, restaurants, magistrates’ homes and other sites were targeted, and deaths en-

sued. This kind of wild politics drew routine condemnation—but also surprising levels of support among working-class activists and the artistic and literary avant-garde.

If politics and class divided the regime, so did gender. A growing feminist lobby called for measures to extend social and political rights to women. In 1897 Marguerite Durand established the first feminist daily newspaper, with the provocatively Parisian title *La Fronde*. Durand was a shrewd critic of the highly patriarchal situation in which French women found themselves in the nineteenth century, condemned to be confined either to the kitchen or the bedroom. Although achievements in regard to women's educational entitlement, career opportunities, legal equality, control over property and rights to divorce were solid rather than outstanding, the feminist movement had a cultural impact which transcended its political muscle, particularly in Paris, where much of their activity was centred.

Tensions at the heart of politics over mass politics and women's rights were given a new ethnic and political focus in the mid-1890s by the Dreyfus Affair. The wrongful imprisonment of the Alsatian Jew and army officer Alfred Dreyfus in 1895 for alleged spying for the Germans split the political nation into two antagonistic groupings. The Dreyfusard cause was championed by the League of the Rights of Man, and expressed with clarity in novelist Émile Zola's famous article 'J'accuse' ('I accuse'). The article, which appeared in Radical politician Georges Clemenceau's *L'Aurore* newspaper in 1898, triggered a major outcry including street disturbances in Paris and other cities and it obliged Zola to take temporary refuge in England. 'J'accuse' pilloried the anti-Dreyfusard movement in the army, the Catholic church and the political establishment, as well as the hatefully anti-Semitic elements which had been drawn into the matter. In 1899 Dreyfus received a provisional pardon and this temporarily took some heat out of the dispute. Certain enmities caused by it would, however, be long lasting. Erstwhile Impressionist comrades-in-arms Degas and Pissarro never spoke to each other again because of their disagreements over Dreyfus; the anti-Dreyfusard Degas sacked his (Protestant and Dreyfusard) artist's model in pique too. The Affair would not be brought to a close until 1906, when Dreyfus received a full pardon and was reinstated within the army.

Paris seemed to take a good deal of political turbulence in its stride. During a session of the Chamber of Deputies in 1893, a bomb was thrown at the session chairman. He ducked, and the bomb demolished the wall behind his seat. He then re-emerged from beneath the podium to announce with studied sangfroid, '*La séance continue . . .*', for all the world as if he was a character from an Edmond Rostand play (and indeed the playwright's *Cyrano de*

*Bergerac* would be one of the hits of boulevard theatre on the eve of the 1900 Exposition). Such business-as-usual nonchalance overlay a core of anxiety at the heart of the regime.

The 1889 and 1900 Expositions sought to salve the political wounds of the embattled but resilient Third Republic, and present the best possible picture of a France unified around notions of progress and modernity. Behind these international and universalist claims and the commercial success of the two ventures, however, lay ongoing debates over the future of the regime, the nature of modernity and the character of the city of Paris.

The organizer of the 1889 Exposition was Baron Haussmann's erstwhile collaborator Alphand, and it was saturated in Haussmannian values. Its highpoint, the Eiffel tower, was a spectacular hymn to science and progress which the whole Exposition had been designed to epitomize. Iron-frame buildings had been becoming more numerous in Paris since the Second Empire, but this thousand-foot structure surpassed any other modern building. It was all the more impressive when linked with the massive iron-and-glass *Galerie des Machines* at its foot, which boasted the largest building span in the world, and in which many of the exhibits were housed. Édouard Lockroy, the chairman of the Exposition Committee, organized an exhibition around the tower's construction which patriotically stressed the conceptual audacity of Eiffel's project, its status as a feat of advanced engineering, and the teamwork required to erect it on schedule. He compared it with Diderot's *Encyclopédie* as a collective work which was based on intellectual rigour, valued manual labour, mobilized energies and served a pedagogic function for society at large. Such objectives chimed harmoniously with the Third Republic's patriotic fervour and its self-assigned 'civilizing mission' in the colonies.

One may question whether all the visitors to the 1889 Exposition shared this lofty civic vision. Even Lockroy himself was rather disappointed by the ambience of the Eiffel tower show which he claimed (surely with some exaggeration) more resembled the Folies-Bergère rather than the republican classroom. If the vaunting of science and progress had been undercut by the air of frivolity, mass spectacle and sheer entertainment in the 1889 show, this was even more the case eleven years later. The 1900 Exposition eschewed the somewhat fussy and cerebral pedagogic style and the infatuation with useful science which had characterized its predecessor. It chose to emphasize the pleasures of the senses, and to encourage visitors to think of themselves more as consumers than as citizens. The decorative and the feminine now took precedence over Eiffel-style engineering functionality and virility. Even so, there were still a great many scientific displays and competitions. The French made much of their continuing scientific excellence as a source of national strength: the names of Louis Pasteur, Claude Bernard and the Curies were ceaselessly celebrated in the exhibition literature. But the big science and technology prizes were taken home by the Germans. That France's fiercest international opponent triumphed in this way was a cause of concern. Were the French becoming soft? This was a question to which the emergence of feminism gave added pertinence. Significantly, two of the most remarked-upon pavilions on the Champ de Mars proved to be the Pavilion of the Decorative Arts and the Palace of Woman. The Palace of Fashion was the second-most-visited exhibit in the whole show. (Its 1.3 million attendance was surpassed only by the 2.1 million who swarmed to the Swiss village exhibit, with its live cows, *trompe-l'oeil* mountain vistas and yodelling demonstrations.) Moreover, the focal point of the entrance to the Exposition was *la Parisienne*—a five-metre-high effigy of a woman sporting the most up-to-date creations of Paris *haute couture*. What contemporaries called the 'supple and vital'<sup>2</sup> contours of this fashion model contrasted with the taut rigidity of the Eiffel tower, which was already looking quaintly archaic.

It was less that the arts prevailed over the sciences in the 1900 Exposition, or that style triumphed over substance; rather, the show seemed to demonstrate that style—a rather feminized, decorative style at that—*was* the substance which made Paris so distinctive, so radiant, so up-to-date, so modern. The Exposition put the spotlight on the city as the home of the modernist good life, a heady consumerist mix including bright fabrics, *haute couture* (yet also ready-made clothing), patterned wallpapers, bicycles, cameras, light-bulbs, sewing machines and sundry home comforts available through the great *magasins*. Industry now bent the knee to culture: on the southern

flank of the Champs-Élysées, the Palace of Industry from the 1855 Exposition was demolished to make way for two massive exhibition halls—the Grand Palais and the Petit Palais—which housed fine-art displays. Even the technological achievements of the Exposition were dolled up. The iron frame of the *Galerie des Machines* was clad in stone and stucco with elegant grottoes and ornamental fountains. There was a similar rococo and neo-baroque encasement to the iron frames of both the Grand and the Petit Palais and to the newly constructed Pont Alexandre-III, the most gloriously exuberant of all Parisian bridges, linking the Champs-Élysées to the Invalides.

Despite being devoted to the ephemeral and the fashionable, the 1900 Exposition had a more durable impact on the material environment of Paris than its 1889 predecessor.<sup>3</sup> Many of the built features in the 1900 Exposition, so openly oriented around leisure and pleasure, remained in place and made a lasting contribution to Parisian infrastructure. Improvements in mass communication designed to handle the huge crowds expected were a particular and enduring feature of the 1900 Exposition. These far surpassed earlier innovations in this domain—including even the moving walkway introduced at the 1889 Exposition. Vehicular transport had dramatically increased over the 1890s, so special efforts were required to ensure Paris did not become clogged with traffic. The Pont Alexandre-III—named after the Russian Tsar who was one of the many crowned heads to attend and with whom France had recently signed a defensive alliance—was built. The Gare de Lyon was expanded and given its distinctive campanile tower. A new station, the Gare d'Orsay, was opened on the Left Bank of the Seine and linked to the Gare d'Austerlitz to the east. (Closed to traffic on the eve of the Second World War, the building would reopen in 1986 as the Musée d'Orsay, one of the Fifth Republic's *grands projets*.)<sup>4</sup> Yet without doubt the biggest impact on the city's future was provided by the creation of the Parisian metropolitan railway—the Métro, Paris's most successful venture ever in public transport for the dawning mass age.

The spirit of the building regulations established in 1783–4 and modified by Haussmann in 1859 and 1864 was still very much observed within the city's twenty arrondissements. By the 1880s, however, an aesthetic critical of Haussmann was emerging. There were attacks on 'these new boulevards without turning, without perspectival adventure, implacably straight-lined . . . which recall some future American Babylon'.<sup>8</sup> In 1885 the architect Charles Garnier came out strongly against 'the odious use of the straight line'.<sup>9</sup> The anti-Haussmannian rhetoric was also deployed by a growing conservationist movement, spearheaded by the *Commission du Vieux Paris*, founded in 1897. One of the most-visited exhibits in the 1900 Exposition would in fact be one displaying *le Vieux Paris* in all its picturesque glory.