

5 Recycling the City

Paris, 1760s–1800

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Recycling the city—refurbishing, reusing, and redeploying buildings—is a practice as old as the first primitive hut redesigned for fresh purpose. Even caves were repeatedly reclaimed for animal husbandry, shelter from predators, and human dwellings. Pagan religious structures were also commonly remade to suit secular purposes or new forms of worship. But in urban France during the *Ancien Régime* recycling in general and recycled buildings in particular suffered from a bad press. The timeless practice was condemned by an Enlightenment discourse that was deeply critical of urban life, and, in particular, of the poor quality of city air, water, and spaces.¹ Enlightened commentators saw a particular danger in dilapidated buildings and crumbling infrastructure, propped up and patched up beyond their useful lives by dangerously precarious means. While the urban production of hazardous materials could be moved beyond a city's walls, the stone, brick, and mortar needed for new urban structures were, of course, less mobile. Older edifices with few windows or doors, as in converted farm buildings or poorly adapted ecclesiastic constructions turned into hospitals, spread disease by trapping and recirculating dangerously corrupted air, often called "miasma." Porous and poorly designed city roads and sewers made of recycled construction detritus, according to the celebrated physicist Pierre Bertholon de Saint-Lazare, in 1786, trapped fouled water during rainstorms and forced people to wade through raw sewage.² Overused and overextended urban structures were increasingly the favoured target of scorn by enlightened hygienic specialists.

Indeed, eighteenth-century Paris was perhaps the most congested and polluted city of Europe. The capital city, whose population in 1789 is estimated at between seven hundred thousand and eight hundred thousand souls in a nation of twenty-seven million people, was teeming with an impoverished population eking out a precarious existence in often cramped housing. Although no statistics can measure the quality of life in preindustrial urban centres, the environment of many Parisians was clearly far from idyllic. Large swaths of Paris on the eve of Revolution had become foul and insalubrious receptacles of new forms of mineral, animal, and human waste. Despite a certain image of *Ancien-Régime* Paris as a tidily ordered and well-policed

city peopled with skilled artisans of the luxury trades, in fact the city was rapidly becoming a rough-and-tumble manufacturing centre. Many commentators, most prominently Louis-Sebastien Mercier, Réstif de la Bretonne, and Siméon-Prosper Hardy, underscored how Paris' formal administrative existence and its messier, gritty realities were often deeply at odds with one another. The perception was widespread that the average Parisians' quality of life declined precipitously in the century of the Enlightenment.³

Paradoxically, however, while older construction was condemned as unbefitting the capital of the empire—too cramped, too closed, in sum, too confining of inhabitants and their exhalations and excretions—it was precisely newer construction that contributed greatly to the capital's miseries.⁴ With its steadily growing population, Paris was clearly in need of more inexpensive housing; but the very fabrication of low-cost building materials only added to the polluted urban environment of the capital. From start to finish, a given structure demanded the production of a wide range of chemical derivatives. As all construction begins with destruction, a range of concoctions were required to make explosive black powder, including charcoal, sulphur, and saltpetre, to pulverise boulders and to raze older structures. Once a given lot was emptied of debris, other materials, such as brick, mortar, and plaster, were increasingly made on a large scale and with new methods of production, which in turn generated waste products and much detritus, as well as presenting an ever-growing challenge to the health and safety of inhabitants.⁵

Along with the hygienic advocates of the Enlightenment, the policing and guild authorities overseeing Parisian construction during the *Ancien Régime*'s boom years also rejected the reuse of materials and buildings. Obsessive newness in construction paradoxically added to unhygienic conditions in the capital. A post-1763 construction boom—encouraged by the easing of fiscal pressures in the period after the Seven Year's War—greatly expanded the market for inexpensive construction. Money flowing to stones increased dramatically after the August 1766 ordinance permitting investors in a project to claim all property on a construction site if their building contractors went bankrupt. This ordinance virtually eliminated risk for speculation, while increasing the financial burden of credit-worthy guilds.⁶ Guild masters, who would lose their total outlay in cases of the bankruptcy of a collaborating building contractor, came to rely increasingly upon their guilds as credit unions. The resulting financial and housing bubble for investors had spectacular consequences. Between 1770 and 1789 Parisians accumulated debts averaging 28 million livres per year; almost half, 12 million livres, of these debts were invested annually in apartments, houses, and land, with the vast majority of this real estate located in Paris.⁷

But the credit crunch amidst the economic downturn of 1787 initiated the very fiscal crisis that helped topple the *Ancien Régime*, leading to a sudden collapse of the housing market. During a fragile recovery, beginning in the spring of 1791, administrators of the Revolution shifted priorities from

wholesale new construction to the large-scale recycling and conversion of nationalised buildings in the form of *biens nationaux*. The mission of a pragmatic, cost-efficient, revolutionary architecture in the capital was later to be defined as the guiding principle in the period of the Directory (1795–1799), which created a national policy of public construction under the centralised and powerful *Conseil des bâtiments civils*. Under the guidance of the *Conseil*, an often-haphazard and improvised system of refitting older structures was transformed into a public service of construction. Accountability to public finances, access to any and all public structures to all citizens, and transparency in the way older structures were transformed, imposed a powerful logic of revolutionary-era urban development. Finally, in the articulation of a national policy of public construction based on recycling older structures, the French Revolution's administrators sketched out the vital elements of what future generations would call modern urban planning, in the sense of the concerted search for the greater integration, harmony, and coherence of an entire city.⁸

If seen through the anachronistic perspective of Haussmannisation, urban planning or revitalisation, rehabilitation, reform, and other ways to designate *embellissement* in the aestheticizing vocabulary of the eighteenth century, meant the wholesale razing and rebuilding of large parts of the city. Yet, the preindustrial search for orderly and aligned streets; homogenous construction styles and materials; "rational" use of buildings and public space; and generalised systems of sanitation and hygiene throughout the city, certainly did not have to wait for the second half of the nineteenth century.⁹ Without the financial means to realise these objectives, administrators of the Directory also sought to assure the health, well-being, and comfort of urban dwellers, particularly in the capital city. A durable achievement of the *Conseil des bâtiments civils* was to inscribe ambitions of *Ancien-Régime embellissement* within a new political order, in which republican administration took responsibility for making the city functional as a public service and later as an integral right of citizenship. At the core of the Directory's *embellissement* project for the capital city was a policy to recycle nationalised buildings, in particular, former ecclesiastical structures, to create a civic architecture whose primary quality, as we will see, was attention to a strict economy of means.

THE PARISIAN ENVIRONMENT ON THE EVE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Eyewitness accounts at the end of the *Ancien Régime* converge on the quality of air, water, and soil in Paris of many quarters: they were characterised as a "miasma" of nasty chemicals, detritus, and industrial waste.¹⁰ To the north and east, beginning in the 1770s, chemical laboratories, primitive manufactures, breweries, and distilleries germinated. The putrid smell of

sulphuric acid, nitric acid, hydrochloric acid, as well as vinegars, salts, and metallic chinks, choked inhabitants of entire quarters. To the south, sewage and polluted waters led to stench-filled summers in swaths of the capital city, such as the quarters where the Bièvre tributary trickled through the capital city. Used as a depository of by-products derived from horse urine by over thirty officially registered tanners, and as an open sewer by much of the Left Bank, the Bièvre caused people to faint from its devastating fumes.¹¹ Even to the wealthier northern and western areas, a construction boom kicked up irritating clouds of vapour riddled with dust, dirt, plaster, and hazardous chemicals used in explosions to clear away older structures. Almost everywhere, in a capital lacking the most basic sanitation facilities, and with very few sewers, human, horse, and other animal excrement added to the stench of decaying meat, fish, and vegetables, often leftover spoilage from the many markets.¹² Near the quarter of the central market, *les Halles*, Parisians living around the *Cimetière des innocents* were regaled with the smell of decomposing corpses when the shallow level of the graves proved insufficiently deep, with the quarter invaded by foul exhalations, leading to the cemetery's hasty closure and evacuation of remains to the former quarries of the *Tombe-Issoire* in 1785.¹³

Nor was there easy escape for most Parisians. Green patches were increasingly rare in a cramped capital city. Nature paid the heaviest price where rental prices exploded and labour migration from the provinces continued unabated, estimated at about seven to fourteen thousand arrivals per year in the second half of the eighteenth century. The population explosion in Paris fed a burgeoning market in sordid lodging homes (*chambres garnies*) for migrant Creusois, Normands, Auvergnats, and other "étrangers." In the outlying areas, particularly to the west where monasteries and convents once thrived amidst agricultural terrain interspersed with a few *hôtels particuliers*, vast expanses of farmland and pasture were snatched up and developed by speculators. The purchase and development of the immense property of the ruined Mathurins order, for example by the wealthy property developer and *fermier général* Jacques-Louis-Guillaume Bouret de Vézelay in the 1770s, led to the hasty construction of several new neighbourhoods out of once-bucolic areas. The Chaussée d'Antin area, in the vicinity of the Faubourg Montmartre, Saint-Lazare, and the Buttes Saint-Roch, was transformed from a sparsely built pastoral into a bustling neighbourhood in the space of one generation.¹⁴

The Parisian eighteenth-century economy was fast becoming a hybrid economy of scale where old and new coexisted in perfect symbiosis. For example, in the outlying Faubourg Saint-Marcel the labour-intensive activity of textile and leather production, with its timeless artisanal organisation of work, grew side-by-side with novel and fast-developing sectors such as the extraction of saltpetre for explosives, needed for land-clearing, demolition, and military purposes. (Saltpetre collection by ordinary citizens was later promoted by revolutionaries as a patriotic contribution to the war effort.)¹⁵

But what tied together both old and new was the propensity to pollute—this ensured that Paris was a hazardous environment for many inhabitants. The lucky few who could flee avoided even the prestigious neighbourhood of the Marais, stigmatised with the stamp of aristocratic old money, and where the foul atmosphere was hardly purer. As a partial result of pollution in the city centre, the quarter close to the Invalides, in the far-western parts of the Left Bank, was chosen for elite *hôtels particuliers*. The area enjoyed a more wholesome atmosphere, at least in the minds of contemporaries, for it was widely believed that purer air was assured to blow directly from the plains to the west of the capital.

Of all the sectors of the Parisian economy, moreover, the "carbon footprint" was perhaps the widest and deepest in construction because of its sheer scale. The building industry was the second most important economic sector of the French economy—a runner-up to agriculture—until the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, most building methods scarcely changed since the abolition of wood construction during the reign of Henry IV, when combustible timber frames were banned in Paris by a 1604 ordinance.¹⁶ Even after this formal eradication within the city walls of Paris, the conversion of the primary material of buildings from wood to minerals was a slow process. The greatest challenge was the prohibitive cost of producing, assembling, and shipping most building materials to a capital which imposed an onerous merchandise tax, the *octroi*, on material passing through the city walls. This added significant cost to erecting buildings in the capital. Despite the expense of keeping manufactures of explosives, plaster, brick, and mortar away from population centres, hazardous production methods incited authorities to ban their manufacture within cities.¹⁷

The sheer quantity of construction in the Parisian building boom between the 1760s and 1780s led to growing recourse to illegal methods of preparing building materials. The history of the clandestine production of construction supplies begins with coal. As deforestation drove up the price of wood, ruining many urban lumberyards, coal became the alternative fuel of choice in the late eighteenth century. The intense heat generated by newly designed kilns emboldened building contractors to design ever-larger ovens to prepare plaster.¹⁸ As Thomas Le Roux convincingly shows, these industrial ovens were frequently confiscated by the Paris police within the city walls as clandestine coal-burning ovens circumvented the *octroi* tax. The size of one industrial oven, seized in 1765, measured an intimidating three metres in diameter and six metres in height. Bricks, mortar, limestone, and chalk were hence rendered less expensive but were more dangerous to greater numbers of inhabitants to produce. No fewer than thirty-four illegal industrial-sized coal-burning chalk ovens were counted by the police in northeast Paris in 1789.¹⁹ These merely added another layer to the stench of new plaster manufactures, as well as the clouds of dust emitted from massive quarries scattered throughout the city, in particular, in Montmartre, Saint-Victor, Saint-Marcel, Vaugirard, the Buttes-Chaumont, Pantin, Belleville, and Ménilmontant. Explosives used

to raze older structures and to clear the ground, gypsum plaster and limestone plaster for the construction of walls, highly corrosive metal forges for ironworks, as well as the increasing demand for large-scale brickworks and noxious glassworks, led to the accumulation of bad air, water, detritus, and foul waste products in the capital city.²⁰

The political implications of a heavily polluted capital city for the tottering *Ancien Régime* should not be underestimated. The accretion of bad air and water that sickened Parisians also inspired demands for expanding civic rights and responsibilities. The public sphere was also a space to demand the right to breathe and to have access to clean water. Earlier, Louis XIV had understood this in a vast campaign to build fountains to bring water to increasingly thirsty Parisians in the seventeenth century.²¹ His Bourbon successors, more conscious of emptied royal coffers, were less capable and inclined to invest public finances in an extravagant manner. In reaction, an Enlightenment urban discourse insisted on the necessity to remake urban centres with greater attention to the health and well-being of their inhabitants. Perhaps the first writer to use *embellissement* to mean the "rational" organisation of Parisian streets and places for the population was the architect and entrepreneur Pierre-Alexis Delamair (1676–1745). In two noted publications of 1737 and 1738, Delamair denounced the declining quality of life in the capital city as linked to its environment. While he employed a familiar hygienic discourse to question whether Paris was a new Rome or new Babylon, Delamair also helped transform the larger debate over possible solutions. Rather than promote the physical enlargement of Paris' size, as was then a commonplace, he focused on transforming the inner city by razing unhealthy quarters to allow for the free circulation of fresh air.²²

The great debate elaborated by those later called "urbanists" centred upon the aerian discourse sketched out by Delamair. Free circulation was a central metaphor for the movement of not just air, but traffic, people, light, water, goods, and ultimately even capital. Architects who contributed to public debates on urban revitalisation, such as Pierre-Louis Moreau, Pierre Patte, and Charles Wailly, had frequent recourse to the terms of aerian discourse. The dismal, cramped housing in the city centre should give way to spacious squares and large streets. Contributing to this refrain, the architectural theorist Marc-Antoine Laugier and architect Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières sought the cause of the declining quality of life in the capital in the actions of profiteers who preyed on the misery of the labouring poor by piling up unworthy and crowded housing—perhaps the first denunciation of what the future would call slumlords.²³ Another adherent to the aerian discourse was no less a figure than Voltaire. In 1749, Voltaire noted the brutal contrast between wealthy, airy and spacious neighbourhoods of the outskirts and the city centre of Paris:

Oversized neighbourhoods demand public places; and whereas the Arc de Triomphe of the porte Saint-Denis and the equestrian statue of

Henri le Grand, the two bridges, these two superb quais, that of the Louvre, the Tuileries, the Champs-Élysées, equal or surpass the beauties of ancient Rome, the city centre, obscure, packed, hideous, represents the most shameful barbarism of the past. We say it without end: but how long can we say it without fixing it?²⁴

Voltaire's conclusion, never heeded, was that the Crown needed to focus more on *embellissement* of the quotidian life of Parisians—in particular, by creating more open spaces—rather than on wasteful monuments to imperial grandeur.

CONSTRUCTION IN THE ANCIEN RÉGIME

Ancien Régime public construction imposed newness over reuse; expansion over rehabilitation; and wastefulness over recycling. Then, as now, not only the fabrication of building materials, but the very act of construction produced much pollution. Moreover, the ravages of building the city were made worse by the lack of comprehensive urban planning. Controls over private building in Paris were largely fragmented within a dense web of *Ancien-Régime* corporate institutions which jealously assured the quality control of construction. In Paris, the *Chambre des bâtiments* was a particularly efficient corporate body that resembled a housing authority of more contemporary times. The *Chambre* comprised inspectors, architects, master artisans, and magistrates who carefully policed over the contractual relationship between builders and proprietors.²⁵ No private construction in Paris took place without plans previously approved by this housing authority—and the soundness of materials, scrupulously inspected before and after construction, formed the bulk of the corporation's affairs.²⁶

Protectionism was enforced by the *Chambre* upon the labour force above all. Guild statutes were applied to the letter in seeing to it that all journeymen were properly working for a master, and "masterless men" in incorporated trades, called *chambrelains*, were banned from the profession by blacklisting and the confiscation of their tools. Towards the end of the *Ancien Régime*, corporations increasingly cracked down on recycled building materials, based on the fear that used materials were compromised and would quickly disintegrate, causing structures to collapse.²⁷ While an oft-exaggerated threat, the use of recovered supplies was a condemnable form of cheating, *malfaçon*, in the terminology of the epoch. Entrepreneurs and masters accused of *malfaçon* risked lawsuits and banishment from the annual trade almanac, the *Almanach des bâtiments*, a listing of the names and addresses of qualified Parisian builders with the technical expertise for each task on the building site.²⁸ Also, the guilds routinely exercised their privilege to raid construction sites to inspect materials. The powerful carpentry guild, one of the most restrictive of construction guilds, was fiercely protective of the

quality of materials. Carpentry guild syndics and other officers concentrated on seizing recycled wood—which they claimed might have been fished out of the Seine—used in scaffolding, or roof beams, window frames, or stairs, a most dangerous form of deceit for masters, workers, and passers-by alike. Clearly, the increasingly high price of lumber, which surged dramatically in the freezing winter of 1788–1789, made the use of mouldering or humid materials a real danger for the carpentry trades. In collaboration with the police commissioner Allix, the syndics and *adjoints* of the carpentry guild engaged in at least eighty-one raids in the years between 1784 and 1790. Predictably, the raids provoked much rancour between journeymen and masters in the waning years of the *Ancien Régime*.²⁹

The profligate material culture of *Ancien Régime* construction was aggravated by haphazard development. Public construction was guided more by royal magnificence to celebrate the power of the Bourbon state than by urban planning. It was also informed by financially driven principles. Sparkling new structures in neglected parts of the city were intended to encourage urban revitalisation. Monuments and royal places were thus purposefully planned for peripheral areas. Marginal neighbourhoods were subsequently developed by speculators and developers around these projects. On the Right Bank, the aristocratic Marais quarter was one of the most famous examples, having received a boost with the Place Royale—today's Place des Vosges—completed after 1612. The Place Dauphine, near the newly constructed Pont Neuf in the early seventeenth century as well the innovative Halle au Blé, designed by Nicolas le Camus de Mézières and completed in 1782, were other examples of this earlier aspiration to stimulate private development in neglected areas of the capital city by the erection of major public structures. Urban rehabilitation, in other words, was a mere corollary to royal monumentalism.

TWO PATHS TO URBAN EMBELLISSEMENT: PARIS' FAUBOURG SAINT-MARCEL AND LYON'S BROTTEAUX, 1764–1789

What difference, if any, did the French Revolution make in matters concerning *embellissement*? On the periphery of Paris, a prominent example of renewal through grandiose projects, first royal then revolutionary, was the Left Bank Church of Sainte Geneviève near the Faubourg Saint-Marcel. It was a magnet for new commerce after ground was broken in 1764. The diverse social profile of Faubourg Saint-Marcel, populated by about ten per cent of the Parisian population, belied its reputation as a poor, marginal, and even dangerous zone. During the quarter century of its construction, many small enterprises, grocers, and larger workshops owed their prosperity by furnishing the site's building materials, the food, water, and wine, and even by coordinating specialised labour—especially the skilled workmen such as sculptors, carpenters, and metalworkers. A conveniently located limestone

quarry was heavily exploited by contractors with ties to the site. By the time of the Revolution, the neighbourhood earned a reputation as a vital industrial engine for the capital city. Here again, Paris was rapidly transformed into a manufacturing centre well before the age of industrialisation.³⁰

Aided in particular by the infusion of four million *livres tournois* in borrowed credit for the completion of the Church of Sainte-Geneviève in June 1784, the neighbourhood was steadily benefiting from the massive *chantier* on its outskirts. For example, a multitude of stores as well as indoor and open-air workshops were frequented by more than five-hundred-and-fifty building tradesmen of the construction site.³¹ The Revolution's transformation of the Sainte-Geneviève Church into the Panthéon in April 1791 also served the dynamism of the quarter. In June 1791 the National Assembly voted a million *livres tournois* in credits transferred directly to public workshops where the indigent poor was engaged in menial tasks, particularly, clearing brush and preparing grounds for road construction. The Revolution's major recycled monument, logically enough, called for recycled funds. Such infusion of public monies in the neighbourhood launched anew a virtuous commercial cycle. Numerous bonnet makers and blanket weavers were clustered around the Gobelins sector; a host of shoe smiths thrived near the site of the Panthéon; and several breweries were installed on the rue de Mouffetard.³² The formerly marginal neighbourhood was fast becoming an economically flourishing quarter.

The worksite of the Pantheon also gave greater visibility to the Revolution's public employment efforts, to the exasperation of its newly nominated supervisor, Quatremère de Quincy. In the summer of 1791, Quatremère denounced the autonomy of the site's labourers who "look upon their work as their property, and the building as a republic where they are co-citizens and believe as a consequence that it is their right to name their chiefs, their inspectors and to distribute the tasks arbitrarily."³³ He was reacting to the deluge of petition literature threatening strikes and challenging the site's direction in labour issues, for the *Panthéon* had a difficult but avowed social function to assure jobs. As certain tasks of refurbishing were brought to completion, such as carpentry work for scaffolding, labourers resisted being laid off. Amidst a strike of carpenters on the site, the chief engineer of the site Rondelet, wrote: "We might say that in dedicating this Temple to Glory, we were building a charity workshop."³⁴ Following its economic fortunes, the political integration of the contentious Faubourg Saint-Marcel within revolutionary Paris was well underway.

While public investment in the Panthéon advanced the fuller social, economic, and political incorporation of the Faubourg Saint-Marcel, however, efforts in provincial cities to develop outlying neighbourhoods were far less successful during the end of the *Ancien Régime* and Revolution. In contrast to some quarters of Paris, for example, was the second city of France, Lyon. At the start of the same post-Seven Year's War building boom that transformed Paris, a private real-estate scheme in Lyon was crafted by architect,

speculator, promoter, and developer Jean-Antoine Morand. His trusted collaborator in this venture was none other than Sainte-Geneviève's chief architect, Jacques-Germain Soufflot. Together, they created a company to project Lyon's densely crowded and insalubrious residential areas towards the east starting in the 1760s. In Lyon, the particular challenge to develop the city's suburbs was not only incarnated by city walls but imposed by its second river, the Rhône. Despite demographic and economic pressures to expand, to breach not only the city walls but to cross the Rhône itself, the weight of tradition embodied by many local interests repeatedly blocked the development of Lyon.³⁵

Morand's celebrated *Plan circulaire* for Lyon, first sketched out in 1764 but republished as a lavishly engraved map in 1775, incorporated manufactures and warehouses, residential quarters, parks, promenades, and squares. Creating a model of integrated urban planning for future centuries, Morand had cleverly conceived of what future generations would call zoning. His plan neatly separated habitations and areas where manufacturing created hazards to the Lyonnais population. The *Plan circulaire* also reimagined the city of Lyon as an orderly and coherent whole. It sought, above all, to rehabilitate a neglected outlying suburb, which became a century later the Brotteaux, also called the Quartier Morand. Morand's agenda was, in fact, that of many a future urban planner: the annexation and development of a city's suburbs to alleviate congestion, limit manufactures to outlying areas, enlarge the tax base, and generally renovate by allowing freer circulation of people and goods. It represented, in theory at least, the triumph of a new discourse in urban matters. But the end of the *Ancien Régime* was not propitious to such "rational" urban development. Opposition from individual proprietors as well as foot-dragging by traditionalists in Lyon's *Hôtel de ville*, led to fruitless years of litigation.³⁶

The cumulative pressures brought by intransigent municipal officers, proprietors demanding feudal dues, and ecclesiastical institutions asserting fiscal privileges, kept Lyon enclosed within a constricted geographic compass for over a century. Morand wasted much time lobbying the Crown's ministers at Versailles for dispensation against this slew of powerful local interests. He found welcome support with those connected to the brave new world of engineering at the *Ecole nationale des ponts et chaussées*, which opened in 1747. But even as he triumphantly returned to Lyon with a royal decree authorising the beginning of construction in 1771, Morand became ever more a threat as an outsider to Lyon's conservative elite. Morand's positioning in the Revolution, however, paradoxically left him exposed to the charge of complicity with the very elite he had detested; he was condemned and executed during the Terror. The guillotine that took Morand's life in January 1794 was situated next to an innovative wooden bridge he had designed, built, and that would carry his name.³⁷

The revitalisation of the Parisian Faubourg Saint-Marcel and Morand's unsuccessful plan to remake Lyon provide a contrasting, but deeply telling,

narrative about the erecting, expansion, and *embellissement* of cities at the end of the *Ancien Régime*. Along with the diminishing capacities of the bankrupt monarchy to build monumental structures, urban development was chaotic and arbitrary. Business ventures and commercial opportunities borne of profitable developmental schemes were determinant in building schemes—but they were in turn entirely dependent on arbitrary factors, particularly, those of entrenched local interests, that at times assured their failure. *Ancien Régime* municipalities, every bit as much as the Crown, often lost control of the administration in favour of "feudal" factionalism.

The French Revolution's attention to urban matters flowed directly from the frustrating experiences of a multitude of failed efforts to transform cities. Small wonder that the National Assembly received and published many projects for reconstructing Paris from prominent architects, critics, and even amateur connoisseurs, underscoring a conviction that vast opportunities existed for remaking the capital. Notable plans to remake Paris were submitted by the architects De Wailly, Brogniart, Poyet, Ledoux, Boullée, Lequeu, Gisors, Rousseau, Legrand and Molinos, Percier, and Fontaine, with little success for their authors.³⁸ While these ambitious plans were not feasible in the midst of an economic crisis, they point to an ambition among architects to put their art to use in the new order. In theory, the regeneration of the French nation would follow a symbolic appropriation of the public space of the capital by architects. In practice, however, it was not the science of architecture but political solutions to urban breakdown that were prominently featured on the revolutionary agenda of 1789. Reforms directly dismantled the entrenched, arbitrary, and corrupt world of France's municipal elites. Also, starting in late 1789, the decree of the seizure and sale of ecclesiastic *biens nationaux* opened fresh economic opportunities for investment in land and stones. Confiscations were later extended to the émigrés and former nobility. The creation of a new currency, the *assignats*, and above all the refounding of municipal institutions, were intended to make sure that future entrepreneurs would not be blocked—as happened in Lyon—by "feudal" interests again.³⁹

REVOLUTION, CONSTRUCTION, AND RECYCLING

The French Revolution is associated not with construction, and with cranes, stones, mortar, and scaffolding, but their precise opposite—vandalism, demolition, and the obliteration of the past with the project to annihilate the *Ancien Régime*. The Revolution evokes, in sum, deconstruction and violence, the ground-clearing to prepare the way for an uncontested capital city. Its history, in fact, is far more complex, and was intimately tied to the rise of the secularisation, safeguarding, and redeployment of older structures. At the same time, the institutions of the French Revolution did not have the financial means to alleviate what Voltaire called the "shameful barbarism"

of Parisian neighbourhoods by remaking urban centres.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the revolutionary period created the opportunity for bourgeois urban dwellers to articulate the right to a "hygienic" protection from the pollution entailed by the rapid economic and urban development of the capital.

The Parisians' lists of grievances, the *cahiers de doléances*, submitted early in 1789, were attentive to the environmental problems of the capital created by unnecessary construction. Many *doléances* denounced the fervour for new development by relating them to symptoms of monarchical megalomania. The case of the recently completed *Mur des fermiers-généraux* surrounding Paris exposed inhabitants on the outskirts to the dust, noise, and contamination of futile monumentality between 1785 and 1788.⁴¹ As the wall could be breached only by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's *barrières*, thirty planned tollhouses, they were the first targets of the revolutionary crowd, which vented their fury in destroying many of them in the days before the taking and dismantling of the Bastille. Apparently, with the Revolution, the occasion to rein in the excessive zeal of speculators, promoters, builders, and even visionary architects had finally arrived.⁴²

The Revolution, in sum, was a propitious political moment to halt haphazard construction and provide an interlude to the dangers and inconvenience of long-term *chantiers*. For the decade of the 1790s was among the most outstanding moments of architectural recycling in the history of modern Europe. In Paris alone, at least a thousand noble and ecclesiastical structures—nearly one in ten of Parisian properties and twelve percent of all land in the capital—were nationalised and auctioned as *biens nationaux* starting in the fall of 1790. This transfer of land and buildings to the state, and then to new private owners (thirteen percent of investors in *biens nationaux* were building contractors), created a dynamic of reselling, restoring, refitting, and reusing buildings.⁴³

During the Revolution, however, financial pressures to maintain, alter, or repair dictated a policy of fresh stewardship and reuse. But in contrast to the modern idea of patrimony or historical monuments, central to contemporary urban planning, there was no corollary claim for conserving original structures in their original state. The Revolution's architectural recycling was the fruit of circumstance not connoisseurship or ideology. The need to stave off the ravages, first of sovereign debt and then of war, starting in the summer of 1792, imposed the logic of giving new proprietors free hand to do as they wished with the confiscated buildings. From the distant Abbey of Fontenay, reused as a paper mill, to the Parisian church-run chapter houses on the rue de Charonne, transformed by the entrepreneur François Richard (later known as Richard-Lenoir) into spinning establishments, the Revolution shaped a vibrant dynamic for the profitable refitting of existing constructions.⁴⁴

Perhaps no single individual understood the metaphoric and commercial importance of revolutionary recycling more than self-described "architect, entrepreneur, former master mason, former journeyman," Pierre-François

Palloy (1754–1835), the building contractor engaged to dismantle the Bastille. Starting on the evening of 14 July 1789, without authority from national or municipal officials, Palloy mobilised a massive labour force of four-hundred building tradesmen to dismantle the fortress while turning its debris into souvenirs. Iron shackles were melted into medals and the stones were carved into souvenir likenesses of the fortress, and were then sold to commemorate the cult of the *Vainqueurs de la Bastille*. Palloy thus contributed a "patriotic cult of relics" to festive celebrations of the taking of the Bastille.⁴⁵

In sharp contrast to *Ancien Régime* corporations Palloy made recycling central to his particular "brand" as contractor. As a prolific entrepreneur, seeking fame and fortune, he sent to municipalities throughout France the Bastille's carved souvenir stones. He was a shrewdly ambitious and dynamic representative of new man at the pinnacle of the building trades. Having started as a bricklayer, Palloy's autobiography, repeated incessantly in pamphlets, was a classic example of social ascension helped, he stressed, by the Revolution's meritocratic inspiration.⁴⁶ His tireless self-promotion led to the publication of two hundred distinct publications of political brochures, maps, songs, and assorted construction proposals, many under assorted pseudonyms, and nearly all self-financed. Palloy's prodigious wealth flourished in the construction business during the Revolution, but was ultimately squandered in massive printing bills for publications.⁴⁷

Palloy and the Panthéon were the private and public antipodes of revolutionary-era recycling. They also embody the haphazard and disordered nature of building in the period when the corporate universe of the *Ancien Régime* was dismantled but the institutions of the new regime were not yet in place. The administrative vacuum no doubt boosted Palloy in his ambition to appropriate and transform the Bastille's debris into a lucrative commerce in souvenirs. Also, as witnessed in the labour strife at the Panthéon's site, the lack of a clear political and managerial hierarchy emboldened the contentious labour force to make greater demands for employment opportunities and higher salaries.

As nature hates a vacuum, so does civilisation. The impulse to centralise authority over construction led to the foundation of the *Conseil des bâtiments civils* to oversee the recycling and reconversion of nationalised religious buildings and the confiscated property of *émigrés*. This unique administration survived all phases of the Revolution. Starting in late 1795, the Directory gave this bureaucratic organ a broad mandate over public structures, distinguishing thereafter between infrastructure and buildings. Its directive was to centralise all public investment construction in the hands of the three celebrated public architects. The Panthéon's Chief Inspector Rondelet, the prodigious civic architect, Alexandre-Théodore Brogniart, and the future architect of the Arc de Triomphe, Jean-François Chalgrin, three advocates of a classical and practical civic architecture, oversaw a team of official inspectors. In a finely defined schema, each inspector had complete

responsibility over one of six "classes" of structures, in which the function of a given building—hospitals, barracks, prisons—dictated its place in a hierarchy of investment priorities. In the new order, the administration of public edifices made steep demands on the time, labour, and even equipment of construction entrepreneurs to engage in the renovation of nationalised buildings: a form of requisition by another name. Finally, the mission of a pragmatic, cost-efficient, revolutionary architecture was defined and made the core of official building policy.⁴⁸

The council's charge was formulated in a circular issued by Rondelet in the spring of 1796. Rondelet called for assurances that "no work relating to civic buildings be undertaken at national expense without its utility, necessity, or other possible advantages having been established beforehand." He demanded scrupulous "perfection, solidity, and economy" as well as methodological verification of all payments.⁴⁹ These directives were scrupulously applied. In pursuit of economy, half of the numerous detention centres, prisons, courthouses, and police stations were located in recycled former religious structures, in particular, churches, monasteries, convents, and former dependencies such as stables. These were systematically recalibrated and refurbished to suit their new function. However, a focus on perfection at times led inspectors to excess zeal. They rejected for payment the slightest negligence to detailed proposals. Hospitals designed with beds less than sixty centimetres apart—considered the minimum space to avoid the spread of disease—were ordered to be completely overhauled. Legal tribunals that did not allow for theatrical courtroom entries were condemned to be redone. In sum, the *Conseil des bâtiments civils* created an architecture of design tightly defined by a written program, a series of serviceable demands entirely suited to their function rather than to aesthetic form.⁵⁰

As Dominique Margairaz argues, the origin of public service in the modern sense of the term began in the Directory period of the Revolution as the state assumed responsibility to assure equal access to a service and the continuity of its exploitation.⁵¹ A national policy of recycling nationalised structures in accordance with a strictly functional architecture represented the origin of a public service of construction. It also scrupulously respected the economy of public finances. Unlike the random and wasteful urban development of the *Ancien Régime*, the Revolution henceforth promised strict financial and functional accountancy to the nation. And while the notion of national patrimony would await the July Monarchy, and the founding of the office of an *Inspecteur général des monuments historiques*, the Revolution also created a movement for the systematic cataloguing and assessment of important historical structures for their functional value to the capital and nation. Revolutionary institutions thus adopted a centralised method of reconceiving the use of old buildings and redeploying structures within their urban context—a first step towards what the future would loosely call urban planning. Whether by rebuilding (as on the site of the Panthéon), refitting (as with numerous hospitals and prisons), or even

remaking into artefacts (as Palloy did to the Bastille), the logic of recycling prevailed. The slower but steadier development of urban France during the Revolution permitted, in accordance with Rondelet's promise cited above, the beginning of planned construction guided by the public's demand for "perfection, solidity, and economy."

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6 Renewing and Refashioning Recycling Furniture at the Late Stuart Court (1689-1714)

Olivia Fryman

During the spring of 1699 the renowned cabinetmaker Gerrit Jensen (d.1715) made a series of visits to the royal palace of Kensington, where he and his assistants began work cleaning and repairing a variety of furnishings in William III's apartments.¹ Amongst other tasks, Jensen's work included "mending and cleaning seven large Oval Sconces and the Chimney Sconces in the council chamber," "cleaning and Polishing a Princeswood Table and Stands and Frame and cleaning the chimney glass in the little Bedchamber," and "mending ye Varnish and Polishing ye Marquettree Tables and Stands and Bookcase and varnishing the clockcase in the Gallery."² This account for Kensington is typical of many warrants and bills that record work on dirty, damaged and unwanted furnishings at English royal palaces during the period. These can be categorised in two ways: furniture renewal through cleaning and repairs, and furniture refashioning that involved either the partial alteration or whole scale transformation of objects. Both of these strategies were intended to maintain the worth, appearance, and usefulness of furnishings and materials that were exceptionally valuable and symbolically rich. Focusing on the period from the accession of William III and Mary II in 1689 to the death of Queen Anne in 1714, this chapter discusses the methods of renewing and refashioning royal furniture and contextualises these practices in relation to contemporary aesthetic taste and attitudes towards monarchical spending and magnificence.

Jensen's bill for his work at Kensington during the spring of 1699 survives today in the papers of the Great Wardrobe, the household department that was responsible for supplying furniture for the court. The majority of the Wardrobe papers are held within records of the Lord Chamberlain, the court official who managed the public and ceremonial life of the sovereign.³ For court and furniture historians, these archives have provided a rich source of information. In particular, studies have focused on the celebrated craftsmen Gerrit Jensen (mentioned above), the French upholsterer Francis Lapiere (d.1714), the Huguenot carver and gilder Jean Pelletier (d.1704), and the identification of records relating to their extant works.⁴ In addition, scholars have stressed the significance of taste, fashionability, and conspicuous consumption as key components of sovereignty during this period.⁵ Although

The Afterlife of Used Things

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**Edited by Ariane Fennetaux,
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