

da oscurità ad oscurità:

Image, text & ideology in the public open spaces of Rome

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Inscription | Enclosure | Insubordination: Graffiti and publicness of space in Italian social conflict



'Marzo' near Via Giulia and Vicolo del Polverone, Rome, July 1985 photograph by Gordon Brent Ingram

While time is the vector of contract, space is the field of forcible possession. The expropriation and control of space, which Marx indicates as primitive accumulation, is the absolute precondition in every phase for the calculation of capital returns. While the idyllic dream of empty time, suitable for frictionless

quantification, seeks to deny the discomfiting history of space's conquest, the urban tangle of antagonistic interests inexorably contains the impression of this conflict between the rulers and the ruled within its architecture, like a fossilized print of some now displaced organism. Because the city is the world-historical cradle of modern subjectivities, no reading of the urban arena is innocent of prejudices about the genetic constitution of civil society and group submission or insubordination. Reflections on urban design inescapably position political theories about civic government, which, in turn, calibrate time-space factors to propose a functioning model of the city. Thus, critical writing cannot explicate metropolitan elements, like graffiti, without implicating itself as one of them. If this is the case, how can writing, on or off the street, redirect urban expression? Or, what is the city to make of the *scritti's* critical remarks?

The current edifice of natural rights theory, advertising the individual in full possession of his self and free of prior determinations, while itself a product of the urban entrepot, is paradoxically sub- or anti-urban as it invokes a pastoral where exchange occurs in a pellucid state of mutual confidence uninterrupted by the noise of brokers hustling to beat their market competition.² Promoting the legal fiction of inter-personal objectivity, social contract theory denies its own cosmopolitan origins for the sake of commodity transitivity; it becomes embarrassed (or is this simply a tactic?) when faced with the self-evident complexity and distinctive contradictions of cities. Consequently, the City of Lockean free-traders loses its Augustan composure when urban muddle delays or misdirects the swift traffic of goods, and it speeds to tear itself down in a neo-classical gesture of surface clearing to achieve the accrued benefits of clearly defined location. A counter philosophy exists, however, in "Machiavellian" urbanity. Crafted by fifteenth-century Florentines when they were faced with the looming shadow of lost autonomy, either through foreign occupation or renewed local despotism, the idea of republican power arose, which was embodied by the active citizen confronting the vicissitudes of fortune aggravated by pre-existing power differentials.³ If the human actually is a political animal, a creature of the mixed polis, Machiavelli and his ideological inheritors sought communal strength not within a cool diorama of equals leisurely signing deeds of collegial transfer, but by saddling the centaur of various interests through by harnessing an amalgam of social coercion and consent, persuasion and compulsion. If the town of natural rights imagines itself as an Edenic garden city, the republican one exists in a post-lapsarian environment. Attuned to history's apocalyptic dysfunction, its reference point is always the worn glory of Rome, the ideal republic that bore its gambit of Empire with the cost of Gothic disassembly. Standing on the shards of the

Eternal City, the Italian school knows all too well the crippling stakes of wrestling with the Angel of Endeavour, but it is also aware of the necessity of casting its eye to the real politics of how collective associations operate or fall apart.

The attraction of the republican vision of gyrating action over the anti-historicist rights model is that while the latter will never be happy with the city as it actually exists, the former accepts, if not adores, its tumult and acknowledges urbanism as a discipline that is best realized in the act of intervention. In return, the challenge for a critical metropolitanism is to forge an approach to the city that goes beyond slide-show colloquiums in order to wager for its contested grounds. Here the writings of Antonio Gramsci, including *The Modern Prince* (his neo-Machiavellian essay on power) are advantageous, first by the complete rejection of social contract assumptions, and then by his expansion of the urban agent from that of the single courtier to the collective group. After increasing the mass of his operators, Gramsci moves to consider material culture, the concrete aspects of mental conceptions, as the over-determined bundle of senses that are never placidly reconcilable so much as provisionally held together by the various needs of the moment. If each situation in time or location in place is the result of the transitory alliance of some interests jockeying to administrate others, then the meaning of cultural objects can shrapnel and be re-assembled as strategic deployments by various interests to gain control. For zones of human contact, there is nothing either immanent or predictable about public or private space. Tactics of representation, like graffiti, can be variously received with confrontation, congratulation, or incomprehension, but they will also always enter a space already complicated by a history of group formation or suppression. Thus, if each place involves a material constellation of mobile coalition of forces and invokes a way of thinking about itself, Gramsci's methodology allows for urban objects to be understood as evidence of a trajectory of tensions modulated through relays of historical phases. Thus, the difficulties of the *Risorgimento* to secure the Italian Nation-State rebound from that of the Humanist International of the Renaissance City-States and their failure to withstand larger national entities, like the Austrians or the French. The situation of the twentieth century follows in this wake as the Northern League's Tuscan condescension toward bureaucratic Rome and an un(der)productive South (the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) amidst an Italy still beholden to the dictates of Northern Europe, this time in the form of EEC cross-subsidies.

By avoiding naturalism, recognizing culture as the churning pool of discordant interests, and locating an isolated object within a series of mutable

configurations and sequence of events, Gramsci's criticism could consider urban composition (and confusion) and then pivot to broach alternative histories and cosmopolitan designs that contract theory will not and a simple Machiavellianism can not. For instance, taking the question of why Italians, in a rapidly urbanizing 1920s, preferred to read translations of French novels from the prior century, instead of contemporary domestic ones, Gramsci describes how the relevance of these older novels, like Hugo's *Hunchback de Notre-Dame*, can be seen as the result of a roving search for a medium of explanation by the largely unorganized populace about the rapid changes to its environment caused by the rapidly changing environment caused by *Il Duce*'s reconstruction. Hugo's writing about the shape of Paris can also be read typologically as inflection for latter-day Rome, as well as suggesting, in turn, how other floating scripts, like graffiti, may convey the disorienting emergence of new social fractions, and their renovation of the old regime, as a spatial dislocation. The implications for contemporary urban activism of this literary transportation is an awareness of the need, prior to other rehabilitating projects, to implode the central zone's definitional markers and mappings of order (as well as dismiss any anxiety about their loss) as a means of loosening the cement the current hierarchy needs to hold its structure together.



Via Galvani, Rome, July 1995 photograph by Gordon Brent Ingram

Streamlining the City

Imagine a city built to be experienced primarily at night. This would not be an urbanism subservient to the glamour of ornamental light, but a metropolis that, by relying on framing coordinates other than the land/sky scape, disavows the monumentalism of vertically congealed authority and spectacle of peripatetic

consumer desire. This optic strain might seem to be an intentional folly, except for how it betrays the scopic imperative that valorizes transparency as the legitimating standard in order to overlook *a priori* disparities of access, establishment, and prestige. In his *Image of the City* (1960), Kevin Lynch argues that good city form of clearly articulated spatial segmentation functions as the pedagogic medium for the viewer's graduation into a participatory mechanism about municipal resource allocation.⁴ Never mind that by positing a naive aboriginal coming belatedly to wonder at an already demarcated settlement, Lynch invokes a Rousseauian primal scene that begs the question of what initiated or prolonged this inequity, which must now be ameliorated through civilian tutelage, or how this redistribution machinery might simply operate as an insidious form of bureaucratic management that protectively encapsulates more immediate and informal modes of dissent. The definition of the functional city remains one of popular submission to a set cartography where the encounter of the civil engineer and the public comment period always results in the fine blue-print solution favoring the applied prosthesis of capital investment over a more intensive reorganization of the intrinsic advantages held by certain life-situations over others.

Lynch's manifesto might easily be relegated to the annals of neo-liberalism except that its imagination has resurfaced with a vengeance in current critical theory, not least of which is how its project of cognitive mapping has been reclaimed in Jameson's highly influential writings on cultural production and periodicity. First drawn to the slogan as a negative indicator of the passage of modernism, Jameson has championed the utility of charting a phase's ideological display as a means of perceiving class consciousness. "Lynch suggests that urban alienation is directly proportional to the mental unmappability of local cityscapes. A city [that] allows people to have, in the imaginations, a generally successful and continuous location to the rest of the city gives them something of the freedom and aesthetic gratification of traditional city form -- the incapacity to map spatially is as crippling for political experience as the analogous incapacity to map spatially is for urban experience. It follows then that an aesthetic of cognitive mapping in this sense is an integral part of any socialist political project."⁵ Yet, whatever our subject position is regarding the optics of spatial composition and its ligature to techniques of accumulation or managerial supervision, there remains the crucial difference between a consciousness about class splayed through the atmosphere and a consciousness of a class for itself in the act of its own apprehension and reconstruction of the city. Furthermore, it seems that any preliminary resistance, no matter how provisional, will seek to scramble the formality of cartographic

guides. The act of the marginalized gaining its own right to experience the city is perceived as vertiginous alienation mainly for those who made the t-rules in the first place. When Berlin squatters spray-painted the street-signs black in post-unification East Berlin to disorient the influx of Western police, property-speculators, and tourists (who, in an moment of unplanned *detournement* straight out a Situationist manifesto, were unable to reconcile their hand-maps with a personal sense of their bodily location), the autonomes were denounced as violating the general will favoring the authority's "change of name" and traffic that had been previously obstructed by the Wall. Local concerns about the renewed loss of self-determination were infantilized as the problematic idioms of a festering, rude provincialism. What followed, in an attitude of simple destruction, was the typical response to graffiti's dissonant square quotes: the mess must be cleaned up.

But Jameson is not alone here, since a homologous gesture exists in Habermas' notion of publicity that he first explored in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1961). The public sphere is the "domain" of our social life in which public opinion can be formed "to deal with matters of general interest."⁶ In principle, it is easily accessible, since the public sphere is "partly constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public." Publicity occurs when individuals speak neither as business or professional people conducting their private affairs, nor as legal consociates subject to the legal regulations of a state bureaucracy and obligated to obedience. Citizens act as a public when they deal with general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantees that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today, newspaper and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. Encountering each other denuded from their past, identity-less individuals perform within the public sphere without hidden interests (private wills or even unconscious drives) fettering the Bourse of ideas. Putting aside issues about the uneven facility of shared language, be it the privilege of a specialized professional discourse or Nation-State mono-lingualism that threatens the immigrant's enfranchisement into citizenship, this definition of the public sphere flattens discensus by imagining that there is, after all, a topic of immediate, common interest that everyone will choose to prioritize and join in.

Shaking hands with Lynch, Habermas' communality depends on a recognizable topography of "public space," like cafes, bars, or parks, where persuasive bodies can meet to discuss. Spatial and cognitive arenas are now symbiotic, if not

interchangeable, as city form requires avenues of inter-course to enunciate its shape, and the public sphere needs to exist within regions of tangible contact, or find alternative mediums like the newspaper that can overcome distance. The shared requirements and sensibilities of visual and communicative clarity neatly converge in the exemplary Nolli map of Roman piazzas, which illuminates the zones of pedestrian publicity, rather than islands of nature or impressive structures, as the city's greatest feature of orientation. Yet, even in the most traditional city-form/forum of Rome, there is no equalizing, Brownian movement of people that can gratify the collaboration of the objective eye and dialogue by evening out differences. The wine-bar talk in the progressive air of the Campo de' Fiori cannot be transferred to Fini's Fascist night-time rallies in the Piazza del Popolo. And whenever these conversational cavities become too set in their ways, there appears the graffiti that projects obscurity and a mono-directional language so that the sweetness of shared opinion is interrupted by the tang of idiosyncratic interests or the urgency of the anonymous, unlocatable rumor that falls off from the grapevine.

While it is common today to summon a Nietzschean suspicion about the will to truth lodged within claims of communicative and visual transparency against Kantian objective reason's domination, not all dissent is circumscribed by the face-off between Habermas and Foucault. Consider, for instance, how Antonio Gramsci positions Habermas' topoi of public space as part of the "material organization aimed at maintaining, defending, and developing the theoretical or ideological" structures of subordination, rather than an ideal plateau isolated from worldly concourse. Although "the press is the most dynamic part of this ideological structure," Gramsci cautions that it, "is not the only one." Everything which influences or is able to influence public opinion, directly or indirectly, belongs to it: libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture and the layout and names of streets."⁷



Via del Biscione near Campo de' Fiori, Rome, July 1994 photograph by Gordon Brent Ingram

Gramsci's City-Centaur: Text and Public Space in the *Prison Notebooks*

While Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* is one of the touchstones of contemporary cultural studies, there has been surprisingly little resort to his work in urbanism, human geography, or spatial studies, even as he devotes a substantive portion of writing to aspects of space ranging from the regionalization of employment to the managerial inter-relations of land, culture, and politics. This absence of critical attention may be that while Gramsci is known for his terminological innovations, he developed no neologisms specifically for analyzing space. But given the interaction of space, collectivity, and mental conception, his more well-known concepts, like common sense and hegemony (useful for their avoidance of the binary of rationality and its degradation) can also inform architecture and urban design, especially since their roots, as we will see, reside in issues about space. For instance, rejecting the notion of philosophy as an "individual' elaboration of systematically coherent concepts," Gramsci understood it to be "above all else a part of the constant struggle to transform and dominate the popular `mentality'." He called this mentality "common sense" and gave to its domain conceptions about the world, patterns of behavior, and rhythms of everyday life. But common sense cannot be graded in terms of its relative lucidity. It is "not a single, united conception, identical in time and space -- it takes countless different forms -- even in the brain of one individual." "Fragmentary, incoherent, and inconsequential," it is a "chaotic,

aggregate of disparate conceptions."⁸ No transparent dicta waiting to be revealed through linguistic exercise or snugly ranked within a chain of intellectual being, common sense is the protean, turbulent, and contradictory jumble of mental and material practices through which fractions struggle to recognize, interpret, and enact their uneven life conditions. It is also the medium where groups strive to promote themselves by orchestrating to their advantage a consensus of accepted behavioural practices where common knowledge, *connaissance*, becomes unquestioned, but still disciplinary, truths (*savoir*). Yet, as Gramsci never failed to stress, common sense is always, and not simply exceptionally, a product of varying ratios of consensus and coercion, persuasion and compulsion, agreement and violence. It differs from a brittle notion of *ideology*, since it does not involve a wholly opposite, external force that might be adroitly removed, if only we knew how, in a liberatory flourish of de-repression. On the other hand, common sense does not have the inclusiveness that **culture** is often taken to mean, where any statement automatically achieves a significant status regardless of its influence on any other performative social acts. Although the specificity of common sense and its application is hard, at times, to characterize, a better sense comes as Gramsci likens it to Machiavelli's anthropomorphic image of compound power, the Centaur.

This image from *The Prince* is not lightly chosen, since its trope holds the key, in fact, to one of Gramsci's essential concerns and is irreplaceable in understanding his importance for urban studies. In a particularly Italian problematic of how to re-conglomerate after the Empire's Fall, where Gothic disarray forever de-naturalized assumptions about the inevitability of Roman glory, Machiavelli asked, how can the Prince rule in regions, like Tuscany, that because of its incessantly changing lineage has no stable mythos of Ancient Tradition that can bathe the reigning authority in the aura of super-naturalized Right? While the Greeks made an art of worrying about the aristocrat's self-fashioning, the development of his *spirit-in-the-body*, and then took for granted that this narcissistic process would automatically insure that the council of beautiful souls could politically dominate the labouring mass, Machiavelli abandoned the psychomachia of ego-centred ethics to consider the challenge and risk of rule as that of how to manage *people-in-space*, be it the communal city or region. This shift of emphasis from the individual's care of the self to the realization of ideas in the act of arranging society inaugurates modern political science, declares the urban theatre as a field of surveillance, and introduces "the Italian Question" of achieving national cohesion that remains as difficult today for the Rome-based Olive Tree of technocrat Prime Ministries as it was for the Florentine Renaissance.

By informing the Prince that he is a centaur, Machiavelli indicates that power is dynamic, heterogeneous, and thoroughly implicated in an actual space beyond the murmuring grove of aristocratic luxury. Where the Greeks assumed that disenfranchised populations (helots, women, foreigners) were blockheads that could be easily moulded by the electivity of Platonic will, such assurances were not to be had in a Po region of tenuous possession. The Prince now operates in a public sphere of varied traffic where the stage is accessible to more than one group, and the centaur-prince forgets the skill of persuasion and cultivating influence at his own risk. If, bedazzled by his rank, he imagines that sheer command of rank will suffice and forgets that his authority comes from a rough-hewn coalition of multiple parts, then, Machiavelli warns, he better learn to watch his ass. Because Machiavellian power is an organic alliance, grand history is diminished in favor of analyzing the temporal sequence of contingency. Why did events happen that way? Because space is now controlled momentarily, rather than ceremoniously, the prince must, for the first time, pay attention to public opinion, and leadership now requires hermeneutic skill. The Prince must learn to read the political scene possible eruptions against his rule. He must inhabit a material realm of allegiances and ideas, and the best medium for this pursuit is the city's meeting grounds and pockets of discussion.

It was this connection between group diversity, power, history, and reading space that Gramsci recalled to renovate Machiavelli into his own treatise, *The Modern Prince*, which shifted the core question from the one of how can the noble rule to how can (Italian) subaltern groups take over the rule of mixed spaces like cities. By positing common sense as a material presence that, by its very nature, is undefined, Gramsci turns the education of the Prince inside-out to open history for a didactic review of the presence and development of non-elite groups. But "the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic" since its narration must be excavated from elements that up until now have been controlled by hegemonic powers. Subalterns groups must often use material space not always of their own choosing for their representation. Thus, when seeking locations of subaltern presence, Gramsci explains that he and the other editors of the *Ordine Nuovo* decided to "study the capitalist factory, but not as an organization for material production which would require specialized knowledge we do not possess. [i.e. not as a case for developing knowledge about the systemic expropriation of surplus-value -- but] as a necessary framework for the working class, as a political organism, as the 'national territory' of workers' self-government."⁹ The mixed use of space (the factory as ambivalent sphere of workers control and rebellion) means that the

fragmentary mental conception of common sense is coterminous to and denominative of common (public) space and common (popular) experience.

If the skirmishes of common sense shape the liquid environment, then piazza space, as well as the factory, shapes its contours and can be used to teased out in the triangulation of time, space, and representation. In what ways though, can non-manufacturing space represent those who have not had the liberty of engineering (or describing) its design? But a Gramscian view of the inscription of conflict within the city-centaur does not cast its eye to the military worthiness of the urban enclosure (barricades over here, the Sitte-esque statue toppled there). Instead, it examines the spectrum of idiographic forces inherent in the publicity of the square, from its arrangement of street furniture and traffic to graffiti's fugitive marks of desire, identity, or malediction smeared on its surfaces. Since subaltern groups are not currently empowered to leverage the large-scale physical plant investments or regulations of public space, their presence will instead appear as fragments in what might seem unified space if we were to accept how the Nolli maps blank out of the actual movement of Romans under its white thumbprint. Since the variegated constitution of common sense means that no group-aspect can be entirely emarginated, we need only to learn how to read the urban fabric from the frog's perspective a textile cross-hatched by the weave writing, time, and space. An example of this appears as Gramsci looks askance at his own Italy to deliver, like an underdeveloped negative, a new picture of the city's record of itself.



near Arco dei Banchi, Rome, April 1990 photograph by Gordon Brent Ingram

The Space of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*

Considering popular fashions during 1920s, Gramsci wondered why, during the imposition of Fascism, Italians preferred reading translations of nineteenth century French novelists, like Balzac or Hugo, to that of their own

contemporary fiction. While it is true that every time has its own literature, Gramsci decided that when the "needs, aspirations, and feelings" of people are not had in what lies about them, they search out displaced writing, texts from other countries, languages, and times, to put before their eyes what their own publicists will not.¹⁰ The cultural politics of this asynchronous, creative *dislocation* is the crucial aspect to Gramsci's own production of the *Prison Notebooks*, which, after being jailed by Mussolini, he began as a historical study of the relations between Italian intellectuals, governmental rule, and popular representation.

Starting with the 14th century, Gramsci analyzed the early Italian Renaissance as a movement kept solely within the courtly City-States. Held within these sophisticated eddies, the Southern Renaissance, unlike the Northern Reformation, did not attempt to consolidate a nation by sending long tubers through the zones of Italian dialects. Its Tuscan "vulgate" may have been demotic, but as the speech of forces seeking to substitute itself for Rome's authority, its patrons were uninterested in enunciating the voices of a larger populace. By disregarding the potential alliance between the proto-bourgeois mercantile and financial interests in the North and the Southern rural plebeian fractions, the Renaissance failed to catalyze the kind of larger alterations brought about by class-coalitions like that seen in the French Revolution. Instead, the isolated Communal regimes dissipated themselves through over-expenditure and petty conflict to the point where they were easily "submerged, oppressed, crushed" by intrigue, foreign military intervention, and the shifting of core lending marts northward.¹¹ Considering the separation of the burghers from the hinterland populace that might have successfully catalyzed a stable State-formation, the problem that was to be "solved" by Fascist regimentation but which continues today, Gramsci was drawn to the paradigmatic figure of Dante and his *terza rima* tectonics. We know that Gramsci began *The Prison Notebooks*, shortly after his political arrest and imprisonment and that he intended it to be a categorically different kind of writing than his pre-incarceration occasional journalism, since, uncertain about the duration of his prison sentence and personal longevity, he wanted the notebooks to be "for eternity."

For as much as Gramsci recalls and renovates Machiavelli as a tactician of power, it is equally hard not to be reminded of Dante's own literary-political conditions when reading Gramsci's cercarial notes on culture and politics. Exiled as a result of the Ghibeline-Guelph civil war, Dante's grand journey through the Divine Comedy's multiple spheres resonates with Gramsci's own

infernal passage as he was shuttled from one prison to another after Mussolini had suppressed the political opposition. The comparison was not lost on Gramsci himself as he often turned to work and rework a personal interpretation of one of the Cantos. But Dante's attraction is not just that of crypto-autobiography, since the problem of how to portray the tensions of the Italian circus in a time of stress was foremost in Gramsci's mind. Accordingly, he also used a kind of writing from and about intercellular spaces (the jail cell, the pandemonic piazza) to capture the flow of time in misplaced writing that appears where it ought not to, be it the old French fiction in modern Italy or Alighieri Gramsci's notes from the inferno. The Gramscian convergence of inscription, enclosure, and insubordination is turned into an investigative instrument for considering the city's relations of society and space. Thus, an approach to revising the seemingly natural order of the lay of the land comes via the intersection of the early Renaissance and the premier nineteenth century French novel about fourteenth and fifteenth century aesthetics, Hugo's *Notre Dame of Paris*, by going from Gramsci, one forcibly cloistered hunchback to another from Gramsci - Quasimodo.



Via Cuccagna Roma, July 1994 photograph by Gordon Brent Ingram

Before *Les Miserables*: Notre-Dame's Traces of the Modern

Notre Dame's pertinence to urban writing comes as it is founded under the sign of graffiti as the residue of unofficial history, when that paradoxical monk,

Claude Frollo, chisels *Ananke* (fate) on the cathedral's passage wall. Hugo claims that he actually saw this word carved into one of the Church's hallways during his preparatory research and then used it as the load-bearing pillar on which to support his imagination.¹² Lest there be any doubt about the significance that he gives to the demotic act of mural inscription, Hugo then directs the reader to another graffiti next to it: "I adore Coralie 1829 signed Ugène."¹³ This ambient scrawl of common attraction reaches the epic register as it fraternizes with the monk's frustrated desire for Esmeralda and echoes Hugo's own composition with its similar date of publication to the novel and phonetic approximation of the author's name (Hugo/Ugène). The imprint of semi-anonymous affection on the monumental institution, where abstract fate covers both Frollo and Ugène, epitomizes Hugo's own sense about History as the cascade of personal tragedies, from one generation to the next, that resonates as the cause or effect, which is unclear, of a larger social transformation. Unlike Hegel, whose comedic History leaves nothing behind in its wake of rigorous unification, Hugo's pessimism about the certain benefits of time's arrow left him obsessed with recuperating the fossilized traces of the suborned fixed within the *Zeitgeist's* overlooked refuse.

While the building (Notre Dame) aspires to give a specific meaning to time as typifying a *period style* and to saturate space with magisterial power as a *national heritage*, the several literatures on the wall (Ugène's, Frollo's, Hugo's) implies that these well-formed spatial boundaries belay an amber-like, manifold surface solidified by the multiple and contradictory pressures of various historical agents that can be recognized in the casual serendipity of minor, almost sub-literate, texts. Hugo's literary interest is not in the bravura, frontal assaults on authority such as Luther's crucifixion as he nails his theses on the Church's wooden barricades, a drama more suited to Scott's taste. Instead, his *belles lettres* is the surreptitious, half-ashamed marks of seemingly trivial emotion. For the barely recognized gospel of Ugène's adoration contains the turbulence of grand history within its humble serifs as surely as that of Luther's protest.

Set in 1482, *Notre-Dame de Paris* concerns the rise of secular modernity over auratic medievalism, a historical transfer that reflects the novel's own conditions of creation on the eve of the 1830 July Revolution that ended the Restoration in favour of Louis-Philippe, the constitutional monarch who facilitated the rise of French industrialism. As per Gramsci, this story of old Paris is also, referentially, one of Rome, since its bifocal transposition of 1482/1829-30 bespeak the problem of Italian autonomy and unification as it brackets, on the

one hand, the last gasps of Lorenzo de Medici's ability to deflect French invasions (the foreign pressure under which Machiavelli wrote) and, on the other, the 1830 failed uprisings in the Papal States against the Austrians, as one of the thousand plateaus toward Italian independence. Furthermore, the 1920s Italian popularity of Hugo's tale (what makes it an "Italian" novel) carries this history forward as a means of making sense of a later royal capitulation, here not Charles X's in 1830, but Vittorio Emanuele II's before Mussolini's "March on Rome," a legitimation crisis about governmental transition which continues to roil post-Christian Democrat Italy.

Emphasizing the framework of this epochal shift, Hugo's novel begins with the raucous interruption of a public mystery-play being produced as part of the diplomatic negotiations to buttress a fraying feudal authority through international marriage. The drama's symbolic order is scrambled first by the entry of the Flemish ambassadors, who represent the rising authority of the artisanal middle class, and then by these new men's incitement of an impromptu plebeian carnival with the festival election of a Pope of Fools, the charivari of establishment that introduces Quasimodo. These Rabelaisian substitutions register the dissolution of deference to a system epitomized by Claude Frollo, Archdeacon to the King's Cathedral, as the intellectual representative of the *Uracien regime*. Underlining the elite's erosion of prestige is Frollo's meditation about the ongoing alteration he contextualizes in the contrast of Gothic architecture, like Cathedral Notre Dame, to "that other plague from Germany," the books made available by the new Gutenberg technology, the black letters of which are as dangerous to the current order as was the random Black Death. In the chapter, "This Will Kill That," Frollo argues that the grand edifices functioned like massive letters which formed a complex material sentence as humanity's granite inscription of its social hierarchy and period relations to the natural and super-natural realms.¹⁴ "In fact, from the beginnings of things to the fifteenth century of the Christian era inclusive, architecture was the great book of the human race, man's principal means of expressing the various stages of his development, physical and mental." But as the book of stone is superseded by the book of paper, the authenticity of local authority is exploded by print's reproducible mobility, which as good as enacts the destabilization of rank. Likened to the other mechanic advances of "artillery, serpentines, bombards" that will shatter the warrior caste's protective armor and defense walls, the "parent revolution" of the recombinatory press matrices also marks a spatio-temporal divide against the fixed feudal and ecclesiastic order with its confusion of set distance and locality.¹⁵

Foreshadowing Marx's own panegyric to the creative destruction that overwhelms "Gothic cathedrals," and dissolves, "all fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions" where "all that is solid melts into air", Hugo annotates the portable miniaturized book's corrosive effect on the anchored site of the cathedral is that it will result in the liberation of thought from the court-church-college nexus.¹⁶ By displacing the old global coordinates of reference and access to information in favour of more fluid corridors of institutional representation, the traffic of printing creates a new public space that will help unleash the mass spirit of democracy. Print makes free thought "more imperishable than ever; it is volatile, intangible, indestructible; it mingles with the air. In the time of architecture, [thought] became a mountain, and made itself master of a century and a region. Now it has been transformed into a flock of birds, scattering to the four winds and filling all air and space. We repeat: who does not see that in this form thought is more indelible? Instead of being solid it has become long-lived. It has exchanged durability for immortality. We can demolish a substance, but who can extirpate ubiquity?"¹⁷

Putting aside the issue about printing's doomsday book of para-nuclear potential, what does writing's anti-architecture (or at least alternative architecture) mean for spatial studies, which relies on certain over-determined chronotopes for its field-work illustrations? Witness, for instance, how Housmann / Baudelaire's Paris magnetizes debates about the relation of aesthetics to capitalist modernization and considerations of historicity, involving time-space compression (Harvey), space-time acceleration (Virilio), and the rise of new regimes of accumulation (post-Fordism). If Benjaminian arcades and flaneurs set the agenda of High Capitalist space / time management, then (Hugo's) Notre-Dame is similarly topical for its architecture at the cusp of modernity, i.e. early capitalism, as Henri Lefebvre confirms when he relies on the example of the Gothic cathedral in his own authoritative overview of the structural transformations of social space.¹⁸ Arguing that Western history can be read through relays of typical urban-architectural constructions, Lefebvre locates the continental divide of modernity in the fault line separating constructions of Absolute from Abstract space. Absolute space is the qualitative fusion of the religious with the political, so that terrain, infused with symbolism, becomes vitalized and animistic. Accordingly, Greek space is epitomized by the Cosmological City and its outline of emptiness, where the open agora is vertically directed to the high-top acropolis of temples shorn of ornamentation, and from thence to the heavens. Roman imperial space is horizontalized as an occupied circle, which exists as a basic node enmeshed within an outlying locus

defined by linear roads leading to the suburban villa or orthogonal military camp / province. The Christian occupation of Rome then negatively applied Greek elevation to the circle and inverted it down as a pit. This underworld expresses, what Lefebvre calls, a cryptic society fascinated with death, decay, and physical abasement, where Catholicism's flagellatory ethics imagines the city as thanatopolis.

Later, a radically different ideology, Abstract space, would approach space as a void that can be segmented effortlessly into interchangeable units. This quantitative conception is essentially intertwined with the practice of Cartesian logic, perspectivism, colonialism, Protestantism, and, of course, commodity capitalism. However, in between the time of abstract space and Catholic crypticism exists the transitional shift from feudal and monastic ruralism to the city of burghers. In this sequence, the Gothic cathedral represents a merger between the Cosmological city (earth to heaven) and the subterranean one (earth to underworld), where its combinatory production of luminous space is a project analogously attempted by Dante's procession through hell's anus to heaven's astra. But, as the last manifestation of Absolute space, the Gothic cathedral ought to either contain the proleptic marks of contradiction that will indicate the oncoming sea-change of a new epoch or, lacking these aspects, lose its pre-eminence as the historically indicative cultural signifier, a devaluation that would implicitly threaten Lefebvre's entire schematic of progressive rupture. Instead of addressing these resident implications, Lefebvre turns instead to criticize the "encounter between technique and symbol" in Panofsky's *Gothic Architecture and Scolasticism* for being "mechanistic, technician, and functionalist."¹⁹ Yet, despite the tenor of this sharp dismissal, Panofsky's study actually provides the answer to Lefebvre's categorical conundrum about writing and space.

In his definitional essay, Panofsky argues that there was a parallel motivation and development between twelfth to fourteenth-century Gothic architecture and Scolasticism. Caught between the scissors motion of Mysticism, as the cabalic back-draft of early Christendom's death-culture, and a Nominalism of empirical observation, which anticipated "the heliocentric system of Copernicus, the geometrical analysis of Descartes, and the mechanics of Galileo and Newton," Scholasticism perfected a expository method that tried to thread its way between past rituals and future cogito by having "human reason" used "not to prove faith, but to make clear -- whatever else is set forth in doctrine."²⁰ Not authorized to rational thought, the human mind had instead to assume a fixed totality of organized knowledge and fill in its empty pigeonholes by a

homologous deduction of "parts and parts of parts." In architecture, Gothic was caught between the umbra of Romanesque space, with its massy exterior walls and light-refusing interior, and a Humanist building that entertained the perspectival eye's vision of disappearing parallel lines. Like Scholasticism, Gothic relies on a cognitive mapping of pedantic segmentation and graphic order where the floor plan routinely divides flat space through reiteration. In this table, one section can be deductively read for the whole, and the interior transparency provided by the arch windows was not meant to enable the individual's phenomenological resources but merely to locate the body alongside a visible grid of the adjacent columns. In its flight from the feudal order, Gothic Scholasticism introduced light, but unwilling yet to dare modernity, it held itself back from Enlightenment by loading on piles of heavy arguments and projects that suffocated the individual by their centuries-long schedule of completion.

Pinioned between two Ages, Gothic Scholasticism's percolating anxiety was its fear of anomaly and contradiction, which had to be restrained from creeping in through over-argumentation and design. To remove its seduction of doubt and secret thirst for flight, Scholasticism would insistently labour over competing texts to reconcile opposites. It filled troublesome lacunae with a passion for plodding, a "classification for classification's sake," which even had Aquinas complaining about the "multiplication of useless questions, articles, and arguments" that resulted in the canonical *Summa Theologiae* by Hales weighing "about as much as one horse could carry."²¹ In building, the comparative gesture is seen with the over-membrification of the ceiling, as if no space should be left unbound. Despite its self-regulation, the Gothic, Panofsky explains, introduced three problems, or *questionne*, for itself: the rose window, sub-clerestory wall, and nave pillars. Of these, the rose window was the most problematic, since "the very concept of an isolated, circular unit conflicted with the ideals of Gothic taste in general and with the ideal of the Gothic facade -- in particular."²² But while disclosing the "solution" (place the rose window high enough within the arch of a huge window so as not to conflict with the lower vault), Panofsky remains silent about what caused this problematic fenestra to break out in any case. If building is the materialization of cultural tension, what sought to be resolved through this flower?



Via delle Bottegue, Rome, July 1994 photograph by Gordon Brent Ingram

Body-Architecture / Space-Time Transitions

One reply to Panofsky's question comes with another of Lefebvre's directional analyses. Trying to distinguish the environmental logic of Mediterranean cities from North European ones, Lefebvre characterized the difference as the one of 12 from 10, from the duo-decimal to the decimal spatio-cultural system.²³ Duo-decimalism is motivated by cyclical rotations of time, attuned to what are traditionally perceived as natural divisions (12 months of the year, 12 signs of the zodiac, a dozen, 360 degrees in a circle), and anatomical measurements (a yard as the length of an arm, so many footsteps in a mile). Flourishing in "solar" cities isolated from the lapping Atlantic, the political apparatus of Mediterranean duo-decimalism is the isolated City-State as vertical Cosmological City. Without any longitudinal ballast, these cities easily vacillate between democracy and tyranny, republic and empire. These societies can endure these dimorphic changes because bonds are based on a totemic alliance between patriarchal clans and an exterior (natural, supernatural) Other. The abrupt meeting between the two forces (man and horse, for instance) becomes culturally harmonized in the catharsis of theatrical public spectacles, like the Doges annual marriage of the sea, which works to make a compact with difference rather than strategizing to abolish it.

Decimalism is organized by linear trajectories that are not defined by a rhythm

of loss and recall, but by repetition's "consecutiveness and the reproduction of the same phenomena." In terms of historical urbanism, decimalism thrives in the Oceanic (lunar) Northern cities that use the tidal seas for long-distance trade relations. Their political culture is based on routinized, commercial exchange that avoids supernatural rituals in favor of "oaths, pacts, charters so that actions are constantly civil and political," and creates a "sworn community" (rather than one of blood-relations) through the institutions of contracts and the legislative jury. Avoiding the drama of otherness, decimalist cities homogenize relations (making everyone alike as a monadic self) by promulgating equations where conversion rather than compromise predominates. The separation of decimal from duodecimal culture is also the switch to modernity from medievalism and the turn away from the barter-economy of goods (commodities for [money for] commodities) to their equalization in the standard of money (money for commodities for money) that is one of the essential definitions of capitalism. As decimalism's cadastral division of abstract space supports long-distance exploration and imperialism, it facilitates the change from a culture based on oppression to one of exploitation, where metric supervision alienates the imperial body's intimacy by segmenting it. This numeric body of fragments projects the individual through a time-space screen where labor power can be misrecognized in its formal relation to the production of goods. But amidst the cultural, political, and epochal distinctions between 12 and 10 lies eleven. Stuck between the medieval integral body and the modern differential one, the odd prime is the confused figure of historical transition. Neither here nor there, it is the grotesque figure of irregularity, the queer monster. Which brings us back to Quasimodo.

It is to Hugo's credit, or political ambivalence, that he ultimately delinks Notre-Dame from any period or faction. As a monument it "is not one of those which can be called complete, finished, belonging to a definite class."²⁴ Neither wholly Romanesque nor Gothic, it is a "structure of transition." Recognizing the cathedral as an incident of historical process rather than aspect of a nomenclated period is the first of Hugo's anti-formalisms. His second is the refusal to evaluate change within a Manichean axis of achievement or destruction, purity or decay. While Hugo considers Notre Dame a structure that represents democracy's victory over theodicy, he also understands this to be an easily reversible process. Similarly, as much Hugo laments the plastering the nineteenth century has made the Cathedral bear, he also grants every period the right to re-form its environment. What prevents this attitude from being a perfectabilitarian one is that it results from an exhausted confidence about historical amelioration, a pessimism admittedly not unreasonable coming from

someone surveying recent French history on the eve of the July Revolution. Thus, the movement of each group in the novel can be considered as either a progressive or regressive. The Truands' attack on Notre-Dame to rescue Esmeralda could either be a harbinger of the popular siege of the Bastille or the action of these "Egyptians," Jews, and Central Europeans might simply be the atavistic return of an Eastern primitive horde that even the Carolingian Age had shrunk from encountering and sought to overcome. What *Notre-Dame*, building and narrative, houses then is not the automatic transition from one prior historical phase to the next, but the location of *historical tension* itself, the conjuncture of multiple interests and incoherent forces pulling in a spectrum of directions, neither medieval nor modern. This torus of power gives the novel its most famous feature as its contradictory contortions of history are famously objectified in the physical uneven development of the hunchback Quasimodo, Notre Dame's *genius loci*.

If *Notre-Dame de Paris* is usually called *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, the substitution is initially acceptable because the physically jumbled Quasimodo acts as the novel's embodiment of an incomplete shift (quasi-mode) between epochs, which is incomplete because it is still in process. Unlike the period's ideological *putti* of adult postures in an infantile body, which projects an elite self-bemusement and confidence at the onset of a new age, Hugo's nineteenth-century depiction of deaf-dumb, half-blind foundling looks backward to ring more ominously the warning bells of the old structure in a more menacing tone voided in retrospect of any Virgilian promise of future ease for that class.



'anarchia', Rome, April 1990 photograph by Gordon Brent Ingram

"Sub"-architecture: The Hermeneutics of Social Space

But while Frolo grants too much power to the new tools of writing, Hugo's inquiry sees the collision of the printed book against architecture, the signifying mediums of the past and future, within a terratological space-time that acts as the hermeneutic means of recognizing the alterations of constituency in common space and reconfiguration of class factions, which appears in anamorphic writing because the common sense (and the commoners) does not yet have any other means of representation. Quasimodo's mangled body and the ephemeral surface lines indicate an ongoing rippling change by pointing to the presence of a third space, on neither side of the wall, which holds the dialectical tension of the developing estates other than those of the old order, but not yet clearly ones of the new. The orthogonal axes of architecture and writing form the x and y, that dialectically suggest a third, z-axis, which is visionally hard to gauge in the terms of a two-dimensional plane. In one direction, Frolo's rage at the machinery of the emerging science and its re-engineering of social distinction flares when he encounters Gringoire, the manqué poet who is "crazy about printing," examining the church's walls for a Grub Street pamphlet on stonework. On the other, Frolo's quest for knowledge draws him beyond the Church, not to Galileo, but to the past of the alchemical Nicolas Flamel, who made Notre Dame's monumental entrance a "symbolical doorway" and gnostic "page of magic written in stone." Frolo's scrutiny reads the gate for its elusive organic unity as the gate must have some "mystic meaning, the symbolic language lurking under the sculpture on its front, like the first text under the second of a palimpsest" wherein the tissue of masonry points to the Alchemist's Stone nominally hidden somewhere inside the Church. The attraction of the literary portal, which opens to some other as yet unforeseen space, is such that Frolo himself scrawls a heteroglossia of arcane language "according to the customs of hermetic philosophers" over his study's entrance, and Flamel's own house, whose "door jambs had been scrawled over with innumerable verses and hieroglyphics," is "beginning to fall into ruin, so much had the hermetics and the alchemists of all countries worn away its walls by simply carving their names on them."²⁵ But as Gringoire's modern nominalism and Frolo's archaic mysticism converge on the manuscript wall, both are mistaken in believing that the decoration of these mural texts is simply about new, barely discernible knowledge. For the greater meaning of this war of the words, Hugo's pock marks chiselled into the Cathedral's facade peel away to reveal the protrusion of distressed faces pushing through the building's membrane, like the gargoyles squeezing out from its walls or the grimacing recluse peering through the rat-hole prison-cellar bars.

What the literary disruption of the Gothic cathedral's stone skin mediates is the impression of plebeian faces that appear contorted and grotesque simply because they are straining for ontological representation. Vandalistic writing, the outsiders' literature, is the cognate to a labour of Visigothic disturbance seen clearly in the festival election of a Pope of Fools. Inside a small chapel, the crowd's face-making contest is framed by the Church's disintegration as a "pane of glass broken out of the beautiful rose-window above the door left an empty ring of stone through which the contestants would pass their heads."²⁶ Coming through this carapace is the pained emergence of a *subject-in-transition*, the "masses" in the process of transformation from the status of serfs of that of urban plebes as they shed the heavy weights of seigniorial dues.

With the people's naivety through the vulgar wall, the "problem" of the rose window is partially answered as the material register of the historical dehiscence of the lower classes. This extrusion from the Gothic is not limited, however, to one class. Hugo also goes out of his narrative's way to depict a Louis XI struggling to keep up with relentlessly increasing court expenditures, which can only be paid for with difficulty as he lacks complete jurisdiction over Paris and France. As a precis of the budgetary troubles that a later Louis will face, the crisis at hand is not, however, one about the absolutist monarchy on the wane, but the difficulty of its creation. Thus, Hugo's Gothic morphology of reconstruction includes both the transformation of the lower classes, reacting after a prolonged immiseration, and the period's elite as the novel occurs when, as Wallerstein notes, "the economic arena of feudal Europe was going through a fundamental, internally generated crisis" that was shaking its social foundations. The authority of Catholicism was disintegrating through innumerable internecine squabbles, and the land-system was falling apart in ways that favored the yeoman farmer. "Had Europe continued on the path along which it was following, it is difficult to believe that the patterns of medieval feudal Europe with its highly structured system of orders could have been reconsolidated."²⁷ So, it didn't. Pointing to the congruence of the upper strata families of 1650 with those of 1450, Wallerstein argues that the "new" bourgeois did not just arise from autochthonous burghers but was also self-generated from the old manorial elites, or a fraction of them, who adapted to the flux of time by using the cultural instruments of the Renaissance to reform themselves in order to maintain authority. If Gramsci considers the Renaissance a popular failure, it was because the ruling order never meant it to be otherwise. They were successful in promoting a globalizing Humanism that would mirror what they considered to be the only true subject, themselves. In this sense, the rose window's punctuation of the Gothic wall acts as first opening of the

"perspectival eye" as a section of the establishment looking credulously back on its own structure and examining how the cathedral's shell could be sloughed off, in favor of a new space of the global abstraction of value, after the Gothic church served its purpose of housing their expansive ambitions until its incubation time was complete.

The graffiti of the rose window appears as a polyvalent icon of European social architecture in multi-vectoral turmoil resulting from the momentary convergence of plebeian intransigence and elite restlessness. If the "very concept" of the rose window violated "Gothic tastes in general," it was because it confronted certain Gothic interests (such as the Church and its ecclesiastic collegians like Frolo) that were trying desperately to comprehend and withstand the centrifugal forces shredding medieval Europe in its long march to modernity. The exceptionality of the rose window was that, even as it violated the Gothic agenda of exclusion through the strict rigor of flat space and minimalist repetition that meant to deny the onset of newly distinctive class contradictions, it also became the point where, against all expectations, the old regime tried to encapsulate, but not integrate, the change within its order as a desperate attempt to regain its footing. It was this tactic that resulted in the "achievement" of the Gothic sublime, which was forged from the tension of an unhappy capitulation by a formerly triumphant will that massively desires to cleanse itself of the threat of difference in an eugenicist denial of heterogeneity, transformation, and history. The political intent of (Gothic) formalism is its total transparency: "Like the High Scholastic *summa*, the High Gothic cathedral aimed, first of all, at 'totality' and therefore tended to approximate, by synthesis as well as elimination, **one perfect and final solution**; we may therefore speak of *the* High Gothic plan or *the* High Gothic system with much more confidence than would be possible in any other period. In its imagery, the High Gothic cathedral sought to embody the whole of Christian knowledge, theological, moral, natural, and historical, with everything in its place and that which has no longer found its place, **suppressed**. In structural design, it similarly sought to synthesize all major motifs -- **suppressing** all elements that might endanger this balance."²⁸ These lines, written by a German Jewish refugee, recognize in a previous formalism the mental architecture of the Nazi Final Solution. By assuming Panofsky's description of Gothic's "principle of unity" is also his identification with its *habitus* (rather than *intuitus* that Panofsky elsewhere approves), Lefebvre misreads Panofsky's sly expose that is not least a discourse about Heidegger's architectural metaphors and its philosophical alliances to the *Dasein* of the Death-camp State.



'autorganizzazio' Via Cavour, Rome, May 1995 photograph by Gordon Brent Ingram

Gradients of Public Exclusion

If Gothicism attempts a philosophic agenda, as Panofsky argues, its formal composition should not be allowed its desire of making various factional fights barely discernible. The cathedral's studied calm barely holds in reserve the subliminal tensions that are mobilized by the structure's act to suppress their presence. In Hugo's tale, the cathedral itself, as the anchor of an authoritative history, becomes the medium for a dialectical space that is neither inside, nor out, neither clear nor confused, but a region of which its confusion is its clear message about ongoing transformation. As a record of the changing gradient of deference, subordination, and collusion with the current state of affairs and confrontation, Notre-Dame and *Notre-Dame* are the ideal instances for Gramscian narrative that portrays finally not temporal change in space, but the very thing of common sense itself in all its incidental, occasional, and self-contradictory fashion.

If public space is always the material field of the current state of contested affairs, its will involve the excavation of new spaces, third zones. These "worthless" spots trace the outlines of community bodies who can not yet be fully seen in the public "vision," since they are groups (workers, women, racial and sexual minorities) that have no more formal measures of representation in the dominant rule of city-space. To simply call this marking a virtual political

space misses the real stakes of social emergence involved or the serious manner of its appearance despite its anecdotal discourse or occasional speech (cafe chatter, self-naming on the walls, or expressions of intimacy in a concourse of careless movement). This social graffiti is not entirely powerless, however, since it may also be used to tactical advantage as Habermas shows with an illustration from his ideal public sphere in the late eighteenth century coffee houses.

Describing the construction of a bourgeois public sphere, Habermas relates how publicity had been previously monopolized by the Court, which totalized representation in the king's body so that, like Satanic despair, everything outside his Grace's sight was privatized, unrepresentable, and wrapped in disregard. With the rise of long-distance shipping and exchange, the conflict bourgeois needed a mechanism of receiving and exchanging information about their mercantile endeavors, and from this need they developed a self-communicating public. The nodes of coffee-houses, discussion societies, and literary salons, successfully competed for the court as the space of legitimation and they helped redefine privateness as belonging to the regions defined by consumption (the home) rather than non-regal production or distribution. This Kantian pastoral of civil society is for Marx, however, "anything but idyllic" as it were time when European "public opinion lost its last remnant of shame and conscience. The nations bragged cynically at every infamy that served them as a means of accumulation of capital."²⁹ These actions included the environmental trauma involving "the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins."

The period's publicity crucially depends on the luxury devolving from an "expropriation of the immediate producers" or metropolitan seizure capitalism against the peripheral zones "primitives," be they Scots or Irish yeoman or non-European aboriginals. This geography of exclusion later disguises these acts with the legal fiction of the free (de-collectivized) individual coming to contract over *time* so that the coffee-house can selectively link and delinks the City Nation-State from a global sub-urban arena. The result, however, is a third partitional-space that captures the residue of the actions as Habermas neatly describes with one of the innovations of letters to the editor by one of the journals of publicity. "When the *Spectator* separated from the *Guardian* the letters to the editor were provided with a special institution: on the west side of Bolton's Coffee House a lion's head was attached through whose jaws the reader

threw his letter. "From then on submitted letters were published weekly as the 'Roaring of the Lion'.³⁰ Using the device of the scriptive wall, the insurgent middle class shoves their bourgeois publicity down the throat of the totemic sign of royal prestige and throttles non-European Nature to alienate its skin for their own pursuits. Yet, this lion also acted as a testimonial space of differentiation or relative advantage within the mercantile classes as when the mono-polis of the coffee-house's enclosure involves its own surface display of public pressure and crisis. Not for nothing were the coffee-houses cloistered round the Exchange so that the petty speculators, who could not afford trading seats, might wait for the gazettes of brokers, who would wander over to quote the latest rate and offer to act, to their advantage, as the stock-jobber for the cafe hangers-on.³¹ For these slightly de-centred people, the lion's roar of letters to the editors stands as intra-class warning by the cafe's "little people" to the high financiers to make sure there is enough to go around.



an early electioneering poster of Gianfranco Fini, Rome, March 1994 photograph of site by Gordon Brent Ingram

Partitions and Offenses: Making Conflict Manifest

The communicative city is on the agenda again with the rise of new telecommunication devices that accommodate another long-wave of accumulation. As the "public sphere" seems to retreat into cyber-space and become its own wondrous realm of interaction separable from the classic access street, the city, especially pedestrian ones like Rome, are increasingly prepared

to be zones of nostalgic pay-for-view performance and the discrete charm of the boutiques. Additionally, squadrons of privatized service workers are marshalled in weak palliatives for the decay of real wage standards and directed to scrub the city's streets because the cleanliness of form conveys the impression of safety from any personal disruption. But no progressive urban criticism should capitulate to these myths of visibility or even their terms focused on preeminence of free exchange. Instead, the task for urban activism is to highlight these new, seemingly flat, seemingly disembodied, signs, like graffiti, in the public thoroughfare as a means of indicating the struggles over the imposition of form and puncturing space to reveal the back-side of the city-centaur of force and compulsion.

Recently there has been a resurgence in graffiti, particularly the "wild style" spray paint tagging of names in distended typography on mass transportation vehicles in the 1970s and 80s, as a topic of critical interest. A reader-reception approach is often brought to bear that attempts to adjudicate graffiti's relative transgression in the dialectic of self-alienation and imaginary re-representation. So, Susan Stewart considers the "brand name" of the graffiti artist as "a critique of all privatized consumption" that "carries out that threat in full view, in repetition, so that the public has nowhere to look, no place to locate an averted glance."³² Yet, the full tale of commodity relations also includes matters of production prior to the act of purchasing. So if graffiti is to be an actual threat to the present order, its branding must involve more than the act of consumption as compensation for not being granted the ease that celebrity confers.

We saw how a "Machiavellian" approach emphasized the agnostic play of forces that differed from the part of the social contract of ostensibly free and fair exchange, but which is anything but open and equitable, and then how Gramsci exfoliated this from an idea about individual psychology to one about the collective struggles over the co-terminus space of ideas and architecture. In doing so, Gramsci managed through an interweaving of history, text, and reference- from Hugo's Paris to contemporary Rome, to indicate that the urban arena has to be read as an overlay of multiple forces on a single space and how, even if controlled by dominant powers, it can and will always indicates another space, partly utopian and partly degraded, that offers a potential alternative to the current contours of common sense / space. For example, the true offense of graffiti is not that we have no place to avert our glance from its informal advertising, but that its guerrilla substitution jars against the names we do not desire to avert our glance from. These offenseless marks are the public names that have become so assimilated within the everyday that our optics routinely

overlook their formal authority so that the difference between street graffiti and street signage is a solely a police matter as to who gets to cut up the city with names. As de-personalized individual names are routinely plated over our heads and in our faces, the difference between Fab Five Freddy and General Donkeybrains or Lady Pink and Senator Malice is that we accept the lettrist intrusion of municipal nomenclature that partitions space and signposts direction as the *marking of order* and absence of placelessness. Outlaw graffiti, with its out of bounds signage, undermines the prerogatives of the clean visual logic of city perimeters, civil society, and due process.

When the insubordinate inscription rolls into view, even with the plainest sign of affinity "Gene loves Cary," its overlay acts as the *de-enclosure* of these partitions and points to another space, the marginal and marginalized communities "out there" that have been kept from real recognition, the bodies that are recognized only in the momentary flourish of their script even though they populate the city's streets and shops. But as much as graffiti indicates the exclusion of producer, whose anonymity devolves from a collective delimitation of presence, from a right to the city, it also alienates the viewer by positioning them as someone who *ought* to be threatened by the municipal's inability to tend to its business of fixed investment.

By flaunting their institutional placelessness, the graffiti-maker reminds us that we, the viewer, are equally fixed in *a place* of privilege that leans on order of writs and summonses for its peace; it gives notice to the intersection of disenfranchisement and elite disability. From these two aspects comes then the possibilities of the third space, the third way that is neither one of Lockean contract nor Machiavellian confrontation, but the Gramscian provocation that there may be a different kind of city life, a more radical urban imagination might not be, after all, so off the wall, even if its shape is hard to appreciate at this time.

Critical urbanism must quit playing the Dutchman and being the supercargo for the smooth traffic of people as goods, a role that benefits only the ones would be unnerved by whatever may come out of the cracks in its hold. The Gramscian project today is to encourage informal transcriptive spaces that both confronts the town with an overlay that indicates the separation, not contiguity, of spaces in order to bring further the zonal tensions of uneven development and racial and economic segmentation. Spaces should be made that puncture the folds of distance and snap formerly unequal spaces and discursive agents together by. The social mobility that mass transit systems provide, as their

stations punctuate a surface point with intimations of a greater, mentally unmappable space is simply the most basic of this kind of connections through time and space.³³ Perhaps we need is the proliferation of informal blue-dots of graffiti, self-generated historicizing markers by people of the significance of their own, everyday habitat, a mundane sacralization that continually challenges the viewer to imagine the sheer pressure of lives in this space. Imagine a Rome that so scrupulously records its loves and fights that the streets themselves became worn away by the pressure of popular representation. At this point, it would be impossible to find the city's official map, but, at that point, who would really want it anyway, since this new *res publica*, or mass thing, would have begun reversing the fields of force in the act of counter-possession. This new redlining of the streets will use the platform of writing to re-conceptualize city-relations toward the promise of true equality and concord.



"STRONZO" near Arco dei Banchi, Rome, August 1985 by Gordon Brent Ingram \

Notes

1. © Stephen Shapiro, Professor, Department of English & Comparative Literary Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL England. This essay was initially written for the *dad oscurità ad oscurità* project in April of 1997 in New York City.
2. C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: from Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962).

3. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).
4. Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960).
5. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 415, 416.
6. Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere” in *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*, ed. Steven Seidman (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 231.
7. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 389.
8. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 419, 422.
9. Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1957), 23.
10. Gramsci, *Cultural Writings*, 209.
11. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 91.
12. André Maurois, “Afterword” in Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (New York: Signet, 1964), 504.
13. Hugo, 261.
14. Hugo, 175.
15. For an analysis along these lines see, Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1973), 83-110.
16. Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1972), 476.
17. Hugo, 182.
18. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
19. Lefebvre, 257.
20. Erwin Panofsky, *Greek Architecture and Scholasticism*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1951), 15-16, 29.
21. Panofsky, 35, 8.
22. Panofsky, 71.
23. Henri Lefebvre, “Rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Cities” in *Writings on Cities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).
24. Hugo, 110.
25. Hugo, 263, 159.

26. Hugo, 48.

27. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 42

28. Panofsky, 44-45. The bold emphasis is mine.

29. Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, (New York: Vintage, 1977), 924, 915.

30. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1989), 42, 42fn.

31. Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century, Vol II. The Wheels of Commerce* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 103.

32. Susan Stewart, "Ceci Tuerra Cela: Graffiti As Crime And Art," In John Fekete, ed., *Life After Postmodernism: Essays On Value And Culture*, 175-176.

33. Most metro-plan maps abandon the attempt surface / system mappability by relying on their own anti-topographical geometry. The traveller is rarely provided with a comparative map of the transit system except at the too late moment of their exit from the underworld.



Via Della Pace, Rome, July 1995 Rome by Gordon Brent Ingram