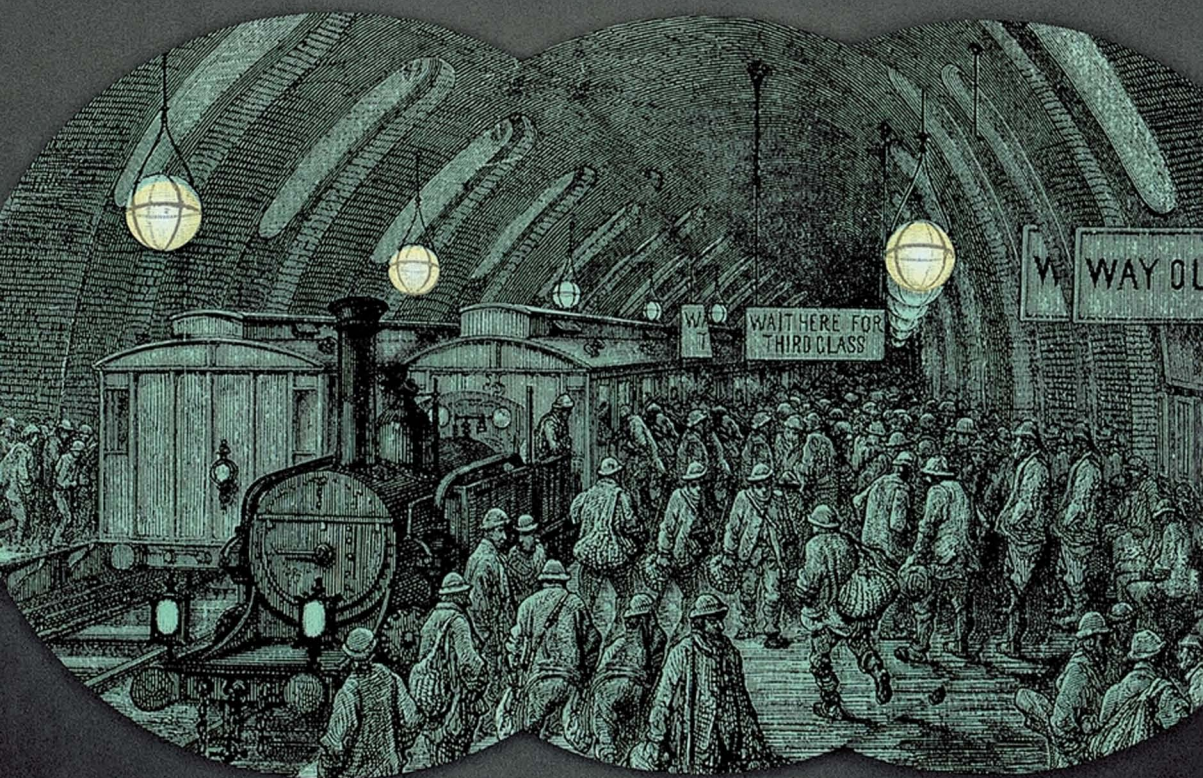


subterranean cities

THE WORLD BENEATH PARIS AND LONDON, 1800-1945

DAVID L. PIKE



Subterranean Cities

SUBTERRANEAN CITIES

**The World beneath
Paris and London,
1800–1945**

DAVID L. PIKE

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS
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Ché non è impresa da pigliare a gabbo
discriver fondo a tutto l'universo

(For it is not an enterprise to take in jest,
to describe the bottom of all the universe)

DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Inferno* 32.7–8

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Preface and Acknowledgments

The official title of this book is *Subterranean Cities*, but in the real world it has always gone by the name of *A Tale of Two Cities*. It became a routine: each time I was newly arrived on a research visit, the taxi driver, baffled by the weight of the books in my bags, would ask me what I was doing there. Upon hearing that I was writing a book about London and Paris, the invariable response would be, “Oh, yes, *A Tale of Two Cities*,” the title in English no matter what country I was in. Such is the power of a received idea, a vaguely recalled reading from high school, a title floating up from the vestiges of an old movie seen on TV. My hope is that the space of this book manages to bridge the images of its real and its shadow title, addressing at once the cold and abstract yet rigorous ideal and the familiar and evocative yet reductive commonplace.

Although the finished book is dedicated to the kitsch-like identification that allowed the project currency in the everyday life of the great cities as well as in the corridors of academe, it is equally dedicated to another threshold between them, one of the many spaces I did not have an opportunity to address in the main text: the unique space of the grand research library, and to its shared population of underground men and women—persons who look as if they could not possibly exist beyond the peculiar air of these reading rooms, corridors, bath-rooms, cloakrooms, and cafeterias. But each library also possesses a distinct subterranean identity, although an identity that has been complicated by the existence, in London and in Paris, of a vanished, nostalgically remembered institution alongside the brand-new, high-tech, and high-risk creation haunted by it, a real space and its shadow. The old Bibliothèque nationale was always metaphorically subterranean, epitomized by its *enfer* of restricted books, reserved for the initiated; by its forbidding guardians; and by its location among the central *passages* (covered arcades) of the Right Bank. In the old Library of the British Museum, it was the demons who delivered the books and who possessed a thousand ways to inflict punishment on the sorry scholar who asked the wrong question, looked the wrong look, or was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Both of these old spaces were redolent with the shades of their past researchers and adepts, Karl Marx and Virginia Woolf, Walter Benjamin and Georges Bataille, among many others. The new national libraries, by contrast, are literally utopian undergrounds, bright and open, rational and regulated. Nevertheless, they can still remind us of the continuity of their identity with centuries past. In Paris the

long, slowly descending moving walkways into the lower level of the Grande bibliothèque are reserved once again only for initiates, and the space is ruled by a computer system that no one, least of all the hapless librarians, has yet been able to master, a system whose automated gates, once crossed, will hold you in the depths at their pleasure. The faulty ventilation of the otherwise idyllic new British Library—reminding me of those past summer days in what felt like the seventh circle of hell in the sweltering reading room of the old British Museum Library—belied the open-air feel, and soon drove the permanent inhabitants to the extreme of a strike. And, finally, I must not neglect the American cousins. The New York Public Library's uniquely open-armed admissions policy attracts an extraordinary cross-section of the city's population, so mixed as to constitute perhaps the premier threshold space of Manhattan. The Library of Congress, with its marvelous, air-conditioned labyrinth of underground passageways, is the only one of these libraries that has truly inspired me with the fear that I might never again emerge, joining the ranks of underground scholars, workers, and congressional clerks, forever wandering the tunnels beneath Capitol Hill under the deluded impression that this, too, is research for my book.

I would be remiss if, intent on the grand design, I were to neglect to express my gratitude to the smaller, less mythic spaces that contributed equally to my research; to the many individuals whose suggestions, ideas, and criticisms helped me along the way; and to those who provided the financial support I have received over the years of researching and writing. Published and unpublished texts and images were made readily available to me in New York by the Billy Rose Theater Collection. In Paris they were made available by the Bibliothèque du film, the Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, the Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Inspection générale des carrières, and the Photothèque des musées de la ville de Paris. In London they were provided by the Bancroft Library, the Bermondsey Local Studies Library, BFI Films' Stills, Pictures and Designs Library, the Guildhall Library, the Imperial War Museum, the Institute for Historical Research, London's Transport Museum, the Mander and Mitchenson Theatre Collection, the Minet Library, the Museum of London, the Theatre Museum Picture Library, and the Westminster Archives Centre; and elsewhere in England by the Henry Moore Foundation, the Lee Miller Archive, and the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. Whenever able, the Interlibrary Loan Office at American University's Bender Library made readily available to me a wealth of essential materials. And, finally, let me acknowledge the gloriously musty and (hopefully still) neglected stacks at Columbia University's Butler Library, within the depths of which this book had its origins.

While it was from time to time annoying that everyone I met knew more about the underground than I did, I nevertheless managed, when I got over my annoyance, to stumble in this way upon all manner of invaluable sources. Although I cannot hope to name all of those who assisted me with their passing

comments and hints, I do want especially to thank the following people whose help went much further, with the inevitable apology for whatever I may have done to distort their suggestions and advice: Michelle Allen, Antoinette Burton, William Cohen, Antoine Compagnon, David Damrosch, Rachel Falconer, Pamela Gilbert, Christina Glengary, David Green, Heidi Holder, Andreas Huyssen, Derek Keene, Michael Levenson, Jonathan Loesberg, Steven Marcus, Joseph McLaughlin, Angda Mittal, Carol Jones Neuman, Karen Newman, Deborah Nord, Stephanie O'Hara, Nicole Pohl, Fred Radford, Michael Riffaterre, Vanessa Schwartz, Myra Sklarew, Scott Manning Stevens, Michael Taussig, David Trotter, Graham Willcox. My students at Columbia and at American University contributed much to the planning and writing of this book, and I am grateful to them. For the space of a year, Mark Stein seemed as much a collaborator on chapter 3 as a research assistant. I want to thank Bernhard Kendler at Cornell University Press for his generous support of my work, manuscript editor Karen M. Laun and copyeditor John Raymond for their efficient and incisive editing, production designer Lou Robinson for untangling and illuminating the book's illustrations, the manuscript's anonymous reader, and everyone else at Cornell Press who helped along the way. Mary Allen de Acosta supported the writing of the book in many ways; I am especially grateful for her generosity in providing me with an ideal place for research in London, and another for writing in Suba. The book is dedicated to Ana, who inspired it and saw it through from start to finish, and to Philip, who came in at the end.

Many of my textual debts should be apparent in the notes, and I have tried to be as clear about theoretical influences as possible; however, due to my combination of broad scope and idiosyncratic focus, I have tended to pillage historical sources, phrases, and images from wherever I could find them. I have in general documented such pillaging; however, especially with older sources, I have not always done so if the reference or quote had nothing whatsoever to do with the source's argument or general subject. I do want to single out my particular debt to Rosalind Williams's extraordinary book, *Notes on the Underground*, which (as will be evident to anyone who has had the pleasure of reading it) I have argued with, rifled through, and revisited time and again since the earliest stages of the project.

I was able to begin the book thanks to a Mellon postdoctoral fellowship at the Society of Fellows in the Humanities at Columbia University. The shape of the work gained enormously from my participation in Michael Levenson's National Endowment for the Humanities Seminar in London, 1995; my thanks to all involved, especially Michael. Further research was made possible by generous grants from American University, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Folger Library. A Mellon Foundation Grant from the College of Arts and Sciences of American University helped defray the cost of illustrations. I have benefited from the presentation of

work in progress at American University, Columbia University, the British Comparative Literature Association (1995), the American Comparative Literature Association (1997), the Mid-Atlantic British Studies Association (1998), the Modern Language Association (1996, 1999, 2002), the New Modernisms Conference at Pennsylvania State University (1999), the Centre for Metropolitan Studies at the University of London (2000), the Society for Utopian Studies (2001), the Folger Seminar on Early Modern Paris (2002), and the annual Monuments and Dust Conference. Portions of chapter 1 have been adapted from "Modernist Space and the Transformation of Underground London," in *Londons Imagined*, ed. Pamela Gilbert (State University of New York Press, 2002), of chapter 3 from "Sewage Treatments: Vertical Space and the Discourse of Waste in 19th-Century Paris and London," in *Filth*, ed. William Cohen and Ryan Thompson (University of Minnesota Press, 2004), and of chapter 4 from "Urban Nightmares and Future Visions," *Wide Angle* 20, no. 4 (October 1998).

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own, rendered as literally as possible within the bounds of English. All emphases are the original author's unless otherwise noted.

Subterranean Cities

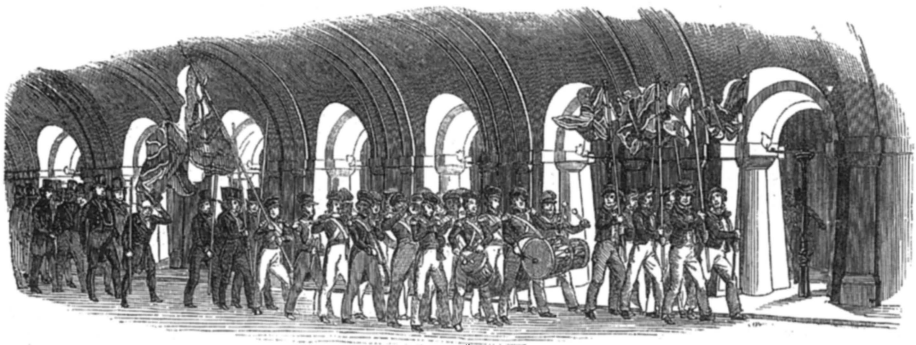
INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Western culture seems obsessed by all things underground. The sewers and catacombs are among the most visited attractions in Paris. London's biggest draw is the disused railway arches that house the shopping arcades of the counterculture-themed Camden Town; close behind on the list are the Tower and the London Dungeon. Even at Disney World, hardcore fans consider a tour of the "Utilidors," the underground utility network serving the immense holiday complex above, to be the ne plus ultra of the Orlando experience. No action movie is complete without a sensational climax in a metropolitan subway, utility tunnel, or sewer, or a showdown in the arch-villain's subterranean stronghold. The image of the late twentieth and early twenty-first-century city is dominated by underworld beings: prostitutes and pimps, dealers and addicts, sexual deviants, mafiosos, terrorists, illegal aliens, slum dwellers. Homeless children live in sewers, men sleep in stacks of rented cages, wild animals roam the streets. Meanwhile, just around the corner, another underground locks its doors to these fears, creating sealed-off, climate-controlled downtown cities beneath the open streets. Other fortresses rule the suburbs: vast windowless malls inaccessible to public transport and carefully policed by private security teams.¹ The countryside is seamed with hidden missile depots, buried toxic waste dumps, secret command centers, and state-of-the-art fallout shelters for the powers-that-be when the surface becomes too dangerous. Desperate to escape from poverty and oppression, refugees attempt to ride a new underground railway of cargo containers, tanker holds, and drainage pipes into the promised land of the West. How did so many disparate phenomena and diverse experiences become so closely identified with the same space?

It all began with the nineteenth century. True enough, man-made spaces such as tunnels, sewers, catacombs, and mines were being excavated beneath the earth by convicts or slaves as far back as the twenty-sixth century B.C.E.² The Western city has long been associated with the underworld in moral terms as the center of iniquity and dissolution.³ But it was only with the development of the nineteenth-century city, with its complex drainage systems, underground railways, utility tunnels, and storage vaults, that the urban landscape superseded the countryside of caverns and mines as the primary location of actual subterranean spaces. This convergence gave rise to a new way of experiencing and conceptualizing the city as a vertical space that is still with us today. The technologies of con-

struction and heavy industry were at the center of urban life, as were the new experiences, fashions, and types of behavior that emerged from them. Bridges and tunnels were visited as tourist attractions and eulogized as heroic enterprises; millions flocked to world exhibitions and the new subways to admire the wondrous inventions of industrial technology, in much the same way that they are currently enthralled by the computer-generated wonders of visual technology (figures 1 and 2). The nineteenth-century capitals of technological novelty were London and Paris. As powerhouse of the industrial revolution and the most populous city in the West, London provided images of modernity as a literally subterranean phenomenon. Paris, by contrast, provided images of a more fantastic and ambivalent modernity: on the one hand, an otherworldly cornucopia of commodities; on the other, an infernal stronghold of revolution, the desire to appropriate that technology in unforeseen ways. Although usually presented in opposition to one another, these two images in fact constituted complementary expressions of a single, highly contradictory attitude toward the experience of the modern city.

The shift from Victorian industrialization to the full-fledged modernity of the twentieth century placed enormous pressure on traditional individual and social attitudes toward everyday life. While the nineteenth century was dominated by the representation of aboveground space as if it were subterranean, and the increasingly predominant experience of underground space in the everyday life of the lower classes, the twentieth century was characterized by the representation of subterranean space as aboveground, and the increasing predominance of underground space in the everyday life of the middle classes. The technological boom of the nineteenth century introduced a novel category of space that has continued to expand in scope while its challenge to the traditionally vertical con-



Intro 1. Celebrating heroic engineering: the opening procession through the Thames Tunnel in 1843, with arches separating the two passages. Illustration from "Thames Tunnel, opened 25 March 1843," *Illustrated London News* (25 March 1843): 227.



Intro 2. Underground spectacle: visitors view the aquarium on the Trocadero at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, 1867. Illustration from “The Paris Exhibition,” *The Graphic* (June 1, 1878): 549.

ception has remained unremarked. The new underground is covered, windowless, or otherwise able to give the impression of being subterranean no matter where it may actually be located: the iron-and-glass arcade, the mausoleum, the factory, the prison cell, the interrogation room, the bunker, and the artificial environment of the office block, shopping mall, or climate-controlled apartment. *Subterranean Cities* documents the emergence of this new space out of the underground obsessions of the nineteenth-century metropolis. At the same time, it details the consequences of the continued recourse to those past obsessions to make sense of a contemporary experience of urban space that, in fact, has little in common with the cities in which they first appeared.

The first three chapters trace the effects on urban experience of the development of three types of subterranean space during the nineteenth century: the underground railway, the modern catacomb and necropolis, and the sewer. Each space attracted a specific form of underground reverie and fear. Chapter 1, “The New Life Underground,” analyzes the emergence of a wholly modern conception of subterranean space: an underground that would be bright, clean, and dry, the polar opposite of traditional images of the world below. It begins with divergent responses to the first of such spaces, the underground railway in London and Paris, from early plans in the 1840s to the completion of both networks in the first decades of the twentieth century. It develops the key components of this inorganic underground as it appeared in various guides to subterranean Paris and London in the early twentieth century and documents a similar conception of

the underground at work in a series of subterranean utopias written in the latter half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, from Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Gabriel Tarde to H. G. Wells and E. M. Forster, and in the architectural modernism of Le Corbusier and others, which imagined a city completely rationalized from top to bottom.

Chapter 2, "The Modern Necropolis," describes the flip-side of the rationalized underground through an examination of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century fascination with cities of the dead: the revived interest in the buried past through the invention of archaeology and paleontology, the incorporation of the design of the Roman catacombs and ancient Egyptian iconography into cemetery and urban design in Paris and London. The modernizing impulse to sanitize the ancient burial grounds of Paris and London went hand in hand with an archaizing fascination with the mythic resonances of subterranean space. Two key representations of the city are analyzed in terms of the necropolis: the coal mine (neotroglodytes in an underground cave city) and the subterranean pastoral (the simple life underground as escape from the modern city). "The Modern Necropolis" concludes with a look at instances of the positive fascination with an inhabited underground during the twentieth century, from Tolkien's hobbit-holes to London Tube shelters to Parisian *cataphiles*, contemporary explorers of the city's underground quarries.

Chapter 3, "Charon's Bark," examines the consequences of another sanitizing impulse: the construction and renovation of the sewage systems of Paris and London in response to the urban pathologies both physiological and psychological that haunted the modern city. Urban sanitation became the privileged discourse with which to address the perceived blights of deviance and perversion, but it did so by recourse to the most atavistic space of the modern city, home to its most extravagant legends and mythical beasts. Alien urban categories, such as prostitution, homosexuality, and crime, were likewise metaphorically assimilated to the space of the sewers, with a combination of fascination and repulsion that was mirrored by the growing popularity of the sewer tour and of the sewer tunnel as a setting in popular literature and theater. Descents to this alien underworld took both positive and negative forms, just as rationalizing narratives of sewer construction and touring were manifested differently in London and in Paris. The discourses of prostitution in London and in Paris were likewise complementary but superficially opposed, and they reworked old underworld tropes of fear and desire to polarize the city in terms of gendered spaces.

The conclusion of the book, "Urban Apocalypse," recounts the persistence of visions (some of them realized) of the destruction of London and Paris from the nineteenth century through the end of World War II. It relates this phenomenon to the overturning of the vertical imagination of the city. It then evaluates the applicability of this model for understanding a similar flurry of visions at the end of the twentieth century in some of the cities that took over from London and Paris

as centers for the production of underground space after 1945, in particular New York, Tokyo, and Los Angeles. The dominant reactions toward urban decay and poverty continue to invoke the underground imagery of nineteenth-century Paris and London. The raw facts of exploitation may not have changed since then, but they are occurring under the radically different spatial conditions of the globalized urban experience of the contemporary world at large. I conclude with the paradox of the underground at the turn of the twenty-first century: a set of images that has lost none of its power to dominate the imagination of an urban landscape in which those same images have lost any relation to everyday life.

Before turning to this material, I want to introduce several basic concepts that I rely on to decipher the complex simplicity of the underground.

The Vertical City

The underground is a slippery term. On the one hand, it is as straightforward as can be: the opposite of whatever the viewer from the world above considers as belonging to his or her own space. On the other hand, it is rife with the contradictions that emerge from that gesture at definition.

We can begin with anthropologist Mary Douglas's formulation in terms of cultural taboos, "Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained."⁴ In practice, this has made the underground the physical and conceptual trash heap of the modern world above, the place to which everyone and everything posing a problem or no longer useful to it is relegated. It is coherent in that whatever is in it at some point must have posed a threat to social order, but incoherent inasmuch as this definition at some time or other has included pretty much everything under the sun—and while garbage may decompose, we are acutely aware these days that it never actually disappears. For example, a primary set of associations persists from the medieval and early modern imagination of the underground in terms of the vertical cosmos of Christianity. Many conflicting images made their way into hell, but there is no doubt that the relationship was rigidly fixed and predominately metaphysical: good was above, evil below, and the earthly city existed in between, with a strongly downward inclination (figure 3). Infernal imagery was easily adaptable to an industrial revolution that saw wage laborers at work in mines and tunnels, or in factories that were underground in all but name: no light, no air—just dirt, grime, and the constant risk of injury or death. Such associations were far less welcomed by those promoting the new feats of engineering aimed at the middle- and upper-class citizens needed to fill the trains, shop in the exhibitions, arcades, and department stores, and blithely ignore the conditions that had produced the goods they were consuming.

Moreover, somewhere between the nightmare visions of hell and the antiseptic promises of a perfectly controlled new underground was a third set of ancient



Intro 3. The medieval legacy to the modern urban underground is the vertical cosmos. In this vision of the Last Judgment the blessed souls march to the heavenly city, and the damned are dragged down into Hell. Drawing by Michael Wolgemut, *Ultima etas mundi*, in Hartmann Schedel, *Liber Chronicarum*, 1493.

associations related to fundamental notions of peace and security. After all, the earliest use of underground space was as shelter from inclement weather, the dark night, and the threat of wild beasts and hostile outsiders. The underground has continued to function as a repository for these and other simple, but nevertheless utopian, desires not met by the strictly regulated society above it. As most of these desires run contrary to the self-denying and materialistic ideology of mod-

ern capitalism, they can take concrete form in the world above only as romantic clichés, dangerous urges, or daydreams so anodyne as barely to satisfy for an instant before leaving behind a thirst for more.

There are many different forms taken by the vertical segmentation of society; what concerns me at this point is the framework itself and its function. The world above—the world of law, order, economy, conformity—is given structure and order by what it excludes beneath it as unfit. Needless to say, this is a symbolic gesture, reinforced by myriad linguistic pairings and tropes: high and low, up and down, upper and lower, light and dark, north and south. Most importantly, it was reinforced during the nineteenth century by a realization that the city itself was beginning to reflect the timeworn metaphysics: the poor lived in dark, airless, and disease-ridden tenements and rookeries; the homeless slept rough under bridges, arches, and tunnels; desperate men (and a few women) scavenged the sewers for dropped coins and lost valuables. A whole system of representation emerged that fixed these images as the single unchanging face of the newly dubbed “lower” classes (figure 4). Very gradually, throughout the nineteenth century, the great cities were in fact becoming more and more segregated by class; however, according to images of those cities, that segregation was hard and fast from the beginning. This was the vertical city: a messy blend of half-truths and bygone myths that took over the representation of urban life.



Intro 4. The misery of Paris under siege in 1871 is emblemized by the forced habitation of underground space. The depiction draws on stock iconography of urban poverty. Engraving by E. B., *A Colony in a Cellar*, in “Paris under Bombardment,” *The Graphic* (25 February 1871): 185.

For nineteenth-century writers of various political and class outlooks, the underground seemed to hold the key to unlocking the secrets of the modern world (figure 5). Imagery of the underground and its relation to the world above tended to fall into two distinct categories: that of segregation and elimination, and that of incorporation and recycling. The first was conventionally identified with London, the second with Paris. There are certain historical and material reasons for this—the more centralized political structure of Paris; the tidal nature of the Thames and the London port facilities; the earlier industrialization and greater population of London; the greater population density of Paris. Such identifications tended to polarize these qualities, finding in one city whatever was wanting in the other. As we follow these two discourses, it will become evident that neither can fully account for the space of either city, nor can the two models be fully understood separately from one another.⁵ Unlike representations of the city in terms of the world above, those of the world below never appeared without manifestly displaying at least some of the underlying contradictions of modern society. No matter how clear-cut the divisions are made in theory, in the actual city the supposedly above and supposedly below are in constant contact. Although there were limit-cases—the mansions and clubs of the rich were more inaccessible than the cribs and hovels of the poor—both extremes were well-represented in fantasy. The promiscuous mixing attributed to Paris infected London, and the spatial segregation attributed to London infected Paris. In both cities, the poor crowded into railway stations, demonstrated in public places, and fomented revolution; in both, prostitutes plied the streets, walking alongside proper ladies.

The View from Above and the View from Below

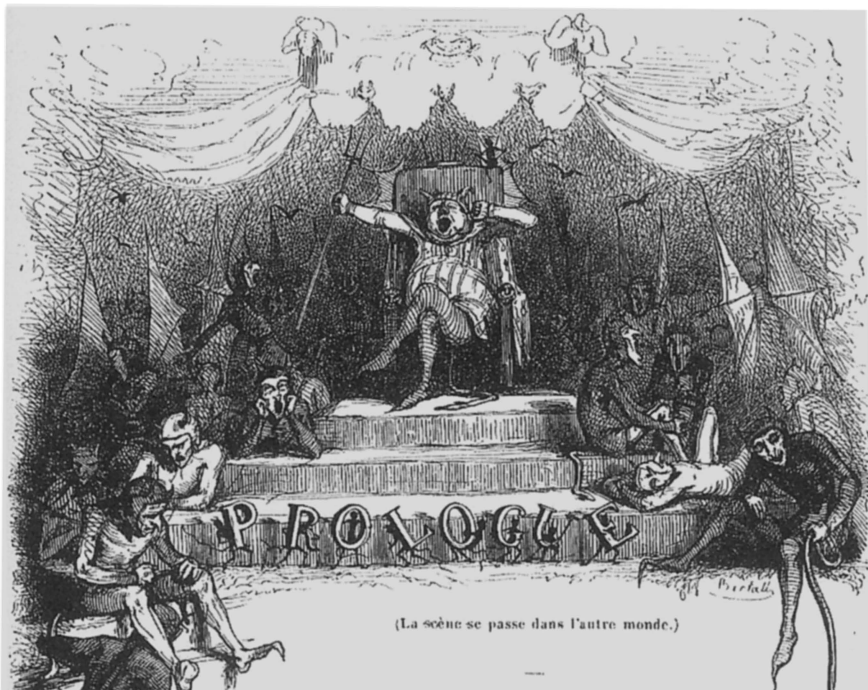
In a city divided between aboveground and underground, there were two customary vantage points from which to describe its spaces. One could take a bird's-eye view—favored sites were the dome of St. Paul's in London and the towers of Notre-Dame de Paris—that encompassed the entire cityscape at the expense of individual detail.⁶ The view from above was epitomized by the "Asmodeus flight," derived from an eighteenth-century Spanish novel where the titular devil on crutches flies above Madrid, unroofing the houses below. This mildly satirical conceit was enormously popular, imitated and adapted to cities everywhere; by the first decades of the nineteenth century, the "Asmodeus flight" had become a commonplace of urban literature in general (figure 6).⁷ The view from above figures the modern city in the most general and abstract sense as hell, and in its various versions it runs the gamut from metaphysical speculation to biting moral satire to humorous verbal anecdote and visual tableaux.

Rather than the metonymic abstraction of the city as a whole through its rooftops characteristic of the view from above, the view from below was emblemized by the literal descent into the *bas-fonds*, the lower depths of the city. As a



Intro 5. The world is described in terms of its underground phenomena on the spine of this thousand-page compendium on life underground. From Thomas Wallace Knox, *Underground; or, Life below the Surface* (London: Sampson, Low & Co., 1873).

bona fide underworld journey, the view from below promises a face-to-face meeting with Satan himself, not just the unimposing Asmodeus leaning on his crutches. Like the moral overview, the material descent has premodern antecedents. The underground lore of Paris, for example, contains the story of a “charlatan,” known only as César, said to have been strangled by the devil on the eleventh of March, 1615, in a cell in the Bastille, where he had been incarcerated



(La scène se passe dans l'autre monde.)

COMMENT IL SE FIT QU'UN DIABLE VINT A PARIS
ET COMMENT CE LIVRE S'ENSUIVIT.

Facilis descensus Averni.
« Il n'est que trop aisé de descendre aux enfers. »
— VIRGILE. —

I

De quoi ne se lasse-t-on pas? — Il arriva
qu'un jour, las sans doute de siéger, une
fourche en main, sur son trône d'ébène,
Satan s'ennuya si fort, qu'il voulut à tout
prix se désennuyer. La chose n'est



since 1611 because of the “magic tours” he would give to view the devil in the *carrières*, the subterranean quarries in the southern suburbs of Paris near the aptly named rue d’Enfer.⁸ Characteristic of the view from below, César’s tours brought together the urban thrill seeker and the mythology of the otherworld in a convincingly material form. The view from below involves descent rather than ascent, it proffers knowledge and power at the cost of danger and ordeal, and, rather than reducing the variety of the world to a play of appearances, it deals in contrasts, for this realm below is always predicated upon its opposition to the world above. While the view from above maintains what it regards as underground at a safe distance far below, hierarchized and conceptualized, the view from below revels in the sensations of its proximity to chaos. Like César’s tour, it is a trip into the devil’s own realm, and it leaves no doubt that the primary allure of the underground in the modern city is the cluster of illicit activities that traditionally were or have been at one time or another associated with various departments of Satan’s realm.

As the city changed, and the second industrial revolution in the later nineteenth century introduced an ever more complex and varied underground infrastructure, alongside the more mythic or metaphorically underground spaces of poverty and crime, the two emblems became less predictable and more confused. The actual spaces of sewers, tunnels, underground railways, arches and viaducts, storage vaults, subterranean parking, and covered passageways become intertwined, sometimes materially and often imaginatively. While not always explicitly diabolical, the frequency with which the language of supernatural power found its way into the view from above and the rhetoric of evil into the view from below is symptomatic of the stakes involved in mapping the modern city and separating its constituent spaces. What remains consistently diabolical, whatever the discourse of evil, is the note of excess that haunts the view from below just as a superhuman power continues to mark the view from above. As Salman Rushdie’s narrator Rai put it in that great novel of late twentieth-century underworlds, *The Ground beneath Her Feet*, “Our libraries, our palaces of entertainment tell the truth. The tramp, the assassin, the rebel, the thief, the mutant, the outcast, the delinquent, the devil, the sinner, the traveller, the gangster, the runner, the mask: if we did not recognize in them our least-fulfilled needs, we

Facing page

Intro 6. In “How It Happened That a Devil Came to Paris,” the prologue to *Le Diable à Paris* (1844), the bored monarch of the underworld sends his courtier Flammèche to report on what is happening in the center of the world. The drawing’s vertical layout rehearses visually the view from above that the urban panorama will proceed to describe textually. Vignette by Bertall [Albert d’Arnoux], engraved by F. Leblanc. From *Le Diable à Paris*, ed. J. Hetzel (Paris: Hetzel, 1845–46), 1.

would not invent them over and over again, in every place, in every language, in every time."⁹ The impulses of the night are dangerous to the order of the world because there is no place for them in it. The most persuasive of the modernist theorists of the underground called this force the id, and spoke of the return of the repressed. But it became ever clearer during the second half of the twentieth century that this was a resolutely social and spatial phenomenon, rather than the individual one that Freud theorized; and the devil has continued to embody that excess, demonstrating a persistence long outliving his putative role in Christian theology.

The vertical framework thus serves two distinct functions: it allows those it places underground to give expression to their own unfulfilled desires, and it allows persons placed aboveground by its framework to make some manner of sense out of those desires. Yet it is important to keep in mind that the devil and his underground demesne are not privileged concepts residing outside of capitalism and modern culture; they are figures for the most available and identifiable of the unfulfilled desires that are seamed through every aspect of a society that, for the most part, has not succeeded in keeping its waste safely buried. The vertical conception of space implies that there is a region to which such desires and vices can be restricted, and in which they take a limited and predictable range of forms. Despite its often eerie correlation to actual conditions, this conception remains merely a representation.

The Dialectic of Antiquity and Novelty

The twin modes of representation personified by the devil constituted a potent force in giving form to the dizzying experience of modernity.¹⁰ The combination of mythic endurance with a liberally employed and constantly shifting corpus of underground imagery was uniquely suited for expressing the contradictions inherent to the ever more refined and ever more baldly exposed mechanisms of capitalist—which is to say modern—society. Capitalism invents, uses, and discards; in order to succeed, each new technology, each new invention must present itself as both familiar enough not to frighten and new enough not to be familiar. The underground presents the opposite combination: it is familiar enough to be recognized and unfamiliar enough to be frightening, or at least enticing. To produce, capital needs new lands to exploit and ever new labor with which to exploit it, ever new markets in which to expand and ever new products to be consumed by those markets. Expansion is not a uniform and continuous process; it takes time to find the most efficient form for each technology, and time to find the most attractive wrapper for each commodity. Nor is it an enduring process; the constant movement of capital outmodes technologies and products as quickly as it invents and packages new ones. The advancement of capitalism leaves behind a trail of obsolescence: overexploited land, superfluous labor,

and outmoded commodities. These ruins of things, places, people, techniques, and ideas end up both figuratively and literally underground, in the garbage dumps and landfills of the world.

Now, it is not axiomatic that what is no longer useful for capital is no longer useful for anything else; the underground is equally the repository for possibilities of invention, innovation, and labor that were not exhausted in the production of surplus value. Because the underground has been frequently, although not exclusively, popular in origin and has been closely associated with traditional stereotypes, folklore, and the armature of popular culture, such possibilities are more often than not expressed in whatever bigoted forms have been repressed in the process of creating a respectable and cohesive discourse aboveground. As the historian Piero Camporesi has written about the “culture of the poor” in early modern Italy:

The beautiful, harmonic, symmetric and geometric do not correspond to the popular vision of the deformed, unmeasured, hyperbolic (or miniaturized), monstrous, overflowing and formless. The image of the world, seen from below, appears uncertain, flawed, ambiguous, unbalanced and inhomogeneous, as in the visions of the drugged and possessed. The images can be overturned, the figures turned upside down, the relations of time and space altered, the edifice of the world itself becomes illusory and shady. The natural and divine order is broken up and altered: chaos takes priority over a rational design that presupposes a centre towards which the whole immense periphery converges in unity.¹¹

It is important to recall that the underground is not the actual form of a popular *mentalité* but the spatial representation of its interaction with the dominant discourse that figures itself by contrast as existing above that *mentalité*. There are two ways in which this underground representation distorts experience: in the terms of the view from above, which portrays the margins of society as alien but virtuous (the worthy poor); and in terms of the view from below, which portrays the margins of society as alien but undesirable (the undeserving poor and the criminal classes). As Camporesi phrases the clash, in what I have termed the view from below, “the structural ambiguity of folk culture—with its two-dimensional view and its double-edged mental machinery—invaded, with its demonic animism, the spaces where ‘superior’ culture was attempting to devise different systems of knowledge.”¹² Because only the negative extremes of the underground can be made directly visible to the world above, the contradictions they express manifest themselves instead as simple negation. Even at its most demonic and apocalyptic extremes of “two-dimensionality,” however, the view from below expresses critical truths about modern life unavailable as such through any other mode of representation.

As Marx maintained, contradiction, not aporia or paradox, is the fundamental characteristic of capitalism, which tends simultaneously toward an ever greater homogenization and an ever greater fragmentation: any one quality, be it time,

labor, space, or land must be rendered equivalent to any other in order to be exchanged; each quality, as commodity, must be distinguished from every other in order to be bought and sold. Contradictions appear most forcefully wherever capitalism is newly arrived and in whatever technology it has newly developed, or wherever it has freshly departed from and in whatever technology it has made obsolete. In the nineteenth century, contradictions appeared most readily in the city, and manifested themselves most frequently in some form of the demonic, whether in the general observation that the entire world under capitalism was rife with contradiction (that is, evil), or in the assertion that the urban underground was a vicious space of difference and resistance to the world above. The mildest form of contradiction manifests itself as novelty, and it is intrinsic to the dialectic of consumption; when that novelty is rejected as excessive, frightening, magical, or subversive, we can assume that the contradiction was too strong for the order of capitalism, and so it was handed over to the devil, “the principle of vague *Excitement* in which Satiety always seeks for relief.”¹³ The devil persisted in nineteenth-century Europe because it was perhaps the only figure powerful enough to contain the fears and express the hopes invoked by the rapidity and magnitude of social change there, in particular the astonishing transformations being wrought by industrial technology on the urban space and those who dwelt within it.

Lefebvre's Spatial Triad

For all its resemblance to conditions in the modernizing city, not even during the nineteenth century could the vertical framework account for the contradictions of actual experience without severe distortion. The architectural historian Siegfried Giedion's analysis of nineteenth-century technology added an important spatial component to the axiom of the *Communist Manifesto* that “within the old society, the elements of a new one have been created.”¹⁴ That component was given its most sustained treatment by the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who believed that the category of space provided a means to theorize everyday life as simultaneously abstract and material in the same way as Marx had analyzed the commodity. In his 1974 book, *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre wrote, “The social relations of production have a social existence to the extent that they have a spatial existence; they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing the space itself.”¹⁵ For Lefebvre, this meant first of all that space, rather than an inert category in which people lived, things existed, and events took place, had always been an integral part of any social process. Most simply, as Edward Soja has summarized it, “There is no unspatialized social reality.”¹⁶

Lefebvre identified three types of space produced through social existence: perceived, conceived, and lived. The earliest spatial practice, he argued, was iden-

tical to the “intelligence of the body,” the gestures, traces, and marks by which the body in action distinguishes between right and left, high and low, central and peripheral, or by which a spider orientates itself in a web that is produced by and part of its body, while simultaneously marking its place in the space around it. Long before space was considered abstractly, “lived experience already possessed its internal rationality; this experience was *producing* long before *thought* space, and spatial thought, began *reproducing* the projection, explosion, image and orientation of the body.”¹⁷

While perceived space is first and foremost a product of the individual body, representations of space arise out of the “order” imposed by social relations, including knowledge, signs, codes, and, especially, language.¹⁸ This is a visible, ideal, and abstract space; it is represented in topographical terms primarily as aboveground space, in contradistinction to lived, or “representational spaces, embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art.”¹⁹

While conceived space is subordinated to the logic and ideology of the dominant social order, lived space need obey no rules of consistency or cohesiveness; rather, it is characterized by the confused traces of the ongoing conflict between childhood and society out of which it has been produced, “a conflict between an inevitable, if long and difficult maturation process and a failure to mature that leaves particular original resources and reserves untouched.”²⁰ Rather than a coherent space of otherness or opposition, representational space and the underground qualities with which it has been associated for several centuries describe the embattled emergence of the “clandestine” as an uneasy compromise between dominant codes of representation and behavior and the exigencies and desires forbidden or distorted by them.

The originality of Lefebvre’s spatial triad lies not so much in its individual components, the contours of which are indebted explicitly to Marx and implicitly to Freud, but in the way in which he showed them to be dialectically intertwined within a space itself produced by that dialectic. Once grasped as something that is produced rather than static, space becomes a rigorous category through which to incorporate into critical analysis those aspects of social life traditionally conceptualized only in such ghettoized, romanticized, and reductive Western categories of otherness as myth, folklore, popular culture, Oriental, primitive, childhood, feminine. Our current critical idioms allow us to analyze the dominant discourse of a field or culture and its conception of space; they allow us to analyze categories of otherness in terms of the same conceptions, or as primary evidence of individual experience. They do not allow us to analyze the interrelationship between these categories except in terms of a dominant discourse, or to grasp what we conceive as otherness in anything approaching its complex and contradictory combinations of individual experience and fragmentary past or alien representations of space.

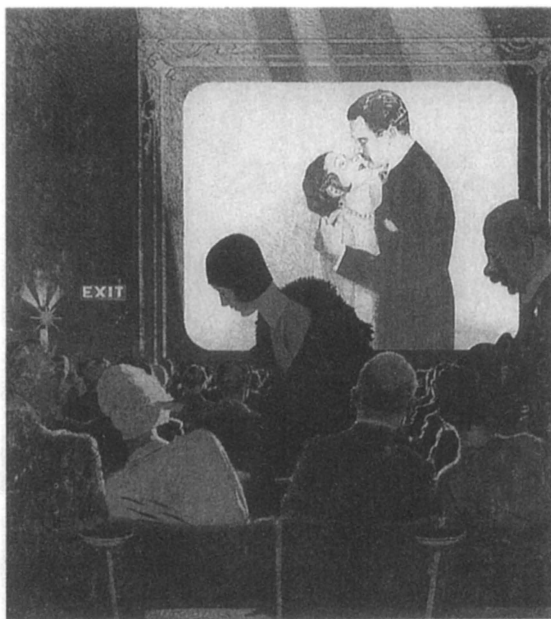
For this reason, I have been less concerned here in reading my material directly through such key rubrics of contemporary critical discourse as race, ethnicity, class, gender, or queerness than in showing how the complex individual experiences invoked, but only partially encompassed, by those rubrics have participated in the dynamics of urban space. My hope is that this spatial analysis will open up different perspectives within the many other critical discourses with which its concerns intersect. The spatial triad does not give the direct access to the margins to which so much of contemporary theory and art aspires, but it does promise a dynamic space for those margins that does not immediately either contain or repress them all over again.

Underground Truth

Because it is a spatial metaphor as well as a material space of difference, the underground is used in both conceptual space and representational space to represent ways in which the everyday is inscribed in social space. “The film lover travels by Underground” promises a utopian London Transport poster of the 1930s (figure 7); “Métro boulot métro dodo” and its London counterpart “Tube work tube bed” run the postwar mantras of urban anomie. Whether selling a dream-world spectacle or epitomizing a dreary existence, the trope of being hidden underground actually bestows conceptual visibility onto what would otherwise be obscured in the uniformity of the aboveground world. We represent the everyday as underground in order to be able to recognize it; what we recognize is a differently coded version of its relation to the world above. In the vertical framework that continues to dominate the conception of modern space, the key component is the threshold, which figures the moments that link aboveground and underground, where what is hidden emerges into visibility, where all three types of space are figured simultaneously; it is the closest we find in representation to an image of the spatial triad.

In the nineteenth century, the underground was the locus of modernity because it was the material sector most being developed at the time by capitalism. In the twentieth century, it remained the locus of modernity because of its traditional link to everyday life, the sector currently under development, and because, as opposed to the previous century, so much of contemporary everyday life was in fact being conducted in underground conditions. Through much of the twentieth century, rather than being closely tied to the spatial practices of a particular city such as London or Paris, the underground was deployed as an abstract conception of modernity and the modern city.

The proliferation of inorganic space—the subways, subterranean downtowns, and sealed-off interiors of the modern workplace—thus transformed the perceived space of the underground without thereby eliminating the traditional representational associations with the organic underground, rooted in ancient



The Film-Lover travels **UNDERGROUND**

Piccadilly, Oxford Circus,
Leicester Square, Strand
Stations

Intro 7. The utopian promise of the 1930s underground: from the subway to the dream palace underworld. Advertising poster for London Transport by Charles Pears, *The Film Lover* [1930]. Reproduced by permission from London's Transport Museum.