Structures of Urban Design in 19th Century American Literature

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Urban centers have long acted as both a setting and a subject of literary production, but their various historical forms give pause to the designer, architect, sociologist, historian, critic, poet, or novelist who seeks to pin them down. Even the phrase "the city" leads to conceptual difficulties; can one speak of the city as an abstract idea which takes specific form as a product of its historical situation, environment, and inhabitants? Or is one limited to speaking of specific areas of specific cities at a single moment in time? Expressions of city life can be understood in relation to each other by their ties to physical aspects of urban design and *la vie quotidienne*, which remain relatively constant in their psychological and spiritual impact on the city dweller and, by extension, the author. Of all these physical aspects, the wall is perhaps the most consistently present in urban life; it is also one of the most contextually variable. The wall is such a basic element of urban structure that it cannot be neatly correlated with any single psychological effect, yet the ways in which it can have psychological significance are defined through several inherent contradictions. These include: the wall as a site of defense and the wall as a constraining element; the wall as a vantage point and the wall as a structured obscurity; the wall as a canvas for beautifying urban design elements and the wall as an ugly, often blank, imposition; and, perhaps most significantly, the divide between interior and exterior. By situating the textual wall somewhere on the spectrum of these contradictions, and in the work's own urban context, the relationship between urban design and literary expression reveals itself. The idea of the wall can be expanded beyond literal structures to include all of the structural principles of urban life—such as the rhythms of urban attention, which can be understood as a kind of phantasmagoria—but even these are often shaped and defined by literal urban structures.

Few stories deal with the psychological impact of walls more directly than Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street." In this story, the constraining and obscuring nature of the wall is self-evident. From the first pages, the narrator evasively describes the limited view of his Wall Street office, trapped between the white wall of an air shaft—a view "deficient in what landscape painters call 'life'" (Melville 2)—and a brick wall blackened by age (2). Everything about this setting evokes limitation. The deficiency of life at both ends of the office is in itself oppressive, but the opposite colors of the wall are also significant. The narrator is situated in a grey area between white and black. Thus the story begins literally in medias res, in the middle of a color spectrum greyed by the city; in other words, Wall Street is shown as a monotonous and unnatural muddle of life from which all spontaneous life has been sapped. Even when color is introduced later, it carries a similar tone: the narrator brings out "a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby" (6). This folding screen, as manmade greenery, demarcates the office and reminds its occupants that it is a space of property. The screen is like a hedgerow defining property lines, yet robbed of any genuine natural beauty. This distortion of natural elements is rebuked at the story's very end when the narrator observes "grass-seeds, dropped by birds" (29) in the heart of the Tombs, the prison where Bartleby dies. Yet even these are only present as the result of "some strange magic"

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(29); the narrator's conception of the logical city does not allow for the intrusion of natural color or any form of spontaneous expression.

Yet the wall has potential for positive form. Properly constructed, a wall is a space of refuge and imagination. Gaston Bachelard famously promotes this view in his book *The Poetics of Space*: "every corner…is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is the *germ*" (Bachelard 155, italics added). The motif of the seed, which Bachelard notes, is essential to understanding healthy human space. A certain level of constraint in urban design is not just unavoidable, but *necessary* to the psychological and imaginative development of the human being; the "grass-seeds" in the Tombs are symbols of potential which have found expression as opposed to the withered husk which Bartleby becomes. Thus the ancient character of the Tombs, enriched by the healthy germination of the subject, becomes something of a sanatorium offering refuge, not isolation. The history of Wall Street lends itself to this interpretation of the wall as a demarcation of significant space rather than an obstruction.

Figure 1. "Vienna Before Redevelopment," Vienna 1844 (Schorske 28)

In its era of Dutch settlement, when New York was New Amsterdam, the current site of Wall Street was occupied by an actual wall built as protection against the English (Lorenzini, "The Dutch and the English, Part 1"). From its earliest form as a relatively simple wooden wall in 1653 ("Part 1") to its final stone iteration, which resembled the walled cities of Holland (Lorenzi, "The Dutch and the English, Part 5"), the wall crossed the island of Manhattan at the same point; also consistent in the development of the wall was its adjacent glacis, which ranged from 12 feet at the earliest time of construction (Lorenzi, "Part 1") to 44 feet in 1653 (Lorenzi, "The Dutch and the English, Part 3"). The glacis is highly significant to the relationship between urban design and its human subject. In its military context, it is functional vacant space. It makes attacking the walls it surrounds more difficult for land armies and allows the defender a vantage point against invasion. In wartime urban design, the existence of a wall and its glacis concentrates significant buildings into an urban core, in order to keep them both safe and within reasonable distance of each other; the density of many modern European cities can be traced back to this necessity. When the need for these walls disappeared, the swaths of space left vacant by the glacis actually became something of a playground for the architect and urban planner. The late destruction of the wall and vacancy of the glacis was highly significant to the deliberate 19th century development of Vienna (Schorske 27; Figure 1). The Viennese Ringstraße, like New York's Wall Street, was a practical source of open space for development and,

after development, an outline of the city's military history. This military history is tacitly expressed in "Bartleby" in the office's function as a barrack, hosting the narrator and his strange posse of scribes who each display a militaristic devotion to authority—the narrator's worship of "the late John Jacob Astor" (1) and Turkey's submissive insistence that he must "marshal and deploy [his] columns" (3) are the strongest examples of this militarism—and the intense reactions to Bartleby's gentle but firm refusals of the narrator's orders make sense in the context of Wall Street as a raging battle of capital whose leaders cannot accept dissent. Wall Street, as portrayed by Melville, neatly summarizes the wall's contradiction as both a source of obscurity and a vantage point. Its original military function is a form of productive obscurity and protects the inhabitants; its modern function is both a reminder of this obscurity, as the narrator's chambers prove, and a site of modern development for New York.

This discussion of Wall Street opens major questions about the wall as a street and, inversely, the street as a wall. In Melville, the urban wall is uncompromisingly restrictive and limiting; but in other works, and in real urban design, the wall often channels the psychological and spiritual fermentation of urban life in productive ways. Urban navigation, a skill which city dwellers cultivate over time, requires an awareness of how the street and the wall interact; the practical knowledge of how to navigate the river of the crowd is essential. Edgar Allen Poe, who played with this idea consistently, depicts a classic flâneur analyzing, entering, and moving through the masses of London in "The Man of the Crowd". At the story's beginning, he catalogues the various urban "types" to be found: "noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, stock-jobbers…cast-off graces of the gentry…the race of swell pick-pockets…gamblers…the dandies and the military men" (Poe 484–5). The narrator proves himself capable of analysis from the privileged space of the café, but is separated by its "smoky panes" (483); even as he pushes his "brow to the glass" (487) in examination, he remains separate. Poe, with his discussion of the glass, very subtly investigates the role of materials in urban design. At first, it functions only as a window, or as a vantage point from which the crowd may be surveyed. As the story unfolds, the man of the crowd—who, like the narrator, does not neatly fit into the categorized urban "types"—absorbs the narrator's attention completely and becomes his double; more properly, the narrator examines his own veiled id after leaving the café, a safe space representing the ego. In the context of this doubling, the glass of the café becomes a mirror. Finally, as the narrator notices the man of the crowd, he catches sight "both of a diamond and a dagger" (488). The crystal signifies luxury, but it also alludes to the crystal ball, a symbol of a future which is fixed but inscrutable to the narrator who cannot read it. Thus glass, throughout the story, becomes more and more opaque to the narrator. This increasing opacity mimics the narrator's confusion and gradual loss of faith in his own navigation of the city.

While he begins the story with "the vivid yet candid reason of Leibniz" (482), easily forming a taxonomy of the city, he admits at its end that the man of the crowd cannot be read (492). This shift is bound up in the wall-esque nature of the crowd itself. At the story's beginning, the narrator sees the way in which crowd members impede each other as bizarre: "when impeded…these people suddenly ceased muttering, but redoubled their gesticulations…if jostled, they bowed profusely to the jostlers" (483). In other words, the very idea of impediment in the crowd is alien. The narrator moves deftly and silently (490) until he must, finally, cease (492). His navigation where others are jostled indicates that he is, in a sense, walking through walls as easily as he saw through the glass; if not for the cursory mention that he makes his way onto the street (488), one might assume he simply drifted through the window, too. Urban navigation implies, in a sense, a ghostly ability to see and walk through walls. Urban navigation is distinct from the analytic: "[routine circulations] are not controlled by any image or plan that can be represented in words, diagrams, or gestures; they manifest rather somatic intelligence" (Tuan 208). Urban navigation is somatic, instinctual, ghostly, and above all unconscious; the city dweller moves on "autopilot." The horror of "The Man of the Crowd" lies in the disruption of these unconscious abilities. The narrator is pushed out of the realm of disinterested contemplation and forced into instinctual, somatic navigation. This "somatic intel-

ligence" still proves unfruitful and, in a sense, unconsummated. The unreadability of the man of the crowd begins as mysterious; it only becomes horrific when it engages and frustrates the narrator on a bodily level. As the man of the crowd disrupts his "somatic intelligence," the narrator begins to mistrust his own body and his unconscious assumptions about the city. In other words, there is an acknowledgment and disruption of what Georg Simmel sees as a phenomenon "unconditionally reserved to the metropolis…the blasé attitude" (Simmel 51). The blasé attitude is rooted in experience and confidence in one's ability to understand the city. The crowd only becomes a source of fear when one must give up the blasé attitude and engage with it directly. In such engagement, the crowd ceases to be an abstract object of contemplation and becomes a concrete structure; this structure is unfamiliar to the typical city dweller. It is no longer another object situated within the city's walls (the crowd, when understood abstractly, is equal to the subject since they are both situated within the walls of the city) and transforms into a structural element of the city, i.e., a living wall.

The sense of horror at the narrator's lost ability to read the crowd—which is a coded inability to read the deeper neuroses of his own psyche—is rooted in this transformation. The crowd, which does not impose itself on the typical blasé city dweller, suddenly impedes the navigation of the city and renders lived experience obsolete. The narrator's anxiety at the "waywardness" (Poe, "Crowd" 491) of the man of the crowd represents this shift into confusion. Central to this dichotomy of crowd as object and crowd as structure is the question of interior and exterior city life. In other words, when the crowd is made an abstract object of thought, it can neatly coexist with other objects of thought, as though the urban "types" were brought into a safe interior (e.g., a café or a study) and arranged on a shelf. When the narrator is pushed out of the café, the space of the ego, into the psyche itself, the crowd cannot be neatly arranged but surrounds the narrator, taking the place of the safe interior. Nothing could be more Gothic than this unstructured, shifting interior. It offers all the worst qualities of the wall—namely, the constraining element found in Melville—with none of the reinforcement or security implied by the wall's early military function or the safety which Bachelard, among others, identifies with the interior.

Another Poe story, "The Cask of Amontillado," reiterates this tie between interiority as the realm of safe, accessible memory and exteriority as the realm of dynamic novelty—the "shock factor" which Walter Benjamin made central in his analysis of 19th-century Paris (Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" 159)—although that story's narrative is, in relation to the city, completely opposite to "The Man of the Crowd." It does not begin in a safe, ego-shielding space but in "the supreme madness of the carnival season" (Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado" 510-11); the narrator does not survey the crowd from afar, then join it, but picks out his prey and brings him to an interior space (512). As with "The Man of the Crowd," this interior is a place of memory. However, memory is elevated from its role as a navigational principle and expanded to include family history. The vault is a constant reminder of the "thousand injuries" (510) which Montresor's family has borne; his monomania is reinforced by the space through its distance from social life and its materials. Frank Lloyd Wright, in a moment of optimism, predicted that "walls themselves because of glass will become windows and windows as we used to know them as holes in walls will be seen no more" (Wright 53). In his discussion of what walls will be, one recognizes what walls were. The glass of "The Man of the Crowd" functions as a vantage point, a mirror, and a crystal ball; each of its functions enable the subject, extending their vision of the world outside. With the latter two functions, Poe distorts this extension of the subject for horrific effect, but it is intrinsic to the glass in the story. In stark contrast, the nitre which ensnares Montresor and Fortunato is oppressive, constraining, and insular (Poe, "Amontillado" 515). Insularity is not limiting in itself. As Bachelard claims, "the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (Bachelard 28). In "The Cask of Amontillado," the airless tomb does, in fact, intensify Montresor's dreaming and bring memory to the fore. The horror of the story lies in the perversion of that dreaming. The nostalgia of the daydream is replaced by the nightmare of family resentment and

revenge, yet the dream is just as focused—and just as fully, materially expressed—as Bachelard could imagine. What distinguishes Montresor from the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" is the materiality of his city expertise. Where the narrator can only wander through a city which becomes more and more walled-in, Montresor builds walls himself. He does not simply experience urban structure but actively changes it. His expressions of the self are not limited to attention and reception of the city, but material impacts on it through the construction of walls. Montresor uses the structural forces of urban life to kill a fellow city dweller; the horror of entombment is partially bound up in the exaggeration and redirection of the city's everyday elements. The interiority of the tomb, like that of the café, induces reflection on the space and contents of the city itself. Just as the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" feels most confident in his navigation of the city from behind glass, Montresor's memory—his recollection and confession of the crime (Poe 518)—revolves around the internal space of the tomb. "The Cask of Amontillado" also plays with similar themes of doubling. As the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" loses track of his double, he admits that his neuroses must remain unexamined; Montresor, in contrast, actively represses his double.

Both of these Poe stories are centered on themes of light and flânerie. In "The Man of the Crowd," the changing light reflects the narrator's growing unease: his "happy mood" (Poe, "Crowd" 482) is at its strongest when daylight still reigns; his quiet but confident analysis takes place when "the lamps were well-lighted" (483); he begins descending into obsession as "the rays of the gas-lamps…gained ascendancy, and threw over every thing a fitful and garish luster" (487); his moment of deepest fear occurs in "the dim light of an accidental lamp" (491); and even as daylight reigns once again, it is darkened by his revelation into "the shades of the second evening" (492). The movement in "The Cask of Amontillado" from the carnival to "the white web-work which gleams from…cavern walls" (Poe, "Amontillado" 512) to Fortunato's damp, dark tomb (516) obviously implies repression and imprisonment. But what exactly is the role of light in spiritual life? Of course, light illuminates; but the implication of illumination, especially in the context of the window, is unity. The window allows the whole of the universe to enter the safe and productive interior for contemplation, just as the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" initially sees the crowd as an object and neatly categorizes its members. Yet this unity is false, or at least exaggerated. Light does not unify *everything*, subject and universe, but *a single thing* and its observer. This difference is key to the relationship between light and the flâneur. The space of the arcades, glass-roofed centers of commerce, in the development of the Parisian flâneur makes the role of light in this process evident. Light elevates each individual object to the realm of the mystical, where it becomes worthy of attention. A halo forms around the object of contemplation, and in turn the impression of that object echoes in the mind's eye; at their highest expression, these impressions seem infinite. Thus, when Benjamin describes the arcades as "fairy grottoes" (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 564), the comparison is not merely descriptive. The illuminated object unifies with the subject, and this unity extends from the timeless present—the moment of arrest—into mythical time.

The horrific element of darkness in Poe, then, is not solely rooted in the victim's isolation from the universe; it is rooted in the extension of the last-illuminated object. The "type and the genius of deep crime" (Poe, "Crowd" 492) does not fade into darkness but continues wandering in the daylight, and the mystery surrounding him extends infinitely into the future. Fortunato, in contrast, has nothing but darkness surrounding him; the last illuminated object he sees is the face of his murderer which will hover in his mind's eye undisrupted until his death. Of course, darkness in itself is spiritually draining. Jacob Riis, surveying the misery of tenement life, focused on darkness as a public health issue (Riis 17; 19; 35; 135). Light, in Riis's view, is intimately connected with air; air, in turn, is directly tied to health, as "foul air" (11) is often so suffocating as to be deadly. The way in which this suffocation works is, as always, bound up in the structure of urban space. The interior is meant to be a space of refuge and protection. Bachelard and Benjamin converged on the conception of the interior as a shell:

> Here a man wants to live in a shell. He wants the walls that protect him to be as smoothly polished and as firm as if his sensitive flesh had to come in direct contact with them. *The shell confers a daydream of purely physical intimacy*…whenever life seeks to shelter, protect, cover, or hide itself, the imagination sympathizes with the protected space…Shade, too, can be inhabited. (Bachelard 149-51, italics added)

> The original form of all dwelling is existence not in the house but in the shell. The shell bears the impression of its occupant. In the most extreme instance, the dwelling becomes a shell. The nineteenth century, like no other century, was addicted to dwelling. It conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him…What didn't the nineteenth century invent some sort of casing for! Pocket watches, slippers, egg cups, thermometers, playing cards…Today this world has disappeared entirely. (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 220-1)

These passages align in their recognition of the paradoxical warming function of darkness. Night is, as in Poe, the realm of terror; yet it is also the realm of comfort, sleep, and dreams. As emphasized in the Bachelard excerpt, the loss of visual phenomena in the lightless shell pushes the subject to seek tactile comfort and intimacy (typically in bed). A dim interior is a place of refuge. The misery of the darkness which Riis documents is owed, in part, to a perversion of this idea. Darkness, in the tenements, is not insulation from the urban but imposition of the urban as the city cracks the shell and enters intimate life. As the foul conditions of 1890s New York seep in, the private sphere becomes porous and loses its sense of security; the presence of the entire city in one's home weakens the distinct unity of family life. In many cases, they seep in by way of materials. In Riis's most shocking photos, the interiors are not just dingy and poorly-lit, but constructed with the exact same materials and structures as the city outside. For example: a kitchen in Blindman's Alley (Riis 28) contains the exact same iron in its stove as one finds lining Bottle Alley (54); clothing typically belonging to the interior, as shown in an Elizabeth Street attic (181), is strung across Gotham Court (34) and Roosevelt Street (36) and made public; and the brick and wrought iron inside the Five Points House of Industry (145) and the Newsboys' Lodging House (156) are identical to the façades of buildings in Chinatown (77) and Hell's Kitchen (13). In other words, interior spaces should be distinguished from the exterior by cleanliness and controlled light, but are not. An unlikely but useful comparison is with the gazebo in a garden. The tenements Riis documents become indistinguishable from the misery of everyday urban poverty because, though they have a clear structure, they make no distinction between interior and exterior.

The parks of Frederick Law Olmsted are staunchly opposed to this urban homogeneity. He states directly that his aim in creating parks was to create "provisions…made expressly for recreation" (Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns" 626). Recreation, already, is at odds with the principles of design governing the tenements Riis surveys; those buildings are made cheaply, and life in them is structured around thrift and cost-reduction (Riis 66; 193). To negotiate with these principles of thrift, Olmsted justifies his vision in material terms—pointing out that "air is disinfected by sunlight and foliage. Foliage also acts mechanically to purify the air by screening it" (Olmsted, "Public Parks" 622)—and in spiritual terms—noting that in parks, one can "see vast numbers of persons brought closely together, poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile" (627), which exemplifies and strengthens the democratic project. Yet the insistence on dedicating space to leisure is radical. Even more radical is his introduction of nature into the city. Olmsted discusses the existing natural elements of the city:

> Would trees, for seclusion and shade and beauty be out of place, for instance, by the side of certain of our streets? It will, perhaps, appear to you that it is hardly necessary to ask such a question…Unfortunately they are so seldom planted as to have fairly settled the question of the desirableness of systematically maintaining trees under these circumstances…If each [tree] were given the proper capacity…a very great number of people might be placed under influences counteracting those with which we desire to contend. (Olmsted, "Public Parks" 632)

As with his emphasis on recreation, Olmsted encourages changes to the city which are reasonable but not based on economic principles and purposes. What distinguishes this discussion of trees is the importance of everyday life, the beautification of the ordinary. The similarities to flânerie, with its regular exhibition of the illuminated object, are clear. Urban nature, like the object of the flâneur, roots itself in the urban psyche through phantasmagoria, i.e., through the presentation of images which—as with images in dreams—seem infinite to the enthralled attention then quickly pass by. Benjamin argues that in the "timeless little squares" of Paris, "the trees hold sway" (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 516). He is right to say trees hold sway over the city; but it must be clarified that they follow urban logic and are not discrete, privileged components of the urban landscape.

The tree-lined street operates under the principles of urban phantasmagoria which are, in turn, dictated by the structure of walls. The word "phantasmagoria" comes from the "Fantasmagorie," a séance-esque show which used the magic lantern—the "predecessor to today's slide projector" (Barber 73)—to rapidly present images of skeletons, phantoms, monsters, and real people (living or dead) in an otherwise dark and smoky room (78-80). The tree-lined streets which Olmsted describes follow the logic of the "Fantasmagorie." Urban images (people, arcade commodities, trees) follow the projector's rhythm of obscurity and revelation. The wall blocks the subject's view until the image appears, all at once, from behind it. The beauty of Olmsted's trees is based on their play with the faculty of attention. Each tree stands alone and occupies the subject's entire field of view, just like the spectral images of the "Fantasmagorie." The subject's attention is arrested by the tree. Benjamin described this arrest of attention, which is only possible when the object has a definite "presence in time and space, [a] unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" 220) as the aura of the object. In the moment of arrested attention, the subject and object seem to exist outside time. This timelessness, a sense of elevated awareness and fixation, is made horrific in "The Man of the Crowd." Yet Poe's story fails to portray its unremarkability.

The urban phantasmagoria is significant not because it induces transcendence or paranoia, but because it is a structural element of everyday life. This is a consequence of two facts about city life: there is a high density of people and things which are unusual in the daily life of the subject; and the city is filled with walls, which obscure the atypical until it is presented as an image which completely occupies the subject's field of view. At the turn of every corner, the opening of every door, the crossing of every street, a novel image is revealed and induces momentary arrest of attention. The rhythm of obscurity, revelation, and disappearance is central to urban life. Every tree lining the streets which Olmsted describes is an image of nature, and so—as with the "grass-seeds" at the end of "Bartleby"—becomes an avenue by which nature enters the urban. But this is a two-way avenue; nature enters the urban, and urban rhythms control nature. In nature itself, the subject approaches the object; therefore, they can control their proximity to the object and how it is presented to them. City walls render urban elements, whether natural, human, or manmade, into a constant phantasmagoria which might be called a sequence of minor epiphanies.

It should be noted that these epiphanies are so minor, so everyday, that they become negligible. Olmsted's trees and the human beings of the city crowd are similar to each other but unique in time and space. Therefore, they retain their novelty and significance. However, being everyday objects, one associates them in a single subconscious category and cheapens their unique position in time and space. Benjamin argues that to reproduce is "to pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura" (Benjamin, "The Work of Art" 223). Categorization achieves the same result through inverse means. Reproduction robs the singular object of significance by distributing it through time and space, making it transitory; categorization robs the common object of significance by severing it from its individual position. Categorization is also the basis of the blasé attitude which Simmel describes, as it allows the city dweller to live as though they had seen and experienced everything in the city. A clear disparity emerges here between the everyday beauty of the tree-lined street and Central Park,

work for which Olmsted is best known. Part of the philosophy governing the Park is its separation from the city. Olmsted acknowledges the distance of the park from the daily life of most people: "for practical every-day purposes to the great mass of the people, the Park might as well be a hundred miles away" (Olmsted, "Public Parks" 644). He addresses the controversy of such a distance directly:

> A wise forecast of the future gave the proposed park the name of Central. Our present chief magistrate…warned his coadjutors, in his inaugural message, to expect a great and rapid movement of population toward the parts of the island adjoining the Central Park. A year hence, five city railroads will bring passengers as far up as the park, if not beyond it. (Olmsted, "The Greensward Plan" 167)

Olmsted's vision of the expansion of New York has proven correct. The gap which appeared to separate the city dweller from his park has been closed. Yet there is another, more significant gap between the city and the park. While the tree-lined streets discussed above follow the logic of phantasmagoria, a governing principle of city life, Central Park operates on its own principles. In his plan for the park, Olmsted notes that "the horizon lines of the upper park are bold and sweeping and the slopes have great breadth in almost every aspect in which they may be contemplated" (165) and that work in the lower park will aim "to afford facilities for rest and leisurely contemplation upon the rising ground opposite" (166). In other words, one goal of the entire park is to provide a space for free contemplation. At first glance, this aim seems to dovetail nicely with the idea of aura put forth by Benjamin:

> The concept of aura which was proposed above with reference to historical objects may be illustrated with reference to the aura of *natural ones*. We define the aura of the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch. (Benjamin, "The Work of Art" 222-3, italics added)

Central Park, built for distant contemplation, would seem to possess this aura. Contemplation, like aura and the phantasmagoria, is based on the subject's static point of view. Yet further elaboration on the idea of aura and its relationship to phantasmagoria reveals that the similarity is only passing. Three qualities distinguish the phantasmagoric image: its rapid appearance and disappearance; its dominance of the subject's senses; and its timelessness, the arrest of attention which makes the momentary glimpse feel much longer. These qualities do not imbue it with aura. It does not possess the aura of the artwork, which is drawn from ritual value and situation in a historical tradition (223-4); nor does it possess the aura of the natural object, which requires "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be." The phantasmagoric object does not appear distant, but immediate; it shocks the subject with its rapid appearance and domination of the visual senses.

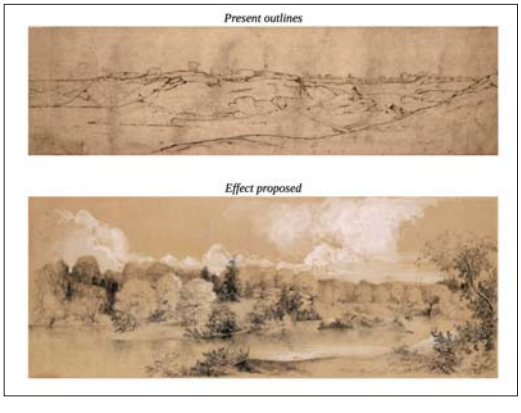

Figure 2. Frederick Law Olmsted & Calvert Vaux, "Greensward Study No. 1: View North across Pond from near Entrance at 59th Street and Fifth Avenue," 1858. (Olmsted, *Writings* 943)

Figure 3. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Greensward Study No. 4: View Northeast toward Vista Rock," 1858. (Olmsted, *Writings* 946)

Yet one could say that the object of phantasmagoria mimics aura. For a moment, it seems to extend infinitely in time and space. Further, as emphasized above, Benjamin's example depicts the aura of a *natural object*, not of nature itself. Phantasmagoria, like aura, deals with objects and images; there is no "space" of phantasmagoria, for the fact that it emerges from space, announces itself, then returns to space is crucial. Nature is spatial. Therefore it has no unique presence in time and space, as the aura-imbued object must. Thus Central Park, which recreates the broad and irregular natural landscape (Figures 2, 3), does not join the system of urban objects as the trees lining streets do. This natural quality of space makes the Park discrete from its city and from the European tradition of landscape architecture, to whose regularity Olmsted was averse (Olmsted, "Report of the Landscape Architects and Superintendents" 661-2; Gopnik 101-2). Rather, the Park fosters a sense of place and scale which is completely discrete from the rhythm of urban life. Olmsted touches on this directly, writing:

> We want, especially, the greatest possible contrast with the restraining and confining conditions of the town, those conditions which compel us to walk circumspectly, watchfully, jealously, which compel us to look closely upon others without sympathy. Practically, what we most want is a simple, broad, open space of clean greensward, with sufficient play of surface and a sufficient number of trees about it to supply a variety of light and shade. This we want as a central feature. (Olmsted, "Public Parks" 632)

In this excerpt, Olmsted's views on city life pass out of the critical and into the contemptuous. He brings the worst aspects of flânerie to the fore. The object of his most severe criticism is the rhythm of urban life. As Olmsted notes, the walled-in nature of the city focuses everything into individual images; the rapid appearance of these images constitutes the urban phantasmagoria. One can distinguish that the flash of the urban image, its spasm into the visual field, is the "shock factor" of urban life which Benjamin posits as central to the loneliness of the city dweller (Benjamin, "On Some Motifs" 163). The "shock" can be beautiful, but it amplifies everyday strangeness and makes it seem inescapable. This is clear as Poe's jostling, gesticulating crowd becomes inhuman (Poe, "Crowd" 483). Significantly, Poe's inhuman crowd is not seen as a single entity, but as a procession of "individual faces" (487). Everyday urban life is built on the procession of discrete images, each posing a possible psychic threat. Thus the city dweller develops the blasé attitude as a "shock defense" (Benjamin, "On Some Motifs" 163) in anticipation of these threats.

Olmsted's Park and Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" neatly reinforce each other. Poe depicts the horror of the flâneur, the endless urgency induced by the "shock factor" of phantasmagoria; Central Park is meant as a space of relaxed and thoughtful contemplation. The differences between the two can be understood in terms of light. As discussed above, the implications of illumination in Poe's story are false. The café window implies that the whole of the universe enters the safe, interior space

as an object of analysis; therefore, it implies an equality between the subject and object as fellow occupants of the city. In reality, the window creates a spiritual separation between subject and object—not entirely negatively, since the window functions as a "shock defense"—which goes ignored by virtue of its physical invisibility. Jean Baudrillard, though describing a much later context, says rightly:

> Advertising calls [glass] "the material of the future"—a future which, as we all know, will itself be "transparent." Glass is thus both the material used and the ideal to be achieved, both end and means. So much for metaphysics…Whether as packaging, window, or partition, glass is the basis of transparency without transition: we see, but cannot touch…the modern "house of glass" does not open onto the outside at all; instead *it is the outside world, nature, landscape, that penetrates*…the whole world thus becomes integrated *as spectacle into the domestic universe*. (Baudrillard 41-4, italics added)

This discussion of glass speaks directly to Poe's café window. The narrator's analysis of the crowd is directional, instrumental, and conscious. Therefore, he believes himself to be in control of the crowd as an abstract object, allowing it into the interior and categorizing it neatly. As his glimpse of "the type and the genius of deep crime" (Poe, "Crowd" 492) reveals, and as emphasized in the Baudrillard excerpt, the universe enters the interior of its own accord. Yet the window offers some "shock defense" by filtering the intrusion of the world into a comprehensible procession of images:

> The wild effects of the light enchained me to an examination of individual faces; and although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window, prevented me from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years. (Poe, "Crowd" 487)

Poe's vision is phantasmagoria in its purest form, connected to Baudrillard's recognition of "the whole world integrated as spectacle" and to the spectral images of the original Fantasmagorie; it is what Olmsted sees as "those conditions which compel us to walk circumspectly, watchfully, jealously, which compel us to look closely upon others without sympathy." The light of Poe's London is divided across the rapid procession of nightmarish images.

The key difference between Poe and Olmsted resides in light. Olmsted's repeated insistence on "leisurely contemplation" requires daylight; he was hesitant to allow any portions of Central Park to be open at night (Olmsted, "Greensward Plan" 169) and wrote that "no part of [Prospect Park] is designed with reference to use after nightfall" (Olmsted, "Report" 670). Although he wishes to "supply a variety of light and shade" (Olmsted, "Public Parks" 632), his emphasis on natural openness lends itself to the exact unity of subject and object which Poe's narrator falsely recognizes. This unity is not equal—nature is not presented as an object of analysis, a fellow inhabitant, but as a space surrounding the subject—but the subject is integrated with nature. Olmstead intended Central Park to be a mixture of park and playground, with the "park" as essentially mental space of contemplation, undirected thought, and "pleasurable wakefulness of the mind without stimulating exertion" (Olmsted, "Public Parks" 628-9) and the "playground" as essentially physical, allowing unrestricted engagement with one's body.

Recreation is, for Olmsted, a celebration of the human being as an animal. He acknowledges that "purely gregarious recreation seems to be generally looked upon…as childish and savage, because, I suppose, there is so little of what we call intellectual gratification in it" (626); through Central Park, he challenges that assumption by celebrating the natural in mankind. The Park channels the exact same "somatic intelligence" upon which Poe's narrator relies to navigate the crowd. Olmsted places a high value on unconscious somatic intelligence:

> We all act much and often most wisely on opinions…that have come to us through no process of thought that we can recall. We say, while engaged in conversation, that we think thus and so, not having been aware of such thought until it was passing our lips. Much that we call tact, sense, genius, inspiration, instinct, is of this unconscious process. (Olmsted, "Trees in Streets and in Parks" 776)

In the city, somatic intelligence is unconscious but expressed in conscious life through its role in navigation. The urban dweller relies on instinct. Somatic intelligence can fail and disorient the subject; disorientation in the city can be annoying or even frightening as it disrupts the urgent flow of city life. Further, if the subject is directly inhibited by the urban phantasmagoria—materially expressed in the living wall of Poe's crowd—horror emerges, as the human being can no longer trust their own body. But Olmsted recognizes that recreation, engagement with somatic intelligence, is "a distinct requirement of all human beings…health-giving to body, mind, and soul" (Olmsted, "Public Parks" 628). This need to engage with the body is crucial to Central Park, and is found in the joys of getting lost. As Gopnik notes, navigating the park is tricky (Gopnik 102). But the difficulty of navigating the Park does not feel like a somatic failure, as in the city. Rather, it reinforces that the Park is separate from frantic city life. The unity of nature which Central Park aims to recreate is not built on the rapid procession of images but on the contemplation of a whole. One may feel disoriented in their wanderings through the Park, but one never feels lost or as though they are in the wrong place; every section of the Park feels connected to the same natural whole. Of course, certain areas are distinct—as proven by the gorgeous chromolithographs in Louis Prang's *Central Park Album*, each depicting a discrete, labeled portion of the Park (Prang 2-13)—but even these separate scenes fit snugly into one another.

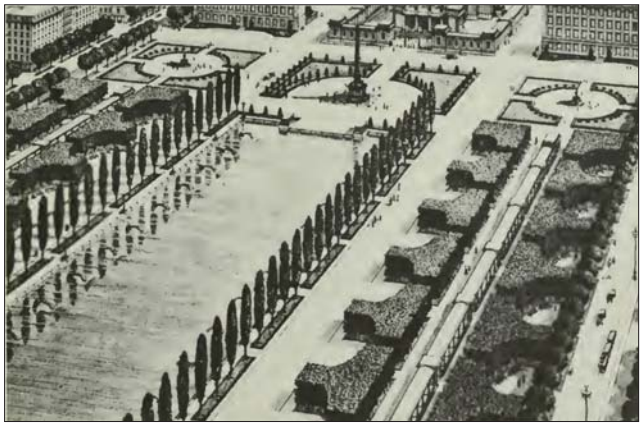

Figure 4. Otto Wagner, "Drawing of an Air Center," Vienna 1911 (Schorske 99)

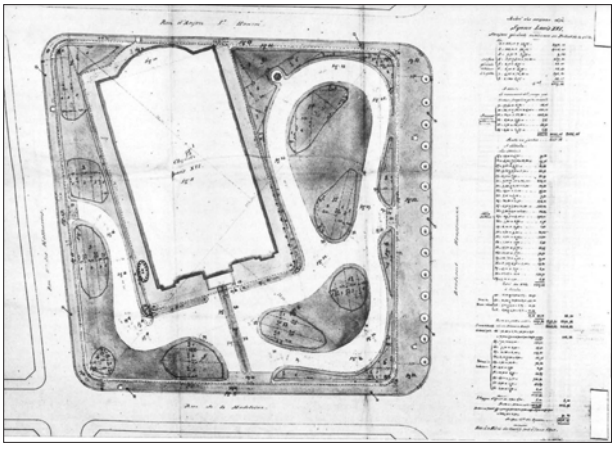

Figure 5. Jean-Pierre Barillet-Deschamps, "Project for the Square Louis XVI," Paris 1857-1862 (Limido 136)

The Park is cohesive, "planned [like a] fresco, with constant consideration of exterior objects, some of them quite at a distance and even existing as yet only in the imagination" (Olmsted, "Public Parks" 635); this cohesion allows for the unbroken expression of the human body. Unbroken somatic expression is not intrinsic to natural park spaces, nor is it intrinsic to unified spaces. This fact is made obvious by many European parks. In the "air centers" of Otto Wagner—whose motto, *Artis sola domina necessitas* governed a vision for a rapidly expanding Vienna (Schorske 73)—the park's inhabitants are scarcely visible (Figure 4). The lines of trees and greenery, which resemble the folding screen in "Bartleby" more than any forest, shape nature into the image of technology. The work of Jean-Baptiste Barillet-Deschamps, the chief landscape architect under Baron Haussmann during his renovations of Paris, has a similar effect (Figure 5). Nature is made to mimic the city. As Olmsted notes, "the liking for detached scenic effects which might be suitable for framing, or for the background of a ballet…influences most French landscape work" (Olmsted, "Report" 662). These spaces may be beautiful, but they are designed for contemplation in the purely intellectual sense; the body has no place. The idea of giving people room to play and express innate somatic intelligence finds expression, as so many themes of urban design do, in the work of Benjamin. Discussing film, he writes:

> By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action [*Spielraum*]. (Benjamin, "The Work of Art" 236)

Harry Zohn's translation of *Spielraum* as "field of action" is appropriate but flexible; it can mean "room to move," "scope," or "leeway." Dana Cooley seizes the opportunity to translate *Spielraum* as "playroom" and frames it as "a space for training our faculties" (Cooley 103). Her recognition that "in conceiving of cinema as a *Spielraum*…Benjamin celebrates its capacity for bodily engagement" (104) extends beyond film. The "playroom" of the Park pushes people to engage with the familiar in terms of materials: the stone in the Park's walls (Olmsted, "Greensward Plan" 168), the flowers in its gardens (179), and the trees in its arboretum (187) can all be recognized in New York itself. Just as the "playroom" of the cinema "extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives," the *Spielraum* of the park reframes the everyday expressions of nature (e.g., the trees along a street). When the city dweller sees natural elements in their full, cohesive expression, they learn to recognize those elements in their everyday life as microcosms of nature. Play is an exercise in fantasy; it is distinctly opposed to the functional and the logical. The *Spielraum* of the park works fantastically. It elevates the natural image, which is common and scattered throughout the city, to the significance of natural space, which is unified and discrete from the city.

Figure 6. Otto Wagner, "Unter-Döbling Station," 1895-1896 (Schorske 80)

In this respect, Olmsted's parks are the inverse of the Riis's tenements. In the latter, the urban landscape cracks the shell of the home and imposes itself on intimate life through the materials of the interior; in the former, the natural blooms from its minor forms within the urban and the unified beauty of nature emerges in the fantasy of the flâneur. The similarity to the "grass-seeds" in Melville's story, whose significance emerges from a small source, is evident. Urban nature exists within the walls of the city, and operates on the same principles of phantasmagoria by which manmade elements, and fellow human beings, are exhibited to the city dweller. But nature, by the "strange magic" of fantasy, acts simultaneously as a discrete image and as the idea of a spatial unity. The natural object possesses the quasi-aura of the phantasmagoria, seeming to bring the subject outside of time through the arrest of attention; it also implies natural space, as the subject momentarily feels as though they are situated in the park. This dual action is not limited to natural elements. The misery of the city's imposition in Riis is based on the same fantastic illusion of being situated in another space. This illusion is the basis of revivalist architecture, which echoes earlier forms to imply their spaces and ideals; it also finds expression in details, such as Wagner's use of iron, ordinarily a functional material, to mimic a railway and unify the form of railway station with its function (Figure 6). Above, it was argued that the basis of phantasmagoria and the urban "shock" is novelty and uniqueness in time and space. This is true, but the urban rhythm of obscurity and revelation is also connected to familiarity. One's attention can be arrested by a familiar face, an unexpected similarity between buildings, the recognition of a street name, the signs of changing seasons which repeat each year. The images of urban life move quickly, capturing attention and disappearing. As the city dweller learns to recognize them as part of daily life, how they echo through each other across the urban landscape, they become familiar; as they become familiar, the city dweller develops a friendship with them; in this friendship, they become beautiful.

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