Globalized Metropolises?
An Issue of History and Memories…

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Abstract: Through specific examples of five different metropolises in globalization, New York, Paris, Rome, Prague and Bordeaux, the sources of prosperity and urbanity are not the same when urban history prevails in our memories or when our memories claim to write its history. Yet everything can be lived differently when both are brought together and when they write their space-time together.

Key words: Urban and architectural history, memories of citizens, flows & heritages, separate deferred confined space-time, communities of identities, centers and peripheries, neighborhood and urbanity.

1. Introduction

This article studies one of the sources of prosperity, urbanity and precariousness of our various heritages, depending on whether the history of the metropolises—and the memories that we share of them—are separated and mutually enriched. Therefore, we will be able to identify the risks/benefits trends that tomorrow's metropolization processes can make us hope for or fear for our urban heritage.

2. When History Becomes a Monument and Prevails in Our Memories

2.1 New York and Paris Shaped Their Heritages and Accelerated Their Flows Much More Than the Memory of Their Inhabitants

Since the first streetcars, subways and cars at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the two capitals, in the process of globalized metropolization, have imposed the history of their supremacy on the memories of the countless immigrants who came to live there. These memories were often sacrificed to the respective emblems of

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these cities of immigration in the globalized competition among metropolises.

Paris, since the 19th century, under the aegis of the Prefect Haussmann and the liberal and authoritarian empire of Napoleon III, stands out from the other European capitals with its architecture of monumental aligned facades, its hygienic urbanism of the Grand Boulevards. The emblems of the *City of Light*, the *Eiffel Tower* and the *World Fairs* were not all compatible with the symbols that brought Parisians together as a *working-class city*. The capital of rich bankers and impetuous engineers of colonization and free trade treaties imposed the trend of big stores (*Grands Magasins*) and enjoyed Jacques Offenbach's operettas, while pushing its poor inhabitants into the neglected suburbs.

New York, from the beginning of the 20th century, stood out as one of the first metropolises with skyscrapers praised throughout the world. The race for height, set up as a display of wealth, was coupled with urban highways from the 1940s. Robert Moses, with the bridges, including the Verrazano bridge, the swimming pools, the playgrounds, the schools and the housing that he had built between the 1940s and the 1970s, configured the metropolis of New York as a *world capital*. Many habitats and populations were

sacrificed because of their discriminated poverty in an "invisible segregation" that has long been blamed [1] on this project owner and prime contractor of the most famous metropolis in the world.

The history of globalization, both in Paris and in New York, combined the memories of immigrant and segregated populations with a future of prosperity, which was always deferred, and with few exceptions, erased them into anonymity during the multiple commemorations and universal exhibitions of the capitals (Fig. 1).

2.2 The Deferred Time of Catch-Up Sessions for Heritages

It was not only in New York City that tenements (40,000 in 1890) did not offer enough space to house
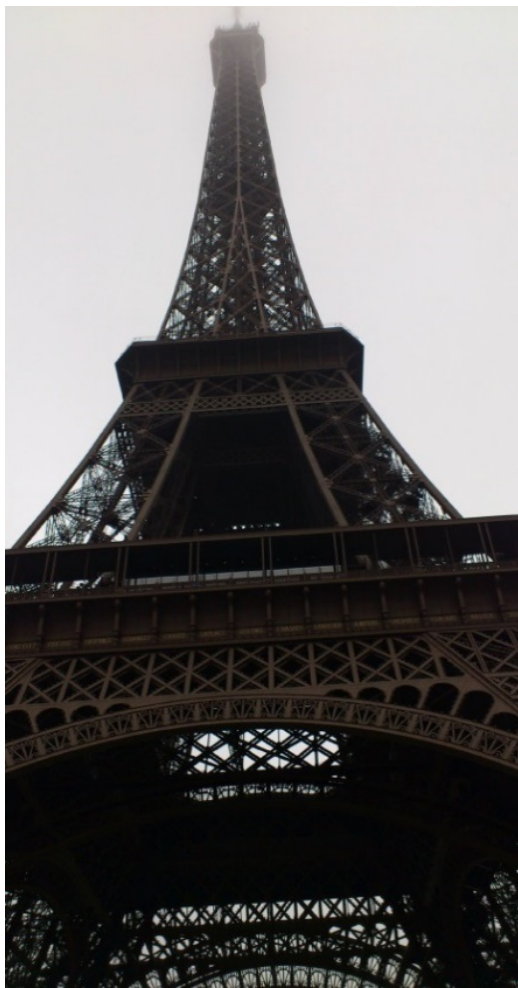

Fig. 1   La Tour Eiffel 1889 Photo Romain Sulivan.

the ever-increasing number of immigrants and poor residents who were looking for a place to live. The housing crisis was endemic during the 20th century in all the major metropolises for the workers and those excluded by industrialization.

In France as well, major laws and public and private financial schemes had been trying since 1894—with the law on the *HBM* (*cheap housing*), converted into *HLM* (*rent-controlled housing*) in 1953—to remedy the lack of social housing. But there was always a great delay in relation to the need for housing of the poorest people, for whom the cost of housing always represented more in their family budgets. The shortage of housing led mechanically to an increase in the price of rents as well as purchases, and the supply shock of new housing led just as mechanically to subcontracting shocks in emergency works and their construction defects. The history of social housing has been such that it appears to be a catch-up solution that is never sufficient to meet the urgent need for housing, and always to the detriment of the "family memory" that the inhabitants give to their housing conditions.

2.3 Successive Urban Models Speak Volumes about the Importance of History at the Expense of Memories

New York and Paris favored high-rise buildings and high-speed flows of gridlocks in their history as world capitals. New York was spreading out and erecting itself at the same time, from Manhattan, with its skyscrapers for upper classes, to the suburbs, as well as the edge cities, the urban sprawl and its edgeless cities. But the Megapolis could not be summed up in its skyline alone.

Paris, from its 1st, 7th, 8th and 16th districts, to the suburbs and towns of the Ile de France, poor in the northeast and rich in the southwest, renewed its urban model of a both working-class and segregated capital. But global Paris can not be summed up by the globalized Olympic Games of 2024 alone.

Rome, Prague and Bordeaux, as former capitals of

empires and colonies, favored the extension of their metropolitan boundaries while keeping their real estate, architectural and artistic heritages at the same height as their history had given them.

Cupolas (Fig. 2), basilicas, palaces, triumphal arches, fora and squares, *Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical, Art Nouveau, Modern, Postmodern, Deconstructivist*, always, and rightly so, capture our attention but can not be summed up by colonizing our memories with their masterpieces alone.

Today, the same consequence is at risk: the rise in land and real estate prices, which is leading to an increasingly marked sectorization and spatial segregation, both in terms of housing prices and their allocation. The historic city centers are indeed undergoing and benefiting at the same time from the global tourism boom (more than a billion tourists a year, before the Covid pandemic) by being greatly emptied of their native inhabitants to the benefit of the more profitable rents of Air Bnbs.

Fig. 2   Pantheon in Roma, 125 A.D., Photo by Christian Sallenave.

A triple segregation follows, spatial, environmental and financial, echoing a triple socio-political injunction.

The "densification" of metropolises, for environmental reasons, often does not correspond to any memory of the inhabitants of working-class districts.

The stipulated "social mix" of central cities and city centers is contradicted by the "gentrification" hyperplaces [2] that the inhabitants of renovated neighborhoods do not visit.

Finally, regarding the "quality of life" of medium-sized cities and small country towns, invested by metropolitans fleeing their metropolises to avoid being confined by the Covid pandemic, real estate development causes a rise in prices that excludes the poorest inhabitants. The poorest inhabitants are left with a plaintive nostalgia or a bitter revanchism of a bygone era in their peripheral city.

3. When Our Memories Claim to Write the History of Metropolises, within Their Communities of Identity

3.1 The Global Tourism Boom

The global tourism boom, not only affects global warming, due to the continuous growth of air travel, boosted by the success of low-cost airlines across the planet. It also represents the triumph of homogenized individual memories over patrimonial history, promoted through two-day visits to the city centers of Prague, Rome or Bordeaux, strapped to their tour guides and amalgamated into compressed groups of fans.

These groups are so compact that all that can be seen of the Charles Bridge in Prague, the nave of St. Peter's in Rome, the Grand Theatre in Bordeaux, the corridors of the Louvre Museum in Paris, or Ellis Island (Fig. 3) are the umbrellas of the tour guides, and all that can be heard is the buzzing of the headsets.

Fig. 3   Tourist migration towards Ellis Island and New York' Skyline, Photo by Romain Sulivan.

Tourism turns into a matter of event planning, where the criteria that prevail are those of the audience and invited "stars". World Fairs, major festivals and the Olympic Games are all about media coverage, global audiences and more or less huge budgets. The "universal" and "exceptional" nature of the Unesco World Heritage Site label alone sums up the narcissistic mirror [3] of instant memories in the age of smartphone stories.

3.2 The New Information Warfare

The new information warfare claims to meet the expectations and memories of those that they subject to their treatment.

Since Silvio Berlusconi, in Italy, reality shows pretend to be information and entertainment in countries around the world. The mainstream media and memories, through a few icons or self-proclaimed opinion leaders, have been reduced to the glittering star system that is constantly being revitalized, and to the hopeless decadence of television. The *blockbusters* of the *American way of life* reduce the memories of the audience to the "winner who takes all the market" [4].

The new Chinese Silk Roads, planetary media competitors of the Hollywood United States, are now putting into orbit and subjugating the countries they cross via their fast-paced investments. High Speed Trains, deep water ports or highways, merge this new Chinese history with the memory of the countries subjected to hazardous debts and increased geopolitical dependencies.

Space tourism combines information warfare and financial segregation, and leads us to a new colonization, this time in space.

3.3 Social Networks

Social networks, global echoes of all these cloned memories by these two great powers and orbiting poles, make people glued to their screens and turned into satellites cross the planet instantly. The anonymous memories all dream of their "15 minutes of fame", as Andy Warhol said, and invent a narrative as if it were the whole world's. In doing so, the artificial memories of big data and billions of daily feeds monopolize, suffocate and annihilate our living memories every second, with algorithms and targets to reach.

The more we are colonized by algorithms, the more we become deaf, the less we see, the more our satellite memories claim to know everything about the world they no longer experience. Our memories then claim to shape history without being enriched by it, because financial flows are the only ones to renew the heritage benefits. The others are confined to the segregated memory of their history in their HLM tower, their ivory tower or their luxury high-rise tower.

4. Reconciling Memories and History

4.1 Emblematic and Symbolic Commemorations Are the First Time-Spaces Where History and Memories Enrich Each Other

From the point of view of architectural history, it is noteworthy that the Pritzker Prize for Architecture was awarded in 2021 to two French architects, Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, for "architecture with a democratic and ecologically sustainable spirit". They are renowned especially for their Latapie house in Floirac, for a building of rehabilitated housing in the Grand Parc in Bordeaux; for a house in Cap Ferret built on a dune planted with pine trees and on stilts without leveling the former or cutting the latter, and

for their School of Architecture designed on the banks of the Loire River in Nantes.

In New York, superstar French architects *Pritzker Price* (Jean Nouvel, Christian de Portzamparc) are invited for their world-famous skyscrapers. In Paris, world superstar architects are invited: Frank Ghery for Bernard Arnault's Louis Vuitton *Foundation*, Tadao Ando for François Pinault's *Bourse de Commerce*, Renzo Piano for *the Courthouse* in Paris after his *Shard* in London and his *Parco della Musica* in Rome, and Herzog and de Meuron for their upcoming *Triangle Tower* in Paris.

However, the *Equerre d'Argent* 2021 prize, the main architecture prize awarded in France, was awarded to the Atelier PNG associated with Julien Boidot and Emilien Robin, for "public spaces designed in a joyful and shared manner". This is proof that history can award masterpieces of both exceptional and everyday architecture, recognized by our memories of inhabitants as both learned and joyful collaborative works.

Last but not least, The *Freedom Tower*, in New York (Fig. 4) (Architects Childs, Skidmore, Ownings, Merril, 2014) and *The National September 11 Memorial & Museum* represent the most intense and subtle union of history and memories that respect each other forever, beyond the borders of war and their shared and conflicting fears.

4.2 Memories of Peaceful Squares and Urban Sites breathe Life into Our Neighborhoods in the Metropolises

In New York, the *High Line*, located in the Chelsea district, has been able to convert a former disused railroad line on the Lower West Side into a promenade.

Inspired by the *Coulée Verte René Dumont* (1988) in the 12th district of Paris, the *High Line* was started in 2006, and the last section opened to the public in 2014. Today, it is not only its public benches that greet lovers of the New York sunset. It has also

stimulated real estate development in the surrounding neighborhoods, and welcomes more than five million tourists each year.

Similarly, *Central Park* welcomes us to our peaceful memories, unlike Time Square and its repeated light screens and advertisements that blind and colonize our imaginations by imposing their memoryless stories on us.

Another significant example of this creative back-and-forth between history and the combined memories of inhabitants, designers and decision-makers is as well known to the world today as it is appreciated by the city's citizens. The *Quays of the Garonne* in Bordeaux, reclaimed from the cars thanks to the new metropolitan streetcar (2003), and their *Water Mirror* (2006, landscape designers M. & C. Corajoud, A. Debarre, architect P. Gangnet, fountain designer J.M. Llorca) (Fig. 5) offer the children of the metropolis jewels of urban architecture that they could never enjoy before in the traffic jams.

Fig. 4   The freedom tower bird photo by Romain Sulivan (Architects Childs, Skidmore, Ownings, Merril 2014).

Fig. 5   The Hermione leaving for New York from the Water Mirror in Bordeaux Photo by Romain Sulivan.

The same mutual benefit is to be noted in the metropolis of Prague, enriched by the constant flow of its restored and constantly renewed heritage tourism (Fig. 6). The daily life of its inhabitants is respected, and they are delighted with walks along the Vltava River and comfortable transportation conditions. This is how the Smichov district, a former working-class neighborhood known for its dark, unpleasant streets until the end of the communist regime, has been rehabilitated since then, with its new shopping mall. It could also have appeared as a "*hyper place*" dedicated to a restricted tourist clientele. It turned out to be the second largest shopping mall in Prague, after the one downtown near the *Municipal House*, and clearly appreciated by the local population. The best evidence of this is that the employees speak only Czech, and the people of Prague can find everything they want to buy and everything they can dream of, inside this three floors shopping mall with its perfectly furnished hypermarket, stores gallery and a multiplex cinema. The important thing is not the name of its famous architect Jean Nouvel, but that he was accompanied in his work not only by the team of architects from his agency (F. Monjanel, Project Leader, P. Bena, M. Cazalda, L. Daude, P. Heyda, M. Forest), but also by French and Prague engineers (SETEC, Metroprojeckt Praha a.s.) and Trade Project Owner, the Prague business community.

We note a notable difference with Bordeaux and the rehabilitation of the *Bassins à flot* district (2015, architect and Lead Urban Designer, Nicolas Michelin and his Agency ANMA), where the residents of the dwellings, as they told us during our two years of interviews, do not go to the district's expensive places, which are therefore reserved for tourists.

The second difference with Bordeaux is that in Prague, the streetcar system, which has also been in the memories of Pragians since 1895, is connected by 26 lines and three subway lines in such a way that travelers do not have to pass through the city center to reach the various stations on their metropolitan journey.

Fig. 6   Saint Nicolas church in Prague 1737 Photo by Christian Sallenave.

No dominant history, no reclusive memories, this seems to be the condition for Prague to overcome all the hazards and difficulties that the globalization of trade, its entry into the European Union and the globalization of its heritage attractiveness, created as constraints that it had to overcome while still respecting them.

4.3 Limited Traffic Zones Seem to Be the Last Contributions of Memory and History to Be Shared in Our Metropolises Today

Italy is famous for its squares, its urban art and the memories of its cities. In the wake of *Siena's Piazza del Campo*, curved like an amphitheater since 1962 and awaiting its famous annual Palio, the traffic flow issue has become critical for the heritage of ancient history and Italian memories, which have always been combined.

Rome was the first capital city to establish a *Limited Traffic Zone*, on November 16, 1995, in its Historical and Archaeological Center. Since then, other zones have been created throughout the Roman municipality, with different regulations according to days, hours, zone boundaries and exemptions for emergency, security, disabled or official vehicles. Many other capitals throughout Europe have since then been inspired by these rules.

5. Conclusion

As we can see from the few examples mentioned above, the only sustainable history, that our memories seem to write together and to which they can subscribe to, is when globalized history and the memories we keep of it are combined for the citizens as for our cities; when circulation and transaction flows are smooth because they are not squeezed and they do not compress or undermine our heritages; when shared places prevail over non-places [5] and hyperplaces, and when historical downtowns and satellite peripheries do not prevent the back-and-forth of urbanity and neighborhoods from enriching our present and enlightening our future.

It is extremely dangerous for a people to lose the memory of its past. With no fear of visionaries who always improvise with their short-sightedness and demagogues who base their beliefs on nostalgia, the claimed truths are restricted by their postulates and the authenticities by their prejudices. It is therefore enough to confront and combine what usually ignores or excludes each other [6-9]: our memories—Latin etymology of monuments—and the history of our legacies—Latin etymology of heritage, can very well combine the life annuities of our cities and the uncertainties of their metropolization. The flows must be regulated with the heritages that they set in motion if we want the History they write not to violate, nor to put into orbite, sacrifice and erase our memories. The smallest place must be respected in its conviviality by the transport networks and the wildest dreams of the Internet flows.

"Mother Earth" also preserves the memory of it all, even if she does not make a big deal of it! She constantly innovates in her own way—as much as technologies, concepts and mathematical models do—by "making the new from the old" [10].

Similarly, our metropolises of tomorrow as well as our ancient cities can create beauty with our collaborative works.

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