Spectacular Realities

Early Mass Culture in *Fin-de-Siècle* Paris

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opened in 1882—the Musée Grévin—and asks why a wax museum captured the public imagination in fin-de-siècle France. In the course of my research in France, I gained access to the museum's private and uncataloged papers, which also provide a rare glimpse into the daily workings of this institution belonging to the nascent entertainment industry. Chapter four examines the contemporaneous "o-rama" craze of the 1880s and 1890s. Chapter five details the history of early cinema at the Musée Grévin as a prism through which to see cinema's origins as part of a broader cultural climate that demanded "the real thing."

This book takes popular behavior and entertainments seriously in order to explain what might be appealing about such things as the morgue and the wax museum to rather diverse groups of people. It is not merely that these phenomena were the best "sold"—although they had to be sold well to succeed. Anyone who has mulled through the bankruptcy files at the Paris Archives knows that for every successful type of novelty there were infinitely more failures. Mass culture works through a dialogue between its producers and consumers—a dialogue that disrupts the fixed notions of production and consumption. This book attempts to illuminate the possible spaces between manipulation and enjoyment that Michel de Certeau introduced in recognition that culture is more "poached" than it is produced and consumed.[42]

The perhaps seemingly eclectic juxtaposition of these different cultural practices identifies a newly forming Parisian mass culture characterized by a shared visual experience of seeing reality represented. This project delineates the popularity of seeing "reality" as a set of referents—people, places, incidents—that Parisians shared, whatever their social origins or gender identities. Nowhere do I claim that these different sets of eyes experienced this culture of realist spectacle in the same way. No doubt, they did not. Rather, by studying the realistic re-presentation and visualization of modern life, this book shows that what appears to the historian like disparate phenomena formed a shared culture in late nineteenth-century Paris. This culture produced a new crowd as individuals joined together to delight in the transformation of everyday life into spectacle while avidly consuming spectacles of a sensationalized everyday life. In this way, Paris not only earned its label as the "capital of the nineteenth century," it brilliantly anticipated the twentieth.

42. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xxiv.

CHAPTER 1

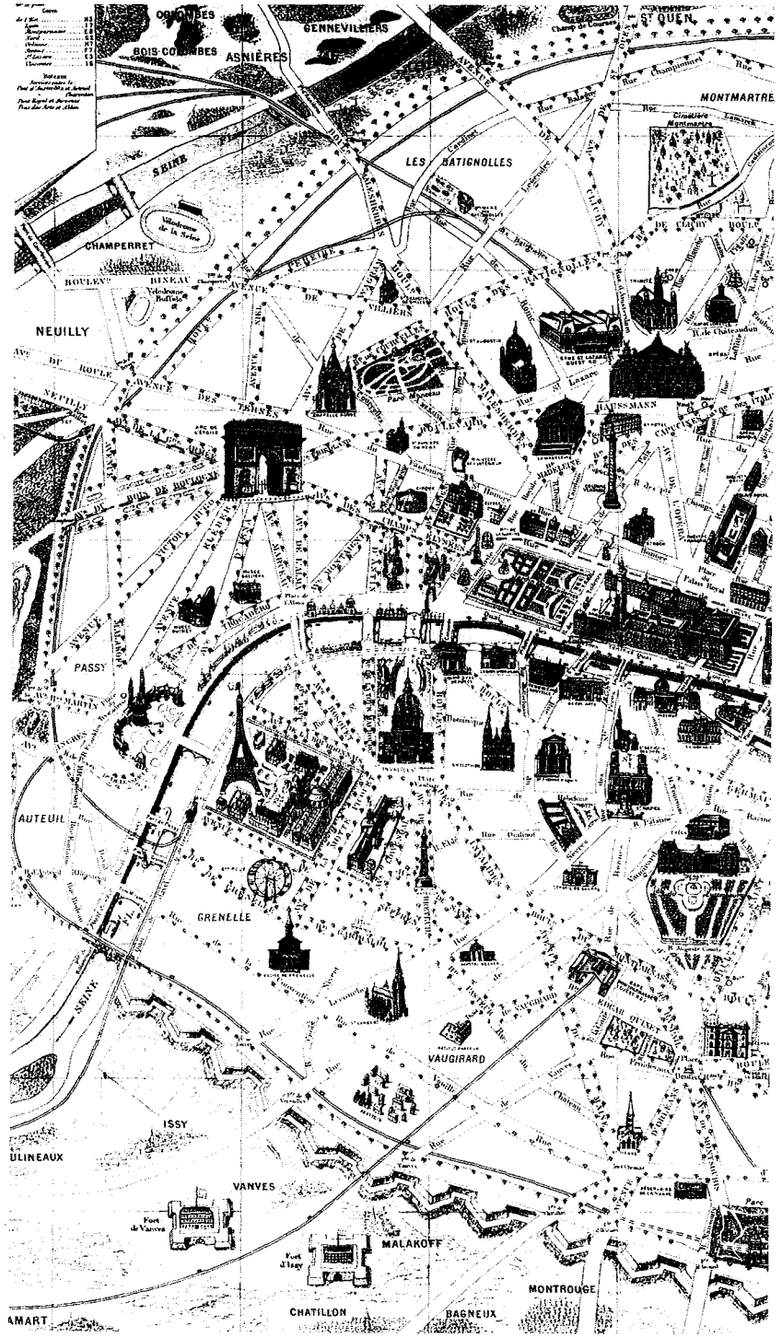
Setting the Stage

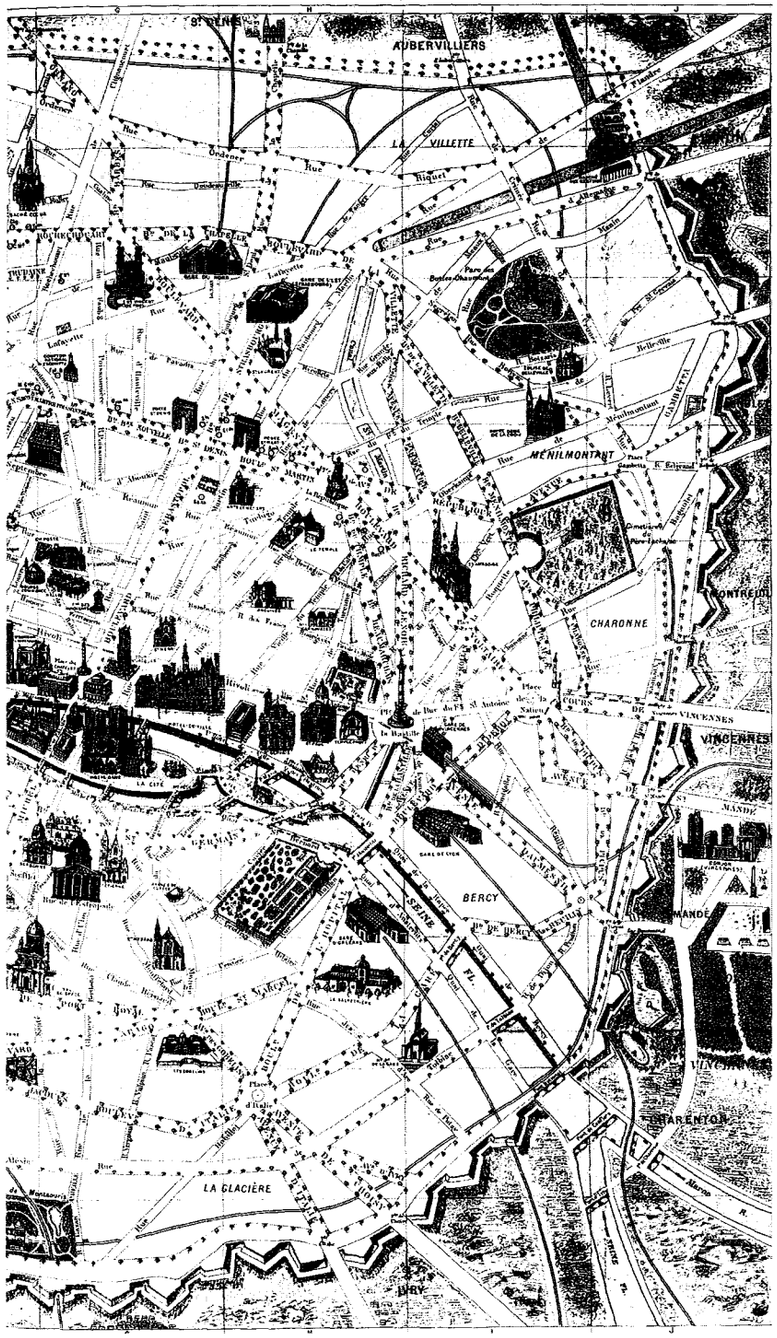
The Boulevard, The Press and the Framing of Everyday Life

Gustave Fraipont, in a book whose very title, *Paris, à vol d'oiseau,* suggested that the city should be observed from above, boasted, "It's the freedom of gazes that rules in Paris and rules here alone . . . and that turns the big city into a spectacle that is always lively, animated and joyous."[1] Although the connection of city life to visuality was not new in the nineteenth century, the identification of Paris as a place where everyday life was elevated to a spectacle for mass consumption was. These qualities, along with the redesign of the city known as Haussmannization, became markers of the city's modernity whereby Paris became the metropolis *par excellence* (fig. 1).

Contemporaries celebrated and lionized Paris precisely for its modernity, which of course served as the very means of rhetorically constructing it. Although it is essential to account for transformations in the actual Parisian landscape, most notably the results of Haussmannization and the explosion of commercial capitalism that it denotes—what I will call "boulevard culture"—Paris also became powerfully identified as an object by being widely disseminated as a spectacle in the new mass press; in guidebooks, serial novels, and most importantly, in the daily newspaper. Simply put, Paris was transformed into spectacle in these texts through the invention of an "everyday" that was then framed as textual representation and subsequently re-presented as sen-

1. Gustave Fraipont, *Paris, à vol d'oiseau* (Paris: Librairie illustrée, 1889), 5.





1. Map of central Paris, ca. 1900. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

sational. For it was not the seemingly quotidian elements of Parisian life that served as the measure of the modern, but rather the implication and the possibility that the everyday could be transformed into the spectacular and the sensational.

Georg Simmel, the early urban sociologist, noted that "the interpersonal relationships of people in big cities are characterized by a markedly greater emphasis on the use of the eyes than that of the ears," as if to say that what marked modern urban life was its flamboyant visuality.[2] More recently, scholars have associated this pleasure strictly with the bourgeois male known as the *flâneur.* I suggest, instead, the many ways in which *flânerie* became a cultural activity for a generalized Parisian public.

In a discursive feat of centralization that mimicked the city's administration and reorganization, the mass press incessantly conjured a never-ending festival of modern life that unfolded in and around the *grands boulevards.* The new mass press provided a printed digest of the *flâneur*'s roving eye. The printed word provided access to modern Paris for an increasingly literate population by constructing Paris as an image. The interlocking relation between the boulevards and the press fostered a new curiosity among a large and diverse population to first read and then see things for themselves and created a culture in which individuals from different classes and of both sexes were expected to derive pleasure from the same sights and experiences.[3] The spectacular and sensational urban life promoted on the boulevards and in the mass press offered the means through which a new collectivity was constituted—one that was distinctly urban and quintessentially "modern."

Haussmannization

"Haussmannization," which vastly altered the city's topography, is often used as a shorthand for the profound economic and cultural changes associated with the ascension of the bourgeois social order in the Paris of the 1850s and 1860s. Haussmann opened up the

2. Georg Simmel, "Mélanges de philosophie rélativiste," cited in Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire,* 151.

3. Fritzsche's book *Reading Berlin 1900* addresses similar issues but appeared too late for me to take full account of his contribution.

city's center, leading one English guidebook to remark that "in Paris everything is so large and so broad, that the pedestrian can move with perfect freedom."[4] The old streets had rarely been wider than fifteen feet. As one observer looking back, put it: "The inner streets were narrow, crooked, crowded, ill built, and very unsavoury."[5] The city had practically no thoroughfares going north-south except from the rue St-Denis to the rue de la Harpe and from the rue St-Martin to the rue St-Jacques. No street went through from east to west.

In an effort to facilitate the movement of traffic through the city, Baron Haussmann, Napoleon III's prefect of the Seine, built boulevards. The boulevard Sébastopol, the first boulevard work of the Second Empire, formed an extension south of the Gare de l'Est and crossed the city north-south, running through the Ile de la Cité as the boulevard du Palais and across the left bank as the boulevard St-Michel (see fig. 1). Because the boulevard pierced through a populous area, many working-class dwellings were destroyed, setting the pace of the displacement of workers from the city's center that has been associated as both a goal and by-product of the city's redesign. Haussmann built still other boulevards: the boulevard Malesherbes, the boulevard de la Madeleine, and the boulevard Haussmann in the center of town; the boulevards Magenta, Richard Lenoir and Prince Eugène further east; and those that radiated from the place de l'Etoile in the west of the city.

Both during and since their construction, these boulevards have sparked much debate. Scholars have considered them to epitomize the counterrevolutionary tactics of social control enforced by Haussmannization because of their displacement of workers from the city's center and because they effectively separated working-class neighborhoods from each other. The new straight thoroughfares were thought to be barricade-proof (barricades had been crucial to the success of the revolution of 1848 that, ironically, led to Napoleon III's rise to the presidency) and would facilitate the rapid deployment of troops and provide unbroken lines of fire for artillery. Yet the *grands boulevards* that stretched in a semicircle from the Bastille in the east to La Madeleine in the west—those boulevards that came to stand for "modern Paris"—actually predate the midcentury transformation of the nation's capital.

4. *Illustrated Guide to Paris,* 64.

5. *The Morning Post,* 1862, cited in Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 35.

The *grands boulevards* stood as the city's original ramparts until the late seventeenth century when Louis XIV transformed them into an open throughway and built great arches to commemorate his military victories. The *grands boulevards* were neither designed nor built during Haussmann's vast reconstruction of the city.[6] "Boulevard culture" during the second half of the nineteenth century, instead, was an amalgamation of long-term urban practices that were recast in light of Haussmannization.

Historians of the eighteenth century have argued that the boulevards offered the greatest show in prerevolutionary Paris.[7] Robert Isherwood has described an animated culture of café-goers, musicians, prostitutes and workers; what Louis Sébastien Mercier, in his *Tableau de Paris* of the 1780s called the place "most open to every estate."[8] The boulevards, but especially the boulevard du Temple, became celebrated for the popular theater that played there. At a time when almost all theater in Paris was a highly restricted and state-supported monopoly venture among the Opéra, the Comédie-Française and the Comédie-Italienne, the boulevard du Temple featured the Théâtre Nicolet and that of his rival Audinot, the Ambigu-Comique.[9] Other entertainments abounded on the boulevards: marionettes, acrobats, menageries, wax cabinets. One contemporary observer noted:

> An infinite crowd of people, an amazing quantity of carriages, street merchants darting in and out amongst . . . the horses with all sorts of merchandise, chairs set on the sidewalks for those who want to watch and for those who want to be watched, cafés fitted up with an orchestra and French and Italian singers, pastry-cooks, restaurant-keepers . . . marionettes, acrobats . . . giants, dwarfs, ferocious beasts, sea monsters, wax figures, automatons, ventriloquists.[10]

The eighteenth-century commercial culture associated with the boulevards "cracked the social stratification separating the highborn and the lowborn," concluded Isherwood, creating a unified counterculture to the officially sanctioned culture of the court. He argued for a common

6. *Les grands boulevards* (Paris: Réunion des musées de Paris, 1985), 5.

7. Robert Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 161.

8. Ibid, 163.

9. For a history of Parisian theaters see Michèle Root-Bernstein, *Boulevard Theater and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984).

10. Memoirs of Carlo Goldoni, from 1780s, cited in ibid., 42.

culture of entertainment, what Michèle Root-Bernstein in her history of boulevard theater dubbed "an urban popular culture."[11]

Social life continued to parade on the *grands boulevards* during the first half of the nineteenth century. At the same time, the newly built *passages* or arcades, located either directly off the boulevards or just slightly to the south of the boulevard Montmartre, attracted fashionable society. Early mini-malls of the luxury trade, the arcades were described as "a city, indeed a world in miniature."[12]

Cafés, theaters and newspapers also rallied Parisians to the boulevards. Despite a proliferation of sites of entertainment and amusement throughout the city, the boulevards continued to draw a dense and diverse crowd as they had during before the French Revolution. In fact, their theaters, such as the Théâtre des Funambules, remained one of the few places where workers and ladies mixed under the same roof. Some scholars such as Philip Nord have stressed the semiaristocratic flavor of boulevard life before Haussmannization, followed by a post-Haussmann "democratization" and commercialization of space.[13] I suggest that what changed were the values attributed to a boulevard culture that had existed, more or less continuously, since the late eighteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, life on the boulevard was no longer represented as cross-class Parisian counterculture as Isherwood characterized it in the Old Regime. The *grands boulevards* had come to stand not only for "the heart and the head of Paris" but also "the soul of the entire world."[14] In the eighteenth century, cross-class culture was counterculture; in the nineteenth it came to epitomize the pleasures of modern urban life.

When Parisians in the second half of the nineteenth century spoke of *les grands boulevards,* they usually meant the area west of the newly refurbished place du Château-d'Eau and more specifically the area between the Théâtre du Gymnase at the porte St-Martin and the Madeleine.[15] The easternmost portion of the boulevards lay squarely within

11. Ibid., 107. Aside from the boulevards, the Palais-Royal was an important site of popular entertainment, especially around the turn of the nineteenth century.

12. Unidentified guidebook cited in Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire,* 158.

13. See Philip Nord, paper delivered at the conference "Paris in the time of Manet" in San Francisco, March 1992, 5. I thank the author for sharing the paper with me and for our discussions about Parisian culture.

14. *Paris en poche: guide Conty* (Paris: Maison Conty, 1883), 147.

15. In 1862 Haussmann razed most of what had been the boulevard du Temple (also known as "the boulevard du crime") to allow for the extension of the place du Château d'Eau (now place de la République) despite objections to the loss of many by-then historic theaters.

one of the few areas not "Haussmannized"; there workers remained and dwellings had not been rebuilt. Not part of "modern" Paris, their exclusion reveals what has been called the westward shift of the city. As one observer noted, "one has to reach the place de la République [changed from the place du Château d'Eau in 1879] itself to find this liveliness, this noise, this intensity of life that is the distinctive characteristic of the boulevard."[16] Some observers, such as Emile Goudeau, pushed the boundaries further west, arguing that the center of town could be identified as the several blocks on the boulevards between the rue de Richelieu (the boulevard Montmartre) and the Madeleine.[17]

A new social geography contributed to the perception of the boulevards as the "center" of Paris. This center was north of the actual city-center that Haussmann had erected—the *grande croisée*—the intersection at the place du Châtelet of the rue de Rivoli and the boulevard Sébastopol. The location of the boulevards directly south of three of the city's six train stations, however, meant they were often the first large commercial thoroughfares reached by visitors to Paris.[18] While Haussmann's new boulevards may have served as by-ways, as a means by which to reach one's ultimate destination rapidly, the older *grands boulevards* had always been and remained a destination in and of themselves. Beyond their actual proximity to the train stations that had been recently built, the boulevards were imagined as the center of the city precisely because of their association as a theater of modern life.

Commentators represented the boulevards as a festive space in which everyday life was rendered spectacular. Gustave Fraipont presented the boulevards as offering "the spectacle of the street."[19] To Georges Montorgeuil, the boulevards were a "feast for the eyes," and he echoed Fraipont in his assurance that "the real Parisian spectacle is where we found it: in the street."[20] What made this a spectacle worth seeing, observers agreed, was the sense that any and all observers might gather to watch there. As one commentator noted, "the whole of the gay capital may be said to be concentrated" on the boulevards.[21]

16. Fraipont, *Paris, à vol d'oiseau,* 38.
17. Emile Goudeau, *Paris qui consomme* (Paris: Henri Beraldi, 1893), 99.
18. These were the Gare du Nord, the Gare de l'Est and closest was the Gare St-Lazare; 62 percent of all the city's train traffic passed through the Gare St-Lazare.
19. Fraipont, *Paris, à vol d'oiseau,* 115.
20. Georges Montorgeuil, *La vie des boulevards* (Paris: Librairies Imprimeries réunies, 1896), iii and 141.
21. H. Sutherland Edwards, *Old and New Paris* (London: Cassell, 1893), 43.

Yet the boulevards were considered to be not only the center of Paris, even the center of France, but also quite explicitly the center of the universe because of the diversity of things and people that could be found there. As a newspaper article boasted, "On the boulevard, one can say everything, hear everything and imagine everything. It's the ideal forum of the free city."[22] Alfred Delvau proclaimed that "the boulevards are not only the heart and the head of Paris, but also the soul of the entire world."[23]

The boulevards were thought of as the "distributive centre of all the flitting fancies of France."[24] Luxury stores flourished on the boulevards that finally replaced the Palais-Royal as the shopping center. The new *grands magasins* did not, however, open on the older boulevards but rather sprang up on many of Haussmann's new streets. As Philip Nord has insightfully argued, the old boulevards and the new department stores became conflated as part of *Paris nouveau.* The department store interiors mimicked not only the architectural style of the rebuilt Paris, but also the "boulevards of the *grand magasin* interior were so many extensions of the *grands boulevards* that stretched from the Madeleine to the Bastille."[25]

Department stores traded in spectacle, which linked them to the boulevards in the Parisian imagination. Improved glass technology facilitated vast window displays that were increasingly aided by better lighting (culminating in the use of electricity in the 1880s), thereby putting a premium on visibility. The introduction of new shopping styles—among them fixed prices and the *entrée libre*—meant customers could wander around by themselves and did not have to interact with clerks, thus emulating a stroll on the boulevards. As a woman visiting Paris remarked, "It is as good as a play to stand at the window of this shop and watch the people inside!"[26]

If these institutions offered a certain theatricality through their visuality, genuine theatrical performances also abounded on the boulevards beginning in the eighteenth century. Although the 1862 enlargement of the place du Château-d'Eau did away with the "boulevard du crime," the boulevards to the west of the boulevard du Temple remained the site

22. Emile Bergerat, "Le boulevard," *L'Echo de la Semaine,* October 9, 1892.
23. Alfred Delvau, *Les plaisirs de Paris* (Paris, 1867), 17–18.
24. Richard Whiteing, *The Life of Paris* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1901), 196–97.
25. Nord, *Paris Shopkeepers,* 133. See also Miller, *The Bon Marché;* Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds;* and Bowlby, *Just Looking.*
26. Maude Annesley, *My Parisian Year* (London: Mills and Boon, 1912), 80.

of an increasingly diverse array of entertainments such as the Théâtre des Folies-Dramatiques, the rebuilt Ambigu-Comique, the Théâtre de la porte St-Martin, and the Théâtre de la Renaissance on the boulevard St-Martin; the Gymnase Dramatique on the boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle; and the Parisiana music hall on the boulevard Poissonnière. The boulevard Montmartre featured the Théâtre des Variétés, one of the oldest self-supporting theaters in Paris, and the Musée Grévin, the wax museum that opened in 1882. The Théâtre Robert-Houdin, a magic show eventually run by the early filmmaker Georges Méliès, could be found on the boulevard des Italiens as could the Opéra-Comique, the Théâtre des Nouveautés and the Vaudeville. The Olympia music hall replaced the *montagnes russes* (early roller coasters) on the boulevard des Capucines, where one could also find the Théâtre de la Salle des Capucines, run by the Isola brothers, a pair of Algerian magicians who later went on to direct the Parisiana, the Olympia and the Folies-Bergères. Finally, of course, the expensive new Opera house stood practically at the end of the line, a symbol of the new Paris. This partial list, which does not begin to enumerate the many *cafés-concerts* that sprang up on and around the boulevards in the eighties and nineties should serve as ample evidence that on the boulevards, Parisians and visitors could find a variety of entertainments that were increasingly grand and glitzy but at the same time offered seats affordable to a socially diverse audience.[27]

Cafés all over the nation served as "the primary theater[s] of everyday life in nineteenth-century France," according to Susanna Barrows.[28] Yet the boulevard café, like the boulevard theater, offered large-scale spectacle. The café's setting literally in the streets poised the viewer for a transient and constantly renewed spectacle of an ever-changing crowd. The boulevard café that served as a central observation point from which to watch the world turned into a show at the same time that the line between the show and its audience blurred.[29] One guidebook described café seats as theater seats and suggested to its readers that "the best way to attend this spectacle . . . is to take your stall at the door of one of the many cafés on the boulevard Montmartre or the boulevard

27. See Concetta Condemi, *Les cafés-concerts* (Paris: Quai Voltaire, 1992); and Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque*.

28. Susanna I. Barrows, "Nineteenth-Century Cafés: Arenas of Everyday Life," in *Pleasures of Paris: Daumier to Picasso*, ed. Barbara Stern Shapiro (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1991), 17.

29. On the increased thematic and kitschy elements of cafés, where service became a show, see Susanna I. Barrows, "Eros in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

des Italiens, and while savoring your coffee or your grog, look with your own two eyes."[30] A Danish visitor noted that "the café is a reserved seat in the street, a sort of comfortable sofa-corner in the great common parlor."[31] Cafés provided theater seats "of a great common parlor" as opposed to the selectivity of a theater.

The café was not the only observation point for the new Paris. The hotel lobby served as an important place from which to watch the *va et vient* of modern life. Starting in the 1860s, no lobby seemed a better place than that of the Grand Hôtel, a large triangular edifice on the boulevard des Capucines between the rues Scribe and Auber, with 750 rooms and all the "modern comforts" such as bathrooms, escalators, telegraphs and translation services. Like the boulevards outside, the lobby offered the image of the world in microcosm. Georges Montorgeuil described "the mingling fez and turbans, Scotch plaid, and Spanish cloak."[32] that someone seated in the lobby might see parade by. Edmond Deschaumes remarked on the lobby's bright lights and described it as a world stage: "At midnight, seated on a large arm-chair in the middle of this blaze, the spectator watches the members of the African embassy and some wife of a rich industrialist covered in a bone-ash opera cloak with a swan decoration."[33]

Like the new city itself, the institutions it gave birth to were always conceived as *grand: grands boulevards, grands magasins, le Grand Hôtel.* In his description of *Paris nouveau,* Fraipont could not keep away from a language of scale: "This place de l'Opéra, with its big ways that open onto everything, with these vast luxury stores, these gigantic cafés, the Grand Hôtel and the Opéra. This is modern Paris."[34] The meaning of *grand* here also implied a certain encyclopedic range, as found, for example, in department store fare. As a young provincial girl living in Paris for the year explained about the department stores, "They are splendid bazaars where one finds practically everything one can desire, and merchandise at all prices . . . objects for a few centimes up to several thousand francs."[35] She celebrates the possible fulfillment of any and everybody's desire through the range of fare found in a department

30. *Paris en poche: guide Conty,* 148.
31. Richard Kaufman, *Paris of To-Day,* cited in Shapiro, ed., *Pleasures of Paris,* 49.
32. Montorgeuil, *Vie des boulevards,* 109.
33. Deschaumes, *Pour bien voir Paris,* 13.
34. Fraipont, *Paris, à vol d'oiseau,* 52.
35. Rose Eméry, *Une année à Paris* (Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1886), 17.

store. And like the department stores it spawned, Parisian spectacle seemed utterly encompassing and inviting to all.

These boulevard institutions stood as emblems of the new city and, in different ways, loci of audience and spectacle. The *grands boulevards* were made into monuments of modern life; their monumental status in fact served to highlight the fleeting nature of urban life. Rather than permanent structures in stone, the sight worth seeing was the flow of traffic on the boulevards; the people who came and went. The site was not merely architectural and spatial but social as well. One came as much to see and be a part of the crowd as to visit a particular place. And crowds did frequent the boulevards. For example, omnibuses traveled the semicircle of boulevards more frequently than on any other line—more than ten thousand cars in a twenty-four-hour period by 1880—according to one source.[36]

The urban crowd was celebrated by Parisian chroniclers and the popular press as one of the distinctive features of the *grands boulevards.* Fraipont explained, "One has to have lived in the provinces to feel the joy one experiences when one finds oneself mixed into a constantly changing crowd . . . well, the Parisian is a man of crowds, he is happy about the racket that is one of the signs of life."[37]

Many sources represented a socially and sexually diverse crowd occupying the boulevards of the new city. As a guidebook in English explained, "This promenade is full of people of all ranks, from the laborer to the peer, in search of entertainment and pleasure."[38] Even the Communard Jules Vallès, who might be expected to be suspicious of the celebration of the new Paris, remarked on the wonder of the boulevard's diversity:

> What characterizes this Parisian boulevard [the boulevard Montmartre], distinguishes it, constitutes its genius, is that its *flânerie* is active and abundant. . . . Open to all, invaded by businessmen or men of leisure, furrowed by all the city's passions, the boulevard watches on its sidewalks the mingling of all of the classes and all the prejudices and hates evaporate in the dust.[39]

An Englishman described the boulevard as "a pageant" and one with no privileged view because "it does not depend for its effect on the

36. *Les grands boulevards,* 199.
37. Fraipont, *Paris, à vol d'oiseau,* 47.
38. *Paris in Four Days* (Paris: Charles Moonen, 1886–87), 70.
39. Jules Vallès, *Le tableau de Paris* (1882; Paris: Messidor, 1989), 55–56.

consideration whether you see it from a bench on the *trottoir* or from a *fauteuil* under the awning."[40] The spectacle of the crowd was evoked in the *Guide Conty* as a "camera obscura where all the objects and the characters, differently but always picturesquely colored, change with every step and in every moment. All of Parisian society and its representatives, from the duchess to the flirt, and from the millionaire stockbroker to the beggar."[41] Guidebooks promised a kaleidoscopic and infinitely transforming spectacle defined by its substantial breadth and its status as visible.

A diverse crowd that might now legitimately "take to the streets" occupied the boulevards and spaces of commercial culture. Cassell's guide remarked, as if to warn its non-French readers about the phenomenon, that "one thing that will strike the stranger is the immense proportion of women in the streets as compared with men."[42] Georges Montorgeuil attested to the variety of women on the boulevards, explaining that public transport "brought and returned . . . in feminine humanity . . . the *grande dame* to the errand girl."[43] It appears that to contemporaries, at least, urban gazing was hardly the privileged domain of the bourgeois male.

Part of the boulevard crowd's modern diversity was a sort of democratic cosmopolitanism. An English guidebook noted that "representatives from nearly every country on the globe may be seen here, as it is the grand meeting-place for all peoples, nations and tongues."[44] All forms of life seemed to burst forth on the boulevard; there one found "a mob, an indescribable vitality" that defined "this Parisian existence."[45]

Yet the framing of life in the streets was not only perceived from such places as café seats. In particular, café-goers could also read about the spectacle of the street in the newspaper, the product that fin-de-siècle curmudgeon Maurice Talmeyr called "the leitmotiv of the street."[46] Indeed, the information they could gather by sitting at a café read like

40. Whiteing, *The Life of Paris,* 155.
41. *Paris en poche: guide Conty,* 147.
42. *Illustrated Guide to Paris,* 65.
43. Montorgeuil, *Vie des boulevards,* 9.
44. *Pleasure Guide to Paris for Bachelors* (London: Nilsson, n.d.), 165.
45. Edmond Benjamin and P. Desachy, *Le boulevard: croquis parisien* (Paris: Flammarion, 1893.), 6.
46. Maurice Talmeyr, "Le roman-feuilleton et l'esprit populaire," *Revue des deux mondes,* September 1903, 204.

advertising copy for the contents of a daily newspaper: "At café terraces, listen to the spirit with which the small and the big happenings of the day are recounted; *mondain* scandal, artistic productions, legislative discussions, financial disasters, all this happens in this sieve of this inimitable Parisian spirit."[47]

The popular press during the second half of the nineteenth century featured a written scenario of life on the boulevards—a sort of literary voyeurism. Modern journalism, especially in the mass-circulation dailies (*presse à grand tirage*), functioned as a major source for legitimating the experience of the city as a spectacle and of looking as a pastime. Like the boulevards, the press—especially in its sensationalization of the everyday—promoted the shared pleasures and identification of individual city dwellers that transformed them into "Parisians."

The *Presse à Grand Tirage*

"To read one's newspaper is to live the universal life, the life of the whole capital, of the entire city, of all France, of all nations. . . . It is thus that in a great country like France, the same thought, at one and the same time, animates the whole population . . . It is the newspaper that establishes this sublime communion of souls across distances."[48] This quote from an 1893 editorial in *Le Petit Parisien* elaborates the newspaper's status as a mechanically reproduced form that represented the standardized quality of mass production.[49] But this editorial (admittedly one written from an interested position) also celebrates the newspaper's ability to enact a "sublime communion of souls across distances." A newspaper created an "imagined community," to borrow Benedict Anderson's phrase, through which its otherwise unconnected readers were able to participate in a shared community—evoked and constructed in the newspaper.[50]

Many scholars have pointed to the mass newspaper as the quintes-

47. Alexis Martin, *Paris: promenades des 20 arrondissements* (Paris, 1890), 167.

48. Editorial from *Le Petit Parisien*, 1893, cited in Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 131.

49. In his analysis of the mass press, Terdiman also sees it as a dominant discourse that homogenized social life through commodification and shifted readers' views of relations of power. Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, esp. 118–38.

50. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, esp. ch. 2.

sential modern and urban form. After all, it in many ways can be considered one of the first commodities devised for mass consumption; it even included built-in obsolescence since its contents were designed to be replaced daily.[51] Aside from its embeddedness in capitalist exchange, however, the newspaper has also been examined as a great engine and purveyor of the transformation from "tradition" to "modernity," an analysis originally championed by American sociologist Robert Park. Park argued that the newspaper replaced the gossip that otherwise traveled in face-to-face communities.[52] Walter Benjamin had another perception of the newspaper's effect. He wrote that the alienation and fragmentation of the individual in modernity could be seen in the mass newspaper's form and content.[53] Although it is problematic to frame a discussion around social needs (community/communication) as though they are an essential structural element in human interaction as Park did, his interpretation seems to summarize at least how the mass newspaper was represented in its own time. Building on Park's framework, I suggest that the newspaper served as one of the most powerful forms of modern mass cultural urban entertainments in the sense that it constituted a collective and then aimed to please it through newspaper reading.[54]

The new press aimed to reach as broad and diverse a constituency as possible and was designed to address an imagined "universal" reader. The newspaper, along with several very popular novel forms of commercial entertainment (and the Paris Morgue, all to be discussed in subsequent chapters) and the Parisian boulevard culture described above, framed, represented and sensationalized the "real thing" as the essence of modern Parisian spectacle.

The late nineteenth century in France has been justifiably called the "golden age of the press."[55] Between 1880 and 1914, the overall circu-

51. See Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, 120; and Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, ch. 2.

52. See Robert Park, "The Natural History of the Newspaper," *American Journal of Sociology* 29 (November 1923): 273–89. See also Michael Schudson's analysis of the history of American journalism, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 40–42 for a discussion of Park.

53. See Benjamin, "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Charles Baudelaire*, 112; and see also Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, 127–28 and throughout, on Benjamin and issues of alienation.

54. Stressing the collective elements of newspaper reading, Anderson called it an "extraordinary mass ceremony" and Hegel noted that the newspapers substituted for morning prayers for the modern man. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.

55. Jacques Wolgensinger, *L'histoire à la une: la grande aventure de la presse* (Paris: Decouvertes Gallimard, 1989)

lation of Parisian dailies increased 250 percent.[56] But beyond mere circulation figures, the newspaper became an emblem of Parisian culture as its sensational reality came to stand for the best translation of the urban experience. In fact, it created the terms through which people might order and make sense of their experiences. Like the city, the newspaper celebrated speed, spontaneity, the unpredictable and the ephemeral. This was a press whose production Emile Zola described as "steam-powered journalism, polished off in twenty minutes, edited on the fly, written at full gallop at a café table."[57]

The longer history of the mass press stretches back to 1836, when Emile de Girardin founded *La Presse,* whose forty-franc subscription price was half the usual cost.[58] As Léo Claretie bemoaned in a chapter dedicated to the press in his 1909 history of French literature, "The literary press is no more than a memory. Emile de Girardin killed it."[59] Girardin planned to generate the lost subscription revenue through an increase in readers and advertising revenue. Until that time, newspapers were sold by subscription only and the circulation of the largest dailies peaked at fewer than ten thousand Parisian subscribers. There were, of course, more readers who rented the paper at various *cabinets de lecture* and cafés, but the newspaper remained outside the cultural world of the majority of even the bourgeoisie. Girardin's *La Presse* also revolutionized the content of newspapers by introducing the *feuilleton*—the serial novel. Balzac's *La vieille fille* debuted there, and the *feuilleton* soon emerged as the sine qua non of every Parisian daily.

La Presse, along with Armand Dutacq's daily *Le Siècle,* which also lowered subscription rates, broadened the newspaper's audience, but the greatest emblem of the popular press became *Le Petit Journal,* founded in 1863. It was not only one of the first newspapers that could

56. Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Le roman du quotidien* (Paris: Le Chemin Vert, 1984), 17.

57. Zola interviewed by Henri Leyrat, "M. Emile Zola, interviewé sur l'interview," *Le Figaro,* January 12, 1893.

58. On the history of the mass press in France, see Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848–1945: Taste and Corruption* (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1979); Claude Bellanger, *Histoire générale de la presse française,* vol. 3 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972); Roger Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967); and Michael Palmer, *Des petits journaux aux grandes agences* (Paris: Aubier, 1983). For publishing more generally, see Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin, eds., *Histoire de l'édition française: le temps des éditeurs,* vol. 3, 2d ed. (Paris: Fayard, 1990); and James Smith Allen, *In the Public Eye: A History of Reading in Modern France, 1800–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

59. Léo Claretie, *Histoire de la littérature française: le XIXe siècle* (Paris: Société d'Editions littéraires et artistiques, 1909), 4:760.

be purchased for a sou, but it also could be bought by the issue at kiosks and from street criers.[60] An explicitly nonpolitical newspaper, its founder Moïse "Polydore" Millaud, the "father of the cheap press," thus avoided the heavy security deposit to the government and the *droit de timbre* of six centimes an issue that "opinion" newspapers were forced to pay during the Second Empire.[61] A great success, *Le Petit Journal* reached a circulation of one million in 1886 and had far out-paced its competition—in 1880 its circulation was four times higher than its nearest rival, *La Petite République française.*[62] Among *Le Petit Journal*'s readers were many of the increasing population of the newly literate. Emile Zola even credited the paper with the rise in literacy, "It has been said, and not without reason, that it created a new class of readers."[63] Millaud's system of sending papers out to major railroad stations and hiring thousands of ambulant criers who roamed both Paris and the provinces help us understand Zola's conclusion.

If *Le Petit Journal* contributed to the drive for literacy, the law of July 29, 1881, fomented a revolution in print and image. Called simply the "freedom of the press law," it reversed the course of almost a century's limitations on freedom of expression following the French Revolution. "Printing and book selling are free" it simply declared, rendering obsolete the stamp duty, the government-required security deposit, arbitrary trials and censorship.[64] The law, described as "a freedom law the likes of which the press has never seen in any moment,"[65] can be held partially responsible for the explosion in the number of periodicals available. In 1882, 3,800 periodical titles were printed in France. Ten years later, that number had expanded to 6,000.[66]

Newspapers for a sou made up the greatest number of new titles. Whereas in 1881, Paris had twenty-three such newspapers, in 1899 city

60. While *Le Petit Journal* is generally referred to as the first newspaper sold for a sou, René Livois asserts that *Le Journal du peuple* in 1848 and Dutacq's *La Liberté* preceded *Le Petit Journal.* See René Livois, *Histoire de la presse française* (Paris: Les Temps de la Presse, 1965), 1:274.

61. Arthur Meyer, *Ce que mes yeux ont vu,* 3d ed. (Paris: Plon, 1911), 187.

62. Allen, *In the Public Eye,* 42.

63. Palmer, *Des petits journaux,* 24.

64. Yet libel laws against citizens were far-reaching, and various amendments to the law introduced restrictions through the Great War. Censorship of the theater was maintained. See Bellanger, *La presse française,* 7–60; Zeldin, *France, 1848–1945,* 547–51; and Allen, *In the Public Eye,* 88–89.

65. Chartier and Martin, eds., *Histoire de l'édition française,* 48.

66. Raymond Manévy, *La presse de la Troisième République* (Paris: J. Forêt, 1955), 9.

dwellers might choose among sixty such publications.[67] Four newspapers, *Le Journal, Le Matin, Le Petit Journal* and *Le Petit Parisien,* accounted for 75 percent of the Parisian market by 1900.[68] While the new press law, not to mention the increase in literacy among the French and especially among urban populations, may help explain the growing number of publications and readers, social practices and desires associated with *Paris nouveau* shaped the novel genres of the modern mass press. As Eugène Dubief, former secretary of the press division of the Ministry of the Interior noted in 1892, newspapers had become "department stores where the shelves need to be stocked daily."[69]

As much as display windows, hotels and cafés, the newspaper became a fixture of and transmitter for boulevard culture. One observer noted, "The movement . . . of newspapers toward the boulevard was inevitable. Is it not fitting that journalism should place itself in the center of activity? Where better than the boulevard to feel the pulse of the city?"[70] Newspapers could be found all over the *grands boulevards,* at the many kiosks located along them.[71] A visitor marveled, "The kiosk is, above all things, a Parisian institution."[72] In 1855, the city inaugurated the "lighted kiosks," seven on the boulevard Montmartre alone—more than any one place in Paris.[73] Newspapers were available in racks to patrons of sidewalk cafés, where they could be read free with the purchase of a drink.

The association of the newspapers with the boulevards is also a reference to the location of the newspaper offices—most of which were on and around the boulevards—despite the high cost of the vast space they required (fig. 2).[74] *Le Petit Journal* moved from the well-known Maison Frascati on the boulevard Montmartre in 1869, where the ground floor sported a bazaar, aquarium and art gallery, to a building

67. Ibid., 19. Other sources list slightly different numbers but indicate the same overall growth pattern. Bellanger lists the number of Parisian papers for a sou at four in 1871, thirty in 1882 and fifty-one in 1892. See Claude Bellanger, *La presse française,* 140.

68. Jean-Pierre Rioux, *Frissons fin-de-siècle* (Paris: Le Monde, 1990), 8.

69. Eugène Dubief, *Le journalisme* (Paris: Hachette, 1892), 245–6.

70. Montorgeuil, *Vie des boulevards,* 42.

71. Almost all kiosks on the boulevards were run by women, usually veterans' widows. See Archives de la Préfecture de police (hereafter APP), DB 198.

72. Whiteing, *The Life of Paris,* 217.

73. APP, DB 198.

74. To name just a few, *Le Gaulois* was located at 9, boulevard des Italiens, *L'Evènement* across the street at number 10. *Le Figaro* was at the corner of the boulevard Montmartre and the rue Druot, *Le Gil Blas* at 10, boulevard des Capucines.

Aspect de l'angle du boulevard Montmartre et de la rue Richelieu le jour de l'apparition d'un numéro du *Journal illustré*. Dessin d'H. de Hem.

2. *Le Journal illustré* and *Le Petit Journal* on the boulevard Montmartre, 1864. Musée Carnavalet. © Photothèque des musées de la Ville de Paris.

nearby at the corner of the rue Lafayette and the rue Cadet. There an enormous five-centime piece, lighted all night long, decorated the front of the building, which also featured a ground-floor bazaar.

Newspapers integrated themselves into the fabric of boulevard spectacle by turning not just their products, but also their offices into centers for the immediate consumption of news, even before it hit the papers. For example, the *salle des dépêches* (telegram room), first opened at *Le Figaro* in 1877, opened onto the street and news items would be posted in the window. Dubief noted that this became a brilliant form of publicity, whose goal was to transform curiosity seekers into "clients."[75]

But the new press did not simply take its place on the boulevards in

75. Dubief, *Le journalisme,* 187.

geographic terms. Rather, the paper's content, which offered a sensationalized reality and an emphasis on novelty, matched and re-presented the framing of everyday life that came to define boulevard culture. In the mass press, coverage of political life took a back seat to theater openings, horse races, fairground descriptions and initially to the *roman-feuilleton* and the *faits divers*, and eventually to what was called *reportage* and such new press genres as the interview.

Le Petit Journal's attempts to avoid paying the *caution* that opinion newspapers needed to pay inadvertently inaugurated a new journalistic philosophy in France. In the words of its most successful columnist Timothée Trimm (whose real name was Napoléon Lespès): "I tell of the recent event, current events that are still hot, the latest anecdote, the play review the day after, the polite and sincere critique of yesterday's book."[76] Rather than attempt to influence opinion, this newspaper would deliver information in the form of *actualités* or current events.

The newspaper was supposed to be a mirror that reflected the broadest possible spectrum of contemporary life. As its founder Millaud advised his reporters:

> You should spend your time in buses, in trains, in theatres, in the street. Find out what the average man is thinking. Then let yourself be guided by this. At the same time keep up with all the latest discoveries, all the latest inventions. Publish all the knowledge that gets buried away in the serious heavies . . . Your job is to report what most men are thinking and to speak of everything as if you know far more about it than anybody else.[77]

Millaud instructed reporters to draw their material from the common spaces of urban life, the places where Parisians gathered, while cultivating novelty all the while. At the same time that reporters were supposed to be guided by the thoughts of the average Parisian, they were also then to assume the role of expert, guiding readers through everyday life in which they would instruct the masses on urban spectatorship.

By the late nineteenth century, however, almost all newspapers also offered fiction in the form of the serial novel, clearly demarcated from the rest of the newspaper by a bar across the bottom of the page. Yet these popular narratives were often derived from the stories above the line of demarcation, and their literary conventions placed them squarely within a realist frame. The newspaper's form was "anti-organicist" as

76. *Le Petit Journal*, June 25, 1866, cited in Palmer, *Des petits journaux*, 24.
77. Zeldin, *France, 1848–1945*, 527.

Richard Terdiman has noted, because "its form denies form."[78] It offered up a fragmented reality that was paired with a fragmented so-called fiction in the form of the *roman-feuilleton*.

Michael Palmer has argued that in the *presse à grand tirage* "the successful elements of the . . . serial novel are those of the *faits divers* and other events taken from the real world."[79] Both the newspaper and the serial novel blurred the boundaries between reality and representation. The newspaper claimed to tell the truth, to present a nonfictive drama of contemporary life. Articles purported to be "nonfiction"; their relation to each other was entirely non-narrative.

Yet, as Palmer has suggested, the narratives of the serial novels were often based on what its authors and readers consumed above this line of demarcation. This overflow of the categories "reality" and "representation" can be seen in a variety of cultural forms in the second half of the nineteenth century, but the newspaper's popular pairing of the serial novel and the *faits divers* arguably set the standard for many other forms.

In 1903 Maurice Talmeyr lamented in the pages of *La Revue des deux mondes* the formidable power of the newspapers' *feuilletons:*

> Let's imagine that we are returning from the ball. It is between six and seven in the morning, and we notice, from the back of our carriage, the spectacle of a Paris street. Workers going to their work, carriage-men pass with their cartloads, concierges open their doors. We pass milkmen and bread deliverers. And what do we notice? That all these people, or almost all, are reading the newspaper. And what are they reading? The serial novel![80]

He also remarked that later in the day, the butcher's apprentice could be found reading the paper while running his errands, the coachman became mesmerized by it while waiting for clients, and the women in Les Halles fell silent, entranced by the *feuilleton*. As a veritable *manne quotidienne des foules* (daily manna of the crowds), he explained that there was not a newspaper without its *feuilleton* and some even offered two or three at a time.[81]

Talmeyr dated the unfortunate introduction of the genre to the early 1840s and explored it in order to understand what havoc it had wreaked

78. Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, 122.
79. Palmer, *Des petits journaux*, 27.
80. Talmeyr, "Le roman-feuilleton," 203.
81. Ibid., 204.

on the popular imagination. Some sources point to Balzac's *La vieille fille,* which appeared in *La Presse* in October 1836, as the first serial novel, others to *La Presse*'s publication of *Le Rhin* by Victor Hugo.[82] Regardless, even before newspapers had a massive audience and were sold by the issue, the *feuilleton* was seen as a way to augment subscriptions. For example, Eugène Sue's *Mystères de Paris* published in *Le Journal des débats* boosted subscriptions by several thousand; his *Le juif errant* raised the circulation of *Le Constitutionnel* from 3,600 to an exceptional figure of 20,000.[83] As one contemporary noted in 1845, "One no longer subscribes to a newspaper because it has an opinion similar to one's own; one subscribes, without paying attention to political colors, instead determining which serial novel is more or less amusing."[84]

Launching a *feuilleton* became an event in which the newspaper could barrage the city with publicity (fig. 3). It involved a "veritable capture of the city streets," and as such "the serial novels of popular newspapers . . . become public events."[85] Newspapers employed men and women to plaster posters all over the city and as many as four hundred peddlers went shouting through the city streets, distributing illustrated handbills containing the beginning of a novel.

If fiction in installments drew public attention, the *faits divers* improved on the formula by creating sensation out of the quotidian. "Future historians of Paris will only need the *faits divers* recounted day by day in the newspaper to write the history of the customs of the capital,"[86] noted the Parisian writer Charles Virmaître. Technically, the *fait divers* was a newspaper rubric. Yet the term denoted a certain kind of story and a particular style of reporting. The genre included an enormous range in subject matter, but all *faits divers* represented contemporary and real-life events. As Georges Montorgeuil asked rhetorically, "At bottom, is the *fait divers* not life, all of life?"[87] Its definition, which

82. Anne-Marie Thiesse, "Le roman populaire," in *Histoire de l'édition française,* ed. Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin (Paris: Fayard, 1990). 3:511; and Wolgensinger, *Histoire à la une,* 80, respectively.

83. Charles Brun, *Le roman social en France au XIXe siècle,* cited in Walter Benjamin, *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle,* ed. Rolf Tiedmann, trans. Jean Lacoste (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1989), 760.

84. Montlaville, before the Chamber of Deputies, March 14, 1845, cited in Palmer, *Des petits journaux,* 26.

85. Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Le roman du quotidien* (Paris: Le Chemin Vert, 1984), 90.

86. Charles Virmaître, *Les curiosités de Paris* (Paris: Lebigre-Duquesne, 1868), 87.

87. *Le Paris,* August 6, 1886.

3. Ad leaflet for Emile Zola, *La bête humaine,* in serial novel form. Musée Carnavalet. © Photothèque des musées de la Ville de Paris.