

Chez Paul Niquet: Sound, Spatiality, and Sociability in the Paris Cabaret

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On 6 January 1854, Paris's Théâtre des Folies-Dramatiques presented its year-end satirical variety show featuring skits, songs, and dances performed by an ensemble of two dozen actors.¹ Featuring allegorical characters, puns, and satirical musical numbers, the annual *revue de fin d'année* was a theater industry unto itself, attracting Parisians as well as foreigners and offering audiences a musical digest of current events. The year 1853 was particularly ripe for humorous catharsis; indeed, the year was a noisy one, both in Paris and abroad. In June, Emperor Napoléon III appointed Georges-Eugène "Baron" Haussmann as Prefect of the Seine, charging him with the most ruthlessly ambitious urbanization project in Paris's history: a thorough leveling of the cramped *vieux faubourgs* and the engineering of a monumental network of

boulevards, squares, and sewer tunnels.² Outside Paris, France's role in geopolitics intensified with the outbreak of the Crimean War in October, which, as scholars have recently shown, had a massive impact on how the sounds of war and industrialization were perceived by Parisians at home.³ While the 1853 *revue* touched on these and other current events, the second act was devoted to Baron Haussmann's demolitions of the Right Bank's market district. Rather than use images of *le vieux Paris* as a scenic backdrop, the old markets, buildings,

²The literature detailing the "Haussmannization" of Paris is vast. Two exemplary English-language studies of Haussmannization's effect on urban culture are David Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995); and David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

³See *Hearing the Crimean War: Wartime Sound and the Unmaking of Sense*, ed. Gavin Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹Corbon, Grangé, and Guénée, *La queue de la comète: revue de 1853 en 3 actes et 4 tableaux* (Paris: Pièstre, 1854).

and drinking establishments were all performed allegorically by singing actors. After a Chinese laborer mourns the leveling of the Marché Saint-Laurent, a character named Paul Niquet barges in and threatens to punch anyone who interrupts his onstage entrance. The characters seem confused by Paul's forceful entry: is he a person, or a place? When one sings "quell [*sic*] est ce malhonnête / qui, si rudement nous traite?" (who's this rogue / who treats us so rudely?) another responds, "C'est un d'nos démolis" (It's one of our demolished comrades).⁴ Maintaining the rhyme scheme of the last syllable, Niquet adds, "Un ex-malin de Paris!" (a clever former Parisian!) A series of songs reintroduce Niquet to the audience: he is not a man, but the embodiment of a recently demolished cabaret:

Dandys d'barrières,
Ouvriers d'portières,
Marchands d'cloyères,
Cachemir's d'osier,
Forts de la halle,
Chacun s'installe
À fin finale
D's'humecter l'gosier.⁵

(Dandies of the peripheries,
Door openers,
Fishmongers,
Cashmere wickers.
Market stalwarts,
All congregate there
In the end
To moisten the gullet.)

The authors of this 1853 *revue de fin d'année* seem to be telling us that this cabaret, one of the countless such structures demolished by Haussmann in the Second Empire's nascent years, played no small role in fostering sociability among the city's working classes. This exchange is an example of how leisure spaces defined what it meant to be Parisian. Enough ink has been spilled concerning the representation of nineteenth-century Parisian urbanism in the

arts that these arguments need not be repeated here. From Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen* to the novels of Flaubert, Zola, and Proust to the paintings of Manet and later, the voluminous ramblings of Walter Benjamin's unfinished *Arcades Project*, Parisian urban policies clearly impacted how Paris's creative class perceived time, space, and sociability.⁶ These oft-studied works all engage with the mid-nineteenth-century practice of aestheticizing the city, or converting the everyday experiences of urban life into the realm of art.⁷ Yet as the scholarship on nineteenth-century Paris continues to grow, what remains missing is a more localized approach that focuses on specific leisure spaces—especially those patronized by a predominantly proletarian clientele. For reasons that hitherto have been unexplored, Niquet's cabaret appears and reappears in musical and theatrical settings over the course of the nineteenth century. The widespread interest in this lowly tavern on the part of middle-class theatergoers reveals a sustained literary preoccupation with the spatial and sonic behaviors of the most destitute of Parisian citizens. Yet this preoccupation was not merely a condescending fascination with the poor. Niquet's cabaret served as a physical and metaphorical microcosm of relational city life that resisted hegemonic notions of monumentality, consumerism, and spectacle.

This article explores the prevalence of Paul Niquet's cabaret in nineteenth-century Parisian song and theater. I argue that Niquet's cabaret functioned as a resonant thirdspace, not only for workers, but also for bourgeois communities whose sensory experience of the city was dramatically impacted by Haussmannization. To Edward Soja, "thirdspace" is not a physical location *per se*, but rather a way of thinking spatially. A strategic awareness of humans' interactions within the

⁶For a historiographical overview of the literary and scholarly texts dealing with Paris as an aesthetic object, see the essays in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Paris*, ed. Anna-Louise Milne (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁷On how Paris was conceived as a unified artwork by both urban planners and artists alike, see Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); and Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*.

⁴Corbon, Grangé, and Guénéé, *La queue de la comète*, 11. All translations from French are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁵*Ibid.*

designed spaces of urban environments “has become a vital part of making both theoretical and practical sense of our contemporary life worlds at all scales, from the most intimate to the most global.”⁸ While my aim is to bring Soja’s poetics of spatiality into conversation with nineteenth-century leisure spaces, I also want to grapple with the “our” in Soja’s remark. Spatial thinking—and more broadly, the notion of a “spatial humanities”—has pervaded critical inquiries into twentieth- and twenty-first-century life but has been largely neglected in investigations of nineteenth-century musical sociability.⁹

Despite offering a multitude of different sensory experiences for all social classes, as a historical object the nineteenth-century cabaret seemed to resist the passage of time. Influenced by a century of historical thought dominated by the work of Hegel and Michelet, we might easily overlook performance spaces that did not house the “newest” musical innovations. A major reason for this, Soja writes, is a nineteenth-century

epistemological bias that privileged time over space. To support this claim, Soja quotes Michel Foucault’s pioneering work on heterotopic spaces, in which the French thinker matter-of-factly explains this epistemological oversight: “The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world. . . . The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space.”¹⁰ Put simply, the question of *when* things happened was more significant than *where*. Music scholars have established how the French literary elite’s obsession with the politics of history translated onto the opera stage, and from there, into the social sphere of bourgeois leisure.¹¹ But with Paris’s theaters subject to strict generic regulations that reflected the segregationist ideology of nineteenth-century urbanization, histories of opera necessarily become histories of time, and therefore, histories of privilege. Lying outside these generic and geographic jurisdictions, cabarets did not concern themselves with history. Instead, proprietors offered clientele immediate and timeless gratification in the form of drink, sex, song, shelter, and conversation.

As such, the institution of the cabaret did not fit into the master plan of mid-century urbanization. More than a series of public works projects, “Haussmannization” was a campaign to control both spatial and sensory experiences of urban dwellers. The boulevards and spaces of spectacle most associated with the Second Empire, such as the Boulevard Sébastopol and the Palais de

⁸Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (London: Blackwell, 1996), 1.

⁹Soja’s notion of thirdspace should not be confused with Homi Bhabha’s “Third Space” theory of cultural hybridity. Soja’s concept is rooted in Henri Lefebvre’s ideas about *tri-lectics of space*; that is, an understanding that urban space is subjected to different interpretative and administrative forces depending on how that space is conceived by the planner, perceived by the outside viewer, or lived by the user. Thirdspaces in Soja’s formulation are defined by a symbiotic relationship between the realities of inhabiting space and the fictional representations of that space in mapping or creative representation. Bhabha defines Third Space in more humanistic terms as a fluid set of signifiers that take on different meanings depending on the cultural crossings of multiple subject positions. According to Bhabha, the notion of Third Space “constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew.” See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 55. Soja discusses Bhabha’s theory at length, noting that the latter’s theory “is occasionally teasingly on the edge of being a spatially ungrounded literary trope, a floating metaphor for a critical *historical* consciousness that inadvertently masks a continued privileging of temporality over spatiality.” See Soja, *Thirdspace*, 140–41. The challenge of using this concept in historical inquiry is precisely that balance of the abstraction of spatiality with the historicist impulse to contextualize chronologically. For an application of Bhabha’s theory to the politics of hybridity in the postwar New York jazz scene, see Brigid Cohen, “Enigmas of the Third Space: Mingus and Varèse at Greenwich House, 1957,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 71/1 (2018): 155–211.

¹⁰Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces (1967),” quoted in Soja, *Thirdspace*, 155.

¹¹Notable studies of nineteenth-century French opera’s depiction of history and power structures include Sarah Hibberd, *French Grand Opera and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Mark Pottinger, “Revolution and the Art of History in France: Daniel Auber’s *Gustave III*, 1833,” *Studia Musicologica* 52 (2011): 393–418, and Mark Everist, “The Music of Power: Parisian Opera and the Politics of Genre, 1806–1864,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 67/3 (2014): 685–734. Peter Mondelli’s work has examined how Parisians’ taste for theatrical history reflected patterns of musical consumption in the domestic sphere. See Peter Mondelli, “The Sociability of History in French Grand Opera: A Historical Materialist Perspective,” this journal 37/1 (2013): 37–55.



Plate 1: “Nouveau Paris monumental: itinéraire pratique de l'étranger dans Paris” (Paris: Garnier frères, [ca. 1878]).

l'Industrie, represented an aesthetics of monumentality: these spaces were designed to be *consumed* and *admired*, but not *used*.¹² The homogeneity of the master plan for *le nouveau Paris* is best understood from a bird's eye map view, which conceals human bodies and masks the use values of urban space in favor of abstract symmetry, the demarcation of borders, and highlighting the city's monuments as if they were the real citizens (plate 1). At the street level, tourists and citizens would constantly be reminded of the perceived progress of time via the city's countless *lieux de mémoire*, such as statues, squares, and large edifices like the *grand théâtres*.¹³ Under this scheme, spaces of leisure, such as the café-concert, get folded into an aesthetics of consumption, thus conforming to the

dominant mode of urbanism, that of spectacle.¹⁴ Years before the explosion in popularity of the *cabaret artistique* frequented by the likes of Satie and Bruant, the early-nineteenth-century cabaret was the antithesis of this audience-driven mode of modern urbanism. Patrons of Niquet's cabaret wanted to forget themselves, not remember. They were not passive spectators—there was no official program of music-making—but rather active participants through social interaction (which often included song). The democratized, relational mode of sociability found within cabarets like Niquet's was also reflected in the ways that writers perceived sound in these spaces. Unlike theatrical sound—directional, choreographed, timed—cabaret sound was relational, participatory, and porous.¹⁵ Due to the geographic

¹²Writing about the 1855 and 1867 World's Fairs, Matthew Truesdell notes that such monumental urban projects reflected the Empire's ambition to bring art and industry together into an aesthetics of imperialism. Matthew Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics: Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte and the Fête Impériale, 1849–1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 102.

¹³See *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman and Pierre Nora, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

¹⁴To Gabriela Cruz, the aesthetics of phantasmagoria that permeated *grand opéra* threw spectators into a dialectic existence between dream and reality. See Gabriela Cruz, *Grand Illusion: Phantasmagoria in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 31.

¹⁵In an essay on Walter Benjamin's *One-Way Street*, Ernst Bloch evoked cabaret (albeit its 1920s Weimar incarnation) as a metaphor for an anti-spectacular, anti-bourgeois material reality, contrasting the “dead architecture” of classical drama with the “open-work” nature of cabaret. “[Cabaret] has not given birth to any new drama; for the most part it

proximity to the sidewalk, cabaret sociability began in the street and flowed seamlessly into the intimate interior, all the way upstairs to where cabaret proprietors would frequently quarter short-term residents and host prostitutional transactions.¹⁶ By re-creating a reception history of a single, notable Parisian cabaret, I aim to adopt a relational framework that treats even the “lowliest” of urban spaces as sites of social and intellectual ferment.¹⁷ The cabaret was a quintessentially working-class thirdspace: a social and sonically rich space whose descriptions and representations in novels and vaudevilles amplified patrons’ feelings and opinions about civic life. Yet authors of vaudevilles and songs—the majority of whom would be classified as *bourgeois* and not working class—also benefited from the existence of cabarets to narrate a distinctly middle-class urban experience. The café, specifically the proletarian cabaret, thus presented an alternative to Haussmann’s monumental mode of urbanism. As W. Scott Haine writes, the Paris café existed “at the interface between worlds of work and leisure, the public and the private, male and female, order and disorder, government regulation and community life, the collective and the individual, political engagement and apathy.”¹⁸ To these juxtapositions I would add key sonic contiguities: cabarets were both discordant and congenial,

has served as entertainment for the populace and has been as amorphous as they. Indirectly, however, cabaret may be employed as one of the most open and—contrary to its own intentions—most honest forms of the present: it then becomes the mirror of that empty space in which nothing can be made whole without a lie and where only fragments can still meet and intermingle.” Ernst Bloch, “Benjamin’s Philosophical Cabaret,” *New Left Review* 116 (1979): 94–95.
¹⁶As social spaces, cafés-concerts had more in common with the cabarets than with the *petits théâtres* they sought to emulate. Prostitution and casual homosexual interaction were not clandestine activities but rather, as Andrew Israel Ross has argued, essential components of how patrons experienced those urban spaces, even when they did not themselves participate. See Andrew Israel Ross, *Public City/Public Sex: Homosexuality, Prostitution, and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019).

¹⁷I borrow this term from Ralph P. Locke, “Paris: Centre of Intellectual Ferment,” in *The Early Romantic Era: Between Revolutions, 1789 and 1848*, ed. Alexander L. Ringer (New York: Prentice Hall, 1990), 60–73.

¹⁸W. Scott Haine, *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789–1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3.

musical and cacophonous, nurturing and alienating. How cabarets sounded depended on who was listening.

The problem, however, is that these descriptions inevitably come not via the workers themselves, but rather via bourgeois voices. This raises a broader issue of how historians continue to privilege the visual—images, signs, the written word—over the aural—random noises, oral traditions, spontaneous song—in determining the degree of participation of one urban population vis à vis another.¹⁹ In his work on the aspirational writings of nineteenth-century laborers, Jacques Rancière has pursued a corrective to the historiographical hegemony of the bourgeois (written) voice. Through an analysis of poetry, newspapers, and pamphlets written for and by workers in early-nineteenth-century Paris, Rancière reveals the ironic interdependency of the working and bourgeois classes: both are in a constant state of emulation, aspiration, and encroachment.²⁰ Rancière never goes as far as to call this dilemma the “politics of voice,” but music scholars have increasingly explored the important distinctions between the voice as a written text and vocal politics as a resonant phenomenon.²¹

¹⁹On the sonic effects of street commerce and modernist poetry and musical composition, respectively, see Aimée Boutin, *City of Noise: Sound and Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Brett Brehm, “Soundscapes of Nineteenth-Century Paris: The Cries of Kastner and Mallarmé,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 38 (June 2016): 263–74; and Jacek Blaszkiwicz, “Listening to the Old City: Street Cries and Urbanization in Paris, ca. 1860,” *Journal of Musicology* 37/2 (2020): 123–57.

²⁰Rancière’s corrective was to rearm his working-class historical actors with the agency to fashion their own collective image. Indeed, he employs hybrid visual/aural metaphors to explain workers’ attempts to take back agency: “What exactly is the meaning of this [historiographical] evasion that tends to disqualify the verbiage of every proffered message in favor of the mute eloquence of one who is not heard?” In other words, historians have largely ignored the voices of the masses, in favor of the less forceful but somehow more sustainable voices of the privileged. See Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (New York: Verso, 2012), 11. For a Rancière-inspired examination of urban workers traversing the social barriers of opera spectatorship, see Gabriela Cruz, “Sr. José, the Worker *mélomane*, or Opera and Democracy in Lisbon ca. 1850,” this journal 40/2 (2016): 81–105.

²¹Recent musicological publications that consider the “voice” as a material sonic entity include Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014);

One way to negotiate the relational politics and sensory poetics of cabarets is to consider how they inspired theatrical representations of everyday urban sociability, and what they reveal about those doing the representing. A psycho-geographic approach can help to understand how, and why, writers re-created these thirdspaces in novels and on stage. Guy Debord defines psychogeography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.”²² What Debord argued for was a form of ludic placemaking: a means for ordinary people to use games and leisure to write their own idiosyncratic narratives of the city. One such example is what he calls playful mapping: take a map of one city and use it to navigate another. This exercise would serve to regain urban users’ abilities to creatively—rather than habitually—move within urban space. Such games demonstrate the agency of urban users to experience unexpected and unregulated personal feelings as they move about. I read nineteenth-century theatrical references to Paul Niquet’s cabaret as a form of playful placemaking on the part of the authors. The genealogy of the fictionalized cabaret is inextricably tied with the representation of its working-class clientele. But a psycho-geographic lens also helps to understand the strange phenomenon of personifying cabarets on bourgeois stages, as was the case in the aforementioned

1853 *revue de fin d’année*. By anthropomorphizing urban space, *vaudevillistes* played a significant role in writing the urban history of cabaret from the early decades of the nineteenth century through the Second Empire. Cafés and cabarets, after all, did not function like concert halls or opera houses. These grand spaces, found along the *grands boulevards*, were engineered to accommodate the more attentive bourgeois listening practices like those detailed in James H. Johnson’s book *Listening in Paris*.²³ Tucked away in working-class districts, on the other hand, cabarets inspired bourgeois *chansonniers* and *vaudevillistes* to mediate relational socio-economic identities through song and on the stage.

Paul Niquet’s lowly local cabaret—and the “media buzz” around it—predated the global early-twentieth-century cabaret industry (made famous by the 1966 musical *Cabaret* and its filmic remakes) by decades.²⁴ But it nonetheless provided a rich sonic cabaret experience recoverable via descriptions found in journalism, essays, songs, and libretti. By using written texts to recover working-class resonant voices—to the degree that we can partially reconstruct them or at least imagine them on an informed basis—this article builds on this recent musicological research to show how listening practices were playfully “inscribed” in song texts and vaudeville libretti. These texts, in turn, contributed to a musical entertainment culture that echoed these listening practices back at audiences. The cabaret, and Niquet’s in particular, was a space that inspired patrons to record their feelings and opinions on urban modernity. By the time Niquet’s cabaret met its demise in the early years of the Second Empire, it had already become a monument to the very sort of relational, social urbanism that Haussmannization attempted to quell with its emphasis on boulevard life.

INSIDE PAUL NIQUET’S CABARET

Although the word *cabaret* immediately conjures images of song, dance, and burlesque (and

A Voice as Something More: Essays toward Materiality, ed. Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); and Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

²²Guy Debord, “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography (1955),” trans. Ken Knabb, in *Critical Geographies: A Collection of Readings*, ed. Harold Bauder and Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro (Kelowna, BC: Praxis Press, 2008), 23. Though often deployed in studies of twentieth- and twenty-first-century popular music and sound art studies, the concept of psychogeography has not featured prominently in nineteenth-century music scholarship. As a space of multisensory play, the nineteenth-century cabaret is a striking predecessor to these case studies. See, for example, Elizabeth W. Biggs, *Everyone Play: Sound, Public Space, and the (Re)making of Place* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2009); and Budhaditya Chattopadhyay, “Sonic Drifting: Sound, City and Psychogeography,” *SoundEffects: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience* 3/3 (2013): 138–52.

²³James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

²⁴See Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

for many, John Kander's multilingual greeting (*Willkommen, Bienvenue, Welcome*), the history of this institution was by no means exclusively musical. In the early nineteenth century, a cabaret simply meant a modest drinking hall, like a neighborhood dive bar or pub. The entry for "cabaret" in *Oxford Music Online* omits this important prehistory when it defines the cabaret as "a form of artistic and social activity of a kind that flourished for about half a century between the opening on 18 November 1881 of the famous 'Chat Noir' in Paris, and the political crises in Europe in the 1930s."²⁵ Niquet's cabaret was not a *cabaret artistique* in the model of Rodolphe Salis's "Chat Noir," nor was it ever zoned as a performance space. During the early nineteenth century, cabarets fell under the jurisdiction of *débîts de boissons*, a catch-all term for drinking establishments under French law. In an age when morality and criminality were entangled, the Republican politician Jules Simon (1814–96) complained that the cabaret is "le plus grand ennemi du progrès matériel et moral" (the greatest enemy of material and moral progress).²⁶ Simon believed that workers took their hard-earned money directly to the cabarets located conveniently close to their places of employment, as opposed to providing for their families. Drunkenness, to Simon, was not merely a home-wrecking vice, but also a gateway to criminal life: "Un ivrogne qui entre dans un cabaret n'est jamais sûr de ne pas entrer en prison le lendemain" (A drunk who enters a cabaret one day is never sure that he will not land in jail the next day).²⁷ With such a reputation, it is unsurprising that musicological histories of the genre typically "begin" in the 1880s, when *cabarets* were rebranded to fuse middle-class consumerism with a more unified and stylized artistic point of view.²⁸

²⁵Klaus Wachsmann, rev. Patrick O'Connor, "Cabaret," in *Oxford Music Online* (accessed 28 October 2020).

²⁶Jules Simon, *Le travail* (Paris: Librairie internationale, 1866), 16.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 242.

²⁸Joël-Marie Fauquet's monumental dictionary of nineteenth-century French music contains an entry on *cabaret artistique* that begins in the 1870s, but it does not discuss the early-nineteenth-century iterations of *cabaret*. See *Dictionnaire de la musique en France au XIXe siècle*, ed. Joël-Marie Fauquet (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 191–93. Likewise,

Yet early-nineteenth-century cabarets were far more than cesspools of drunkenness: they were safe social spaces for the working class. Rancière has put pressure on this nineteenth-century binary pitting work/morality on one hand and leisure/immorality on the other. The cabaret, he writes, "did not overthrow the authority of the workshop, it was also a place where workshop business was negotiated."²⁹ Haussmann's master plan revolved not only the reconfiguration of urban space along bourgeois lines, but also the redistribution, and silencing, of a working-class soundscape that was deemed incongruent with the aesthetics of the city center—a process known as *embourgeoisement*.³⁰ It was not so much the violent noise of the cabarets that was scary to Haussmann, but rather the idea of proletarian and bourgeois voices intermingling, either in speech or in song.

Although singing did occur in cabarets, strictly speaking there were no designated public performance venues for free-standing popular song in Paris pre-1840. Cabarets and cafés would instead host private singing societies whose members would perform for one another. If you were a Parisian in the central *faubourgs* with a taste for anti-establishment songs, you would belong to

Derek B. Scott's study of how Parisian cabarets participated in a "popular music revolution" focuses on this particular Third-Republic incarnation of cabaret. See Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. 196–218.

²⁹Jacques Rancière, "Good Times, or Pleasure at the Barriers," in *Voices of the People: The Social Life of "La Sociale" at the End of the Second Empire*, ed. Adrian Rifkin and Roger Thomas (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 47.

³⁰*Embourgeoisement* refers to the bureaucratic or corporate appropriation of middle-class values and cultural practices, usually to suppress and relocate working-class values. Today this process would be called gentrification. But as Anne Clerval writes, *embourgeoisement* was a complex ideology linking morality, urbanism, and culture with roots in Haussmann's transformation of Paris. See Anne Clerval, *Paris sans le peuple: la gentrification de la capitale* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013), 30. Writing about the construction of *Les Halles centrales*—in the neighborhood where Niquet's cabaret was located—Victoria E. Thompson has deployed the term *embourgeoisement* to explain how authorities disenfranchised the women who ran the decentralized markets in the *faubourg*, under the pretense that they did not embody Second-Empire values of proper female domesticity. See Victoria E. Thompson, "Urban Renovation, Moral Regeneration: Domesticating the *Halles* in Second-Empire Paris," *French Historical Studies* 20/1 (1997): 87–109.

a *goguette*; if you were a worker on the outskirts with a proclivity for merrymaking and drinking songs, you would attend a *guinguette*.³¹ It was only in the late 1840s that drinking establishments began to host public spectacles featuring solo singers. This hybrid format would receive a hybrid name: the *café-concert*. Part drinking hall and part theater, *café-concerts* menaced authorities as they fell squarely in between two licensing and policing jurisdictions: the *Préfecture de Police* and the *Ministère d'état*. A major reason for this double level of bureaucracy was that the *café-concert* marketed a more refined type of experience than the cabaret had previously provided. In a society increasingly repressed by the cultural and spatial norms of *embourgeoisement*, the *café-concert* became a new type of thirdspace that promised the same leisurely releases albeit with more expensive drink and high-profile entertainment.³² As Haussmann's public works projects materialized, *café-concerts* began to splinter across socio-economic and geographic lines. Venues to the North and East of Paris (Montmartre and Belleville) received negative press due to a tourist industry campaign urging foreigners to "stay away."³³ By contrast, *café-concerts* built on the newly refurbished Boulevard de Strasbourg and along the Champs-Élysées were monumental, gaudy, and accessible from the city's equally monumental train stations. Venues like the Eldorado, which seated 1,500 and sported a spacious orchestra pit, more closely resembled the opera houses than they did the venues on the outskirts.³⁴ Concetta Condemi has argued that

this hybrid institution emerged as part of the Second-Empire desire to convert social life into a spectacle; the *café-concert* was in part the result of Parisian popular music's shift from oral communication to scripted theater.³⁵ Censorship, beat policing, and other interventions kept both the lyrical content of songs and the social behaviors of performers and audiences in check. Thus, the *café-concert* eventually became an institutionalized form of popular music-making controlled from many angles by governmental presence. Cabarets, on the other hand, remained havens for the destitute, the accused, and the shunned. Though not musical spaces per se, nineteenth-century cabarets offered these marginalized communities a space to voice their right to leisure and free discussion.

Paul Niquet's cabaret was located at 26 rue aux Fers, in the heart of the working-class Les Halles district (now the rue Berger in the first arrondissement). The rue aux Fers was remarkably unmonumental (plate 2): a little appendage on the map surrounded by industrial side streets. By 1870, the entire neighborhood was razed to make room for Victor Baltard's monumental market *Les Halles centrales*.³⁶ For outsiders wishing to experience Niquet's cabaret, simply finding the place would have resulted in a psychogeographical adventure of navigating tiny alleys, inhaling the stench of market fish, and negotiating with locals of vastly disparate levels of sobriety.³⁷

Little is known of Niquet's personal life, except that he opened his eponymous cabaret

³¹On the cultures of popular song and dance in nineteenth-century France, see François Gasnault, *Guinguettes et lorettes: Bals publics et danse sociale à Paris entre 1830 et 1870* (Paris: Aubier, 1986); and Stephanie Schroedter, *Paris qui danse: Bewegungs- und Klangräume einer Großstadt der Moderne* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2019). On the effects of the commercial music market on social singing societies, see Nathan Ashline Therein, *Popular Song as Social Experience in Nineteenth-Century France: From National Culture to Commodity* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1985).

³²See Martin Penet, "Le *café-concert*: un nouveau divertissement populaire," in *Les spectacles sous le Second Empire*, ed. Jean-Claude Yon (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), 362.

³³See Kelley Conway, *Chanteuse in the City: The Realist Singer in French Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 32–34.

³⁴Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis*, 49.

³⁵See Concetta Condemi, *Les cafés-concerts: Histoire d'un divertissement, 1849–1914* (Paris: Quai Voltaire, 1992). On the philosophical undercurrents of the opera industry's shift from "voice" to "text," see Peter Mondelli, *From Voice to Text: Parisian Opera and Material Culture, 1790–1870* (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

³⁶See Christopher M. Mead, *Making Modern Paris: Victor Baltard's Central Markets and the Urban Practice of Architecture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).

³⁷A walk through such streets would inevitably result in a run-in with a *chiffonnier* or ragpicker, whose clanging refuse and perpetual singing was standard fare. As Walter Benjamin remarked, "The 'jerky gait' of the ragpicker is not necessarily due to alcohol. Every few minutes, he must stop to gather refuse, which he throws into his wicker basket." See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 364.



Plate 2: 26 Rue aux Fers (highlighted). "Plan de la ville de Paris, divisé en 12 arrondissements et 48 quartiers, dressé par X. Girard (1830)." BnF.

in the early 1820s but stepped away from direct management a decade later. No evidence suggests that he was concerned with his establishment's (un)sanitary conditions, its clientele, or its reputation. In short, Niquet seemed content to let his name become synonymous with the cabaret. By the middle of the century, this lowly tavern was (in)famous for attracting Paris's accused criminals and, subsequently, slews of tourists eager to experience the gritty urban underbelly described so vividly in novels like Eugène Sue's 1843 *Les Mystères de Paris*. By many accounts, all types of clientele were welcome, whether rich or poor, guilty or innocent, Parisian or foreign. According to a British tourist magazine, Niquet's cabaret had the following inscription hanging above its door, replete with English translations of key French phrases: "On promet à tous les messieurs et autres (gentlemen and others) qui entrèrent ici, de les rendre mort-sivres (dead-drunk) pour deux pence (four sous). Ils sont prevenus qu'il y a de la paille toute fraîche dans les caves."³⁸ The sign's bilingual messaging signified that the interior was a leisurely thirdspace for Frenchmen and Englishmen, workers, and tourists alike. But it also functioned

like a caption to an art object, or an overture to the main event, not only identifying what could be found inside but also curating the experience before patrons walked through the door. John Kander's 1966 *Wilkommen, Bienvenue, Welcome* was not the first internationalized cabaret greeting, after all.

Novelists, essayists, encyclopedists, and critics spent time in Niquet's cabaret, documenting in detail their sensory experiences of locating, navigating, and socializing in the cramped quarters. Not all writers, however, were equally open-minded. Pierre Larousse devoted a paragraph to Paul Niquet in the "cabaret" entry of his encyclopedia of nineteenth-century life, the *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*. As he writes, "This cabaret, open all night, was frequented by a very particular sort of clientele: ragpickers, thieves, drunks, and women whose age and sex one could not discern beneath the mass of rags that covered them."³⁹ This sentence captures Larousse's sense of temporal and visual confusion. First, it was rare for a tavern to be

³⁸A. H. G., "Coffee House and Tavern Life of Paris," *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* 67 (September 1866): 294.

³⁹"Ce cabaret, ouvert tout la nuit, était fréquenté par une clientèle toute particulière, des chiffonniers, des rodeurs, des ivrognes et des femmes dont l'âge et le sexe n'eussent pu se reconnaître sous l'amas de haillons qui les couvraient." Pierre Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* 3 (Paris: Larousse, 1864), 11.



Intérieur de l'établissement de Paul Niquet, vu à minuit.

Plate 3: "Inside Paul Niquet's establishment, seen at midnight." Illustration in *La semaine des familles*, 14 January 1860.

open all night, and numerous accounts in addition to Larousse's dwelling on the disorientation of the influx of clientele at hours marked as rest in the normative work schedule (plate 3). Second, Larousse's gender norms are also checked; his inability to recognize female bodies is exacerbated by the notion that women would be in Niquet's cabaret in the first place. This type of language, common in nineteenth-century descriptions of working-class social life, has an exoticizing, dehumanizing effect on its subjects. Niquet's patrons were treated as urban Others, members of a marginalized and homogenized community to be observed with distant, curious fascination. Hervé Tchumkam has described the Parisian *banlieues* of the twentieth century as focal points of the French government's "colonial obsession" with the city's outer ring of immigrant communities.⁴⁰ Indeed, this idea of

municipal "colonization" stretches back to the nineteenth century with Paris's 1860 annexation of Montmartre, Belleville, and neighboring villages. The French "colonial gaze" appeared within Paris's borders through the linkage of class status with morality. This binary mode of socio-spatial thinking, Edward Soja would argue, dictated nineteenth-century epistemologies of space and sociability. Citing Foucault, Soja notes that urban *sites*—this especially includes thirdspaces like cabarets—are necessarily *relations among sites*.⁴¹ In this light, Larousse's comments reveal the unwritten rules that bound the production of urban space to the politics of identity.

Literary interest in Paul Niquet's cabaret swelled in the early 1850s, as Haussmann was embarking on the first *réseau* (network) of urban demolition and construction.⁴² Writers continued

⁴⁰See Hervé Tchumkam, "Banlieue Sounds, or, the Right to Exist," in *Remapping Sound Studies*, ed. Gavin Steingo and

Jim Sykes (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 185–202.

⁴¹Soja, *Thirdspace*, 156.

⁴²Haussmann's first *réseau*, carried out between 1854 and 1858, created a *grande croisée*: the rue de Rivoli and the

to document the sensory disorientation they felt when they visited the site of the cabaret and the condemned neighborhood where it resided. Gérard de Nerval wrote a long exposé of Paul Niquet's cabaret in his 1852 novel *Les nuits d'octobre*. After describing the imposing bar, thick liquor glasses, and stuffy breathing conditions, Nerval passes a value judgment on the kinds of creatures that could thrive in this sort of habitat: "Rich men lack the courage to enter such places, these vestibules of purgatory, where it would perhaps be easy to save a few souls."⁴³ By the end of this quasi-Biblical passage, Nerval makes his subject position clear, choosing the polluted air of the street to the hellish scentscape of the tavern: "I would remove myself from that hell the moment the police would raid it, and I would happily inhale the aroma of heaps of flowers along the sidewalk of the rue aux Fers."⁴⁴ Such language suggests that Nerval seemed haunted—possessed, even—by the spectral presence of Niquet's regulars. Such cultural "ghosts," as Mark Everist has explored in the case of Mozart, regularly haunted elite musical institutions throughout Europe.⁴⁵ Like Mozart, Niquet was a spectral figure who lived on from one representation to the next, and who inspired the sort of multisensory, Romantic *Sehnsucht* typical of the first half of the century. Nerval's translation of the cabaret into a biblical realm reflected what Jacques Derrida might call "time out of joint," or the author's own disorientation with the realities of urban progress and desire to craft a new one.⁴⁶

boulevards Sébastopol and Saint-Michel were elongated to create a perpendicular axis. For a comprehensive overview of Haussmann's three *réseaux* and their varying degrees of completion under his tenure, see Jean des Cars and Pierre Pinon, *Paris: Haussmann* (Paris: Publications du Pavillon d' Arsenal, 1991), 74–84.

⁴³"Les hommes riches manquent trop de courage qui consiste à pénétrer dans de semblables lieux, dans ce vestibule du purgatoire, d'où il serait peut-être facile de sauver quelques âmes." Gérard de Nerval, *Les nuits d'octobre* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1868), 350.

⁴⁴"Je m'élançais de cet enfer au moment d'une arrestation, et je respire avec bonheur le parfum de fleurs entassées sur le trottoir de la rue aux Fers." *Ibid.*

⁴⁵See Mark Everist, *Mozart's Ghosts: Haunting the Halls of Musical Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁴⁶Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 21. Derrida's enigmatic concept of "hauntology" is explored throughout this text, although it is only mentioned by name two or three times.

The journalist Alexandre Privat d'Anglemont described Niquet's cabaret in similarly vivid detail in his 1854 travel guide/memoir *Paris anecdote*. To d'Anglemont, Niquet's cabaret was a quintessentially Parisian establishment down to its flooring; remarking that the same Fontainebleau sandstone used to pave the street extends into the cabaret's interior, he comments that the cabaret's floor is as well worn as the Rues Saint-Denis and Saint-Martin.⁴⁷ Where Nerval focused on smells, d'Anglemont also detailed sounds. As d'Anglemont entered, he was hit with a *pêle-mêle* of shouts, profanities, and rude bar songs (*chansons grossières*). The cacophony of voices was only amplified by the sharp din of glasses clinking and—with rhythmic regularity—shattering on the sandstone floor. Criminals rubbed shoulders with street musicians and hawkers, all of whom belonged to a heavily policed urban subculture: "there, one meets all sorts of pariahs: ragpickers, poets, and misunderstood musicians; border guards, rustic Paganinis, etc."⁴⁸ Despite expressing his sense of alarm, d'Anglemont theatricalized Niquet's cabaret into a democratized sonic tableau, interpreting the diverse clientele as a cacophonous yet choreographed flash mob.

It was not just the soundscape that interested writers. The demographics of the cabaret's clientele presented a microcosm of proletarian Parisian society that counted hawkers, musicians, haggling prostitutes, and other noisemakers among its rank and file. This microcosm in turn became a tourist attraction; as the guidebook author and memoirist Alfred Delvau observed in 1862, Niquet's cabaret had Europe-wide fame, and it was visited by foreigners in the same way that French tourists sought out Europe's "most abject curiosities."⁴⁹ After

⁴⁷Alexandre Privat d'Anglemont, *Paris anecdote* (Paris: A. Delahays, 1860), 203.

⁴⁸"Là on rencontre des parias de toute sorte: des chiffonniers et des chiffonnières, des poètes et des musiciens incompris, des ménétriers de barrière, des Paganini de ruisseau, etc." *Ibid.*, 206. Singers and ragpickers were often written about in tandem. See Romain Benini, "Chanson et chiffonnière à Paris au XIXe siècle," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 118/3 (July–September 2018): 571–84.

⁴⁹Alfred Delvau, *Histoire anecdotique des cafés et cabarets de Paris* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862), 174. Quoting Delvau, Charles Dickens called Niquet's cabaret one of Paris's "gulfs of perdition." See Charles Dickens, "Paris Cafes and

Hausmann began his sweeping urbanization of Paris, cabarets became relics of the old city. Demolitions in the modernizing city prompted the famed journalist Timothée Trimm to construct his own haunted narrative of urban life: “these unique taverns are but a memory . . . but they have all too often served backdrops for Romantic literature, so much as that writers have spent many lines detailing their picturesque and somber history.”⁵⁰ Demolition, specifically demolition of local social establishments, acted like a specter of death upon those writers—most famously, Charles Baudelaire—whose careers were forged by excavating humanity out of urban detritus.⁵¹ Jules Vallès, who published an obituary of Baudelaire in *La rue* on 7 September 1867, commented that it was not just the “writer of modern life” who had passed, but “modern life” itself. “These are,” Vallès lamented, “bad times for the biblicists of the sacristy or of the cabaret! Ours is an age of gaiety and distrust, one that never long suspends the recital of nightmares or the spectacle of ecstasies. It has now become clear that no one else had enough foresight to undertake such a campaign at the period when Baudelaire began his.”⁵² Baudelaire himself never wrote about Niquet’s cabaret, so it is unclear if he ever visited it. Yet Vallès presciently picked up on Baudelaire’s powers of synecdoche: if Constantin Guys was modern life’s “painter,” and Baudelaire its “writer,” then the aforementioned “sacristy and cabaret” can be interpreted as stand-ins for a mode of sociability vanishing amid the “spectacle of ecstasies,” i.e., the Second Empire. The bourgeois writers who entered Niquet’s cabaret emerged with a desire to associate the clientele with walking ghosts and the space with the afterlife. Ultimately, the physical space of the cabaret would vanish along

Cabarets,” in *All the Year Round: A Weekly Journal* (25 October 1862): 161.

⁵⁰“Ces maisons singulières ne sont plus qu’un souvenir. . . . Mais elles ont trop servi de toile de fonds à la littérature Romanesque pour que les écrivains ne consacrent pas quelques lignes à leur pittoresque et sombre histoire.” Timothée Trimm, “Le cabaret de Paul Niquet,” in *Le petit journal*, 10 January 1869.

⁵¹For a comparison of the urban-inspired writings of Nerval and Baudelaire, see Patrick M. Bray, “Prose Constructions: Nerval, Baudelaire, and the Louvre,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 54/2 (2014): 115–26.

⁵²Quoted in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 266–67.

with the mode of sociability it fostered, fulfilling the spectral prophecy of these mid-century Romantics.

It is one thing to see such a cabaret symbolically personified on stage, but another to go to the real place. If Niquet’s cabaret was as destitute and unsavory as these writers would believe, then why did people keep going? One answer came from an essay reprinted in the 1858 collection *The London Tales*. In the 1850s, the Parisian police used a technique called “mousetrapping” (*une souricière*), in which an unofficial agreement was made between authorities and tavern owners that police would raid taverns but allow proprietors to continue running their business undisturbed. Mousetrapping was decidedly conducted off the books, and it is unclear if the practice continued after 1860, the year Paris ballooned from twelve *arrondissements* to twenty. In the late 1850s, as the culture war against unregulated cafés reached its apogee, the municipal courts doubled down on proprietors’ legal responsibility to turn away drunk customers. By 1862, the mere presence of an intoxicated individual in a café could cause the café owner to be convicted.⁵³ Official police practice or not, mousetrapping was an effective means of keeping patrons’ senses constantly attuned to presence of the police. “Criminals,” explains an anonymous English correspondent, “are perfectly aware of the system, but are quite reconciled to it; they know that they are watched everywhere, or at least they feel as if they were, so they prefer facing the open danger to tormenting themselves with hopeless precautions against the hidden ones by which they think themselves surrounded.”⁵⁴ By attaching themselves to a communal space whose urban rhythms were familiar and predictable, criminals were able to face the police on their own terms. Their feelings of paranoia were tempered by the social and geographic sense of ownership. The sights, smells, and sounds—especially the din of approaching police—granted the accused the right to a safe space.

⁵³Haine, *The World of the Paris Café*, 18.

⁵⁴Anonymous, “The Freemason’s Story,” in *Titan: A Monthly Magazine* (1856): 332.

Alain Corbin has reminded us of how senses of smell and hearing informed discourses that framed modern life in the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ More recently, Eliza Jane Smith writes that textual representations of nineteenth-century working-class and criminal life “served the same sociolinguistic function of social identification.”⁵⁶ I would add that the sonic ambiance of the cabaret performed two different types of cultural work. As imagined by “outsiders,” sound marked not only the interior space but the surrounding area and people who were associated with it. Much like our ears may pick up the distinct phonemes of a foreign language better than a native speaker who hears meaning within those phonemes, so Nerval and d’Anglemont recorded their personal experiences of dwelling in spaces in which they felt themselves foreigners. This mode of urban experience was not uncommon in a metropolis in which neighborhood soundscapes modulated along cultural, social, and geographic changes. Yet cabaret sound also informed real-life urban experience, separate from its representation in literature. The technique of “mousetrapping” guaranteed that both police and clientele attuned their ears to their surroundings. And it made immersive spectacle impossible, as the sound of footsteps down the street pavement—the same, familiar pavement that lined Niquet’s floors—could spell the difference between a night of pleasure and a night in jail. The cabaret was therefore an important node in what Robert Darnton would call a “communication network” that linked the worlds of leisure, literature, and law enforcement.⁵⁷ Despite its alleged olfactory and auditory filth—or perhaps because of it—Paul Niquet’s cabaret became a popular *mise-en-scène* in songs and theatrical works glorifying these networks of sociability.

⁵⁵See Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁵⁶Eliza Jane Smith, “Dissonant Voices: Noise and the Criminal Leitmotiv in Vidocq and Victor Hugo,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 48/1 (2019–20): 38.

⁵⁷See Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

For those who drank there, Paul Niquet’s cabaret was not so much a destination as a refuge from the uncertainties of the city. In an anonymous song published in 1833, the narrator references Paul Niquet as a getaway from the onslaught of current events:

J’aime mieux vider mon pichet,
Que de m’ mêler d’ politique:
Ou bien licher mon sou d’ crique,
Su’ l’ comptoir à Paul Niquet.

(I’d rather empty my pitcher
Than get involved with politics
Better drink my one-dollar brandy
At Paul Niquet’s bar.)⁵⁸

The narrator does not flatter the cabaret as an exotic working-class space, but rather uses it as a punchline to avoid political conversation. Written from the perspective of a proletarian patron, the song suggests that Niquet’s cabaret protects the worker from the political machinations of the city. Yet such sympathetic depictions did little to correct the narrative that working-class Parisian spaces were somehow deviant by default and therefore prone to marginalization—even when those spaces were centrally located in the city.⁵⁹ Two overlapping realities of the urban “center” emerge: one rich and healthy, one poor and sick. Haussmann’s totalizing approach to urban planning was predicated on this idea that poverty is deviant and therefore

⁵⁸Quoted in Romain Benini, “Chanson et chiffonnière à Paris au XIXe siècle,” 578.

⁵⁹This paradox is particularly apparent in American cities today. On one hand, corporations and nonprofits tout the return of “downtown” life in the production of so-called “arts districts” and “central business districts” (CBDs). As Sharon Zukin, Adam Krims, and others, have argued, such newly elite spaces deployed public music, visual art, and organized leisure activities (like street festivals, parades, and farmer’s markets) to fill the vacuum of the deindustrialized urban landscape, confirming the popular notion that downtowns were like palimpsests, able to be redrawn without much concern for what—and who—was previously there. On the other hand, the phrase “inner city” functions as a euphemism for impoverished urban zones, often weaponized to denigrate communities of color. See Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (London: Blackwell, 1996), esp. 109–52; and Adam Krims, *Music and Urban Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2007), esp. pp. xiii–xxxv.

dangerous to the city as a whole, and it informed his personal disdain for the congested inner *arrondissements*. At the heart of this epistemology was the notion that the city was a unified organism, and that urbanization was a form of treatment to maintain the city's vital core. In his 1846 novel *La cousine Bette*, Honoré de Balzac paints a damning portrait of the area around the Louvre as a dilapidated, cancerous district in dire need of urban renewal. Eschewing a more traditional first-person account, Balzac gives the Louvre a voice of its own as he quotes the building's visceral cry for help: "For forty years now the Louvre has been crying through every gap in these damaged walls, and through every gaping window, get these warts off my face!" ("Voici bientôt quarante ans que le Louvre crie par toutes les gueules de ces murs éventrés, de ces fenêtres béantes: Extirpez ces verrues de ma face!").⁶⁰ Corporeal metaphors—boulevards and sewers as arteries, central markets and cafés as heartbeats, etc.—turned cities into bodies and urbanists into doctors. Haussmann espoused bodily analogies in describing his plans for the sewer system in 1854: "these underground galleries would be the organs of the metropolis and function like those of the human body without ever seeing the light of day."⁶¹ Such organicist language positioned the act of demolition not as financially driven creative destruction, but rather as a necessary procedure to rid the body politic of unsanitary, malignant

⁶⁰The line "get these warts off my face" is sometimes attributed to Haussmann himself, and if he indeed said it about the *vieux quartiers*, he would have been quoting Balzac. See Colin Jones, *Paris: Biography of a City* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 354. The association of the city of Paris as an imperfect human body has a long literary history. In book 3, chapter 9, of his 1686 *Essais*, Michel de Montaigne personifies the city as a flawed female body, deploying the word "warts" (*verrues*) much more sympathetically than Balzac/Haussmann would two centuries later: "that city has ever had my heart from my infancy, and it has fallen out, as of excellent things, that the more beautiful cities I have seen since, the more the beauty of this still wins upon my affection. I love her for herself, and more in her own native being, than in all the pomp of foreign and acquired embellishments. I love her tenderly, even to her warts and blemishes." Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Charles Cotton (London: Reeves and Turner, 1877).

⁶¹Matthew Gandy, "The Paris Sewers and the Rationalization of Urban Space," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24/1 (1999): 24.

urban spaces. Balzac's "warts" remark is a clear example of how marginalization had less to do with any idea of geographic centrality, and everything to do with a psychogeographic linkage of poverty, deviance, and otherness.

We have seen how deviance was fetishized in quasi-ethnographic accounts of Niquet's cabaret, in which writers equated their sensory overload with the conditions of purgatory. Yet this metaphysical and medicinal imagery was not restricted to cabarets. In the Romantic literary imagination, taverns existed on a par with the *cours des miracles*, or dead-end streets and cul de sacs in the slum districts where—legend had it—the sick were cured of their diseases. The *cour des miracles* functioned as a therapeutic thirdspace for the poorest of the poor. As such, it became fodder for romantic imagery of working-class life.⁶² Gustave Doré's 1860 lithograph of a *cour des miracles* (plate 4) is in effect a double representation, as it was published as an accompanying illustration to Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* (known in English as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*), a novel that famously featured episodes in the slum districts of Pre-Haussmannian Paris. Hugo does not mince words when describing the *cour des miracles* as a space of filth and transgression, a self-sufficient, microcosmic world separated from the surrounding city:

This was the most lively, and consequently the most hideous, point of the whole outcast den. It was a sort of monstrous hive, which buzzed there night and day. At night, when the remainder of the beggar horde slept, when there was no longer a window lighted in the dingy façades of the Place, when not a cry was any longer to be heard proceeding from those innumerable families, those ant-hills of thieves, of wenches, and stolen or bastard children, the merry tower was still recognizable by the noise which it made, by the scarlet light which, flashing simultaneously from the air-holes, the windows, the fissures in the cracked walls, escaped, so to speak, from its every pore.⁶³

⁶²Patrice Higonnet, *Paris, Capital of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 81.

⁶³Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, trans. Isabel B. Hapgood (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1888), 192.



Plate 4: The *cour des miracles*. Gustave Doré's illustration of Victor Hugo's novel *Notre Dame de Paris*, ca. 1859 (Paris: Maison de Victor Hugo).

Hugo's relentless, noisy characterization of 1400s Paris anticipates the myriad descriptions of Niquet's nineteenth-century cabaret. Reading these passages in tandem, it follows that both the *cour des miracles* and the city's cabarets presumably attracted the same "type" of clientele—as if the poor, sick, and accused all operated according to predictable urban rhythms. Put differently, these spaces stood as geographic symbols of the poor's apparent unwillingness to conform to modern (bourgeois) norms of urban life. Jessica Bombard notes that Hugo's *cour des miracles* depicted a criminal subculture that was organized according to its own laws and norms.⁶⁴ Whether it functioned as a haven for the destitute or as a breeding ground for disease and crime, the *cour des miracles* was deemed by Hugo as a non-normative space, or as Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston puts it, an "alien territory"

within the city of Paris.⁶⁵ In fact, both the *cour des miracles* and Niquet's cabaret were self-sufficient urban spaces born of necessity; as each respective regime began to remap Paris along bourgeois lines, the poor practiced a form of tactical urbanism, or what Debord would call *dérive*: converting semi-public spaces into makeshift, judgment-free dwellings.⁶⁶

Niquet's cabaret also featured as an atmospheric *mise-en-scène* in theatrical representations of street commerce. In addition to remarking on the cheapness of the digs and booze, writers used the venue to underline how the Parisian working class transgressed normalized expectations of when it was socially appropriate to drink. Yet this transgression can also be read as the worker's "right to the city." Coined by Henri Lefebvre and developed by David Harvey, the concept of *le droit à la ville* calls to action

⁶⁴Jessica Bombard, "Criminal Spaces in *Notre-Dame de Paris*: Hugo's Portrayals of Underworlds," in *Criminal Papers: Reading Crime in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rosemary A. Peters (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 123.

⁶⁵Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, *To Kill a Text: The Dialogic Fiction of Hugo, Dickens, and Zola* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 170.

⁶⁶For an overview of the concept of *dérive* within the realm of theater studies, see Carl Lavery, "Rethinking the Dérive: Drifting and Theatricality in Theatre and Performance Studies," *Performance Research* 23/7 (2018): 1–15.

marginalized communities whose agency over urban space has been taken from them by the forces of capitalist accumulation. As Harvey explains, “the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city.”⁶⁷ One example of how this right was staged is *Paris la nuit*, a popular crime drama that premiered on 28 June 1842 at the Théâtre de l’Ambigu-comique.⁶⁸ The curtain rises in act V on the Marché des Innocents, a popular outdoor market famous for its singing market vendors, which was condemned by Haussmann in 1857.⁶⁹ By five in the morning, a crowd of amicable street vendors have already congregated in the square. Their disparate shouts and sale-pitches, which for centuries were known as the *cris de Paris*, functioned to create a sonic atmosphere that would have been immediately recognizable for anyone who spent time in the Les Halles district.⁷⁰ A brief exchange ensues between a *marchand de café* and a *balayeur* (street sweeper). Another sweeper, already drunk, interrupts the conversation and proposes another beverage option:

Connais pas le café au lait, c’est bon pour les infirmes.
... Du cassis, d’ la *coniac* [*sic*], du fil en quatre, v’là des
liquides comme il faut . . . à la bonne heure. . . . Formez
vos bataillons, et en avant chez Paul Niquet!

(I don’t know about café au lait, that’s good for sick
people. . . . Cassis, cognac, brandy, those are proper
drinks . . . it’s time . . . arrange your troops, and for-
ward to Paul Niquet’s!)

⁶⁷See David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *New Left Review* 53 (September–October, 2008). Accessed online 3 May 2020. <https://newleftreview.org/issues/II53/articles/david-harvey-the-right-to-the-city>.

⁶⁸Dupeuty, Cormon, and Artus, *Paris la nuit: Drame populaire en cinq actes et huit tableaux* (Paris: Imprimerie de V. Dondey-Dupré, n.d.). On literary representations of violence and urban space in the nineteenth century, see Andrea Goulet, *Legacies of the Rue Morgue: Science, Space, and Crime Fiction in France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

⁶⁹On operatic representations of the Marché des Innocents, see Jacek Blaszkiewicz, “Street Cries on the Operetta Stage: Offenbach’s *Mesdames de la Halle*,” in *Musical Theatre in Europe, 1830–1945*, ed. Michela Niccolai and Clair Rowden (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 63–89.

⁷⁰See Blaszkiewicz, “Listening to the Old City.”

At this cue, the onstage crowd joins arms and parades off stage chanting “Vive Paul Niquet!” The libretto indicates that their assembly should coordinate with the orchestral music, accredited in the printed edition to “M. Artus,” which most likely referred to the composer of incidental music, operettas, and parlor piano pieces, Alexandre Artus (1821–1911). Typical of the nineteenth-century vaudeville genre, Artus’s incidental music would have gone largely unnoticed, providing little more than a soundtrack to the onstage proceedings. But the fact that Paul Niquet’s cabaret continued to be effective as a visual and textual cultural reference—even meriting a whole choral number—spoke to the establishment’s renown among the theatergoing population. Niquet’s cabaret served as a space of temporal transgression; infamous for being one of the only taverns open all night, the cabaret provides refuge for the market vendors who did not discern between morning and evening drinks. The chorus’s flippant attitude suggests that this march *chez Paul Niquet* was a rejection of status quo temporal norms around work and leisure. Taking over the fictional city space, the singing workers defy stereotypes of bumbling auxiliary characters and escort themselves—and the audience—into a Parisian space belonging entirely to them.

The melodrama *Les rues de Paris*, which premiered at the Ambigu-comique in 1854 (one year after Niquet’s cabaret was demolished), also references Paul Niquet’s cabaret as a space of refuge. Artus, the composer who provided incidental music for *Paris la Nuit*, provided incidental music and song, likely in his capacity as deputy music director of the theater. In act V, set in Paris’s Les Halles district, a character sings a *ronde* that captures the noisy festivities and drinking habits of the merchant community:

Point d’orgueil à la Halle!
Chiffonnier ou pekin,
Toute bouche est égale
Devant un arlequin.
On s’dispute, c’est de mode,
On se poche un quinquet,
Puis on se le raccommode
Chez monsieur [*sic*] Paul Niquet,
Hohé!

(No proud men in La Halle!
Ragpicker or Pekinese,
Every mouth is equal
In front of a harlequin.
One argues, that's just the way,
One peeps around,
Then one works it out
In Mr. Paul Niquet's cabaret.
Hey!)

The message is egalitarian: one can disagree but still find common ground over a drink. The unifying factor is not just Paul Niquet's cabaret, referenced in the second stanza, but more broadly, the specific sonic experiences of the city shared by workers. In the song's refrain, the chorus chants "Toujours du bruit, toujours des cris, voilà la Halle de Paris!" (Always noise, always cries, such is the market district of Paris!) This workers' scene ends in a similar way to the aforementioned 1842 melodrama: with a group of merchants parading to the cabaret, chanting "chez Paul Niquet!" Both melodramas demonstrate the extent to which their authors and producers staged working-class communities not merely as exotic bodies on the fringes, but as sonic agents with an emotional attachment to their surroundings. Songwriters relied on personal experiences of these spaces to re-create what a cabaret can do for the morale of a community beleaguered by rapid urbanization and heavy policing.

This article has explored how cabarets functioned as resonant thirdspaces, both in their ability to unite social classes through drink and song, and also in their potential to inspire critical reflections on policing, planning, and other civic interventions. As both a real and imagined space, Niquet's cabaret reasserted the working class's right to the city. David Harvey has explored the connections between urbanization and the commodification of culture in Second-Empire Paris, and he has shown how Haussmann's "creative destruction" was intended to accommodate surplus capital in urban form. The city would in turn transform into a commodity: "Paris," Harvey observes, "became 'the city of light,' the great center of consumption, tourism and pleasure; the cafés, department stores, fashion industry and grand expositions all changed urban living so that it could absorb vast

surpluses through consumerism."⁷¹ This consumerism extended beyond the visible to include the sonic. Authors, songwriters, and playwrights re-created the imaginary sounds of Niquet's cabaret as a sort of fanfare for the working class. While the imagined space of Niquet's cabaret succeeded with bourgeois audiences, such representations did not save the *real* cabaret from demolition. The Second Empire regime deployed accusations of moral bankruptcy, deviance, and anachronism to slow and ultimately erase the cultural value of these establishments. And the best way to erase their influence was to wipe them from the city map. Despite this erasure, Paul Niquet's cabaret assumed an afterlife after it was demolished by Haussmann in 1853, continuing to provide fodder for playwrights, songwriters, journalists, and caricaturists (plate 5; see cartoon, third from the left).

This sustained fascination with a seedy remnant of *le vieux Paris* eventually had a detrimental effect on an unlikely victim: the surviving family of Paul Niquet. In 1863 a thirty-three-year-old writer named Jules Beaujoint returned to Paris from a self-imposed exile in Brussels. A socialist and friend of the insurgent journalist Jules Vallès (the author of Baudelaire's obituary), Beaujoint was outspoken in his opposition to Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte following the 1851 coup d'état. This position cost him both his reputation with the bureaucracy and the generosity of his conservative father, who cut him off financially. Desperate for work, Beaujoint rebranded himself as a writer of historical fiction. It is unclear what motivated him to write about an extinct cabaret, but in 1864 Beaujoint wrote a novella titled *Les nuits de Paul Niquet*, which began to appear in serial form in the October through December 1864 issues of the newspaper *L'omnibus*. It won him fame, not so much because of its contents, but rather for the scandal that ensued. Soon after the novella's full publication, the heirs of Paul Niquet filed a libel suit with the Imperial court, claiming that Beaujoint's vivid portrayals of robbers and assassins tarnished the family name. Beaujoint fought back, claiming that he had no intention of slandering Niquet's heirs. The court

⁷¹Harvey, "The Right to the City."



Plate 5: "You are no more, Paul Niquet, but your *spirit* [pun intended] stays within us!" *Le journal amusant*, 5 November 1853.

ultimately came down against the plaintiffs, and the Niquets were ordered to pay all legal fees.⁷² Thus, Haussmannization was just not about removing old structures and building new ones. Haussmann's "creative destruction" extended beyond abstract planning and into the personal lives of families for whom those much-derided cafés constituted their financial and reputational legacy.

A psychogeographic approach to the cabaret reveals the layers of emotions and sensations that accompanied urban change in real time. In his "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," Guy Debord had this to say about Haussmannization: "from any standpoint other than that of facilitating police control, Haussmann's Paris is a city built by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."⁷³ Debord's blunt statement reflects some pervasive notions about the culture of Second-Empire Paris: many Marx-inspired writers, from Walter Benjamin to Siegfried Kracauer to David Harvey, have critiqued the aesthetics of order, monumentality, and perpetual *fête impériale* epitomized by the World's Fairs, department stores, and burgeoning operetta industry.⁷⁴ These were not the only physical

and ideological problems generated by Haussmannian aesthetics. Soja's thirdspace framework allows us to rethink how musical and theatrical representations of urban space highlighted a relational form of sociability that became threatened by Haussmannization's hierarchal social structures. Haussmannization, after all, functioned as a metanarrative predicated on binaries of center/periphery, rich/poor, old/new, monumental/ephemeral, and spectator/performer. Musical thirdspaces such as the cabaret resisted many of these binaries. Early-nineteenth-century cabarets were not dedicated performance spaces but rather sites of participation. They were not set off from the street or announced by lavish architecture, but rather concealed in liminal corners of the city, indicated only by shrewdly positioned signs. As both a real and imagined space, Niquet's cabaret was an important artifact in the prehistory of the *fin-de-siècle* popular music industry, reincarnated in the famed *cabarets artistiques* and *music-halls* of Montmartre and Pigalle.⁷⁵

By tracing Paul Niquet's cabaret through the eyes and ears of novelists, songwriters, and *vaudevillistes*, I have aimed to show how a tiny

⁷²The case made news in England and was reported in British legal newspapers. See "Foreign Tribunals and Jurisprudence," in *The Solicitor's Journal & Reporter*, 18 February 1865, 332–33.

⁷³Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," 27.

⁷⁴See Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit* (Amsterdam: Albert de Lange, 1937). Scholars have explored the cultural politics of music during the 1889

World's Fair, but there are comparably few such studies of the 1855 and 1867 fairs. On 1889, see Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 World's Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005); and Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), esp. 547–94.


⁷⁵See Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis*; Steven M. Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Kelley Conway, *Chanteuse in the City*.

nineteenth-century tavern reveals layers of urban identity formation in three significant ways. First, songs, vaudevilles, and other nonoperatic genres localize urban identities and practices, resisting the Haussmannian tautology that those without power are geographically “other” because they do not conform to the power structures of the urban center. As we have seen, cabaret patrons and interested outsiders alike experienced a suspension of time and a heightened sensory awareness when entering these spaces. The porosity of cabarets, beginning with the street and signage and extending into the crowded interior, stands in stark contrast to the monumental geography of the *grands théâtres*, whose stage is hermetically sealed from the street and whose performance rituals—from concert attire to scheduling to ticketing to the expectation of polite silence—created structural barriers of entry. In other words, it is easy to take for granted that spectacle was not the only form of evening leisure that involved crowds and music in an indoor setting.⁷⁶ Second, cultural references in vaudevilles—however casual—transform popular spaces into literary and sonic artifacts of urban experience. It is notable that while “serious” realist drama began to coalesce in the middle years of the century—especially in boulevard theater-inspired operatic works like Verdi’s *La traviata*—vaudevilles also staged urban spaces, monuments, and other nonhuman objects as allegories, linking them to the *ancien régime* operatic tradition of cultural commentary through allegorical embodiment.⁷⁷ Moreover, the diversity of these allegorical references reminds us that different communities experience space differently. We miss this richness of social leisurely activity when we rely too heavily on

⁷⁶In a classic article, Steven Huebner emphasizes that opera audience demographics did not neatly align with the repertory offerings of specific state-funded theaters. See Steven Huebner, “Opera Audiences in Paris, 1830–1870,” *Music & Letters* 70/2 (1989): 206–25. On silence and class in Paris’s *grands théâtres*, see James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris*; and Gabriela Cruz, *Grand Illusion*, esp. 14–42.

⁷⁷On *La traviata*’s relationship to Parisian boulevard drama and to the aesthetic of realism more broadly, see Emilio Sala, *The Sounds of Paris in Verdi’s La traviata*, trans. Delia Casadei (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). On the politics of allegory during the *ancien régime*, see Olivia Bloechl, *Opera and the Political Imaginary in Old Regime France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

specialized journals like *Le ménestrel* and the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris* for testimonials about the sounds of everyday life in Paris.⁷⁸ Finally, musical representations of Paul Niquet’s cabaret reveal the problems with strictly binary-class struggle arguments that have pervaded what sparse scholarship there exists on the topic of music and working-class leisure in Paris.⁷⁹ Heavily policed, derided, and ultimately demolished, the physical space of Paul Niquet’s cabaret no longer exists, but the imagined space, and the social and sensory experiences it nurtured, haunted novels, memoirs, song texts, and vaudeville libretti.

The noisy entrance of the allegorical “Paul Niquet” onto the Théâtre des Folies-Dramatiques stage, cited at the beginning of this article, was perhaps not an imposition after all; nor was it merely a comedic metaphor for the intrusive ubiquity of proletarian drunkenness. By 1854, Niquet the place was a ghost, Niquet the man a phantom. A decade later, the Niquet family would be haunted by their own name, which by then functioned as a metonym for the pre-Haussmannian cultures and practices of leisure. Far from being at odds with *nouveau Paris monumental*, cabaret culture, including its representations on the vaudeville stage, was intimately involved with it, not only seducing its morbidly curious literati, but also defining what it meant to be both *from* and *of* the city. 

⁷⁸Scholars of nineteenth-century France continue to interrogate the political ideologies of music critics and how these ideologies have shaped reception histories. See in particular Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1834–80* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Shaena B. Weitz, “Propaganda and Reception in Nineteenth-Century Music Criticism: Maurice Schlesinger, Henri Herz, and the *Gazette musicale*,” this journal 43/1 (2019): 38–60.

⁷⁹Notwithstanding the pioneering excursions into artistic representations of urban life, T. J. Clark’s famous book on Parisian modernity maintains a perspective that the bourgeois Parisian fundamentally approached working-class culture with condescension. An example of this tone is in his brief description of Paul Niquet’s cabaret, in which he fails to mention that the café was in fact demolished by 1853: “For a while the bar had been a stopping place for sightseers of the Parisian underworld, but by 1865 it had returned to its normal obscurity.” See T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 141.

Abstract.

Years before Montmartre's *cabarets artistiques* took Europe by storm, the Cabaret Paul Niquet thrived as a Right-Bank tavern popular among Paris's laborers, vendors, and criminals during the early nineteenth century. It became notorious not only for its clientele, but also for its vivid representations in travel literature, fiction, popular song, and vaudeville. Even after its demolition by Baron Haussmann during the Second Empire, the cabaret remained a fixation among Paris's musical and literary class. The interest in this lowly tavern reveals a sustained middle-class preoccupation with the spatial and sonic practices of the most destitute of Parisian citizens. Yet this preoccupation was not merely a

condescending fascination with the poor. Niquet's cabaret serves as a lens through which to examine social and sensory changes brought on by urbanization. Bringing urban geography into conversation with the historiography of French theater, this article contends that the city's proletarian leisure spaces offered a relational form of sociability that was at odds with the spectacular aesthetic of Haussmannization. The sounds emanating from Niquet's cabaret, from clanging glasses to spontaneous songs, defined the cabaret institution spatially: not merely in acoustic terms, but also as a democratized site of leisure for workers and literati alike. Keywords: cabaret, Haussmann, psychogeography, thirdspace, vaudeville