



Chez Aubert Pl de la Bourse

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La cinquième acte à la Gaité

1 Frontispiece DAUMIER, 'The Fifth Act at the Gaité Theatre',
Whatever You Like, 1848, D.1674

Judith Wechsler

A HUMAN COMEDY

Physiognomy and Caricature
in 19th Century Paris

Foreword by Richard Sennett

With 161 illustrations



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Preface and acknowledgments

Les Enfants du paradis, Marcel Carné's film of 1944, made an irreversible impression on me at the age of fourteen. Its romantic partiality has not weakened its force as an exemplary work of recreation. I have learned since how much of its lyricism came directly from the passionate research of its art director, Alexander Trauner. The delicacy and assurance of Jean-Louis Barrault's portrayal of the mime Jean-Baptiste Gaspard Deburau, and the exuberant force of the world around him, were unforgettable. Some seven years later, when I became a performing mime and a student of Etienne Decroux—who had played the father of Deburau in the film—I came to realize the discipline necessary for articulate expression and the freedom of performance. Again, seven years passed and I had become a student of art history. For my own diversion, while writing my dissertation, I began looking at the work of Honoré Daumier, and was struck by the physiognomy, bearing and gesture of his figures and their resemblance to the forms of movement I had learned as a mime. I began exploring the relationships between caricature and mime—and over the years the subject grew and the present study developed.

Walter Benjamin has been a model throughout. His *Paris: Capital of the 19th Century* and *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* are the most profound and perceptive studies of the period, and his powerful receptiveness to every kind of evidence is a model to history and to criticism alike. One cannot enter his terrain without paying homage.

I am deeply indebted to certain friends and mentors. The lectures of Professor Meyer Schapiro at Columbia University from 1963 to 1965 sparked my interest in nineteenth-century French art and first alerted me to the motif of the spectator. Our conversations over the years helped me hone the ideas presented in this study. Jean Adhémar, Conservateur-en-Chef emeritus of the Cabinet des Estampes at the Bibliothèque Nationale, confirmed my ideas of the parallelism of Deburau and Daumier and encouraged me in the initial stages of my research, suggesting a number of profitable leads and unveiling the mysteries of the library's great holdings.

Professors Linda Nochlin and Rosalind Krauss read parts of the manuscript and offered helpful suggestions concerning procedure, content

2 Public reading room. *Le Diable à Paris*. 1845-6



and structure. Their insights deepened my thinking on a number of issues. I cannot express my gratitude sufficiently to Jehane Burns who did the translations from the French and saw the manuscript through every stage of its development, offering unstinting aid – she is a true accomplice in this enterprise. Without her the book would not have reached its present form.

Benson Rowell Snyder, my husband, has been a source of support, advice and encouragement: he read draft after draft acutely and untiringly. A. William Menzin has helped spring traps. My father, Nahum N. Glatzer, has been a model of scholarship, and my mother, Anne Glatzer, of lively engagement. Josie, my daughter, strengthened me in countless loving ways.

The photographs for the book were mainly taken by Charles Eames and Bill Tondreau at the time we were making our film, *Daumier, Paris and the Spectator*, 1977. Charles Eames' vision has meant a world to me.

JUDITH WECHSLER

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Key to abbreviations of catalogue acknowledgments in the captions

B Emile Bouvy, *Daumier, l'oeuvre gravé du maître*, 2 vols, Paris 1933
D Louis Deltiel, *Le Peintre-Graveur illustré: Daumier*, 10 vols, Paris 1925-30
Maison K. E. Maison, *Honoré Daumier. Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings, Watercolours and Drawings*, New York and London 1967
s. Gottfried Sello, (intro), *Grandville. Das Gesamte Werk*, 2 vols, Munich 1969

Introduction

PARIS in the mid-nineteenth century is a prototype of the modern city. In the course of a century, the city underwent four revolutions (of 1789, 1830, 1848 and 1870), a fourfold increase in population (from half a million to two million), and complete physical redesign, from a medieval city to a modern one. Under these pressures, together with radical technical changes in communication and transportation, cultural emphasis shifted towards those forms which could respond with alacrity to topical urban themes – journalism, popular theatre and caricature. This encounter with the ephemeral data of city life as prime material for art and letters is the beginning of a social self-consciousness which is one of the components of modernity.¹ Honoré de Balzac, Honoré Daumier and Charles Baudelaire – from our perspective, the novelist, the draughtsman, and the critic and poet par excellence of this period – all practised within the framework of journalism. All three, in their portrayal of 'modern life', focused on Parisian 'types'; and Balzac and Baudelaire typically introduced their urban characters by description *from without*, as they would be seen by a stranger – as the caricaturist does, *per force* – rather than by direct statement of character or origins.²

This study, which is restricted to the decades between the July Revolution of 1830 and the founding of the Third Republic in 1870, is about the description of people from without: the Parisian's characteristic preoccupation with visible bodily clues to class, profession, character and circumstances. Through caricature, popular writing and theatre, Parisian types and their distinguishing traits were codified: in the way they made sense of the city to itself, these arts were the antecedents of more formal models of the urban population in sociology, demography and criminology.

People are changed by the city and they are the city and the city changes. As people moved from the provinces to the city, and city neighbourhoods lost their autonomous character, traditional roles were lost, traditional obligations were unenforced, and traditional behaviour seemed inexpedient or naive. Upward mobility may not have been a reality for much of the bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie,³ but it was a constant preoccupation; there was an eager market for tales of ambition and self-improvement. New informal codes of behaviour emerged, for orientation,

for emulation and simulation, to recognize others and to hold one's own. The illustrated newspapers were a vehicle for identifying, deciphering and communicating the signals and norms of urban exchange.

Our cross-section through these cultural shifts is approached primarily by way of caricature in the daily press. When caricature is discussed in the history of art, although its political and social context is acknowledged, formally it is analysed in relationship to prints and drawings. But caricature can also be looked at in relation to the tradition of classification and codification of human types.

The year 1830 marks the founding of the major caricature journals: the 1870s see the introduction of photogravure, which undercuts the informative role of draughtsmanship. The major work of Daumier, Gavarni (Guillaume Chevalier), Grandville and Henry Monnier falls within these four decades. Scores of other caricaturists were at work: illustrated journals and cheap editions proliferated, reaching a very broad audience at a time when half the population of Paris was still illiterate.

Only the most distinguished of this material has entered the history of art; but, considered altogether, it forms a pictorial contribution of extraordinary quality to cultural and social history. Caricature recorded moods and attitudes of city life - boredom, alienation, social displacement, political unrest and self-consciousness.

Three main strands can be distinguished in caricature, and each has its own relation to our theme. One is the *portrait charge*, which depicts an individual, usually a political figure, with more or less exaggeration of his characteristic features of face or body. Often this exaggeration has a satirical message, in the ancient tradition of animal-human analogies used as a code for human character. A caricaturist stressing the owl-like eyes and small beaky nose of Adolphe Thiers, politician and historian, was not merely finding a humorous formula to refer to a public figure, he was commenting on Thiers's political personality, his affectation of sharp-sighted wisdom, the owl's traditional attribute.

The second strand is the allegorical interpretation of public events. Nations, factions, or abstractions such as Peace or Diplomacy, are represented by single figures with recognizable characteristics, and the action of the caricature is a transposition of, and a comment on, the public situation. Emblematic figures, such as Robert Macaire and Joseph Prudhomme, who represented the characteristics of their period, were a popular device for social and political comment. Here there is an element of riddle-guessing and of punning, involving the audience in the pleasures of deciphering a silent code.

The third strand, which is explored more fully than the others in this study, is social caricature - the satirical presentation of typical characters in everyday situations. This element predominated during the periods of

political censorship, from 1835 to 1848 and from 1852 to 1866; Chapters Three and Five discuss some of the political content of this social analysis. Whether it employs the grotesque deformations of Louis-Léopold Boilly or Joseph Traviès, the fantastic transformations of Grandville or the benign stylization of Gavarni, social caricature is thematically affiliated with *genre* painting, which by definition portrays *types* rather than individuals, and modest, often domestic, situations rather than the exalted personages of history painting.

Social caricature in the newspapers went out to find its public in the streets and cafés; it was consumed casually, as Baudelaire pointed out, along with the news and morning coffee. To be successful with its public, it had to develop a pungent and rapid communicative vocabulary, exploiting the graphic limitations of its means of reproduction.

The journalistic draughtsman, often working directly on the lithographic stone, was a performer, in daily dialogue with the public who were also his subject matter. Daumier's drawing has a communicative bravura and economy which is comparable to the discipline of mime, with its succinct evocation of character and situation. Both caricature and mime drew artistic advantage from their marginal status. (Another generation had to pass before studio painting and 'official' theatre could allow themselves to profit from the advances in realism which had been won in these popular arts.) Both caricature and mime use vernacular codes directly reflective of daily life. Both are directed to the eye - they show what the urban spectator *sees*, through highly articulate, and at times subversive, silence.

Caricature draws on and develops a twofold tradition: that of physiognomics, the classification of people into character types according to outward bodily signs, such as the shape of the eyes, forehead, mouth, and so on; and that of pathognomics, the interpretation of changing emotions by facial or bodily expression. In nineteenth-century Paris, in a context of urban pressure, dislocation and mass communication, this visual lore of physiognomy, bearing and gesture gained currency, immediacy and artistic power. The caricaturists drew their silent vocabulary in part from the academic rules for the pictorial 'expression of the passions' and in part from more informal models also familiar to their audience.

The *interpretation* of bodily signs, on the premise that traits of inward character are linked with outward traits of body and feature, goes back to a treatise on *Physiognomics*, attributed in the Middle Ages to Aristotle, and thought to be a prudential guide for his pupil Alexander. (The text makes extensive use of the analogy from the forms and imputed 'character' of animals: 'persons with hooked noses are ferocious; witness hawks'). In Chapter One and its footnotes I briefly discuss Johann Caspar Lavater's late eighteenth-century *L'Art de connaître les hommes par la physionomie*, first

published in Paris in 1806–9, which established this tradition of physiognomic sign-reading as part of the culture of nineteenth-century France.

Another schema or set of conventional signs which was familiarly present, especially to the caricaturist, was that of the manuals for painters, giving rules for *depicting* emotion and character. This tradition, too, whose principal text in nineteenth-century France was Charles Le Brun's *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* (1698), is closely linked with the treatises on physiognomics: it reads the same code, as it were, in the opposite direction. Where physiognomics, from pseudo-Aristotle through Lavater, starts from the outward sign and teaches how to interpret it in terms of inward character, the treatises for painters start from an emotion or disposition and teach the signs which will express it: and in this they are paralleled by guides to gesture for actors and orators.

Every physiognomic codification is also a classification of human character types: pseudo-Aristotle's *Physiognomics* has its near-contemporary complement in Theophrastus' *Characters*, short vignettes which describe, in terms of social behaviour rather than physiognomy, the 'tedious man', the 'idle man', and so on. Through Jean de La Bruyère's *Les Caractères de Theophraste, traduits du grec, avec les caractères ou moeurs de ce siècle* (1688), these vignettes are the source for a continuing 'literature of moeurs' (mores: social behaviour, habits, customs, manners). This essayistic classification of human types interacts with physiognomic analysis, and is widely used in our period: the popular *Physiologies* – paperbound books on Parisian types – are descriptions of *moeurs* rather than of bodily features.

The *Physiologies* also bear witness to the familiarity of another schema of classification of living beings inherited from an earlier century. For comic effect, the *Physiologie de l'étudiant* (1841) describes the varieties and behaviour of the species Student in forms that recall a natural historian's account of a species of butterfly. Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon's *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière avec la description du cabinet du roi* (1749–1804, 44 volumes) was almost as familiar a text in the mid-nineteenth century as La Bruyère. In Chapter One I touch on Buffon's model of observation and classification as a frame of reference for Balzac, who transposes it, not merely for comic effect, to social description.

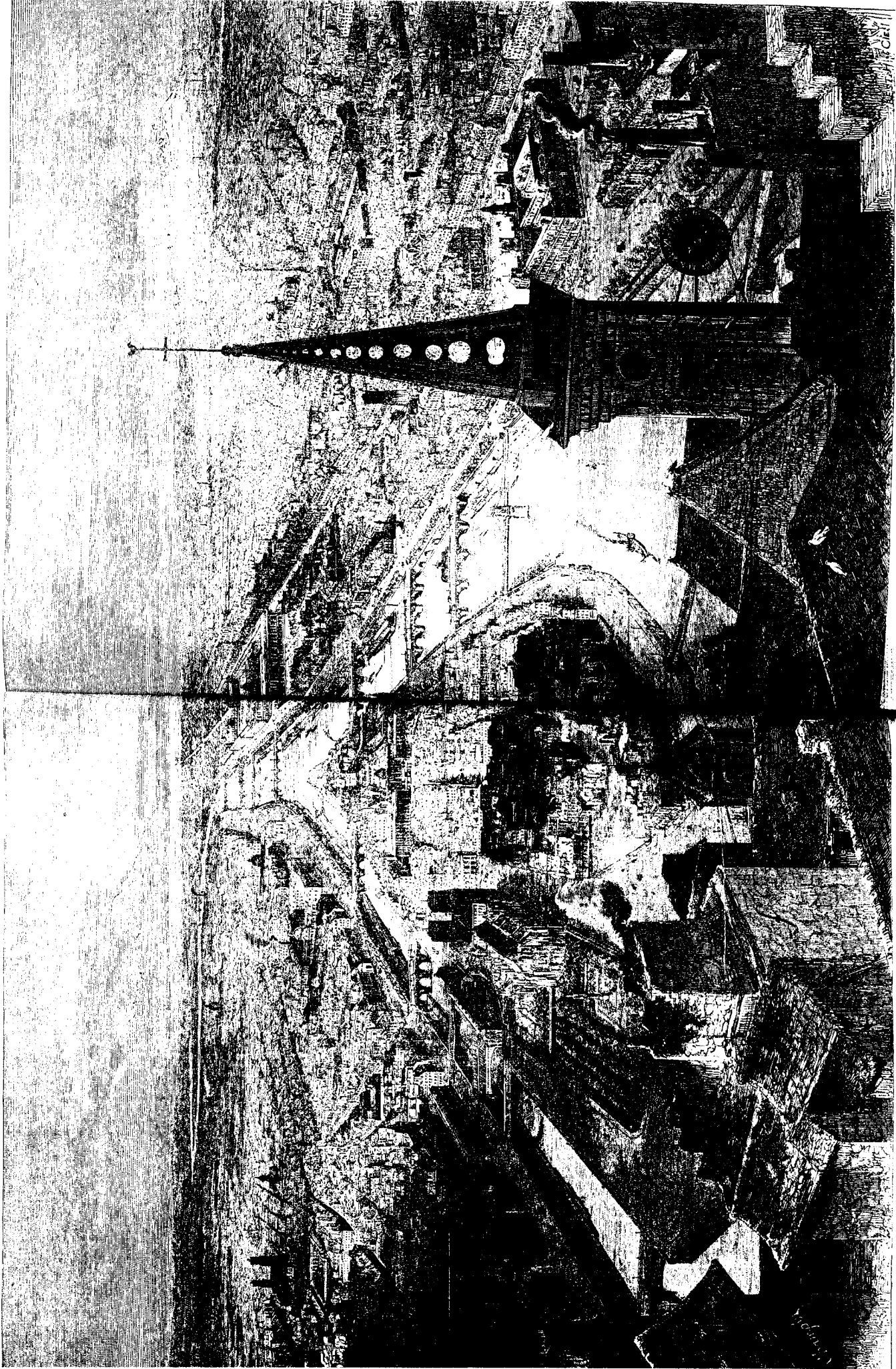
One last cross-section through this manifold of sign-giving and sign-reading is provided by the rules for decorum, which also formed part of the popular literature of our period. The *Codes* (see Chapter One), like a certain kind of popular sociology-cum-self-improvement literature in our own time, appealed both as entertaining social comment and as guidelines for the naïve and/or ambitious. We shall see in Chapters Four and Five how Monnier and Daumier make satirical use of the commonplaces of decorum and self-presentation.

The premise explored in this study is that these combined traditions of classification and characterization provided a functional base for a corpus of social description, in which the work of the caricaturists is central. In this enterprise, whose motto was Daumier's – 'One must be of one's time' – writers and graphic artists, Romantics and Realists, were equally engaged.⁴

We shall see how the exemplary spectators of our period, Balzac, Daumier and Baudelaire – as well as Jean-Baptiste Gaspard Deburau, the mime, Charles Philipon, the impresario of caricature publications, and Monnier, the actor-writer-caricaturist – were all praised in their time for having updated the vocabulary of their respective arts, making it complex and subtle enough to represent new urban relationships. Contemporaries recognized an analogy, even a symmetry, between the talents and oeuvres of Balzac, Deburau and Daumier: each was a master of silent expression. Both Deburau and Daumier, of artisan status by birth, and working in strictly popular art forms, were hailed as 'great artists': George Sand challengingly set the populist Deburau alongside the great classical actress and actor of the first half of the nineteenth century, Rachel and Talma; Baudelaire classed Daumier with Ingres and Delacroix. Each was perceived as fulfilling, in his own art, Balzac's programme of *La Comédie humaine*.

Overleaf

3 Bird's-eye view of Paris: view from the clock-tower of Saint-Louis en l'Île.
Texier, *Tableau de Paris*, 1852–3



One Parisian panorama: codes and classifications

Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear.

GEORG SIMMEL

THE mid-nineteenth century is the period of the bird's-eye view. The panorama was a comprehensive and distancing conceptual mode – and a device of perspective in literature and the visual arts: Victor Hugo's opening scene in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831); Eugène de Rastignac in Balzac's *Père Goriot* (1835), gazing down on Paris from the Père Lachaise cemetery; the frontispieces to three popular compendia on Parisian life, *Le Diable à Paris* (1845–6), Edmond Texier's *Tableau de Paris* (1852–3), and *Paris dans sa splendeur* (1861); the dioramas and panoramas offered as public spectacles of the city, of which Louis-Jacques-Mandr  Daguerre's was best known; Daumier's depiction of Nadar photographing from his aerial balloon; the early photographers, Daguerre, Nic phore Niepce and Henry le Secq's view of Paris from the tops of buildings.

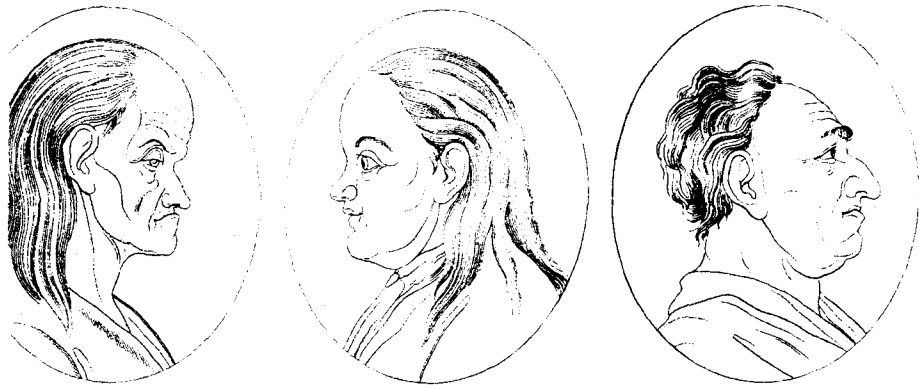
Honor  de Balzac (1799–1850) occupies a key position in this study. As a man of letters he was steeped in Enlightenment and earlier models of characterization and classification: La Bruy re's *Moeurs de ce si cle*, Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, and Lavater's idiosyncratic *L'Art de conna tre les hommes par la physionomie* are the three which most directly concern us.² And as a prolific day-to-day writer for the popular press, Balzac combined and exploited these models informally. His preoccupations underlie our whole theme: his insistence on social mobility, his fascination with bodily expression as a manifestation of social conditioning and his interest in manipulation of expression for social ends.

Balzac's master-image of his own enterprise is that of an abstraction of his subject, society, spread out and scanned from above: a bird's-eye view, a panorama, a map or a schematic diagram where types are re-arranged into a matrix or a hierarchy. This is essentially different from the Realist master-image of the novel as 'a mirror which one walks along the street'.³ The eighty novels and stories that comprise Balzac's *La Com die humaine*

20



4 DAUMIER, 'Nadar Elevating Photography to the Level of Art', 1862, p.3248



5, 6, 7 LAVATER, melancholic, phlegmatic and choleric types. *Essay on Physiognomy*, 1789.

the title was first used in 1842 as a partly retrospective characterization of his work: are explorations of a chart which Balzac imagines as complete and simultaneously present.

In *Théorie de la démarche* (A Theory of Bearing)⁴ – one of the semi-serious ‘analytic studies’ attached to *La Comédie humaine* – Balzac presents a full-scale eulogy of the Observer, who must have both a high viewpoint and an eye for detail:

The observer is incontestably the man of genius. All human inventions come from an analytic observation in which the mind acts with an incredible rapidity of insights. Gall, Lavater, Mesmer, Cuvier . . . Bernard de Palissy, the precursor of Buffon . . . Newton, and also the great painter and the great musician, all are observers . . . those sublime birds of prey who, while rising to high regions, have the gift of seeing clearly in matters here below, who can at the same time abstract and specify, make exact analyses and just syntheses.⁵

Although Balzac’s list of great observers rather pointedly refers to Buffon only to omit him in favour of De Palissy, there is a striking parallel between his account and a passage in Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle* (1749). After an acknowledgment of the prodigious multiplicity of nature, far beyond any one student’s capacity, Buffon gives his requirements for the good investigator:

There is a kind of mental courage in envisaging . . . nature in the innumerable multitude of her productions, and in believing oneself capable of comprehending and comparing them. . . one may say that the love of the study of nature presupposes two qualities of mind which seem conflicting: the large

views of an ardent genius which embraces everything in one *coup d’œil*, and the small attentions of a diligent instinct which attaches itself to one single point.⁶

Buffon’s insistence on the status of *individuals* within a formal system of classification is also pertinent to our theme: ‘The more we increase the number of divisions in the productions of nature, the closer we shall approach to the true, since nothing really exists except individuals.’⁷ Buffon’s ideal calls for a combinatory lexicon of distinguishing characteristics.

In relation to humankind, Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801), the Swiss physiognomer, proposed a larger lexicon of distinguishing signs than any previous author: the massive popularity of his treatise all over Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century indicates a growing market for characterological interpretation. His physiognomic study first appeared in Germany in 1775–8.⁸ It was published in France in between 1781 and 1803, under the title *Essai sur la physiognomonie destiné à faire connaître l’homme et à le faire aimer*, and then in a more popular and successful edition, annotated and illustrated in four volumes in 1806–9, edited by Dr Moreau de la Sarthe, under the title *L’Art de connaître les hommes par la physionomie*,



8 LAVATER, ‘A Group of Mean Faces’. *L’Art de connaître les hommes par la physionomie*, Paris 1806–9

and reissued in 1820 in ten volumes.⁹ Numerous other editions, some abridged, even in pocket size, were issued over the hundred and fifty years after the book's first appearance. Lavater was a basic resource in a gentleman's home, to be consulted when hiring staff, making friends and establishing business relations.¹⁰

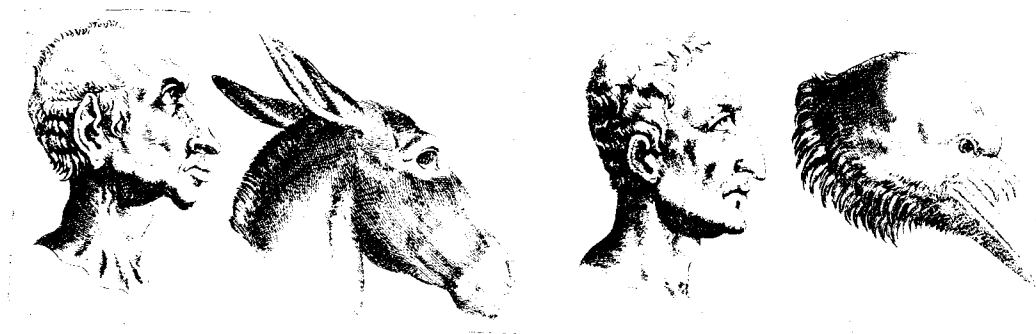
Lavater's premise was the correspondence of physical appearance and moral character: he taught 'the science or knowledge of the correspondence between the external and internal man, the visible superficies and the invisible contents'.¹¹ He intended his work primarily as a moral and prudential guide and, collaterally, as a source book for painters.

The codification which had begun with pseudo-Aristotle's *Physiognomics* and became a pragmatic system for painters in Le Brun's *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière*, first delivered in 1668, was expanded by Lavater into a system of classification and codification of the forms of the parts of the human body and their corresponding moral traits.¹² Lavater maintained the tradition of animal-human parallels as a basis for moral interpretation. Each person is an individual soul and each single feature has 'the nature and character of the whole' and can serve as a key to the person's character.¹³ Chapters are devoted to the variety of single features – eyes, noses, mouths, and so on.

Like Aristotle, Descartes, Le Brun and Hogarth,¹⁴ Lavater maintained that often-repeated emotions leave their mark on the permanent expression of a person, so that, for example, an angry man will bear the marks of his disposition in a permanent scowl: 'Our gait and deportment are natural only in part and we generally blend with them something borrowed or imitated. But even these imitations and the habits they make us contract, are still the results of nature and enter into the primitive character.'¹⁵ Education, training, even one's profession, he thought, had an effect on bearing: 'Trifles often decide much concerning the character of man. The manner of talking, holding or returning a teacup is frequently very significant. It may be affirmed that whoever can perform the smallest office with entire circumspection is capable of much greater.'¹⁶

Lavater conceived his work in the established tradition of physiognomic writing.¹⁷ He cited his authorities – the Bible, Pliny, Cicero, Michel de Montaigne, Gottfried Leibniz, Johann Gottfried von Herder and Immanuel Kant – as testimony to the correspondences between inner and outer states. For method he cited Carolus Linnaeus, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Buffon; for his illustrations he drew freely on Le Brun as well as on Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Albrecht Dürer and Hogarth.¹⁸

Although Lavater's work never became a textbook as did Le Brun's guidelines to painters, his encyclopedia of characters prefigured and supported (in part through Balzac's mediation) the panoramic, anecdotal and prudential literature of nineteenth-century Paris. Balzac owned and



9. 10. LE BRUN, 'De humana physiognomica': comparison of animal and human physiognomy

referred to either the 1806 or 1820 Moreau de la Sarthe edition, with its augmented and updated notes which reflected the personal interests of its editor and the presumed interests of its audience.¹⁹ Lavater's work was presented with emendations and excursions on current research into phrenology and physiognomy, as well as sections on J. J. Engel's eighteenth-century observations on the analogies between physiognomy, acting and painting and Denis Diderot on expression.²⁰ Especially pertinent and interesting to Balzac was the attention given to professions and métiers. Although he had cited various occupations and their visible effects on bearing, Lavater had been more concerned with inborn than with acquired characteristics.

In his chapter, 'Observations sur les signes physiologiques des professions', Moreau develops Lavater's notes on this distinction:

The major varieties of the human species have been well observed and well described; it would be no less interesting and useful to study the detailed varieties, which are so numerous, and which derive from the diversity of conditions of life among civilized peoples. Each métier, each profession, should in general be regarded as a particular education, continued through life, which develops, exercises, strengthens certain organs, and establishes a specific relationship between the individual and his environment.

In general, the different professions announce themselves, either by the condition of the forehead and eye, or the state and configuration of the wings of the nose and the mouth, according to whether, in the exercise of those professions, exalted meditation, observation, profound and lasting feelings predominate, or the superficial attention, quick perceptions and small passions of worldly people.

Skilful and very experienced surgeons have in their physiognomy a particular dominant trait, which comes from an habitual movement of raising the

upper lip – which can be attributed to the effort they make to resist the impression caused by the sight of suffering and pain which they have before their eyes during major operations.²¹

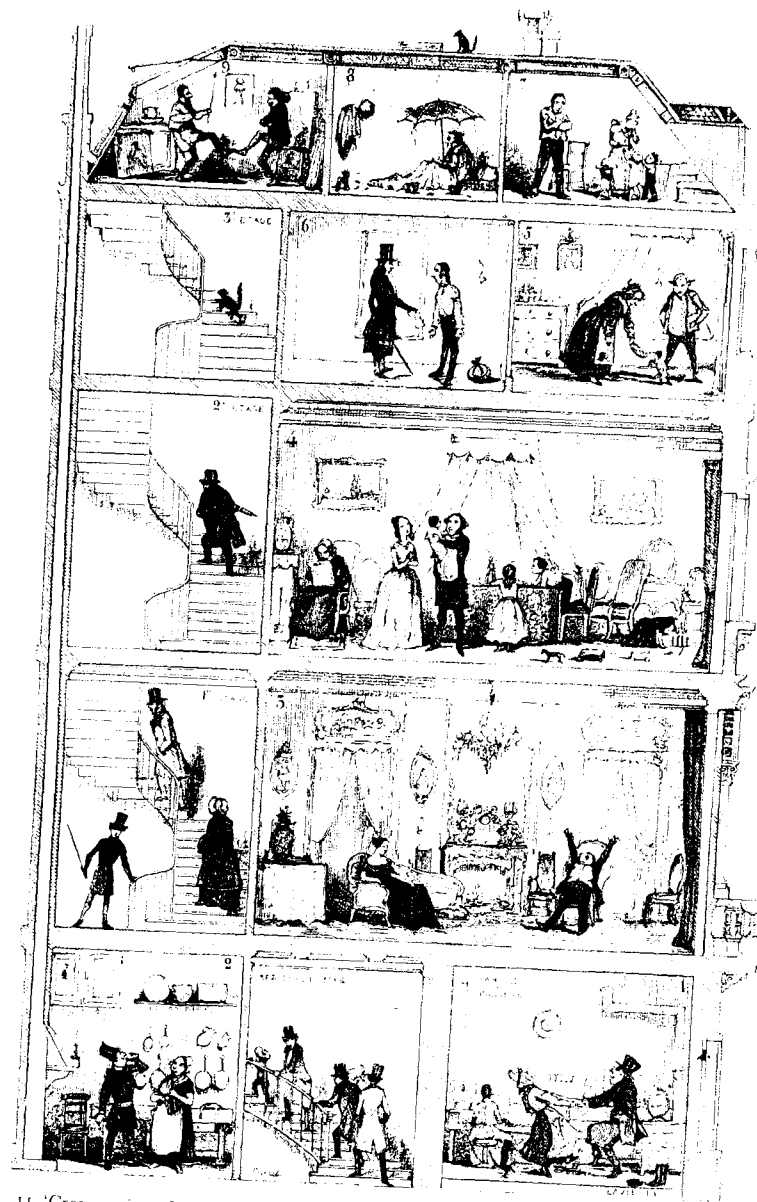
Certain professions – business, law, diplomacy, politics and prostitution – give the observer frequent occasion to exercise both physiognomic discrimination and dissimulation: 'It is noticeable especially that people of the world, courtiers, all those who cultivate appearances very much, who make it their business to be agreeable, have a very marked mobility of the nostrils and the upper lip, whose muscles are more developed than in other men.'²²

In his *Physiologie du mariage*, Balzac made his acknowledgment to Lavater explicit: 'Lavater's Physiognomy has created a real science, which has taken its place at last among human knowledge.'²³ And elsewhere: 'The laws of physiognomy are exact, not only as they apply to character, but also as they apply to the destined course of life.'²⁴ Balzac used the language of physiognomy as well as phrenology in many of his first introductions of the dramatis personae of *La Comédie humaine*.²⁵

Balzac was concerned both with the classification of Parisian types and their immediate and specific social context. It was primarily through him that a new repertory of Parisian types emerged in nineteenth-century narrative: the bureaucrat, the confidence man, the social climber, the banker, the money lender, the stock-market player, the industrialist, the journalist and the commercial writer.²⁶

He presented a view of Paris at the time it was beginning to undergo staggering growth and dramatic change from a medieval city to a nineteenth-century urban centre. One's view of Paris at this time is inescapably coloured by that of Balzac. He projected on to his characters his own preoccupation with decoding of visual clues and the capacity to dissimulate. As the demographer Louis Chevalier has pointed out, Balzac did not describe all of Paris: his Paris was essentially bourgeois.²⁷ The streets he cited were largely those inhabited by small investors and tradesmen – Rue St Honoré, Rue des Bourdonnais and, above all, Rue St Denis. His characters rise through the strata of the bourgeoisie. His descriptions of working-class characteristics are less faithful and complete.²⁸ His descriptions of métiers are at least partially based on Louis-Sébastien Mercier's picturesque *Tableaux de Paris* 1781 which was re-issued several times in the nineteenth century.²⁹

Balzac repeatedly used physiological and anatomical metaphors for the whole of the city as an organism which can be analysed and studied: 'Paris is a sentient being, every individual, every bit of a house is a lobe in the cellular tissue of that great harlot whose head, heart and unpredictable behaviour are perfectly familiar to them.'³⁰ Paris is also like a delightful monster: 'Its head is in the garrets, inhabited by men of science



11 'Cross-section of a Parisian House, 1 January 1845: Five Stages of the Parisian World,' *Paris Comique*, 1845

and genius; the first floors house the well-filled stomachs; on the ground floor are the shops, the legs and feet, since the busy trot of trade goes in and out of them.³¹ He repeatedly remarked on the correspondence between the Parisian and his neighbourhoods, echoing the eighteenth-century axiom that the part reflects the whole. For instance, in *La Femme de trente ans* ('The Woman of Thirty'), he wrote: 'The influence exercised by the locality on the soul is a remarkable thing'³² and in *Ferragus*:

In Paris the different types contributing to the physiognomy of any portion of that monstrous city harmonize admirably with the character of the *ensemble*. Thus, the concierge, doorkeeper or hall porter, whatever the name given to this essential nerve-system in the Parisian monster, always conforms to the quarter in which he functions, and often sums it up. The concierge of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, wearing braid on every seam, a man of leisure, speculates in Government stocks; the porter of the Chaussée-d'Antin enjoys his creature comforts: he of the Stock Exchange quarter reads his newspapers; porters in the Faubourg Montmartre work at a trade; in the quarter given over to prostitution the portress herself is a retired prostitute; in the Marais quarter she is respectable, cross-grained, and crotchety.³³

In *Les Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* 'A Harlot High and Low', another example, one of many: 'Who can fail to observe that [in the crush room of the Bal de l'Opéra] as in every other zone of Paris, there is a mode of being which reveals what you are, what you do, where you come from and what you are after.'³⁴

Histoire des treize 'History of the Thirteen' begins with an evocation of the physiognomy of the city: 'The streets of Paris have human qualities, and such a physiognomy as leaves us with impressions against which we can put up no resistance.'³⁵ 'Those who savour Paris 'are so familiar with its physiognomy that they know its every wart, every spot or blotch on its face'.³⁶

Balzac intersected his anatomy and topography of city life with the vertical axis of social status. He explored social promotion as one of the salient characteristics of the Bourbon Restoration. In 'Parisian physiognomics', the opening section of *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, Balzac described finely distinguished class differences of behaviour. There is, for instance, the small shopkeeper, working his way up, who

takes his patriotism ready-made from the newspaper. . . . *He is always expert in miming mirth, grief, pity, astonishment, at producing conventional cries or remaining mute* [italics mine], as he stands by to take on any role at the Opera every other evening. . . . His children are recruited into the class immediately above. . . . Often the younger son of a small retailer aspires to a position in the civil service. . . . That kind of ambition brings our attention to the second of the spheres of Paris. There you will see the same result. Wholesale merchants and their staff, government employees, small bankers of great integrity, bailiffs,

solicitors, notaries, clerks; in short, the bustling, scheming, speculating members of that lower middle class.³⁷

This portrait of the *moeurs* of the petit bourgeois derives in form both from Buffon's descriptions of animal species and the characterizations of La Bruyère. It is a report on the physiology, habits and inclinations of the genus. Typically, the petit bourgeois belongs to the National Guard, has a plot at the Père Lachaise cemetery, hires a carriage for a Sunday drive in the country with his wife and children, goes to the Théâtre Italien at night. At fifty, when their children are married, he and his wife get a third-tier box at the opera, go to the Longchamps races in a hired cab and wear somewhat faded clothes on the boulevard. At sixty-five, he is awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honour. His children meantime have risen to the ranks of the upper bourgeoisie. 'Thus, each social sphere projects its spawn into the sphere immediately above it. The rich grocer's son becomes a notary, the timber merchant's son becomes a magistrate. Not a cog fails to fit into its groove and everything stimulates the upward march of money.'³⁸

On the next level, there are the business men, lawyers, barristers, bankers, traders on a grand scale and doctors. Here, Balzac agreed with Moreau's clues to physical, moral and aesthetic consequences of certain professions:

What countenance can retain its beauty in the debasing exercise of a profession which compels a man to bear the burden of public miseries, to analyse them, weigh them, appraise them, batten on them? . . . they no longer feel, they merely apply rules which are stultified by particular cases. . . . And so their faces present the raw pallor, the unnatural colouring, the lack-lustre eyes with rings round them, the sensual, babbling mouths by which an observant person recognizes the symptoms of the deterioration of thought, and its rotation within a narrow circle of ideas calculated to destroy the faculties of the brain and the gift for seeing things broadly, for generalizing and drawing inferences.³⁹

Of the 'idle' rich he wrote:

Unrelieved boredom, this inanity of mind, heart, and brain, this weariness with the unending round of Paris receptions, all leave their mark on the features and produce these paste-board faces, those premature wrinkles, that rich man's physiognomy on which impotence has set its grimace.⁴⁰

Balzac was explicit about the relation between type and environment. Temperament sets one's outlook but contact with urban society has major, usually corrupting effects. In *Une Fille d'Eve* he explained that social mobility has produced a world of 'infinite nuances'. Previously, 'the caste system gave each person a physiognomy which was more important than the individual; today the individual gets his physiognomy from himself'.⁴¹

The education of a provincial in Parisian society is the vehicle used by Balzac and his contemporaries, both novelists and caricaturists as we will see later, to present the effects of society on the individual: physiognomic adaptation is a recurrent device. The typical novels of mid-nineteenth century France – Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir*, George Sand's *Elle et lui*, Flaubert's *Education sentimentale* – all constitute a vade-mecum of types, people and situations to cultivate and avoid, appropriate behaviour and decorum in a variety of circumstances.

In Balzac's *Père Goriot*, Eugène de Rastignac is coached by the Mephistophelian Vautrin and becomes the picture of an unscrupulous climber, straining against the human sentiments and family feeling with which he arrived from the provinces. The Vicomte de Beauséant also advises Rastignac never to reveal his true feelings. Throughout *La Comédie humaine*, Vautrin is noted for his genius for disguise. There are recurrent references to the means of dissimulation, particularly masks and costume, and to its opposite, phrenology, whose evidence cannot be modified by training or disguise.

The study of cranial cavities and protuberances as indices to character was a popular branch of medicine. F. J. Gall's phrenological theories were translated into French in 1818 and were used by Balzac and other novelists and illustrators.⁴² We have seen that Moreau's updated Lavater included sections on phrenology. Phrenological reference occurs throughout Balzac's work.⁴³ For instance: 'Foreheads which are high, but receding at the top, betray an inclination to materialism': 'all domed heads are ideological'.⁴⁴ In *Théorie de la démarche* Balzac argued that one's walk and bearing – 'the physiognomy of the body' – is harder to disguise than facial expression.⁴⁵ Only actors are trained to manipulate their appearance thoroughly, convincingly to convey a character unlike themselves. In *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* even Vautrin, in an unguarded moment, reverts to his convict's *démarche* and is recognized by an old associate.

Théorie de la démarche is the text which most explicitly reveals Balzac's view of his own enterprise:

Pushed also, no doubt, by a first love for a new subject, I yielded to this passion: . . . was it not necessary to analyse, abstract and classify?

To classify, so as to be able to codify!

To codify, to draw up the code of *démarche* . . . so that progressive men, and those who believe in perfectibility, can study to appear amiable, gracious, well-bred, educated, instead of vulgar, stupid, boring. . . . And is this not the most important thing in a nation whose motto is 'All for display'?⁴⁶

Balzac developed a set of axioms: the walk announces the man; gesture is thought in action, by which one can decipher vice, remorse, sickness; the look, the voice and walk are equal means by which you can know the

12. DAUMIER, 'The Cranioscope-Phrenologistoscope: Yes, that's it I have the bump of ideality, of causality, of locality, it's a remarkability.' 1836. D. 300



entire man: all our body participates in movement, but no part should predominate: when the body is in movement, the face is immobile: economy of movement is the means to render a noble and gracious walk: all jerky movement betrays a vice or bad education: grace favours rounded forms: rest is the silence of the body: work has its effect on our bearing, scholars, for instance, incline their heads: courtesans, actors, spouses and spies, the ambitious and vindictive, betray their disingenuousness in their walk and bearing.

Balzac's recognition of popular consciousness of decorum and pose can be seen in a Daumieresque description from *Grandeur et décadence de César Biotteau*: 'Almost everyone has a favourite pose, which they think will heighten their natural advantages: in the case of Crevel, this consisted in crossing his arms Napoleonicly, setting his head at a three-quarters angle, and fixing his gaze on the horizon, as the painter of his portrait had shown him.'⁴⁷

Balzac's vignettes on social types developed into an independent semi-journalistic genre – the *Physiologies* – which, under the leadership of the

editor Philipon, was taken up by other writers and illustrated by leading draughtsmen of the day. This literature began in the 1830s, reached its peak in the early 1840s and subsided in the 1850s.

The range of its audience, though still somewhat a matter of conjecture, can be inferred from novels, caricatures and illustrations which show people as consumers of this literature, as well as from the material itself. Their success depended on the authors' awareness of their readers' ambitions, fantasies, fears and uncertainties, and in its vernacular recognizability. The *Physiologies* had a precursor in the literature of decorum – the *Codes*. These were admonitory and humorous 'books of rules' for eating, for conversation, for love and marriage, and for the traveller. They were mostly published between 1825 and 1830, under such titles as: *Code Parisien. Manuel complet du provincial et de l'étranger à Paris, contenant les lois, règles, applications et exemples de l'art de vivre dans cette capitale, sans être dupé et de s'y amuser à peu de frais*. This particular example, by Charles Rousset, was a satire of social life that contained practical advice for the tourist in Paris, with anecdotes dealing with customs, manners and bearing. The writer recommended to the visitor not to be too expressive about his impressions: don't gape; don't mime your impressions; follow the new manner of theatre audiences who don't applaud excessively; don't assume airs (head high, nose in the air): an honest and modest bearing is the sign of a good education; the object of a journey is to notice, not to be noticed, your costume will anyway identify you as a stranger; if you want a view of the 'petulant frivolity' of the Parisian population, go to the Tuileries in the afternoon; everyone should go to a café, but stay only half an hour; the fashionable thing to do at a ball is to stay at one's table, engage in general conversation, and not dance. And so on.

The descriptive *Physiologies* were more popular – little paperbound monographs on Parisian occupational and avocational types that flooded the bookstalls between 1841 and 1843. Their vogue in these years was spectacular. A verse in *Le Charivari* ran:

*Semblable aux champignons
Après une pluie
On vit ces embryons
La ville remplie!
Chose étrange à concevoir,
Chaque homme voulut avoir
Sa physiologie
O gué!
Sa physiologie.⁴⁷*

⁴⁷Like mushrooms after a rain, one saw these lumps all over town. It's hard to understand/Everybody wanted to have his Physiologie-heigh-ho his physiologie.

Physiologie DE L'HOMME DE LOI,

PAR
Un homme de plume.
VIGNETTES
De MM. Trimolet et Maurisset.



PARIS,
AUBERT ET C^{ie},
Place de la Bourse, 21
LAVIGNE,
Rue du Croissant, 10

Physiologie DU BOURGEOIS,

PAR HENRI MONNIER



PARIS,
AUBERT ET C^{ie},
Place de la Bourse
LAVIGNE,
Rue du Croissant, 10

13 Frontispieces, *Physiologie de l'homme de loi*, 1841; *Physiologie du bourgeois*, 1841

Over 130 volumes, profusely illustrated, with 30 to 60 engravings to a hundred pages of print, were published primarily by the Maison Aubert, print-sellers and publishers of the illustrated newspapers *La Caricature* and its successor *Le Charivari* – to be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. Philipon, Aubert's general editor, retained and guided a stable of writers, illustrators and caricaturists from the newspapers. Grandville, Daumier, Gavarni and Monnier were outstanding among the illustrators; others included Traviès, Joseph-Louis Trimolet and D.-A.-M. Raffet.

Balzac claimed paternity of the *Physiologies* as a genre – his own *Physiologie du mariage* had been published eleven years before the Aubert series appeared.⁴⁹ Balzac acknowledged Brillat-Savarin's *Physiologie du goût ou méditation de gastronomie transcendante* (1826) as a predecessor; but his own book certainly was the direct model for the genre.

Many of the *Physiologies* were first serialized in the daily *Le Charivari* before being issued as paperbacks. *Physiologies* were full of anecdotal accounts and contemporary allusions. As Benjamin observed, they were basically a petit-bourgeois genre.⁵⁰ At one franc each, they were cheap and portable.⁵¹

An ironic definition of the physiologist was offered in *Le Charivari*:

The physiologist is a kind of La Bruyère at so much a line, who takes on, in the newspapers, the observation and study of private and public manners. . . . The physiologist is above all a sceptic, and has never believed in virtue, least of all in the virtue of women; he says that he is paid to be like that. The physiologist is grave and dignified; when asked the reason for his sadness, he responds modestly that it is the mark of perceptive spirits and cites Molière and Deburau.¹⁴

The term *physiologie* suggested objective observation of a *type* rather than of an individual. The series dealt with the broad range of middle-class life according to profession, trade and avocation, diagnosed by habits, customs and manners. Besides the accounts of Parisian types, there were also physiologies of neighbourhoods and institutions, such as the press, the cafés, the balls. They described and illustrated where people lived, how they dressed, what they ate, where they went, what theatre and café they frequented, what they aspired to and the compromises they accepted. The roles were described primarily by social behaviour and interactions rather than by visual characteristics of the individual. The physiologies were classifications by stereotypes: the doctor, the lawyer, the investor, the soldier, the traveller, the student, the poet, the musician, the blue-stocking, the married man, the robber, the tailor, the kept woman, the worker, the bourgeois and the spectator.¹⁵

Balzac's *Physiologie de l'employé* (1841), illustrated by Trimolet, sketched a bureaucracy that revolved around power and money. As with his *Théorie de la démarche*, Balzac articulated his descriptions with axioms such as: 'For employees, the office supplants nature.' Balzac depicted the office manager exuding such self-satisfaction that on passing him in the street one could diagnose with assurance, 'that's an office manager'. He described the social bearing of all office workers from secretaries to bosses. Monnier had covered the same ground in his series *Moeurs administratives* of 1828. Huart's *Physiologie de l'étudiant* (1841), illustrated by Trimolet, Alophe and Maurisset, is another early example that drew explicitly on the natural-history model for its imagery: students exhibit a variety of habits and an exuberant pretentiousness, they later undergo a metamorphosis more striking than nature's: 'The brilliant butterfly once he returns to the provinces, folds into a chrysalis for the rest of his days.' The profuse variety of characteristics found among students collapses into a single stereotype of passivity.

Half a million copies of the *Physiologies* were bought during the few years of their vogue. The Paris population at this time was less than one million, and only half were literate. The most popular volumes concerned diversions: the zoo, the theatre; and avocations: the spectator, the man of fashion, the traveller, followed by professions and trades. The popular theatre during this same period incorporated a number of themes from

Le salut est comme les caractères, il est altier, simple,



bonhomme, insultant, bienveillant, froid, humiliant, . . . bas, . . .



naïf, goumé, . . . orgueilleux, triste, . . .



inquiet, misérable, . . . audacieux, . . .

¹⁴ 'How One Greets in Paris. Salutation is like character, it is haughty, simple, good-natured, offensive, kindly, mortifying, base, naïve, affected, arrogant, sad, apprehensive, wretched, bold. . . . *Le Diable à Paris*, 1845-6.

the Charter of 1830 'created among us an entirely new set of characters, of strange and incredible manners'. The tone was one of intellectual disappointment and disaffection with society. Janin explicitly contrasted La Bruyère's types with contemporary ones: a more caustic form of description was now appropriate.

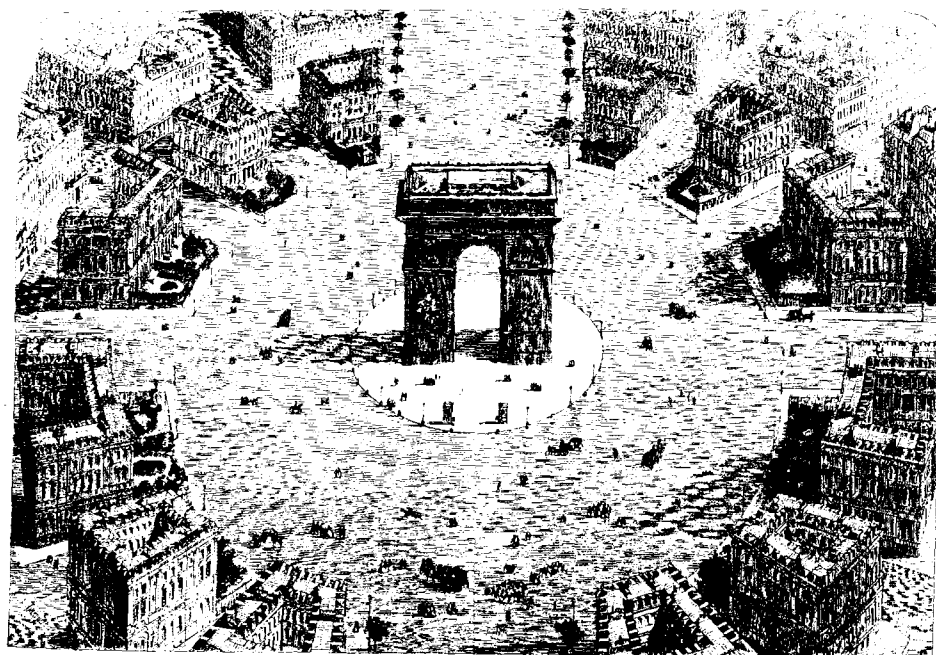
Another publication in this genre was a two-volume compendium of Paris and Parisian life illustrating 'our physiognomy, our gesture, and our costumes', *Le Diable à Paris, Paris et les parisiens* 1845-6, edited by Jules Hetzel. It carried the subtitle: 'Manners and costumes, character and portraits of the inhabitants of Paris; complete picture of their lives: private, public, political, artistic, literary, industrial, etc. etc.' Among the contributors were George Sand, Charles Nodier, Eugène Briffault, Balzac, Alphonse Karr, Gérard de Nerval, Arsène Houssaye, Théophile Gautier and Alfred de Musset. Gavarni drew a series of caricatures for these volumes. *Les gens de Paris*, including: *Philosophes* Street Types, *En Carnaval, Presenteurs et présentés, Hommes et femmes de plume* Men and Women Writers, *Bourgeois, Artistes, Petits Commerces* Small Trades, and so on.

The narrative device used in this collection of texts is of the devil bored with hell, deciding to visit part of his empire, Paris. The book is hardly an exposé: it begins with straightforward accounts of the history and geography of Paris and ends with government statistics on population, finance, professions, criminality, schooling and poverty. The core of the book consists of entertaining, cynical accounts of customs and institutions, such as the Chamber of Deputies and the Palace of Justice – though carefully never crossing the line of censorship – the Jockey Club, the cemeteries, theatres, carnivals and balls. There is a song on indifference, and a satire of bourgeois marriage by Monnier. In an illustrated section entitled 'How one greets in Paris', B. Pascal noted: 'In France every conversation begins with a ballet', and suggested that one could write a history of Parisian society by providing a chronological account of forms of greeting.⁵⁸

Six years later, a still more ambitiously illustrated two-volume work, Texier's *Tableau de Paris* 1852-3, was published with 1,500 engravings, some reproduced from the vignettes in *Le Diable à Paris*, and some from the various caricature journals and illustrated newspapers. The frontispiece shows a panorama of the city and, in his text, Texier punned on other popular uses of the suffix 'rama': the diorama, the panorama, the georama, the neorama, the navalorama. In *Père Goriot* the students in Mme Vauquer's pension pun on the same lines. *Tableau de Paris* is a panorama of the city; a detailed account of Parisian sites and institutions just before the city was redesigned and expanded by Napoleon III and Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, the prefect of Paris. Texier presented

a straightforward account of streets, neighbourhoods, law courts, medical and law schools, artist's ateliers, theatres, department stores, carnivals, prisons, cabarets, balls and parks. He delighted in the rich physiological detail of the city: 'Physiognomy and physiology, individual and collective, the mass and the details: this programme is continuously developing and always new, from the viewpoints of a thousand observers; every human being with eyes and judgment will make his own new and original discovery, but the exact plan will never be complete.'⁵⁹

Paradoxically, when Haussmann and Napoleon began to impose their panoramic design on the city in 1854, the bird's-eye view lost most of its visual drama and became hardly more than official propaganda, revealing little more than what Haussmann had intentionally put there. Before then, it had afforded the Romantic pleasure of a privileged command over recalcitrant, unplanned material: Baudelaire's *foumillante cité* and Balzac's 'organism'. The pleasures – 'demonic', rapacious, voyeuristic or scientific – of discovering *hidden* structures, like those of Nature, are lost when the spectacle is a deliberate artefact.⁶⁰



17 Projected view of the Place de l'Étoile, after a drawing by M. Wibaille, architect, 1857