Forum

Concrete Dreams: The Built Environment and Human Behavior in Europe's Twentieth Century

Edited by
Andreas Greiner
Jan Hansen
and Paul Lerner

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Andreas Greiner
German Historical Institute Washington

Jan Hansen
University of California San Diego

Paul Lerner
University of Southern California

Introduction

The devastating wildfires that swept through Pacific Palisades and Altadena in early January 2025 exposed the ecological fragility and vulnerability of the Los Angeles region and highlighted the effects of escalating climate change. Furthermore, they underscored how natural forces — wildfires, earthquakes, and floods — can overwhelm even highly-developed societies like the United States.[1] For many of those living and working in Southern California, these events were a stark reminder of the "agency" of natural forces and the physical world. Scholars have long examined the connection between

1 Natalie Rauscher and Welf Werner, *Natural Disasters in the United States: Making Sense of Risks and Vulnerability* (London: Springer Nature, forthcoming).

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environmental disasters and the city of Los Angeles.[2] However, this relationship felt particularly urgent in the wake of our Los Angeles-based workshop, *Concrete Dreams: Urban Infrastructure and the Regulation of Human Behavior in the Global Twentieth Century*, held at the University of Southern California in May 2023.[3] This workshop sparked discussions on how twentieth-century urban infrastructure projects in Europe, the United States, and beyond were designed to influence human behavior. This thematic *Forum* in the GHI's *Bulletin* continues that dialogue by featuring contributions on this topic, including three papers originally presented at the workshop.

The forum explores the complex interplay between the built environment and human behavior. The contributions examine how architecture and infrastructure have shaped societal expectations and behaviors across diverse geographical contexts. Key areas of interest include Paris's tramway network, penal agricultural colonies in nineteenth-century France and early Soviet Ukraine, government offices in the Westminster district of London, and the coalfields surrounding Leipzig, Germany. More specifically, the contributions delve into visions of social progress and advancement through efforts to marginalize the urban poor by using transport infrastructures to exclude them from city centers; ideals of achieving moral reform through youth incarceration; the enhancement of white-collar productivity and efficiency through the architectural design of office towers; and fossil-fuel extraction, often while neglecting the health consequences for local populations. Taken together, these papers examine how architects, planners, politicians, penal reformers, judges, journalists, and ordinary people tried to shape social relations through the built environment. Questions of control and surveillance within the built environment, alongside the unintended consequences of such behavioral regulation, also reverberate throughout these papers.

The central premise of this forum's contributions is that the built environment offers a vital lens for exploring broader

2 Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York, 1998).

3 Andreas Greiner, Jan Hansen, and Paul Lerner, "Concrete Dreams: Infrastructure and the Regulation of Behavior in the Global Twentieth Century," workshop report, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 72 (2023): 129–136.

historical questions about societies — their norms, moral standards, systems of inclusion and exclusion, and overall functioning. We contend that social orders are not only embedded within physical structures, profoundly shaping how people lived, worked, consumed, and raised families, but that the built environment actively reinforces and transforms these social systems.[4] Beyond recognizing that physical structures have effects, the forum's contributions emphasize the affective dimensions of the built environment — the expectations, promises, and aspirations attached to architectural and infrastructural developments.[5] This perspective enables our authors to investigate how spaces were deliberately designed to guide or modify human behavior and the consequences — both intended and otherwise — of these interventions. By examining the intersections of physical spaces and social dynamics, this forum aims to deepen our understanding of how environments shape — and are shaped by — human experiences.

To achieve these goals, the papers in this forum draw on a rich body of scholarship. Beginning in the 1970s, the "spatial turn" in historical writing has brought about a new understanding of the formation and organization of the physical environment, treating space not as a mere geographical entity but as a product of social and cultural transactions. In his seminal work *The Production of Space* (1974), the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre famously established that "(social) space is a (social) product,"[6] created by historical actors and their relations. In turn, space itself is "both produced and productive,"[7] insofar as spatial arrangements also shape and influence social interactions. Recognizing that the spatial order has the capacity to govern behaviors and influence circulation, modern statehood since the eighteenth century has sought to organize and control spaces in order to exercise power over populations. Municipal and national administrations have restructured spaces in ways that facilitated policing and control. The French philos-

4 Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words," *American Historical Review* 110 (2005): 1015–1045.

5 Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 327–343.

6 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK, 1991), 26.

7 Ibid., 288. For an introduction to Lefebvre's work, see Harvey Molotch, "The Space of Lefebvre," *Theory and Society* 22 (1993): 887–895.

opher Michel Foucault famously engaged with the historical mechanisms used to monitor, classify, and order people. In his book *Discipline and Punish* (1975), he argued that in the modern era spatial reconfiguration became a key method for disciplining and surveilling populations, with novel institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons emerging as central disciplinary spaces.[8] Foucault's analytical framework has since been widely adopted and elaborated upon. The political theorist Timothy Mitchell, for instance, has highlighted how European colonizers in mid-nineteenth century Egypt "enframed" the rural population to foster state control by rearranging village landscapes.[9] In a similar vein, the American anthropologist James C. Scott, studying urban planning from Baron Haussmann's Paris to Brasília and Le Corbusier's unrealized Plan Voisin, contended that modern states have tended to increase the "legibility" of the cityscape, that is to streamline and regulate complexities to facilitate the management of its inhabitants and intervention into their activities.[10]

Urban planners and reformers indeed regarded regulating the built environment as a means of directing or controlling human behavior. Analyzing urban reconstruction from the medieval era to the interwar years, the American historian and critic Lewis Mumford reasoned in 1938 that "the improvement of cities is no matter for small one-sided reforms: the task of city design involves the vaster task of rebuilding our civilization."[11] This idea that spatial intervention could effect human betterment was shared widely, and the scope of architectural reform movements was international, with knowledge and practices circulating on a global scale through publications, congresses, and exhibitions.[12] In the late nineteenth century, social engineering meant fostering changes in demography and hygiene. Sanitizing the overcrowded urban centers of industrialized Europe by ventilating the cities, developing sewage systems, establishing parks, and restructuring urban layouts was a prime preoccupation of planners, whose spatial

8 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975; New York, 1995).

9 Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, CA, 1991).

10 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT, 1998).

11 Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (1938; New York, 1970), 9.

12 Anthony Sutcliffe, *Towards the Planned City, Germany, Britain, the United States and France, 1780–1914*. Oxford, 1981; Stephen V. Ward, "Re-Examining the International Diffusion of Planning," in *Urban Planning in a Changing World: The Twentieth Century Experience*, ed. Robert Freestone (London, 2000), 40–66; David Kuchenbuch, "Architecture and Urban Planning as Social Engineering: Selective Transfers between Germany and Sweden in the 1930s and 1940s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 51 (2016): 22–39.

interventions were soon replicated in the colonial world.[13] Social reform was also at the heart of the Garden City movement and its efforts to decentralize urban living.[14]

Intervention into the built environment and people's everyday use of it did not remain uncontested. Urban reconstruction led to evictions, the marginalization of neighborhoods, and racial and class segregation. In the United States, the shift away from city centers and the ensuing process of suburbanization, highly criticized by Mumford and American architecture critic Jane Jacobs, accelerated these processes.[15] Sprawling suburbs became only possible through individual motorization from the 1940s onwards — when the number of car owners in the United States exceeded that of all other countries combined.[16] The ubiquity of cars engendered a process of urban reconstruction that pushed other forms of mobility, especially walking, to the side of the road. In the postwar boom phase, car ownership and suburban development then called for new broad thoroughfares into city centers, making African-American neighborhoods the prey of bulldozers.[17] Thus enlisted into the project of automobility, urban space increasingly came to govern mobility through the implementation of signage systems, parking, and traffic rules. After its introduction, urban driving competed with other forms of mobility, leading to the criminalization of "jaywalking."[18]

The contributions to this forum serve as case studies probing the bidirectional relationship between the built environment and human behavior. In the first paper, Peter Soppelsa turns to

13 Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years 1830–1910*. (Oxford, UK, 1987); Martin Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore, 2000); Stephen Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi's Urban Governmentalities* (Malden, MA, 2007); William Cunningham Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar* (Bloomington, IN, 2011); Aro Velmet, *Pasteur's Empire: Bacteriology and Politics in France, Its Colonies, and the World* (Oxford, UK, 2020); Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity* (Berkeley, CA, 2004).

14 Dirk Schubert, "The Neighbourhood Paradigm: From Garden Cities to Gated Communities," in *Urban Planning in a Changing World*, ed. Freestone, 118–138.

15 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961; New York, 1993).

16 Thomas Zeller, *Consuming Landscapes: What We See When We Drive and Why It Matters*, (Baltimore, 2022), 17.

17 Derek G. Handley, *Struggle for the City: Citizenship and Resistance in the Black Freedom Movement* (University Park, PA, 2024); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley, CA, 2004)

18 Peter D. Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*. (Cambridge, MA, 2008); Gabrielle Esperdy, *American Autopia* (Charlottesville, VA, 2019); Robert A. Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban* (Minneapolis, 2006).

Third Republic Paris and the arrival of the new metropolitan tramways to demonstrate previously unacknowledged popular engagement in and protest both for and against new urban modes of transportation. While voices from the left cheered the democratizing effect of new forms of public transportation at the end of the nineteenth century, which made the city core accessible for members of the working-class and thus created new opportunities, conservatives decried the trolleys as a threat to civilization and a blight on the beautiful Parisian cityscape. As the new trams transformed the built environment and popular experiences of the city, observers debated and recast the meaning of Frenchness in terms of Paris' Roman heritage, its position as a beacon of "civilization" and an imperial metropolis, and its resistance to the forces of Americanization.

Anna-Christine Grant's essay focuses on penitentiary institutions for juvenile offenders in two disparate contexts, nineteenth-century France and early Soviet Ukraine, investigating two colonies whose creators touted the influence of environment on human behavior. Nineteenth-century French ideas about rehabilitation, the salutary effect of the rural, and the positive influence of a well-ordered environment also inhered in penal and educational reform movements in Imperial Russia and persisted but took on a different valence after the October Revolution. While earlier French reformers construed wayward youth as an urban population in need of distance from the morally corrosive city and the corrective influence of a well-ordered agricultural colony, in the Soviet context, where urban modernity was celebrated in contrast to the allegedly backwards countryside, youth residents of the Gorky colony were seen as the beneficiaries of modern planning, rationality, and efficiency.

The third contribution, by Juliana Kei, turns to the establishment of the Department of the Environment in 1970 in the United Kingdom, an amalgam of existing governmental bodies tasked with the improvement of British life through

interventions in the environment. She points to the ambiguity and slippage in the meaning of the term "environment" which originally referred to urban spaces that were to be transformed through rational planning and construction, and not to the natural world and planet, as in more recent usage. Paradoxically, the establishment of the Department of the Environment actually presaged the state's withdrawal from attempts to rationally manage the built environment, as modernist ideas lost credibility and Thatcherite privatization began to hold sway. Lack of a coherent notion of "the environment," Kei argues, was one of the factors that prevented the state from mounting any effective interventions into quality of life.

In the *Forum's* final article, Andrew Demshuk takes us from the main streets of Britain's new towns to the abandoned coal fields of the former GDR, Saxon wastelands scarred from decades of lignite pit mining which defied generations of planners' dreams of transforming the pockmarked fields into a salubrious landscape to improve its residents' lives. Demshuk's is a story of utopian visions giving way to bureaucratic realities in the East German and then the reunited German state, which at last brought significant financial resources to older reclamation projects but also proved unable to undo the effects of natural devastation, falling prey to a hubristic belief in humanity's ability to bend nature to its will.

Taken together, the papers reveal the rich and intense struggles over attempts to reshape the built environment over the last two centuries of European history and also the limits of humanity's power to intervene against stubborn social and natural forces, exposing both the attraction and the limits of the modernist dream of rationality, order, and surveillance. These papers, we believe, represent just the beginning of a promising new research area at the intersection of environmental history, architectural and planning history, and the history of the human sciences and governmentality. Future avenues could include expanding the investigation to a

global perspective, with a particular focus on non-European contexts in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, including forceful attempts to reshape the colonial world under the imperial European gaze.[19] Additionally, the intersectionality of categories of difference warrants further exploration, as for instance, the gendered dynamics of behavioral control through the built environment, a topic hinted at in the essays at hand, and explored more substantially in several of the workshop papers. What notions of masculinity and femininity were associated with these efforts to influence human behavior? To what extent did the built environment itself become gendered? How did it reify but also potentially undermine differences of class, race, and ethnicity? What sorts of continuities can be located across the boundaries of the Cold War at the intersection of global development, infrastructure, and the regulation of behavior? The contributions to this forum represent, we hope, a significant first step in identifying and exploring this rich and urgent field of inquiry.

19 See, for example, Andrew Denning, *Automotive Empire: How Cars and Roads Fueled European Colonialism into Africa* (Ithaca, NY, 2024).

Andreas Greiner is a research fellow at the German Historical Institute in Washington. His research specializes in infrastructure networks, their spatiality and materiality in the long 19th and early 20th centuries. He received his PhD in history from ETH Zurich. Before joining the GHI in January 2021, he was a postdoctoral fellow in the Max Weber Program at the European University Institute in Florence. His first monograph, *Human Porterage and Colonial State Formation in German East Africa, 1880s–1914: Tensions of Transport* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), explores the shifting role of caravan transport and human porterage in colonial East Africa, revealing the resilience of precolonial structures in the era of "high imperialism." His current research project examines the entangled history of intercontinental airline networks in the interwar period.

Jan Hansen is a Visiting Associate Professor in the Department of History at UC San Diego, sponsored by the

German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). He is also a Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter (research fellow and lecturer) in the Department of History at Humboldt University of Berlin, currently on leave. A historian of modern Germany, Europe, and the United States, his research and teaching focus on infrastructure history, new materialism, the Cold War, and social movements. He is the author of *Abschied vom Kalten Krieg? Die Sozialdemokraten und der Nachrüstungsstreit (1977–1987)* (de Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016). His co-authored volumes include *Making Sense of the Americas: How Protest Related to America in the 1980s and Beyond* (Campus, 2015); *Den Kalten Krieg vermessen: Über Reichweite und Alternativen einer binären Ordnungsvorstellung* (de Gruyter, 2018); *The European Experience: A Multi-Perspective History of Modern Europe* (Open Book Publishers, 2023); and *Historische Friedens- und Konfliktforschung: Die Quadratur des Kreises?* (Campus, 2023). He is currently completing his second book, *Anatomy of the Mundane: Living with Infrastructure in Los Angeles, 1850–1940*.

Paul Lerner is a Professor and Chair of History in the Van Hunnick History Department at USC where he directs the Max Kade Institute for Austrian-German-Swiss Studies. He is a historian of Modern Germany and Central Europe with particular research and teaching interests in the history of the human sciences, Jewish history, the history and theory of consumer culture, and theories of fascism. He has written two books: *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany* (Cornell, 2003) and *The Consuming Temple: The Jewish Department Store and the Consumer Revolution in Germany* (Cornell 2015) and co-edited four books: *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age* (Cambridge, 2001), *Jewish Masculinities: German Jews, Gender, and History* (Indiana, 2012), *Feuchtwanger and Judaism: History, Imagination, Exile* (Peter Lang, 2019), and *Jewish Consumer Cultures*

in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe and North America (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). Lerner is currently working on two book projects: "Exiles on Main Street: How Central European Émigrés Reimagined American Life, 1940-1970" and "The Psychoanalysis of Terror: Fred Hacker between Vienna and Hollywood."

Paris Tramways as Artifacts of Civilization and Barbarism in the Age of Empire, 1890s–1920s

Peter Soppelsa
University of Oklahoma

From the 1890s to 1914, Paris's horse-drawn and motorized tramway networks expanded rapidly. Growth peaked before the 1900 Universal Exposition, when officials approved nineteen new lines to serve Parisians and millions of guests gathered to celebrate the turning century.[1] These tramways inspired two types of protest. Historians have noted NIMBY-like bourgeois efforts to exclude tramways and poorer passengers from wealthy neighborhoods, but they have overlooked popular protest for tramway inclusion.[2] This essay builds on previous historical mobility studies, including Peter Norton's and my own, that analyze the language used in negotiating transportation infrastructure.[3] Protests against the tramways registered in the press in notable categories of epithets:

1 Alain Faure, "Les invasions barbares ou le tramway criminel (Paris, 1872–1914)," *Le mouvement social*, no. 266 (January–March 2019): 87–110, at 88.

2 Alain Faure, "Les invasions barbares"; Gérard Jacquemet, "Voirie, transports et équipements urbain à Belleville de 1860 à 1914," *Paris et Ile-de-France: Mémoires publiés par la Fédération des Sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France* 33 (1982): 225–253, 249n25.

3 Peter Norton, "Street Rivals: Jaywalking and the Invention of the Motor Age Street," *Technology and Culture* 48 (2007): 331–359, quote 331; Peter Soppelsa, "Reworking Appropriation: The Language of Paris Railways," *Transfers* 4 (2014): 104–123; Anton Rosenthal, "The Streetcar in the Urban Imaginary of Latin America," *Journal of Urban History* 42 (2016): 162–179.

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"murderous," "crusher" and "tramway of death," concerning safety; "criminal," "odious," "mutilation," and "vandalism" with respect to aesthetics; and this essay's centerpiece, *tramway des barbares* (barbarians' tramway), reflecting concerns about civilization. The term "vandalism" also evoked Europe's barbarian past. In such debates and protests, to quote Norton, "competing users flung epithets at one another." The article thus takes what Martin Melosi has called the cultural turn in infrastructure studies, working against traditional top-down and institutional approaches by studying how users experienced, represented, and imagined infrastructures.[4]

The vocabulary of civilization and barbarism saturates modern French cultural, political, and imperial history. Alice Conklin called civilization "a particularly French concept; the French invented the term in the eighteenth century and have celebrated the achievements of their own ever since." Alice Bullard added that "savagery and civilization are rhetorical devices used in attempts to enforce a particular social order or political agenda. . . In nineteenth-century France, the ideal of civilization acted as a sort of talisman that kept away the crisis of meaning generated by modernity."[5] As detailed ahead, Paris tramways became charged objects in this crisis. Conklin and Bullard share a focus on how the concept of civilization was mobilized to justify French imperialism and its famous civilizing mission. It is no coincidence that Paris's debates about tramways and civilization occurred as the age of empire crested around 1900.

Since historians have already recognized the social exclusion of Paris's elite tramway protests, this essay pursues three other analytic threads — local, national, and transnational. For local social history, it documents protests from below that demanded tramway access and inclusion, appropriating and reversing charges of "barbarism." For national cultural history, it analyzes "barbarian" rhetoric in the long-term context of France's Roman heritage, and the short-term context of the

4 Martin Melosi, "Urban Infrastructure and the Cultural Turn," in *Concepts of Urban-Environmental History*, ed. Sebastian Haumann, Martin Knoll, and Detlev Mares (Bielefeld, 2020), 145–154; Jonathan Soffer, "Introduction," in *Urban Infrastructure: Historical and Social Dimensions of an Interconnected World*, ed. Joseph Heathcott, Jonathan Soffer, and Rae Zimmerman (Pittsburgh, 2022), 3–8.

5 Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford, CA, 1997), 1; Alice Bullard, *Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific* (Stanford, CA, 2000), 2.

1900 exposition and the new imperialism. Finally, this essay situates Paris debates about tramways and civilization transnationally, by reviewing tramway protest studies globally, before showing that foreign journalists around 1900 covered Paris tramways while foreign intellectuals also linked tramways and barbarism throughout this era.

I. Global Studies of Tramway Protest

Histories of public transport have consistently found that shared vehicles were objects of social conflict from the introduction of omnibuses in the 1820s and street railways in the 1830s, both pulled by horses. Before motorization raised new safety, noise, and emissions concerns in the 1880s, group travel caused controversial social mixing on two related levels. First, transit lines joined places of different wealth and status with frequent and rapid connections. Second, vehicles themselves enclosed different classes, races, or genders in spaces of encounter and conflict; to manage these encounters, railways, steamships, and eventually airplanes established separate spaces and prices for different "classes."[6] Using language later applied in Paris and elsewhere, Philadelphia tramway critics in 1858 called horsecars "barbarism" that would "invade, vandalize, and vulgarize" the streets. In 1867, Mark Twain criticized New York's crowded trams for "going back to original barbarism."[7]

During the second industrial revolution (1880s–1920s), motorization, electrification, and the growing mass transit market accelerated tramway conflicts, sometimes violent, in cities worldwide. As Eric Hobsbawm wrote in 1968, "tramways, whether in Calcutta or Barcelona, are usually convenient for rioters; partly because the raising of fares, which tends to affect all the poor simultaneously, is a very natural precipitant of trouble, partly because these large and track-bound vehicles, when burned or overturned, can block streets and disrupt traffic very easily."[8] Since Hobsbawm wrote, a rich

6 Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870–1900* (Cambridge, MA, 1978); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), 70–88; Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 191–193; Masha Belenky, *Engine of Modernity: The Omnibus and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Manchester, 2019), esp. part 2.

7 Joel Tarr and Clay McShane, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, 2007), 71; Gregg Camfield, *Sentimental Twain: Samuel Clemens in the Maze of Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia, 2016), 87.

8 Eric Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* (New York, 2001), 262.

scholarly literature has examined urban tramway opposition, protest, sabotage, and violence. This literature shares his global scope.

Social histories of tramway protest foreground race, gender, and class. Studies of race highlight protests for tramway access by marginalized and minoritized people. Geoff Zylstra has shown how Black Philadelphians faced racist violence while struggling to access horse trams in the 1850s–1860s.[9] As a broad literature has documented, transport access remained central to American struggles for racial liberation and civil rights for another century, before the iconic 1955–1956 Montgomery, Alabama, Bus Boycott.[10] Comparable dynamics gripped another segregated city, apartheid Johannesburg.[11] Similarly, studies of gender aboard American, Canadian, German, Turkish, and Japanese tramways have examined debates about women riding trams and the troubling "intimacy" of interacting with male passengers.[12] Finally, labor histories have implicated tramways in class struggles from the Carolinas to Uruguay. From the 1890s to the 1920s, violent tram worker strikes called "car wars" or "trolley wars" touched most major U.S. cities and were mirrored in Mexico City, Havana, Lima, São

9 Geoff D. Zylstra, "Whiteness, Freedom, and Technology: The Racial Struggle over Philadelphia's Streetcars, 1859–1867," *Technology and Culture* 52 (2011): 678–702.

10 Citing only some recent examples: Kenneth W. Goings and Brian D. Page, "African Americans Versus the Memphis Street Railway Company: Or, How to Win the Battle but Lose the War, 1890–1920," *Journal of Urban History* 30 (2004): 131–151; Blair L. M. Kelley, "Right to Ride: African American Citizenship and Protest in the Era of 'Plessy v. Ferguson,'" *African American Review* 41 (2007): 347–356; Robert Cassanello, "Avoiding 'Jim Crow': Negotiating Separate and Equal on Florida's Railroads and Streetcars and the Progressive Era Origins of the Modern Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Urban History* 34 (2008): 435–457; Jason L. Bates, "Consolidating Support for a Law 'Incapable of Enforcement': Segregation of Tennessee Streetcars, 1900–1930," *Journal of Southern History* 82 (2016): 97–126; Hilary McLaughlin-Stonham, *From Slavery to Civil Rights: On the Streetcars of New Orleans 1830s–Present* (Liverpool, 2018); Elizabeth Belanger, "Working-Class Mobility and Streetcar Politics in Reconstruction-Era St. Louis," *GeoHumanities* 8 (2022): 122–139.

11 G. H. Pirie, "Racial Segregation on Johannesburg Trams: Procedures and Protest, 1904–1927," *African Studies* 48 (1989): 37–54.

12 Donald Davis and Barbara Lorenzkowski, "A Platform for Gender Tensions: Women Working and Riding on Canadian Urban Public Transit in the 1940s," *Canadian Historical Review* 79 (1998): 431–465; Barbara Schmucki, "On the Trams: Women, Men and Urban Public Transport in Germany," *Journal of Transport History* 23 (2002): 60–72; James Ryan, " 'Unveiling' the Tramway: The Intimate Public Sphere in Late Ottoman and Republican Istanbul," *Journal of Urban History* 44 (2018): 811–834; James A. Fujii, "Intimate Alienation: Japanese Urban Rail and the Commodification of Urban Subjects," *differences* 11 (1999): 106–133; Belanger, "Working-Class Mobility."

Paolo, and Valparaiso. Critics of Chicago's 1903 strike called it "barbaric."[13]

Historians of technology have shown that European and North American city dwellers often opposed electric tramways' nuisances and risks, shaping the uneven adoption of electricity and motor vehicles during the second industrial revolution.[14] Electric trams, and particularly their overhead trolley wires, posed two problems: the risk of electrocution and fire, and the threat of wires disrupting architectural aesthetics — especially in major cities (see figure 1). Both problems touched Paris, where trolley wires sparked resistance from elites and conservatives defending the capital as a national architectural showcase. In 1902, one municipal councilor threatened to remove trolley wires installed in his district by hand. Elsewhere, protestors cut down trolley wire poles: crowds led by New York's mayor in the 1880s and by lumberjacks in Toronto in the 1890s.[15] In 1893, the mayor of Montreal suburb Mile End tore up tram tracks.[16] Electric tramway infrastructures — tracks, poles, and wires — were a major source of controversy across the North Atlantic, with similar incidents also occurring in American, Canadian, Belgian, German, and Austro-Hungarian cities.

13 Jeffrey M. Leatherwood, *The Quest for Streetcar Unionism in the Carolina Piedmont, 1919–1922* (Cambridge, UK, 2017); Neil J. Lehto, *The Thirty-Year War: A History of Detroit's Streetcars, 1892–1922* (East Lansing, MI, 2017); Scott Molloy, *Trolley Wars: Streetcar Workers on the Line* (Durham, NH, 2007); Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), 35–36 (for Chicago strike); Anton Rosenthal, "Streetcar Workers and the Transformation of Montevideo: The General Strike of May 1911," *The Americas* 51 (1995): 471–494; Anton Rosenthal, "The Streetcar in the Urban Imaginary," 169–170.

14 John McKay, *Tramways and Trolleys: The Rise of Urban Mass Transport in Europe* (Princeton, 1976); Eric Schatzberg, "The Mechanization of Urban Transit in the United States: Electricity and Its Competitors," in *Competitiveness: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives on Electrical, Electronics, and Computer Industries*, ed. William Aspray, 225–242 (Piscataway, NJ, 1993); Eric Schatzberg, "Culture and Technology in the City: Opposition to Mechanized Street Transportation in Late-Nineteenth-Century America," in *Technologies of Power: Essays in Honor of Thomas Parke Hughes and Agatha Chipley Hughes*, ed. Michael Thad Allen and Gabrielle Hecht (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 57–94; John H. White, "War of the Wires: A Curious Chapter in Street Railway History," *Technology and Culture* 46 (2005): 374–384.

15 For New York, see Charles W. Cheape, *Moving the Masses: Urban Public Transit in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, 1880–1912* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), 62; John McKay, *Tramways and Trolleys*, 86 (for Paris), and 87 (for Toronto); see also Peter Soppelsa, "Reworking Appropriation."

16 Christopher G. Boone, "The Politics of Transportation Services in Suburban Montreal: Sorting Out the 'Mile End Muddle,' 1893–1909," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 24 (1996): 25–39.

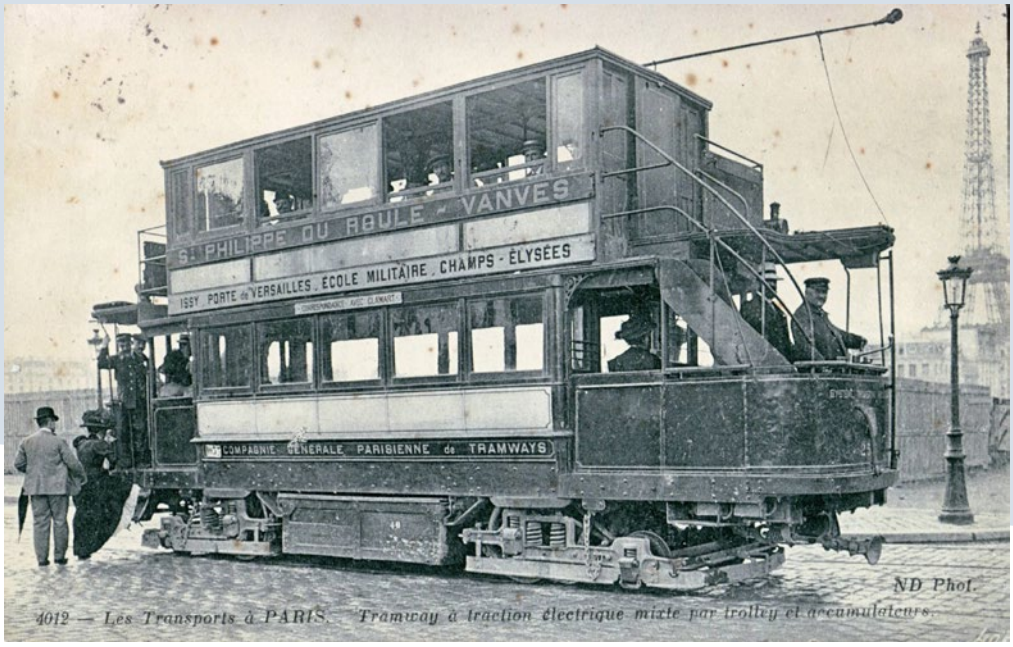

Figure 1. Photographic postcard, c.1900, Neurdein brothers #4012. From the series Transportation in Paris, captioned "Tramway with mixed electric traction by trolley and accumulators." Source: https://soundlandscapes.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/043.jpg

Studies of African, Asian, and Latin American cities implicate electric tramway protests in contests over the meanings of civilization and modernity that characterized this age of accelerating European imperialism. In 1899, Seoul protesters threw rocks and overturned trams as vehicles of Western and Japanese colonial influence. Tokyo passengers violently protested fare increases from 1906 to 1911. Although more peaceful, contemporaries in Cairo, Mexico City, and Montevideo raised similar concerns about electric tramways' dangers, Western influence, and their relevance for negotiating civilization and barbarism. One Montevidean wrote about gruesome tramway accidents, "Progress is something that appears much like barbarism."[17]

Paris historians have also contributed to this research. Arnauld Passalacqua showed that Parisians long treated tramways as "resident aliens," fundamentally foreign (especially American) artifacts that achieved only "reluctant" acceptance even

17 Min Suh Son, "Electrifying Seoul and the Culture of Technology in Nineteenth Century Korea" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2008), 79–130; James A. Fujii, "Networks of Modernity: Rail Transport and Modern Japanese Literature," *Japan Railway and Transport Review*, no. 13 (1997): 12–16, at 13; Anton Rosenthal, "The Arrival of the Electric Streetcar and the Conflict over Progress in Early Twentieth-Century Montevideo," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27 (1995): 319–341, esp. 329–332, quote on 331; On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley, CA, 2013), chap. 5; Diana Montaño, *Electrifying Mexico: Technology and the Transformation of a Modern City* (Austin, 2021), chap. 3.

after operating for almost a century.[18] Alain Faure recently interpreted the anti-tramway protests of Paris's elite as bids to segregate Paris, limiting access to wealthy western neighborhoods. Highlighting the epithet "barbarians' tramway," he documented in detail the exclusionary aims of elite protest.[19] Passalaqua and Faure examined both organized and spontaneous tramway protest, but they ignored why it was cast in terms of civilization and barbarism, because they did not address Paris's imperial role. Writers outside France also saw tramways as artifacts of civilization or barbarism, a theme which returns ahead. Meanwhile Parisians debated civilization in light of longstanding constructions of their Roman heritage, a repository of lessons about imperialism.

II. The New Rome

Paris's Roman roots run deep. The Roman settlement beneath the Left Bank emerges today in the Cluny Museum baths and the *Arènes de Lutèce* amphitheater. More controversial is Rome's legacy, refigured through centuries of discourse. French national identity is often explained as "Gallo-Roman," forged in the clash between Gauls and Romans. While meaningful, this explanation is neoclassical and nostalgic, excludes France's empire, and complicates its Roman-ness. Yet French leaders from Charles de Valois to Charles de Gaulle claimed to rule a "New Rome," a notion richly documented in a recent conference volume.[20] Although artifacts from bread and wine to Catholicism might justify such claims, Roman engineering has been particularly prominent, both intellectually (an approach to engineering) and infrastructurally (built into the landscape as roads, bridges, and waterworks).

The medieval Valois dynasty pursued a new Rome by rebuilding Paris bridges and wider, straighter roads. Renaissance studies track the notion through the 1500s, documenting French travel to Rome, trade in Roman artifacts, and a legion of textual and visual representations of Rome.[21] Soon the

18 Arnaud Passalacqua, "Resident Alien: France's Ambivalent Relationship to the Tramway Before 1914," in *Mobility in History: Themes in Transport*, T2M Yearbook 2011, ed. Georgine Clarsen et al. (Neuchâtel, 2011), 71–86; Arnaud Passalacqua, "Reluctant Capitals: Transport Mobility and Tramways in London and Paris 1830–1950," *Town Planning Review* 85 (2014): 203–216.

19 Faure, "Les invasions barbares"; Jacquemet, "Voirie, transports et équipement urbain," 249n25.

20 Michèle Lowrie and Barbara Vinken, eds., *Paris, a New Rome* (Berlin, 2024).

21 Margaret McGowan, *The Vision of Rome in Late Renaissance France* (New Haven, CT, 2000); Richard Cooper, *Roman Antiquities in Renaissance France, 1515–65* (Abingdon, UK, 2016).

wars of religion lent the phrase "New Rome" the flavor of the Counterreformation. In the 1600s and 1700s, the absolutist Bourbon dynasty expanded neoclassical public works. Chandra Mukerji's studies of absolutist water engineering — the Versailles gardens and the Canal du Midi — have shown how builders tried to imitate and surpass Rome's celebrated aqueducts, canals, fountains, and sewers.[22]

After the French Revolution, Napoleon I embellished Paris with neo-Roman monuments, including triumphal arches on the Places de l'Étoile and de la Carousel and the Vendôme Column, imitating Trajan's Column.[23] (See figure 2.) Donald Reid showed that later underground projects, such as the catacombs ossuary and sewer modernization, also claimed Roman antecedents. After 1853, Bonapartists Napoleon III and Baron Haussmann explicitly pursued the New Rome through the ambitious and controversial urban rebuilding project known as "Haussmannization," which stretched for decades and included engineer Eugène Belgrand's aqueducts and sewers. As Reid noted, "Even ironic observers of Haussmannization couched their comments in terms of the Roman analogy."[24]

Meanwhile, France braided infrastructure and imperialism to make its empire a new Rome. Alice Conklin has shown how infrastructures of public works and public health were central to France's civilizing mission in West Africa. Diana Davis's history of North African colonization showed how intensified farming, land reclamation, and irrigation sought to "resurrect the Granary of Rome." Sara Pritchard showed how modern French waterworks, both metropolitan and colonial, followed Roman legal and engineering precedents as "officials forged genealogies, not only from Roman hydraulics to their own endeavors but also from the Roman Empire to their own."[25] Thus, for

22 Colin Jones, *Paris: The Biography of a City* (New York, 2004), 104, 127, 130–131, 160, 172; Orest Ranum, *Paris in the Age of Absolutism*, rev. ed. (1968; University Park, PA, 2002), 8–9, 328–373; Chandra Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles* (Cambridge, UK, 1997); Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal du Midi* (Princeton, NJ, 2009).

23 Eleanor Tollfree, "Napoleon and the 'New Rome': Rebuilding Imperial Rome in the Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-century Paris" (Ph.D. diss., University of Bristol, 2000); Diana Rowell, *Paris: The "New Rome" of Napoleon I* (London, 2012).

24 Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), 16, 29, 36, 50, quote on 47; Sean Weiss, "Making Engineering Visible: Photography and the Politics of Potable Water in Modern Paris," *Technology and Culture* 61 (2020): 740–771.

25 Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, chap. 2; Diana Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Athens, OH, 2007); Sara Pritchard, "From Hydroimperialism to Hydrocapitalism: 'French' Hydraulics in France, North Africa, and Beyond," *Social Studies of Science* 42 (2012): 591–615, 596; see also Sara Pritchard, *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 28–34.

Figure 2. The Arc de Triomphe and the place de l'Etoile. An electric tram and its tracks are visible in the lower right quadrant. Press photograph, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica digital library (gallica.bnf.fr), digital ID: btv1b532131082.

centuries French elites promoted infrastructure as embodying the legacy of Roman civilization, although this legacy gained new urgency as France expanded its empire in the late 1800s.

In Paris around 1900, civilizational claims defended Parisians against the perceived suburban threats of crime, disease, poverty, and violence, which were often cast as barbarian, specifically as Native American, like the iconic suburban street thugs called "Apaches." While terms like barbarism, civilization, vandalism, and Roman evoked Europe's own past, Native American imagery allowed French imperial chauvinism, exoticism, and othering to target Paris's suburbs, while drawing attention away from France's empire in Africa and Asia. This imagery, dating at least to Alexandre Dumas's serial novel *Les Mohicans de Paris* (1854–59), also conveyed subtle nostalgia for France' lost colonies in the Americas.[26] Such Native American imagery added ethnic and racial overtones to the otherwise nationalist notion that tramways threatened to "Americanize" France.

Paris's urban geography after the 1860 expansion of the city limits reflects a clear division of space by social class: as the city center gentrified, lost population, and centralized power, the priced-out working classes were increasingly pushed

26 Gérard Jacquemet, "La violence à Belleville au début du XXe siècle," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France* (1978): 141–167, 141–146 (on the "Apaches"); Jérôme Beauchez, "The Iconic Apache: Early 1900s Paris and the Making of a Criminal Bogeyman," *British Journal of Criminology* 64 (2024): 1405–1427.

into the peripheral districts and the suburbs. The wealthy core of Paris was surrounded by a ring of poverty frequently described as the capital's "margins" or "frontier," and linked with the neglected "Zone" of squatters and shantytowns just outside the city limits and the "red belt" of radicalized left-wing suburbs beyond.[27] This local center-periphery inequality illuminates the epithet "barbarians' tramway." Tramway critics accused progressive politicians of "vandalizing" the streets with tramlines that let savage suburbanites "invade" Paris. Tramway supporters, by contrast, thought it more barbaric to protest social and technological progress. However, given the size, diversity, and ideological specialization of the Paris press in this era, it is crucial to note that the language of civilization and barbarism was widely shared and appropriated for different purposes by authors from different classes and with different political perspectives. Parisians thus debated tramways as assets or threats to civilization by overlaying the capital region's class geography with images of far-flung cultures and continents. How could civilization and modernity coexist in a motorizing city with deep Roman roots? Could tramways share the Roman luster of aqueducts, catacombs, and triumphal arches?

III. Barbarian Tramways

The epithet "barbarians' tramway" emerged in 1897 when the General Omnibus Company (commonly CGO), which operated most Paris horsecars, opened a new horse-drawn line from the southern working-class suburb Montrouge to the church of Saint-Philippe-du-Roule in the wealthy western 8th Arrondissement (district). (See figure 3.) The opening followed months of centrist and right-wing editorials and organized local opposition, which found it fit for "barbarians."[28] *Le Petit moniteur universel* quipped that famed Greenland explorer Fridtjof Nansen could imagine a dog-drawn tram for "Eskimos," but not Parisians.[29] Conservative journalist Jules Claretie

27 John Merriman, *The Margins of City Life: Explorations on the French Urban Frontier, 1815–1851* (Oxford, UK, 1991); Tyler Stovall, *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt* (Berkeley, 1990).

28 "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 23 March 1897, 3; "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 25 March 1897, 2; "Assez! Nouvelle mutilation projetée," *La Presse*, 28 March 1897, 4. All French publications cited in this article were published in Paris unless otherwise stated.

29 "Echos du jour," *Le Petit moniteur universel*, 29 March 1897, 1.

Figure 3. Two horse trams pass each other on the Avenue des Gobelins. Photographic postcard dated by the sender to 1904, author's collection.

demanded "outcry" and "fury" against the "odious tramway." Recalling decades of Haussmannization, he expressed "fear" that new trams would wake Haussmann's "ghost" to continue his mutilation of the streetscape from beyond the grave.[30] Critics worried about traffic congestion, public safety, and above all monumental aesthetics. The new line crossed the east plaza of Paris's celebrated classically named avenue, the Champs-Élysées. American William Walton observed "the jealous care with which the Parisians guard the ornamental features of the Champs-Élysées."[31] Recalling tramway protests later, French socialist Paul Brousse similarly called Parisians "jealous of the beauty of their boulevards."[32] Although this was only the first tramline to be tarred "barbarians' tramway," the prestige of the Champs-Élysées ensured that protest of this line was particularly intense.

In April, conservative municipal and national politicians tried blocking the tramline with a state buyout and a police declaration of unsafety, but they were outvoted three to one. Leftists cheered this "democratic tramway," arguing that it "will not injure the appearance of the Champs-Élysées at all." Conservatives replied snidely, "The democratic tramway . . . will be pulled by democratic horses," and charged that the tramway and its supporters were barbaric threats to the cityscape, a trophy case of civilization.[33] One writer slurred suburban commuters: "Every day the barbarians make their descent

30 Jules Claretie, *La Vie à Paris* 1897 (Paris, 1898), 110; "Le tramway des barbares," 9 May 1897, 2; "À l'Hôtel de Ville," 21 May 1897, 2; "Les journaux de ce matin," 24 May 1897, 2, all in *Le Matin*.

31 William Walton, *Paris: From the Earliest Period to the Present Day* (Philadelphia, 1900), 8:83.

32 Paul Brousse and Albert Bassède, *Les transports* (Paris, 1912), 139.

33 "Les interpellations," *Le Matin*, 4 April 1897, 1; horses quote from "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 9 May 1897, 2; see also "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 25 May 1897, 2.

into the heart of Paris."[34] Independent journalist Edmond Lepelletier called them "hordes," "migrators," "Goths," and "Huns."[35] Critics imagined suburban barbarians invading the New Rome aboard tramways.

One periodical, the *Bibliothèque universelle et revue Suisse*, found these protests fickle and irrational, echoing Gustave Le Bon's recent theory of crowd psychology. Elite protest was an unlikely target for a theory emphasizing masses and mobs, but the editors made it fit. Le Bon diagnosed the masses as volatile and suggestible; thus, this publication argued that press misinformation created anti-tramway protest. First, like all French public works, tramways required an "inquiry of public utility" to officially collect public opinion about a project before approval. By offering no opinions or objections, citizens forfeited their chance to protest the tramway. Later, press invective about barbarism and vandalism "suddenly" stoked protest. Protestors villainizing this single tram ignored that four tramlines already crossed the Champs-Élysées, where accidents were rare. Thus, aesthetics and safety were less motivating than protestors claimed. The *Bibliothèque universelle* detected other motives derived from mass psychology and media influence.[36]

The new tram opened in mid-May, already "famous" (*fameux*) or "too famous" (*trop fameux*).[37] G. d'Azambuja, editorialist for the ultramontane Catholic paper *L'Univers,* wrote that the tramway had "won" its "duel" with the Champs-Élysées, raising aesthetic questions about the western "luxurious quarters" (*quartiers de luxe*) or "beautiful quarters" (*beau quartiers*). He mourned "the magnificence of ancient times." From Babylon's Hanging Gardens to the "splendors" of Nineveh, Thebes, Palmyra, and the "marvelous Roman Forum," classical grandeurs had "fallen into ruins" or vanished "beneath the sand." Such losses were "returns of barbary" (*retours de barbarie*). Less shrill than other critics, d'Azambuja offered a neoclassical elegy for civilizational change and loss.[38]

34 Quoted in Walton, *Paris*, 8:84.

35 Quoted in Faure, "Les invasions barbares," 106.

36 "Chronique Parisienne," *Bibliothèque universelle et revue Suisse*, May 1897, 378–387, at 380–381; Jean Robert, *Les Tramways Parisiens*, 3rd ed. (Neuilly-sur-Seine, 1992), 57, 79, 102–103.

37 "À travers Paris," *Le Petit Journal*, 19 May 1897, 3; "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 21 May 1897, 2.

38 G. d'Azambuja, "Ça et là: Quartiers de luxe," *L'Univers*, 22 May 1897, 1–2.

Close behind aesthetics and civilization were safety concerns. In the tramway's early weeks, papers from left-liberal *La Justice* to populist *Le Matin* discussed traffic congestion and accidents. Could pedestrians enjoy elegant streets swarmed with dangerous vehicles? Could residents safely navigate their neighborhoods? One consolation for critics was that the barbarians' tramway was horse-drawn, not motorized. Police manned its route to manage traffic, where one officer was hit by a small horse carriage (*fiacre*).[39] This accident emboldened critics to demand again that police shut down the tram for safety reasons, but the police sensibly blamed the carriage, not the tram.[40]

The now-famous tramway ran for two weeks until a new protest erupted (see figure 4). On May 28, 1897, organized working-class riders from Montrouge occupied the tram, turning this mobility machine into a protest and publicity machine. They hung a large fabric banner from the roof deck reading: "The Barbarians of Montrouge to the Recalcitrant Press." En route, protesters "shouted ultra-revolutionary slogans," and upon reaching the ritzy Avenue d'Antin, they rushed local bars and denounced the district's "savages." The Montrougians ironically embraced their own barbarity *and* condemned the bourgeois "savages" who would exclude them from western neighborhoods.[41] One protester told Catholic newspaper *La Croix*: "We are civilized people. And en route to Saint-Philipe-du-Roule!" — stressing that suburban worshipers took the tram to church.[42] Protesters threw civilization, Catholicism, and tramway protest back at conservatives.

Montrougians also bragged that "the Montmartrois, who have a reputation for wit, could have done no better," but later that summer, Montmartre's irreverent cabarets produced several satirical sketches entitled "The Barbarians' Tramway." One sketch featured a ridiculous cardboard tram dragging two sheep through a crowd of riotous protestors and harried police. Foreign observers also saw humor here. Britain's celebrated funny paper *Punch* printed a sing-song poem demanding,

39 "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 21 May 1897, 2; "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 21 May 1897, 2; "La Ville," *La Justice*, 22 May 1897, 2; "Le tramway des barbares," *L'Univers*, 23 May 1897, 5; "Première victime," *Le Matin*, 24 May 1897, 3; "Le tramway des barbares," *Gil Blas*, 25 May 1897, 3.

40 "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 25 May 1897, 2; "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 26 May 1897, 2; E. Bois-Glavy, "Le tramway des Champs-Elysées," *Le Journal*, 26 May 1897, 2.

41 "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 29 May 1897, 3 (all quotes this source); "Les 'barbares' de Montrouge," *L'Illustration*, 5 June 1897, 452; Walton, *Paris*, 8:83–84.

42 "Le tramway des barbares," *La Croix* (supplement) 30 May 1897, 3.

DEMONSTRATION ON THE CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES BY THE INHABITANTS, THE "BARBARES," OF MONTROUGE ON THE OPENING OF THE NEW TRAMWAY FROM THAT QUARTER IN MAY, 1897.

Figure 4. Illustration of the May 1897 Montrouge protest, from: William Walton, *Paris from Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Philadelphia, 1899), author's collection.

"Why this sudden *melée* / is a mad dog astray?"[43] From Paris's popular periphery in Montrouge and Montmartre to London, humorists parodied bourgeois tramway protests.

Some newspapers defended the Montrougians. Liberal *Le XIXe siècle* said suburban protesters were "justly aggrieved" (*justement froissés*) at being called "barbarian" because this tram, useful for so many, would "perhaps bother a few fancy ladies" (*gêne peut-être quelques belles madames*).[44] For this paper and *La Petite Presse*, the protesters rightly prioritized the public utility of infrastructure over the complaints of a few bourgeoises in fancy neighborhoods. Progressives thought tradition should bend to modernity.[45] In literary paper *Gil Blas*, Léo Trézenik offered a colorful defense of Montrouge's "barbarians" with a hint of irony. Calling the protestors "heroes" and "Huns," he strikingly likened them to Gallic king Vercingetorix, enemy of Julius Cesar. Trézenik also used chauvinistic Native American–inflected language against wealthy women as "squaws" (he used the English term) protecting their "wigwams." By pitting "Gauls" against wealthy women, he gendered male victors and female victims, blurring Gallic resistance to Roman imperialism and modern European imperialism in the Americas. He unmasked the "civilized"

43 Montmartre quote from Walton, *Paris*, 84; "A Paris Impromptu," *Punch* 29 May 1897, 262; "Tablettes Théatrales," *Le Matin*, 26 June, 27 June, 2 July, and especially 31 July 1897, all p. 4; "Spectacles Divers," *Gil Blas*, 26 June, 27 June, and 3 July 1897, all p. 3; "Courrier des Theatres," *La Justice*, 29 June 1897, 3.

44 "Les on-dit," *Le XIXe siècle*, 30 May 1897, 1.

45 "Echos et Nouvelles," *Le Petite Presse*, 1 June 1897, 1–2; "Echos et Nouvelles," *Le Pays*, 1 June 1897, 1–2.

residents of the wealthy 8th Arrondissement as foreign, American, racialized, and barbaric, while protesters defended the "democratic, socialist, and revolutionary" tramway.[46]

The next week, newspapers reported that pro-tramway activists had occupied cafés on the Avenue du Maine, along the tramway's route in the Left Bank 14th Arrondissement. Like the Montrougians and the *Bibliothèque universelle*, these protesters decried "offensive" (*désobligeant*) press bias and "partiality" in negative tramway coverage. One café owner hosting protesters said that Right Bank elites were "shocked" when "our blouses cross the Champs-Élysées." Signaling class conflict, he juxtaposed the iconic working-class *blouse* with the 8th district's "aristocrats."[47]

Controversy simmered into late 1897. Cabarets and theaters parodied the barbarians' tramway while newspapers chronicled its accidents. In June, two young men were hurt when the tramway toppled their tandem bicycle.[48] In August, the tram crushed a young boy named Henri Gadignon, severing his right foot.[49] Montmartre's satirical songwriters were watching the accident pages. A December cabaret tune featured a vendor on the Champs-Elysées selling first aid supplies to locals injured by the barbarians' tramway.[50]

As debate continued and *Le Figaro* demanded "mass protest" that never came, commentators revealed the national context of these local disputes — the public works preparing Paris, and especially its western neighborhoods, for the 1900 Universal Exposition.[51] *Le Pays* mourned the "death" of the Champs-Élysées, "decapitated" by the barbarians' tramway.[52] In October, the newspapers *Le Matin* and *La Justice* reported a plan to expand morning commute service on the barbarians' tramway for laborers building the exposition grounds.[53] A letter to leftwing *L'Aurore* from "Decagon" unfavorably likened the barbarians' tramway to the Gare d'Orléans train station (today the Musée d'Orsay) underway for 1900.[54] *L'Aurore* editorialist Eugène Thebault criticized the exposition as an

46 Léo Trézenik, "Les voyageurs à 15 Fr. le cent," *Gil Blas*, 31 May 1897, 1.

47 "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 6 June 1897, 3; "Le tramway des Champs-Elysees," *La Petite Presse*, 6 June 1897, 1. Alain Faure, "La blouse ouvrière au XIXe siècle: Les normes de la dignité," *Modes pratiques* 1 (2015): 148–173.

48 "Faits divers," *La Liberté*, 16 June 1897, 3; "Accident de voiture," *Le Pays*, 18 June 1897, 3.

49 "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 10 August 1897, 3.

50 "Les premières," *Le Gaulois*, 20 December 1897, 3.

51 "Échos: À travers Paris," *Le Figaro*, 22 June 1897, 1; see also: "À l'Hôtel de Ville," *Le Matin*, 14 June 1897, 3; "Les journaux de ce matin," *Le Matin*, 21 June 1897, 2; "Chronique Parisienne," *La Croix*, 22 June 1897, 3.

52 "L'exposition de 1900," *Le Pays*, 17 June 1897, 1–2, quotes 2.

53 "Conseil municipal," *Le Matin*, 19 October 1897, 2; "Le tramway des Champs-Elysees," *La Justice*, 20 October 1897, 2.

54 Decagone, "Cartes postales," *L'Aurore*, 27 October 1897, 1.

investment craze for financiers who would further damage the Champs-Élysées, already marred by the famous tramway.[55] While officials used the exposition to justify tramway expansion, the event raised national identity issues: How would France present itself to the world? For the exposition's harshest critics, the event embodied France's barbaric decline and tramways were merely symptomatic.[56]

In early 1898, the *Journal des transports*, an international review of railways and navigation, favorably reviewed a controversial CGO plan to motorize several horse trams. Among them was the barbarians' tramway, which the editors described pointedly: "the famous tramway . . . which [public] opinion, at an overexcited moment — but how artificially? — nicknamed 'the barbarians' tramway.'" With little elaboration, the editors portrayed the nickname as unfair and unfitting.[57] Weeks later, the equally progressive city administration journal *Revue municipale* made similar moves to rethink the nickname. Author A. Perrier welcomed motorization: horse trams, including the original barbarians' tramway, were backward and brutish, not because of aesthetics or class conflict, but rather for being technologically and socially outdated, "utilizing old horses, old cars, and perhaps even old habits." Like the Montrougians, Perrier gave the phrase "barbarians' tramway" a new and progressive meaning.[58]

In September 1898, the epithet barbarians' tramway touched a projected Trocadero–Neilly tram that would cross the Bois de Boulogne, one of Paris's two largest parks. Again, the beautiful quarters were at stake. Newspapers noted, as if recruiting protesters, that this project, like all public works, would require an inquiry of public utility with comment from the public.[59] *Le Petit journal* called it "A project of vandals."[60] In October, the conservative *Journal des débats*, moderate *Le Journal*, and progressive *Le Radical* used similar language to oppose motorized trams crossing the Place de l'Étoile, site of

55 Eugène Thebault, "L'Anse de panier," *L'Aurore*, 13 November 1897, 1.

56 Jacquemet, "La violence à Belleville," 158; Peter Soppelsa, "Paris's 1900 Universal Exposition and the Politics of Urban Disaster," *French Historical Studies* 36 (2013): 271–298.

57 Henry Haguet, "Le programme des omnibus," *Le journal des transports*, 22 January 1898, 37–38, quote 37.

58 A. Perrier, "Les tramways dans le département de la Seine: Question d'attelages," *Revue municipal*, 5 March 1898, 297–299, quote 297.

59 "Nouvelles diverses," *Journal des débats*, 15 September 1898, 3; "Chronique," *L'univers*, 15 September 1898, 3; "Nouvelles lignes de tramways," *Le Pays*, 16 September 1898, 5; "Courrier de Paris," *L'Illustration*, 24 September 1898, 194.

60 "Un projet de vandals," *Le petit journal*, 18 September 1898, 1.

the Arc de Triomphe.[61] In March 1899, municipal councilors rejected the proposed line.[62]

Such victories against tramway expansion were rare. In August 1899, the satirical paper *Le Journal amusant* mocked the capital's aesthetic defenders, citing Edmond Benoit-Levy's Society of Fine Arts and Friends of Paris, and reminding readers ironically that campaigns in the name of "art" against the Eiffel Tower and the original barbarians' tramway had succeeded (they failed). Surely, Benoit-Levy's new crusade against public advertisements would be equally successful! Like Montmartre's songwriters, this popular humorist mocked bourgeois tramway protests as laughable elitism.[63]

Later that year, a proposal to expand Romainville–Opera service projected a tram on the rue du 4-September in the central 2nd district. Organized residents petitioned the Minister of Public Works about this "barbarians' tramway" and "act of vandalism."[64] By January 1900, newspapers from nationalist *Le Figaro* to center-left *Le Temps* declared their opposition. Again, aesthetics and safety were not the only concerns. Historians Jacquemet and Faure showed that these protesters also sought to exclude workers from their neighborhood.[65] *Le Figaro* boasted of its sustained combat against barbaric tramways and noted that cycling magazine *Le Vélo* (the Bike) mounted its own campaign against a "tramway of death" on the Maisons-Lafitte bridge. The 300-meter-long bridge crowded two tram tracks that would normally require ten meters of width onto a six-meter-wide roadway, leaving little room for cyclists, equestrians, pedestrians, or automobilists to pass trams, tossing them all into a "murderous salad."[66] Despite ongoing debate about aesthetics and safety, Director of Works architect Joseph Bouvard, the head of public works for the department of the Seine, encouraged municipal councilors to stay optimistic about tramway growth.[67]

61 "Nouvelles diverses," *Journal des débats*, 14 October 1898, 3; "Nouvelles diverses," *Le journal*, 14 October 1898, 3; "Échos et nouvelles," *Le radical*, 15 October 1898, 2.

62 "À travers Paris," *Le Figaro*, 1 January 1899, 1; "'Tramway des barbares,'" *New York Herald*, 1 January 1899, 1; "Conseil Municipal de Paris," *Le petit parisien*, 25 March 1899, 2; "Conseil municipal," *Le Pays*, 26 March 1899, 4.

63 Xanrof, "Chronique," *Le journal amusant*, 19 August 1899, 5–6.

64 "Nouvelles diverses," *Journal des débats*, 27 December 1899, 2; "Echos de partout," *Le Petit Journal*, 27 December 1899, 2.

65 "À travers Paris," *Le Figaro*, 1 January 1900, 1; "Cela ne pouvait pas manquer," *Le Matin*, 1 January 1900, 3; "Le tramway de Romainville," *Le Temps* 11 January 1900, 2; "Le tramway de la rue du Quatre-Septembre," *Le Temps* 18 January 1900, 1; Jacquemet, "Voirie, transports et équipement urbain," 249n25; Faure, "Les invasions barbares."

66 "Le tramway de mort," *Le Figaro*, 1 January 1900, 4.

67 "À L'Hôtel de Ville," *La Lanterne*, 1 January 1900, 2.

Le Journal writer E. Bois-Glavy criticized the tramway opponents' "aristocratic instincts," asking "Are the proposed tramways so frightful?" The new 2nd district line, he wrote, would not only serve Romainville, but also connect the wider working-class periphery with the Right Bank's commercial core, satisfying a decade of suburban demand for access to central Paris. He reminded readers that the *Journal* had long opposed defiling the "*beau promenades*" and "mounted a vigorous campaign" against the original barbarians' tramway and the cancelled tram through the Bois de Boulogne. But this new 2nd district line was different. No "aesthetic pretext" could justify keeping tramways from busy streets that were "differently elegant" (*autrements élégantes*). Claiming that the line was useless because east Paris workers did not want Opera access was a "bad" or "cruel" joke (*mauvaise plaisanterie*). The new tram would ease commutes for those who worked far from home, raising questions of "true democracy" that the 2nd district's republican and radical politicians ought to recognize. "Before protesting," he ended, consider foreign cities, where tramways rode even the wealthiest, most elegant avenues. His full-throated defense of the proposed tram showed the geographic and conceptual limits of tramway criticism. While opposing tramways out west, he welcomed them elsewhere. His rhetoric blended familiar conservative critiques and democratic defenses of tramways.[68]

68 E. Bois-Glavy, "Le Tramway de la rue du 4-Septembre," *Le Journal*, 17 January 1900, 2.

Though these debates regarded specific districts and streets, their national significance resurfaced as the 1900 exposition approached. In March, independent rightist paper *L'Intransigeant* linked the barbarians' tramway to a project by French President Emile Loubet to renovate the Champs-Élysées, which it compared to recent national scandals, the Panama and Dreyfus Affairs. Using pitched rhetoric and veiled antisemitism, they called the president "[King] Panama I," a "provincial vandal" (*vandale montillien*) and a "sticky nougat" (*nougat poisseux*), too soft. "Uprooted" (*déraciné*) from Montélimar and "transplanted" in Paris, he therefore lacked

loyalty. The editorial ended by calling left-leaning municipal councilors allies of Dreyfus and Panama I, "idiots," "crooks" (*filous*) and "traitors." This nasty editorial combined claims of local loyalty and national identity, again articulated in gendered and ethnocentric terms.[69]

Days later in centrist *La Presse*, Léon Bailby called a new Charenton–Concorde "barbarians' tramway" an aesthetic "threat" to another elegant western plaza, the Place de la Concorde.[70] Soon the self-styled "progressive republican" paper *La Petite Presse* joined the chorus, calling a proposed tramway on the central *grands boulevards* "monstrous," "utilitarian," and "shameful." The editors bemoaned the "Americanism" inflicted upon this celebrated historic royal parade route by "engineers" and "financiers." National interest and patriotism, they argued, required resisting such attempts to turn Paris into New York or London.[71] The Liberal Catholic periodical *Le Correspondant* orientalized the trams, decrying "such mutilations, profanations, deformations, which will fatally end by making of the former aesthetic capital of the world the gigantic and vulgar caravan-station of the future democracy."[72] *Le Figaro*'s editors, consistently stoking protest, made their "nationalist" motives explicit while mourning that they could not save the Champs-Élysées.[73] Thus papers across the editorial spectrum blew religious, regional, and racial dog whistles, othering tramways as African, Asian, and American threats to French civilization. Such nationalist and xenophobic claims stood in tension with the ongoing "universal" exposition.

As *Le Figaro* recognized, the exposition not only buoyed nationalism symbolically, but also renewed conservative opposition to the Republic. The leftist majority on the municipal council lost several seats as the tramway controversies continued. From fall 1900 into 1901, conservatives, especially the vocal 8th district municipal councilors including Pierre Quentin-Bauchard, sustained tramway protest as another line threatened the Champs-Élysées.[74] Quentin-Bauchard

69 "Panama 1er Vandale," *L'Intransigeant*, 24 March 1900, 1.

70 "Nouveaux tramways," *La Presse*, 31 March 1900, 1.

71 L.S., "Un tramway sur les grands boulevards," *La Petite Presse*, 6 April 1900, 1.

72 "Les oeuvres et les hommes," *Le Correspondant*, vol. 198 (January-April 1900), 416.

73 "A la surface," *Le Figaro*, 11 May 1900, 1; E., "Notes d'un parisien," *Le Figaro*, 17 August 1900, 3.

74 "À l'Hôtel-de-Ville," *Le Journal*, 25 October 1900, 3; "Hôtel de Ville," *La Petite Presse*, 4 July 1901, 1–2; "Hôtel de Ville," *Le Pays*, 4 July 1901, 1–2; "Les tramways de Paris au Conseil Municipal," *Journal des transports*, 13 July 1901, 350.

repeated familiar anti-tramway rhetoric, for example echoing Jules Claretie with a "fear for the future."[75] Progressive *Le Radical* called these councilors "reactionary" and charged that they criticized tramways "at their ease" (*à leur aise*), in other words speaking too freely without regard for audience or context.[76]

Conservatives feared a future that would sacrifice form for function, leaving Paris "ugly" (*laid*). In the *Journal des débats*, Alcide Ebray argued that "the utilitarianism and industrialism of present times no longer respect anything."[77] Critics consistently cast such coarse modernization as American. Quentin-Bauchard had earlier pronounced, "Paris should not be treated like an American city," while Léon Bailby in *La Presse* warned that Paris would become "as brilliant, as new — and also as ugly — as Chicago."[78] From 1900 to 1902, the municipal council gradually softened limits on installing trolleys, briefly bringing them to the center of ongoing tramway debate.[79] After March 1902, when the CGO moved to motorize the original barbarians' tramway (see figure 1), *Le Petit Journal* moaned that "the too famous barbarians' tramway" was becoming "more and more barbaric!"[80] Months later, in an opinion piece, "The Cursed Trolley," for independent paper *L'Éclair*, L. Roger-Milès chided tramway critics who "reopened the faucet of municipal tears." They evinced "a sort of sentimental enfeeblement" (*affaiblissement sentimental*) that left them unable to distinguish monuments worth preserving from places worth rebuilding. The critics, he argued, exaggerated the streetscape's "immutability," taking preservation too far. Opposing all urban change only held Paris back.[81]

That same year, Paris's tramway troubles reached international audiences after Prime Minister Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau was injured when a tram hit his automobile. London's *Observer* and *Spectator* were watching, as was "all of Europe" according to the *Spectator*. The British *Electrical Engineer* reported that the crash reignited ongoing tramway debates in Vienna.[82] The *New York Times* posted updates on his

75 *Bulletin Municipal Officiel*, 2 July 1901, 2190–2194; *Bulletin Municipal Officiel*, 6 January 1902, 171–173, quote 172.

76 "Les travaux de Paris," *Le Radical*, 2 January 1901, 2; "Conseil municipal," *Le Radical*, 30 June 1901, 2 (quotes from this source).

77 Alcide Ebray, "Guillaume II et Berlin," *Journal des debats*, 29 October 1901, 2.

78 Quentin-Bauchard in "À l'Hôtel-de-Ville," *Le Journal*, 25 October 1900, 3; Léon Bailby, "Le nouveau jeu," *La Presse*, 20 November 1902, 1.

79 Soppelsa, "Paris's 1900 Universal Exposition"; Soppelsa, "Reworking Appropriation."

80 "Too famous" in "Echos de partout," *Le Petit journal*, 7 May 1902, 2; "barbaric" in "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Petit journal*, 24 March 1902, 2.

81 L. Roger-Milès, "Le trolley maudit," *L'Éclair*, 10 October 1902, 1.

82 "M. Waldeck-Rousseau's Accident," *The Observer*, 2 March 1902, 5; "News of the Week," *The Spectator*, 8 March 1902, 349; "Business Notes: Traction," *The Electrical Engineer*, 7 March 1902, 352–55, at 354.

recuperation over two weeks.[83] The Prime Minister's story reached the anglophone *Japan Weekly Mail* via French colonial Saigon and traveled as far as Australia and New Zealand papers.[84] At home, Paris independent *L'Évenement* connected his accident with familiar traffic and safety concerns, speculating that he might (now) support increased tramway regulation.[85]

In the early 1900s, the phrase barbarians' tramway faded without disappearing. In 1903, the conservative city of Versailles opposed a new "barbarians' tramway" from Paris.[86] Paul Gaulot, writing for women's magazine *Le monde modern et femme d'aujourdhui* (*The modern world and woman of today*) in 1904, called the "famous" tramway "picturesque."[87] Overtly positive but faintly dismissive, Gaulot's wording suggests that the tramway's bad reputation was slowly dwindling.

In 1905, when officials proposed another tramway in the Bois de Boulogne, controversy emerged around the threat to planted trees. The *promenade plantée* (planted promenade) was an essential urban form in the luxurious quarters, the nexus of bourgeois street life. It comprised rows of trees (especially chestnut) shading paved or gravel walking paths, often integrated into avenues, boulevards, plazas, or parks. Conservative *Le Figaro*, literary *Gil Blas*, and progressive *Le Radical* joined the critique.[88] Edmond Le Roy, in political journal *La revue diplomatique*, argued that times had changed since the barbarians' tramway opened. Parisians, he suggested, had greeted 1897's bourgeois protest with a populist and dismissive, "What does it matter to me! The Champs-Élysées is the quarter of the *aristos*" (aristocrats). By contrast, he argued, in 1905 luxurious locations like the Champs-Élysées and the Bois de Boulogne were filled each Sunday with visitors from across the region thanks to the Métro. As mass transit provided more comprehensive access to Paris, the tree-lined luxurious quarters were no longer an elitist enclave, but everyone's concern.[89] Like Bois-Glavy, Le Roy stitched together popular enthusiasm for mass transit and elite defense of western districts. In so doing, he revealed the reality of social mixing that elite tramway critics had long feared.

83 "Waldeck-Rousseau Hurt in an Accident," *New York Times*, 1 March 1902, 9; "French Premier's Condition," *New York Times*, 1 March 1902, 4; "Waldeck-Rousseau's Condition," *New York Times*, 3 March 1902, 9; "Waldeck-Rousseau Drives Out," *New York Times*, 14 March 1902, 9.

84 "Accident to M. Waldeck Rousseau," *Japan Weekly Mail*, 8 March 1902, 272; "Accident to the French Premier," *Morning Bulletin* (AU), 3 March 1902, 5; "Accident to French Premier," *Colonist* (NZ), 7 March 1902, 3.

85 Frontis, "Notes Parisiennes," *L'Événement*, 3 March 1902, 1.

86 "De Paris à Versailles et à Saint-Cloud," *Le petit journal*, 8 July 1903, 6.

87 Paul Gaulot, "La place Louis XV de 1757 à 1795," *Le monde moderne* 20, no. 1 (1904): 17–26, quote 18.

88 Le passant, "Le chute des arbres," *Le Figaro*, 14 September 1905, 1; Un parisien, "Bavardage," *Le Radical*, 16 September 1905, 1; Louis d'Hurcourt, "Propos du jour," *Gil Blas*, 24 September 1905, 1.

89 Edmond Le Roy, "La vie Parisienne," *La revue diplomatique*, 10 September 1905, 5.

A 1907 rant from *Le Figaro* titled "Destins," published a decade after the original protests, illustrates the continuing salience of these fears: "Oh universal Americanism! Oh the vandalism of governance! Oh ramparts of Avignon! Oh barbarians' tramway! Oh the plague of democracy!" This remarkable exclamation connected tramways with foreign influence, republican government, historical preservation, and democracy in a dramatic lament about declining civilization. *Le Figaro* linked democracy with leveling, a mass culture that valued "quantity" over "quality," lessening classical aristocratic virtues like distinction and excellence.[90]

The editors of building magazine *La Construction moderne* addressed *Le Figaro*'s pitched tone and advocated balancing urban development with historical preservation. They noted that "today every administration is accused, and sometimes charged [*atteinte*] and convicted [*convaincue*] of vandalism. When it's not a crime [*délit*], it's at least a sickness [*epidémie*]."[91] This quote reveals that charges of "vandalism" could be widespread and unfair. *La Construction moderne* validated traffic, safety, aesthetics, and preservation as planning issues, but joined other specialized periodicals in cooling debate by contesting the tone of heated newspaper editorials and political oratory.

In 1909, the 8th district's municipal councilors made their swan song, proposing pedestrian tunnels under the Champs-Élysées to bypass the barbarians' tramway and renewed limits on trolleys to slow tramway electrification.[92] These proposals were interrupted by major changes in transport governance: the 1910 expiration of the CGO's 1860 charter and the 1913 withdrawal of all remaining horsecars.[93] Now Paris's tramway debates declined more quickly. Except for the central 2nd district, most tramway protest from 1897 to 1909 occupied a discrete wealthy western area: the neighboring 8th and 16th districts and the Bois de Boulogne. As journalist-politician Gabriel "Mermeix" Terrail wrote in 1911, western anti-tramway

90 "Destins," *Le Figaro* 20 June 1907, 1.

91 "Actualités," *La Construction Moderne*, 29 June 1907, 457–459, quote 458.

92 *Bulletin Municipal Officiel*, 20 February 1909, 922–923; "Pour faciliter la circulation," *Le Temps*, 21 February 1909, 3; "Echos de partout," *Le Gaulois*, 27 February 1909, 1.

93 Peter Soppelsa, "The End of Horse Transportation in Belle Epoque Paris," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 24 (2017): 113–129.

organizing revealed the area's "aristocratic pretentions."[94] The elitism and nostalgia of these loudest tramway protests increasingly clashed with early-twentieth-century notions of modernity.

A 1914 article about traffic congestion reprinted in *Le Pays* and *La Petite Presse* asked, given growing tramway traffic, "Where are the furors which unleashed themselves previously during the implementation of the famous barbarians' tramway . . . ?"[95] But the fury was subsiding. As electric tramways became normalized, neoclassicism receded, and charges of "barbarism" lost their sting. In 1921, leftist paper *Le Cri de Paris* asked "How many Parisians still remember" the barbarians' tramway. Personnel on the Montrouge–Gare de l'Est line jokingly called each other "barbarians," calling out, "En route, les Barbares!" The editors wondered whether these employees "knew the original sense of the nickname."[96] In 1925, *L'Intransigeant*, which earlier railed against the barbarians' tramway and the exposition in ethnocentric and nationalist terms, now celebrated tramways as cosmopolitan tools of social mixing and proof of Parisians' "Roman blood."[97] These shifts in the epithet's meaning, from negative and anti-Roman to positive and Roman, and from currency to memory, help pinpoint when and why tramway protest ended.

Though charges of barbarism resonated less in interwar Paris, they were still deployed more broadly in diagnosing the decline of Western civilization associated with Oswald Spengler in Germany and Georges Duhamel in France. Across the twentieth century, French sources described the barbarians' tramway as a curious artifact of collective memory.[98] Demographer René Martial wrote in 1933, "Forty years ago, the so-called 'tramways of penetration,' departing the suburbs to reach the center of Paris, began to disfigure the latter. It was the tramway from Montrouge which, crossing the roundabout of the Champs-Élysées, received the name barbarians' tramway. But it was only the first."[99]

94 Mermeix Gabriel Terrail, *L'Angleterre: Aspects inconnus* (Paris, 1911), 8.

95 "La vie municipale," *Le Pays*, 17 January 1914, 2; "La vie municipale," *Le Petite Presse*, 18 January 1914, 2.

96 "Les 'Barbares,'" *Le Cri de Paris*, 12 June 1921, 7.

97 André Laphin, "Où l'on parle du tramway des 'Barbares,'" *L'Intransigeant*, 8 December 1925, 1–2.

98 Robert Dieudonné, "Les nouveau visages de Paris," *La nouvelle revue feminine*, 1 August 1933, 120–123; "À travers Paris," *Le Figaro*, 3 January 1950, 7; Jean Galtier-Boissière, *Mémoires d'un Parisien* (Paris, 1960), 37.

99 René Martial, "Le mouvement de population dans les villes," *Annales d'hygiène publique, industrielle et sociale,* series 11, no. 10 (October 1933): 541–565, quote 562.

Conclusion

Tramway critics coined the phrase "barbarians' tramway" in 1897 to link mass transit with the perceived dangers of modernity: speed, accidents, democracy, and Americanization. These wealthy, bourgeois, conservative, Catholic, reactionary, and populist Parisians sought to save the "New Rome" from modernization. But pro-tramway protests soon appropriated the phrase, reinforcing the centrality of modernity and democracy. Republicans, socialists, sympathetic journalists, humorists, workers, and commuters from the 14th district and suburbs from Montrouge to Romainville celebrated tramways, casting these mobility machines as vehicles of democracy and equality. They welcomed a progressive French civilization, technologically enhanced by electrification and motorization. While elitists called trams and their defenders "barbaric," the public flocked to them, celebrating their accessibility as "democratic" and "ten-centime" tramways.[100] The annual number of tramway riders grew from around 58 million in 1879 to peak at 700 million in 1928, expanding over tenfold as the epithet came and went.[101]

Growing mobility especially benefited suburban workers. As Martial noted, several "barbarian" tramways joined a regional "network of penetration" intended to connect city and suburbs. Increasing radial mobility in-and-out of Paris destabilized the centuries-old geography distinguishing the spaces within (*intra muros*) and beyond (*extra muros*) the city walls or limits. Tramways increased suburbanites' access to the city center. This core-periphery geography reveals the spatial meanings of the epithet, which expressed fear of social mixing and leveling caused by mass transit. Tramway critics revived classical terminology to express this fear as the barbarian invasion and sack of civilization, and the dilution of Frenchness by African, Asian, and American influences. Critics othered suburban "barbarians" as Goths, Huns, Apaches, and Eskimos. Importantly, progressive reversals of barbarian

100 "Les Tramways à 0.10 centimes," *L'Éclair*, 19 June 1896; "Les tramways à dix centimes," *L'Éclair*, 24 October 1897.

101 Robert, *Les Tramways Parisiens*, 527.

language, for example heroicizing "Gauls," underscored its familiarity and rhetorical force. Parisians appropriated tramways as tools of class conflict, cultural negotiation, even protest, reshaping the French watchword "civilization" for a modernizing era of democratization, electrification, and motorization. The epithet "barbarians' tramway" served both elitist/exclusive and popular/inclusive tramway protests as motorization transformed Paris streets.

This epithet had local, national, and transnational meanings. Locally, it meant specific tram lines, but also suggested that all trams were a bit barbaric. Nationally, it reflected deep questions about French identity's Gallic and Roman roots and its foreign influences, "American," "Oriental," or otherwise. Transnationally, Paris's debates connected and compared with tramway controversies in other cities, for example echoing the focus on fares analyzed by Hobsbawm and Fujii. Although Paris saw limited sabotage and violence against trams, mostly during worker strikes, its tramway protests were more peaceful than those elsewhere. Yet Paris' debates were fierce and fiery, waged in open conflict over society, urban form, and the future. Whether Paris was Roman, Gallic, French, or American, beautiful or ugly, civilized or barbaric, traditional or modern, tramways raised questions about what kind of city Parisians wanted to inhabit.

It is significant that tramways signaled foreign influence in both Paris, an imperial capital, and in Asian and Latin American cities under European influence (whether colonized or not). The connections of tramways and civilization were relevant transnationally amid imperialism and globalization. Paris's tramway discourse was transnational both because Parisians compared their capital to places outside France and because British, Swiss, Australian, New Zealander, Japanese, and U.S. observers watched Paris. Foreign intellectuals offer further evidence of widespread connections between tramways and civilization. Spanish author Antonio Azorin illustrated "a more horrid barbarity than in ancient times" by

recounting an old man crushed by a tram.[102] In 1910, Henry James charged U.S. streetcars with "a savagery and ruthlessness beyond conception."[103] In his noted 1917 lecture "Science as a Vocation," Max Weber invoked tramways and barbarians to illustrate modern "disenchantment." He wrote, "Unless he is a physicist, one who rides the streetcar has no idea how the car happened to get in motion." By contrast, "the savage knows incomparably more about his tools." Further left, Walter Benjamin reversed barbarism, claiming that World War I's "monstrous" technologies unleashed a "barbarism" unrecognizable to older generations who "had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars."[104] Contemporary Argentine writer Ricardo Rojas also inverted barbarism. In characterizing modern cities he wrote, "barbarians do not ride horses but tramways."[105] These thinkers invoked tramways and barbarism to portray a modern world transformed by technology. Paris's tramway debates thus nested within transnational discourses about modernity, technology, and civilization, which often paired tramways and barbarism. Although the "barbarians' tramway" had local and national significance for Paris, the global resonance of its tramway debates suggests a larger story yet to be told about how tramways mattered in familiar debates about modernity and civilization that gripped the age of empire.

102 Lily Litvak, *A Dream of Arcadia: Anti-Industrialism in Spanish Literature, 1895–1905* (Austin, 2014), 84.

103 Ted Morgan, *Maugham* (New York, 1980), 167.

104 Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (New York, 1958), 139; Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller Essays* (New York, 2019), 42–48.

105 Michela Coletta, *Decadent Modernity: Civilization and 'Latinidad' in Spanish America, 1880–1920* (Liverpool, 2018), 88n8.

Peter Soppelsa is an assistant professor in the Department of History of Science, Technology, and Medicine at the University of Oklahoma. His book *Inverting Haussmannization: Living with Infrastructure in Paris, 1870-1914* is under contract with the University of Pittsburgh Press.

Controlling Spaces, Creating Identities: Penitentiary Agricultural Colonies for Young Detainees, from Nineteenth-Century France to Early Soviet Ukraine

Anna Christine Grant
Occidental College

Children share with criminals the burden of heightened surveillance and reduced agency. From the Enlightenment to the present day, young lawbreakers, combining these two categories in one, have attracted special attention, anxiety, and attempts at control. Studying juvenile detention can thus reveal how people use built and natural environments to elicit desired behaviors. Prior to the early nineteenth century, European nations generally made no special provision for judging or punishing child criminals differently than adults, although magistrates might apply a more lenient variant of the prescribed penalty. It was in the context of the rapid urbanization associated with industrialization which took place during this period that the juvenile criminal was first defined as a distinct type.[1] Although villages continued to have their share of child thieves and vagabonds, in city streets the concentration of young pickpockets, panhandlers, and prostitutes made them newly visible and, to wealthier citizens, a recognizable

1 See for example Margaret May, "Innocence and Experience: The Evolution of the Concept of Juvenile Delinquency in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Victorian Studies* 17 (1973): 7–29; Heather Shore, "Inventing and Re-Inventing the Juvenile Delinquent in British History," *Memoria y Civilización* 14 (2011): 105–132.

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hazard of urban life. Yet it was in rural spaces that the first institutions designed specifically for young lawbreakers were created. The pioneer was the Mettray penitentiary agricultural colony, founded in 1839 near the city of Tours in central France. Its founders reshaped a rural space to address an urban problem.

Eight decades later, the nascent Soviet regime faced a massive wave of homeless and criminal children who had been orphaned, lost, or abandoned due to seven years of wars and revolutions and consequent displacement and famine. Children congregated in cities, where they could survive by petty theft, begging, or scavenging, and which they could reach easily by stowing away on or under a train carriage. State agencies and volunteer associations scrambled to help, although they were often overwhelmed by the scale of the problem and the paucity of funds and material.[2] One resource available to administrators was the handful of penitentiary agricultural colonies founded by late–Russian Empire philanthropists and patterned after Mettray. Because Mettray had become known internationally as the best model for reforming delinquent youth, its distinctive layout and practices were adopted in a range of contexts, including, from the 1870s, in Russia.[3] Many Russian reformers in the late nineteenth century looked on western practices as a roadmap to a modern and prosperous state. The colonies' capacity fell far short of the need, and thus do not represent the full extent of the response to the unhoused children crisis, but they were a direct, material link with the previous philanthropic system.

Unlike the earlier philanthropists, however, Soviet educators did not subscribe to a nostalgic view of rural virtues; rather, their Marxist ideology elevated the urban proletariat as the revolutionary class. When they sent troubled youth to the countryside, it was out of pure necessity.[4] The best-known of these new Soviet institutions was the Gorky Labor Colony, founded in 1920 near Poltava, Ukraine, by a former schoolteacher and future novelist named Anton Makarenko. He

2 Alan M. Ball, *And Now My Soul Is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918–1930* (Berkeley, CA, 1994), 108–26.

3 Marie-Sylvie Dupont-Bouchat and Éric Pierre, eds., *Enfance et justice au XIXe siècle: essais d'histoire comparée de la protection de l'enfance, 1820–1914: France, Belgique, Pays-Bas, Canada* (Paris, 2001); Felix Driver, "Discipline Without Frontiers? Representations of the Mettray Reformatory Colony in Britain, 1840–1880," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3 (1990): 272–293; Jeroen J. H. Dekker, "Punir, sauver et éduquer: La colonie agricole 'Nederlandsch Mettray' et la rééducation résidentielle aux Pays-Bas, en France, en Allemagne et en Angleterre entre 1814 et 1914," *Mouvement Social*, no. 153 (1990): 63–90; Christine Grant, "Grazing the Limits of Provincial Philanthropy," *Peripheral Histories?*, peer-reviewed blog, April 16, 2021, https://www.peripheralhistories.co.uk/post/grazing-the-limits-of-provincial-philanthropy.

4 Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (Cambridge, UK, 1993), 63.

claimed that his methods, based on nurturing a functioning children's collective, could produce proletarians from the very soil that would otherwise sprout peasants and exploiters.

Because the renowned Gorky Colony was first established on the site of the late-tsarist Poltava Agricultural Colony and Industrial Asylum, it inherited a material configuration originally devised at Mettray, transmitted via transnational networks, and adapted with limited success to a Russian Imperial provincial context. Makarenko's diligent work, both practical and discursive, to use this space in ways that explicitly contradicted the values embedded in it under the previous regime sprang from an awareness of what Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennett have termed "material powers." They have called on historians to take account not only of "the distinctive kinds of effectivity that material objects and processes exert as a consequence of the positions they occupy within specifically configured networks of relations that always include human and non-human actors" but also of "the difference they make in their own right as a consequence of their specific material properties considered relationally."[5]

Applying this lens of material powers to the Mettray and Gorky Colonies reveals several processes at play. A material configuration — in this case, a penitentiary agricultural colony — is explicitly designed both as a representation of a certain conception of how social relations should be ordered, and as a tool to implement that order. Over time, it is further shaped by the everyday practice of this system of order. The founders of Mettray, believing in the power of environments to determine identity and actions, intentionally designed the material configuration of the colony to elicit a set of actions and affects that they viewed as both a means to inculcate, and an expression of, an honest character. This material configuration consisted of buildings, objects such as uniforms, furniture, and tools, the movement of children's bodies along designated routes and performing designated actions, and the natural environment in which the colony was situated. At the

5 Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennett, "Material Powers: Introduction," in *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* (Oxford, UK, 2010), 5. Other authors who have theorized the relationship between societal norms and the built environment include Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words," *American Historical Review* 110 (2005): 1015–1045 and Nancy Rose Hunt, "History as Form, with Simmel in Tow," *History and Theory* 57 (2018): 126–144.

moment of its founding, the colony embodied its founders' ability to exercise power over the space and its inmates. This power relation became, in a sense, petrified, set into the stone and other materials of the colony's physical existence and destined to persist after the original founders had disappeared — or so the founders of Mettray hoped, and Makarenko feared.

When Mettray-style colonies appeared in tsarist Russia, they imitated the original design, but because the philanthropists' power to command space was limited by the relative poverty of the country and by the autocratic state's heavy hand on civil society, the material configuration of the colonies did not exactly reproduce the original model. The power relations thus embedded into the physical sites were those of the tsarist-era philanthropists, influenced by Western models and Russian conditions. At first, Makarenko, like other early Soviet educators, had few resources available to reconfigure these spaces, but his actions and writings make it clear that in directing his colonists to use the spaces in ways that reflected and supported the new, Soviet regime, he recognized and resisted the power of material things to entrench a social order despite its political defeat.

Considering the two model institutions, the Mettray and Gorky Colonies, in a single transnational and comparative frame facilitates evaluation of different approaches to youth criminality and reveals the extent to which ideology and culture shape solutions to similar problems in different contexts. This paper considers one aspect of the comparison: how, in each case, rural spaces were made to solve a problem and serve a population understood as predominantly urban. In each case children were rhetorically constructed as urban, even when their origins were in fact rural. In nineteenth-century France, colony directors created spaces that were tightly regulated and designed to elicit desired behaviors. In Anton Makarenko's narrative, it is the children's collective that is portrayed as transforming and controlling various degraded rural spaces in the name of the proletariat.

I. Mettray: Shaping physical spaces to guide behavior

Beginning in 1810, France's Penal Code provided for children under sixteen to be acquitted of crimes they had committed if a judge believed they had acted "without discernment," and to be sent back to their families, or, if no suitable family existed, to a "house of correction."[6] However, since there were in fact no houses of correction, judges in the next three decades faced the dissatisfying choice of returning children to dysfunctional families or sending them to local prisons. Some of these institutions began to construct separate wings for juveniles to protect them from adult detainees, but with no special adaptations to the needs of children. In 1839, one of these judges, Frédéric-Auguste Demetz, together with his friend, former military officer *vicomte* Louis-Hermann de Brétignières de Courteilles, founded the Colony of Mettray to address this lacuna. Run by a private charitable society, the *Société Paternelle*, and funded by a combination of public funds and private donations supplemented by the labor of the young detainees themselves, the colony accepted male youth acquitted under the penal code who had nonetheless been sent to prisons because they had no family deemed capable of raising them. Demetz intended Mettray to accept boys whose conduct in prison had been good and who deserved a gentler regime, although as the colony grew this principle was abandoned. Beginning with just eight "colonists" in early 1840, Mettray housed around 800 at its peak in 1874.[7] This figure represented just under 15% of the 5,383 young male detainees living in privately-run colonies in that year; a further 2,268 were held in state-run prisons or colonies. Girls were administered separately, and there were just over two thousand young female detainees, almost all in private institutions, in 1874.[8] Once at Mettray, boys received a primary-school education, and worked to grow various crops, tend livestock, or learn crafts and trades that would prepare them to settle in rural areas on their release.[9]

6 *The Penal Code of France, Translated into English with a Preliminary Dissertation and Notes* (London, 1819), Article 66.

7 Anna Christine Grant, "Model Colonies: A Transnational Study of Penitentiary Agricultural Colonies for Young Detainees in France, Russia, and the Soviet Union, 1839–1937" (PhD diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 2019), 38-42.

8 Henri Gaillac, *Les Maisons de correction: 1830-1945* (Paris, 1991), 181–84. By 1874, Mettray's example had inspired other private individuals or societies to found a network of similar colonies across France.

9 For a history of the Mettray colony see for example Luc Forlivesi, Georges-François Pottier, and Sophie Chassat, eds., *Éduquer et punir: la colonie agricole et pénitentiaire de Mettray, 1839–1937* (Rennes, 2005); Stephen A. Toth, *Mettray: A History of France's Most Venerated Carceral Institution* (Ithaca, NY, 2019); Grant, "Model Colonies."

Mettray was a rural space, but it was designed to serve the needs of an urban population. As one supporter of Mettray wrote in 1847, Mettray and its imitators "diminish the population that encumbers cities, and weaken that excessive competition that, in one blow, crushes workers twice by lowering salaries and at the same time raising the price of essential goods."[10] Urban workers under economic stress could turn to crime or to political unrest; by reducing these stresses, urban elites made their own lives more secure.

Because they relied in part on private donations, Mettray's founders and patrons produced a discourse about juvenile crime designed to engage public support. In this discourse, juvenile crime is defined as primarily the result of urban life. In cities, they argued, when overworked or morally corrupt parents failed to keep their children disciplined, it was too easy for them to escape the authority of priests or employers, shirk productive work, and be enticed by cabarets and immoral entertainment. At their society's inaugural general meeting, Mettray's founders decried city life as "the abyss of corruption," an "impure atmosphere" for young people's moral and physical health. To "preserve them for the future from dangerous frequentations," boys at Mettray were encouraged to "love and taste the charms" of agrarian life, which was "more in keeping with our natural needs" than the manmade attractions of the metropolis.[11] The rural setting itself, construed as closer to nature (a milieu uncorrupted by human intervention, compatible with good health and evoking an imagined, more innocent time in human history), was understood to possess the inherent power to transform.[12] Indeed, Mettray's founders fully shared the faith of fellow-reformer Charles Lucas in "amending the child by the land, and the land by the child."[13]

This discourse did not include young female detainees, who were generally expected to perform domestic labor.

10 Augustin Cochin, *Notice sur Mettray* (Paris, 1847), 2, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k63889q.

11 Archives départementales d'Indre-et-Loire (hereafter AD37) 1Y 103, Assemblée générale des fondateurs de la Colonie de Mettray, 7 June 1840, speech by Société Paternelle president Adrien de Gasparin, 6-7.

12 For a discussion of the positive values attached to nature in the modern West, see for example Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York, 1973); William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York, 1995), 69–90. Mettray's founders said little about any spiritual or psychological benefit working-class children could gain from being close to nature; in this period, such discourses applied primarily to the affluent, educated classes. For a discussion of concepts of nature applied to the urban poor, see Anna Christine Grant and Jeremia Njeru, "Sunlight and Free Markets: An Urban Political Ecological Perspective on Social Housing in Victorian London (1850–1914)," *Urban History* 50 (2023): 424–444.

13 For a concise account of the life and work of Charles Lucas, see Dupont-Bouchat and Pierre, *Enfance et justice*, 38–43.

Because this kept them confined indoors, it did not greatly signify whether the outside world presented them a rural or an urban face. Until the 1880s, when republican-dominated governments stopped cooperating with religious groups to provide correctional services, these girls were entrusted to charitable orders of nuns, often housed in towns. Here, they learned domestic skills such as needlework, which brought in little money. An 1873 penitentiary commission warned that women in cloistered orders, being cut off from the outside world, were ill-prepared to help young detainees reintegrate into it.[14] Although the commission encouraged the charitable orders to found agricultural colonies, only a few were ever created.[15]

Colony founders believed that a rural setting would help young male offenders develop hard work, honesty, and thrift, but they expressed a certain disapproval of the men and women who already inhabited these spaces, viewing them as backward, slow, dirty, and disinclined to respect their superiors. Having trained in modern farming methods which were informed by an agricultural research station on the site, former colonists were expected to settle in rural districts, acting as agents of modernization by helping "to uproot those old routines to which our peasants cling so tightly only because they defy the examples and advice given to them by men who are placed above them."[16] Only when subjected to order and hierarchy would a rural setting bring forth honest laborers from lawbreaking children. This desire for order was reflected in the highly symmetrical layout of the colony, with its chapel, workshops, and houses regularly spaced around a central square (Figure 1). Such symmetry did not prevent a Russian visitor to Mettray, Nikolai Shcherban', from experiencing the colony in 1864 as the true image of what rural life could be:

> There was no trace of artificiality in it. Everything around was perfectly natural, as if it had not been put there but had taken shape all by itself; one did not think of a house of correction, but it seemed as if we were standing in the square of a small hamlet,

14 Gabriel-Paul-Othenin d'Haussonville, *Les établissements pénitentiaires en France et aux colonies* (Paris, 1875), 473.

15 The Nazareth colony near Angers was the best known of these, but it gave its founder "many crosses" to bear: Augustin Nicq and Henri Pasquier, *La Vénérable Marie de Ste Euphrasie Pelletier, Fondatrice de La Congrégation Du Bon-Pasteur d'Angers* (Arras and Paris, 1901), 251, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9752173r.

16 AD37 1Y 105, Assemblée générale des fondateurs de la Colonie de Mettray, 23 January 1842, 17.

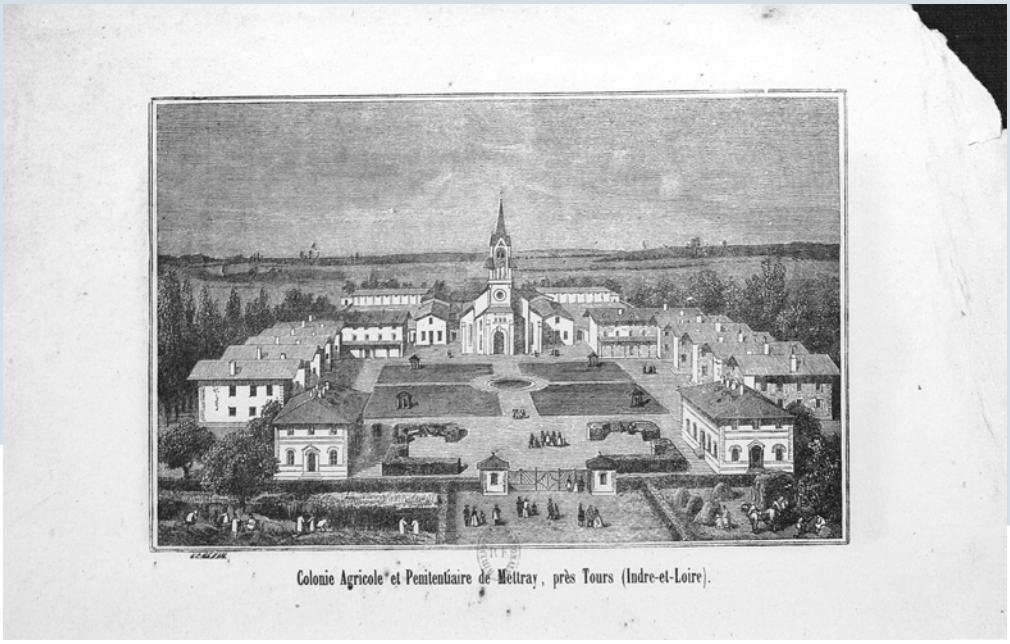

Figure 1. This engraving of the Colony of Mettray was first produced and distributed to potential supporters in 1846, at a time when only a few of the buildings portrayed had been built. Symmetrically laid out and presided over by the central chapel, the colony's buildings embody order and submission to religion. The buildings' position around a central square recalls France's urban *grandes places* on a modest scale. Source: Frédéric Auguste Demetz, *Notice sur la colonie agricole de Mettray* (Tours, France, 1865), Bibliothèque nationale de France, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k378430r.

> whose inhabitants had gone off to work in the fields, leaving only the artisans and youngsters at home. Only the ship in the middle of the yard recalled that all this had been *built,* and built with a particular goal.[17]

A well-ordered agricultural colony promised all the benefits of country life without the poverty, dirt, or disorder endemic to actual rural conditions.

Mettray's leaders, therefore, shaped the physical environment in which colonists lived, and imposed routines to script their movements through it. Amenities in the colony were kept deliberately simple and Spartan, to prevent boys from becoming accustomed to a standard of living that they would not be able to attain in future through honest labor. To foster quasi-familial feelings between boys and their supervisors, they lived not in a large dormitory, but in "small houses, each consisting of two rooms, and affording under one roof

17 Nikolai Vasil'evich Shcherban', "Metre - ispravitel'naia koloniia dlia maloletnykh prestupnikov. Iz dorozhnykh zametok. Stat'ia pervaia," *Otechestvennyia Zapiski*, no. 168, September 1866, 389. The so-called "ship" was a set of masts and rigging set up in Mettray's central square, where boys, particularly those interested in a naval career, could practice useful skills. The equipment was a gift from the Ministry for the Navy.

working, eating, and sleeping accommodation for a 'family' of forty boys and their superintending officers, two in number," known as "fathers" of the families.[18] A "father" at Mettray spent almost every non-working moment with his charges: "he takes his meals at the same table, he sleeps in the same dormitory as his pupils; he never leaves them or loses sight of them."[19] Like a real father, he shared the home lives of his children.[20] Each supervisor had a separate sleeping room in the family cottage from which he could observe his charges through a small grille without being seen. This technique draws from the Panopticon, a nineteenth-century prison design comprising a central watchtower from which a guard could observe inmates housed in cells arranged around it. Because the inmates could not see into the watchtower to know whether they were being observed, the design encouraged them to regulate their own behavior at all times, and eventually to internalize the moral values on which the prison's rules were based.[21] The boys slept in hammocks, and to prevent them talking during the night, their orientation alternated, one with his head near the wall, the next near the center of the room. Bugle calls punctuated their days, indicating when to get up, wash, eat, go to work or attend lessons, and so on.

These technologies were intensified in the colony's punishment quarter. Boys whose misbehavior was deemed rebellious or harmful to morale — including some unlucky early colonists who guilelessly admitted they preferred the sheltered industrial workshops of their former prison to field labor in the wind and rain at Mettray — were sent to small solitary confinement cells where their only human contact was during visits from the director or chaplain.[22] For an infraction such as encouraging others to disobey their supervisors, solitary incarceration could drag on for months.[23] Slogans painted on the cell walls, such as "God sees you," encouraged detainees to reflect on their actions and repent.[24] The cells were attached to the chapel building, and incarcerated boys

18 Matthew Davenport Hill, *Our Exemplars, Poor and Rich* (London, 1861), 263.

19 AD37 114J 579, copy of article from *La France*, 8 August 1839.

20 Michel Foucault described the "fathers" as "technicians of behaviour: engineers of conduct, orthopedists of individuality," *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 1995), 294. Foucault did not believe that skilled affective labor rendered the carceral framework less burdensome, but that by using affective labor to manipulate children's emotions so that they willingly participated in their own rehabilitation, Mettray's "fathers" merely disguised the power they exerted.

21 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195-230.

22 AD37 114J 187, Assemblée générale des fondateurs de la Colonie de Mettray, 1841, 31.

23 AD37 114J 584, unsigned, undated manuscript of an account of a visit to Mettray [1850s].

24 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, 294*.

could observe religious services without seeing or being seen by the other colonists.

In addition to being guided by the physical environment, colonists were taught to give their actions and those of their supervisors an approved interpretation. These supervisors, or "fathers," were encouraged to view their charges with genuine affection with a view to that affection being returned and serving as motivation for boys to please them through good behavior. But they also used a system of reward and punishment, instrumentalizing peer pressure, collective responsibility, and the sense of honor.[25] Few sources capture the voices of the detainees themselves, but letters from some freed colonists, as well as accounts of their words and actions in the narratives of the colony's directors and visitors, follow a familiar pattern: repentance for their former misdeeds, gratitude for the instruction received, and exhortation to those who remained in the colony to submit to discipline and attain a successful future. For example, in a New Year's greeting at the end of 1882, former colonist Audfray scripted out this call-and-response between his letter and its audience: "I think you will put my advice into practice, and to prove it I ask you, when your benefactors read you this letter on the platform on Sunday, all of you to lift your right hand and say I swear before God and before my benefactors . . ."[26] On Sunday evenings, during the early years of the colony, Demetz and Brétignières would read these letters, as well as other uplifting stories of heroic young Frenchmen or repentant miscreants, to an assembly of the whole colony, providing a model narrative that colonists could and did use to claim the identity of honest, reformed, and trustworthy citizens: "All colonists placed far from Mettray feel the need to correspond with us, and with their comrades to whom they often address the best of advice."[27] Colony directors designed the natural and built environment to guide the boys' behavior, but they did not rely upon it alone to reform them. Rather they scripted and choreographed the boys' movement through, and understanding

25 Foucault, 294.

26 See for example AD37 114J 585 (*Livre d'or*), extract of letter from former colonist Audfray, 30 December 1882, and other letters collected and transcribed into this ledger; AD37 114J 584, unsigned, undated [but c. 1850s] manuscript of an account of a visit to Mettray, which describes the tearful repentance of a boy in the punishment cell.

27 AD37 1Y 108, Assemblée générale des fondateurs de la Colonie de Mettray, 22 June 1845, directors' report read by Demetz, 17.

of, the colony, trusting that this would help them to internalize its values.

A visitor's account preserved in Mettray's archives reveals Demetz's skill at using punitive spaces and choreographing different actors' movements through them to provoke repentance and ensure cooperation on the part of his colonists. After accompanying the visitor on a tour of the colony, Demetz showed him a letter from a sixteen-year-old Breton who had been confined to the punishment cell after encouraging others to disobey their supervisors. The straitened conditions had induced the boy to ask for forgiveness: "Dear sir, I am still in the cell. If you knew how sad my existence is, locked up like this for 7 [sic] long months between four walls, working continually, receiving neither compliments nor rewards, oh! Director, sir, you would not leave me to languish like this." The letter touched the heart of the visitor, who accompanied Demetz to the boy's cell where he witnessed the boy's tears and interceded for him.[28] By making it clear to the detainee that his release was due not to his having served his time, but to the gracious and undeserved intervention of a patron, Demetz could put an end to what was an extremely severe punishment for insubordination without losing face, while underlining the boy's dependent position. The visitor's journey down into the cell and his reemergence with the promise of clemency for the boy served to reenact the religious theme of Christ's death, resurrection, and promise of salvation; and the boy played his designated role as the repentant sinner.

Mettray's success, then, rested on its ability to rewrite incarcerated boys' life stories through redirecting their behavior. But its founders knew that the colony's survival also depended on their ability to persuade supporters to finance its work, and they used Mettray's built environment toward this end, too. Visitors were welcomed and given guided tours that combined experiencing the material reality of the colony with an approved narrative of the history and working of the institution.[29] The abovementioned engraving (Fig. 1) not

28 AD37 114J 584, unsigned, c. 1850s account of a visit to Mettray.

29 Many visitors to Mettray published accounts of their visits; see, for example, Paul Huot, *Trois jours à Mettray: rapports lus au Congrès scientifique de Tours et à la Société des sciences morales de Seine-et-Oise* (Paris, 1848); the abovementioned account by Shcherban', "Metre"; and William Henry Leigh, *The Reformatory at Mettray; a Letter from a Visitor to That Institution, Addressed to a Member of the Committee of the Warwickshire Reformatory, November 1855* (London, 1856).

only conveyed an image of the real Mettray to far-flung supporters; it was the only Mettray that these supporters would ever encounter, possessing a "mediated materiality," and it was designed to influence their discursive and financial relationship with the colony.[30] Signed by V. Chevin, the engraving appeared in the minutes of the May 1846 General Assembly of the Founders of Mettray.[31] Each year, the *Société Paternelle* held an annual meeting in Paris at which the directors gave an account of the colony's work, financial statements were presented, and, usually, a government minister or other prestigious figure was invited to speak. The speeches were printed and distributed to all those of Mettray's supporters who had, by donating 100 francs or more, been designated "founders" of the colony. Many of these founders never visited Mettray and knew it primarily through these reports. The engraving presents aspects of the real colony, with a faithful depiction of the chapel tower, the central square, and the architecture of the cottages. However, it portrays more cottages and other buildings than actually existed, encouraging supporters to envision a perfected future colony whose expansion depended on their ongoing donations. In the foreground of the image, colonists cut and stack hay (although, in reality, no fields existed in this location), but the figures at the center are groups of visitors. The image thus invites viewers to imagine themselves at the heart of the scene, creating a sense of belonging that could motivate them to make financial contributions.

Demetz and his associates, then, seem to have understood that, as Leora Auslander has argued, material objects such as this printed image "are active agents in history" possessing "communicative, performative, emotive, and expressive capacities."[32] The colony's ability to communicate ideas to and evoke emotion among its supporters was limited by the technology available and the material qualities of the medium. The complimentary brochure was printed in black and white on ordinary paper, conveying simplicity and frugality. Unlike

30 Joyce and Bennett, "Material Powers: Introduction," 13 discusses the "mediated materiality" of literary representations, which I here apply to a visual image.

31 AD37 1Y 109, Assemblée générale des fondateurs de la Colonie de Mettray, 10 May 1846.

32 Auslander, "Beyond Words," 1017.

a photograph, the medium of engraving allowed the image to be recognizable as representing the real colony, yet aspirational, showing it in an as-yet unrealized state, and placing affluent supporters at the center of the image, laying out the whole institution around them for their perusal and their approval.

Mettray operated for almost a century, but after the death of Demetz in 1873 it began a long decline, closing in 1937 with its reputation in tatters after revelations of abuse and mistreatment.[33] In its heyday, however, its model had become the acknowledged standard, inspiring imitations across Europe and the Americas, each offering its row of "family" cottages and encouraging bracing agricultural work.[34] In the 1860s, as the Russian Tsar introduced a series of modernizing reforms, including the first independent judiciary, reform-minded Russians took an interest in Mettray and its various imitators, founding the country's first penitentiary agricultural colony near Saint Petersburg in 1870 and a handful of others across the western part of the Empire in the following decades. Like their French predecessors, Russian reformers ascribed moral purity to rural spaces. When novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky visited the Saint Petersburg colony, he thought its church should have icons that would "remind the boy, sinking and befouled in the whirlpool of the capital, of the distant village where once he was clean."[35]

II. The Gorky Colony: Raising proletarians

For the socialists who took power in the former Russian Empire after 1917, there was nothing pure or romantic about poorly paid agricultural labor, and they viewed the pre-revolutionary penitentiary agricultural colonies as sites of brutal exploitation and physical abuse. Maxim Gorky, the revered Soviet writer who had himself been homeless as a child, recalled boys he knew who had had been beaten and the skin ripped from their head, or been killed with a blow from an

33 Toth, *Mettray*.

34 See for example the two-part article by Robert M. Mennel, "'The Family System of Common Farmers': The Origins of Ohio's Reform Farm," *Ohio History* 89 (1980): 125–56 and 279–322; "Redhill and Mettray," *The Spectator* (London), 26 May 1849; Dupont-Bouchat and Pierre, *Enfance et justice*; Edouard Ducpétiaux, *Colonies agricoles, écoles rurales et écoles de réforme pour les indigents, les mendiants et les vagabonds, et spécialement pour les enfants des deux sexes, en Suisse, en Allemagne, en France, en Angleterre, dans les Pays-Bas et en Belgique.* (Brussels, 1851).

35 A. F. Koni, "F. M. Dostoevskii," in *F. M. Dostoevskii v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov*, ed. K. I. Tiun'kin and M. Tiun'kina, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1990), 243; for a history of the Saint Petersburg colony, see Grant, "Model Colonies," 228–97.

employee's fist.[36] In 1918, the new Soviet government declared that no child under seventeen could be convicted of a crime: institutions for troublesome youth were to be educational and therapeutic, not punitive.[37] However, authorities did not have the resources to adequately fund such institutions, and much depended on the resourcefulness of individual educators. In 1920, the district (*guberniia*) education authority assigned schoolteacher Anton Makarenko to the former Poltava agricultural colony, soon renamed in honor of Maxim Gorky. After a difficult start, the colony thrived, and Makarenko led it until 1927, when the NKVD — the Soviet security police — invited him to run a new children's commune in Kharkiv funded by their agents' donations. After leaving the Dzerzhinsky Commune in 1935, he devoted himself to a literary career until his death in 1939.

Makarenko's best-known novel, the *Pedagogical Poem* (published in English as *The Road to Life*), appeared in 1935 and is a fictionalized account of his work with the Gorky Colony.[38] The book was immediately successful among Soviet readers and remains in print today.[39] As a primary source, it is uniquely valuable, revealing details of daily life and painting rich portraits of individuals that do not appear elsewhere. However, it is not a straightforward, documentary account. Like any autobiography, Makarenko's book was written not only to record events, but to justify the author's actions, and in the treacherous political climate of the 1930s, a writer's fate could hinge on their skill in doing so.

Makarenko was acutely aware of the political climate in which he wrote. By 1935, although repressions had not yet engulfed the country as they would by 1937, political dissent had effectively been stifled. Makarenko was careful to cast events of the 1920s in a light that harmonized retrospectively with Stalin's policies of the 1930s, such as the collectivization of agriculture and the repudiation of paedology (the academic study of childhood from medical, social, and psychological standpoints).[40] When the Soviet leader, having solidified his polit-

36 Maksim Gorky, "Po Soiuzu sovetov," in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 11 (Moscow, 1962), 253.

37 Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution*, 78; Ball, *And Now My Soul*, 127–50.

38 Citations in this article will be to the three-volume English-language edition published in Moscow in 1955: Anton Makarenko, *The Road to Life: An Epic of Education*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Moscow, 1955). The most recent scholarly edition published in Russian is Anton Makarenko, *Pedagogicheskaia Poema* (Moscow, 2003).

39 Letters received by Makarenko's publishing house from his early readers praise the novel's vivid evocation of characters and its hopeful message; many who had borrowed a copy wanted to know where they could buy the book for themselves: Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (hereafter RGALI) f. 332, op. 1, ed. khr. 70.

40 For the history of paedology (child science) in Russia and the early USSR, see Andy Byford, *Science of the Child in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia* (Oxford, UK, 2020).

ical control over the state apparatus by 1936, took a sharp, socially conservative turn, he made paedology anathema, returning responsibility for child-raising to the family, promoting teacher-centered, disciplinary modes of education, and making children twelve and up subject to adult courts, prisons, and gulags.[41] Archival sources, including correspondence, official reports, and the earliest drafts of the novel from 1925 on, suggest that Makarenko was already in the 1920s aligned with the side that prevailed under Stalin in the 1930s, embracing military forms of labor organization that his critics derided as "regimental pedagogics."[42] Still, his motivation to ensure that the values and perspectives conveyed in the novel were unimpeachably Stalinist must inevitably have influenced what events he chose to recount, as well as the interpretations he gave them.

Makarenko also had strong motivation to keep his narrative as true to real events as possible. Gorky wrote to him in 1933, "Your enormously significant and strikingly successful pedagogical experiment has world significance," and in 1934 that his book would "vindicate and strengthen [his] method of raising children." Makarenko, in reply, described his pedagogy as essentially dialectic, not founded on "any absolutely correct pedagogical measures or systems" or "dogmatic theses" but adapted to the specific moment and situation.[43] It followed that a narrative, rather than a formal treatise, could best communicate the essence of Makarenko's approach. He had struggled to convince his opponents in the education authorities that his methods were working: "A properly organized children's collective evidently represented such an impossible miracle that they simply did not believe in it, even when they observed it in living action."[44] By bringing the colony to life in prose, he hoped to convince a wider and friendlier audience. Makarenko believed it was the colony's results, rather than any theoretical argument, that best defined and vindicated his pedagogical approach. To achieve its goal of conveying Makarenko's pedagogical principles, the novel had to be true to actual events.

41 For the experiences of young detainees in the later Gulag, see for example Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* (1985; New York, 2002), part 3, chapter 17; Jacques Rossi, *Fragments of Lives* (Prague, 2018), 74–75.

42 RGALI, f. 332; see for example op. 1, ed. khr. 55, Extract from protocol no. [. . .] of the meeting of the presidium of TsB KDR, 13 July 1928.

43 Correspondence between Makarenko and Gorky, cited in Svetlana Sergeevna Nevskaia, "'Pedagogicheskaia Poema' i proza zhizni Antona Makarenko," in *Pedagogicheskaia Poema* (Moscow, 2003), 11–12.

44 Makarenko, *Pedagogicheskaia Poema,* 649 (this passage did not appear in the first published versions of the novel or in its translations, but deleted passages were included in this scholarly edition).

There are indications that the book does, on the whole, hew close to actual events. Writing in the first person, Makarenko uses his own name but gives pseudonyms to all the other dramatis personae. Makarenko's own photographs illustrate the text, with individuals identified by their fictional names, bolstering the claim that the novel captured real events. He is candid about some of his failures, including an infanticide and a suicide, as well as several boys who quit the colony unreformed. Archival sources also confirm key dates and details.

Later testimonies from former colonists underline the accuracy of the narrative: "His book deals with real people who actually lived in the Gorky Colony. The author merely changed some of the names," wrote Semion Kalabanin, a former colonist who featured heavily in the novel under a pseudonym; everything in the book was "the actual truth," according to Ivan Tokarev, another of Makarenko's pupils.[45] Such testimonies, however, given after Makarenko's death when he had become an icon of Soviet education, could not feasibly deviate from the approved narrative.[46] Perhaps a better argument for the relative veracity of the *Poem* is the contrast with its sequel, *Flags on the Battlements,* a fictionalized account of Makarenko's Dzerzhinsky Commune, published after the 1936 death of his mentor and protector Gorky, during the Terror in 1938.[47] It follows a hackneyed socialist-realist plotline of enemies plotting sabotage and being unmasked by good-hearted Soviet youth. In this book, the main characters (especially the villains of the piece) are much less nuanced and more stereotypical. It is significant that in this work Makarenko no longer uses his own name for the character of the commune's director, distancing the author from the text in recognition, perhaps, that it was no longer possible to write an account that was true to life.

Whether or not any specific event in the *Poem* happened as narrated, or indeed at all, is impossible to determine. However, the accuracy of any given scene is less important than

45 *Makarenko, His Life and Work: Articles, Talks and Reminiscences* (Moscow, 1963), 77; Ivan Dem'ianovich Tokarev, "Vospominaniia o Kommune im. F. E. Dzerzhinskogo, *Igor' Petrovich Ivanov i kommunarskaia metodika,* http://kommunarstvo.ru/biblioteka/bibtokvos.html, accessed May 6, 2023. See also A. M. Tubin's testimony, in *Makarenko, His Life and Work*, 43; as well as former communard Leonid Konisevich's account of his time at the Dzerzhinsky Commune, *Nas vospital Makarenko: zapiski kommunara* (Cheliabinsk, 1993), http://makarenko-museum.narod.ru/lib/Konisevich_L_Nas_vosp_Mak.htm.

46 Götz Hillig and Marianne Krüger-Potratz, "'Vtoroe rozhdenie' A. S. Makarenko: opyt rekonstruktsii protsessa kanonizatsii ego kak pedagoga (1939–1941 gg.)," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* 29 (1988): 209–42.

47 Anton Makarenko, *Learning to Live: Flags on the Battlements* (Moscow, 1953)

the meanings it conveys. After all, the fictionalized Gorky Colony survived in Soviet culture long after the original—and its author—had passed away. As a primary source, it tells us what Makarenko wanted the world to know about his colony and his pedagogy.

Makarenko's Gorky Colony transformed, in turn, three rural spaces previously under the control of "non-toiling" (that is, neither proletarian nor peasant) classes: first, the former agricultural colony for juvenile detainees; later, a former noble estate; and finally, a former monastery which had, since the revolution, housed a dysfunctional children's colony. In each case, Makarenko portrays not individual leaders, but the collective itself, as an entity naturally endowed with the power and authority to purify and reshape these rural spaces. This purification is physical, as colonists remove what is broken and filthy: building latrines, using stones from old monastery walls to build pigsties, and renovating a noble country home to house dormitories. It is also cultural, as they overcome mindsets associated with the bourgeoisie and "former people."[48] Monks, guards, and aristocrats had fled, but religious believers, *kulaks*, and experts in progressive pedagogy remained to be defeated and their ideas exposed as inferior and ineffective.[49] The spaces all these "former people" had inhabited and which had conformed to their interests and values had to be reshaped and reused in explicitly proletarian ways lest they serve to preserve pernicious aspects of the old regime.

Makarenko rejected the values embodied in the tsarist-era colonies by using the existing built environments in ways that undermined their original purposes. He began his work at Tribi, on the site of the Poltava Agricultural Colony and Industrial Asylum, founded in 1891 and built on an orderly, Mettray-style "pavilion" plan.[50] He described it mockingly as a "perfect square" of "uncompromisingly symmetrical brick buildings."[51] Although Makarenko's colonists necessarily occupied buildings designed for the previous surveillance-

48 The term "former people" (*byvshie liudi*) was used by Soviet authorities to designate those who had not been "toilers" (that is, peasants or proletarians) before the October Revolution.

49 *Kulak* was a term that denoted wealthy peasants who exploited their poorer neighbors, although not all those targeted by Soviet anti-*kulak* policies were in fact any better off than their neighbors, as discussed below.

50 *Otchet pravleniia Poltavskago Obshchestva Ispravitel'nykh Priiutov za pervyi god sushchestvovaniia Obshchestva (c 7-go iiunia 1891 goda no 7-e iiunia 1892 goda)* (Poltava, 1892).

51 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 1:28; see also Shcherban', "Metre," cited above.

based regime, in which the educators were instructed "never to take their eyes off their charges, either during work or recreation, and at night to sleep next to them in an adjoining room," Makarenko refused to let the built environment determine his own system and gave all his teaching staff their own, separate apartments.[52] One former educator's room was later used by a local wheelwright who joined the colony to escape his unhappy marriage. Rather than a site of power over the colonists, the room became a refuge for a harmless but somewhat pathetic character, as the old man "would sit huddled up in his little room" waiting for the colonists to drive his angry "virago" of a wife away.[53] Makarenko's narrative thus inverts the power relations embedded in the original design.

Makarenko uses descriptions of the colony's agricultural land to condemn the impotence or unwillingness of the previous regime to provide genuine help to juvenile detainees: "The very soil on which our colony stood was unsuited to agricultural purposes. It was little better than sand, which a breath of wind sent shelving into dunes."[54] This was the land the tsarist regime had deigned to make available for the children most harmed by poverty and exploitation. Indeed, the records of the former colony show that after waiting fruitlessly for a promised grant of land from the state, the Poltava philanthropists had to accept a private donation. Poltava is located in the richly fertile black earth region, an area covering much of Ukraine and Western Russia and providing abundant grain, but the only plot available for the purpose was a site that had been logged and then rented out to peasants to graze their livestock, whose hooves had destroyed whatever topsoil remained.[55] The land was so worthless, Makarenko later argued in a letter to the local authorities, that the colony should not have to pay rent for it.[56] Although the Gorky colony survived there for three years, thanks to deliveries of food from various state agencies, it was not until it moved to a former noble estate that it began to prosper. Makarenko's narrative upholds the Marxist view that the working classes should

52 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 1:29.

53 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 1:112.

54 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 1:89.

55 *Otchet pravleniia Poltavskago Obshchestva zemledel'cheskikh kolonii i remeslennykh priiutov za 1895 i 1896 gody* (Poltava, 1897), 5.

56 RGALI, f. 332, op. 1, ed. khr. 52, Makarenko to Regional Executive Committee (Okrvikonkom), 20 September 1921.

not be content with the scraps allotted to them by bourgeois philanthropy but should seize the means of production to create a better world.

The next site seized by the Gorky Colony was an estate formerly owned by the Trepke family, who had fled in 1917, leaving the estate in disrepair. Here, in the "wild beauty of the loop of the Kolomak [River]," were handsome houses for the colonists, together with rich farmland, an orchard, and buildings for livestock, awaiting only the colony's labor to repair and refurbish them.[57] A trained agronomist joined the colony and assured its productivity. As at Mettray, the colony employed modern agricultural expertise to maximize yields, demonstrating the superiority of science over peasant traditions. Like the nineteenth-century French reformers, the Gorky Colony used the children's labor to improve and modernize agricultural land: it "amended the land," to use the French reformers' phrase, by the labor of the child. However, unlike them, Makarenko did not believe the land could, in turn, morally "amend the child." In fact, he worried that agricultural work could turn promising proletarians into *kulaks*. Building a strong and cohesive collective required labor that was challenging, meaningful, and politically aligned with the Soviet regime. The *Pedagogical Poem* thus paints the colony at Trepke as a producer of proletarians through the collective: the rural space was made to serve an urban purpose.

Whereas the founders of Mettray had viewed young criminals as an urban phenomenon, the "waifs" of the Gorky Colony initially had, Makarenko wrote, no class identity at all. "We had hardly any children of workers, the proletariat was for them something remote and unknown, while most of them harbored profound scorn for agricultural labour, or rather not so much for the labour, as for the labourer's scheme of life and mentality."[58] Most were of peasant backgrounds, but almost all had spent time living rough in cities. Some Soviet educators believed that this experience of alienation freed homeless youth from bourgeois values, making them the proletariat of

57 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 1:387.

58 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 1:117.

children, but Makarenko dismissed this idea, arguing that it was labor and collective belonging, not dysfunctional street life, that produced class consciousness.[59]

Even before the Gorky Colonists displayed any sign of proletarian consciousness, however, the Soviet regime deployed them to embody its sovereignty over rural spaces and people. Makarenko recorded scenes of colonists exposing their neighbors' corrupt dealings, participating enthusiastically in raiding their illicit liquor stills and catching them illegally harvesting trees.[60] Even though they had not yet given up their own illegal activities, stealing property and crops from the neighbors with little fear of being caught, their presence served to impose proletarian, Soviet power on the countryside. To do so, as the young detainees decamped from the original colony site to Trepke, they reorganized the terrain itself: "The boys persistently, and with the utmost sangfroid, carried out revisions of the various communicating paths between the farmsteads, determinedly straightening them in their pursuit of a definite ideal."[61] Colonists ignored fences' function as "tokens of the inviolability of private property" and set up stiles to pass over them. Makarenko's ironic tone here sweeps away peasant concerns that their private property could be their best means of survival. The local farmers' crops suffered, but the work of moving people and supplies between the old and new colony sites was greatly reduced.[62]

Recounting these activities in his 1935 text, Makarenko took care to show that his colonists had been pioneers in the fight against *kulaks*. The *kulak* was a looming figure in Stalinist agricultural policy. Originally meaning "fist," the term was given to peasants who had become wealthier than others, especially after late-tsarist reforms had removed the equalizing influence of traditional peasant communes. Anyone who hired (and exploited) laborers was a *kulak*, but the term metastasized to include anyone who owned several horses or was conspicuously wealthier than their neighbors—or whose reluctance to support Soviet power made them politically suspect. Stalin's

59 Eric Aunoble, "S'éduquer à part pour mieux s'intégrer? Les communes pédagogiques en Ukraine soviétique (1920–1924)," *Revue d'histoire de l'enfance « irrégulière »*, no. 7 (2005): 217.

60 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, chapters 5 and 9 of volume 1.

61 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 1:381.

62 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 1:384.

collectivization of agriculture from 1930 on relied heavily on the image of the *kulak* as a threat to other peasants and to Soviet power. Many peasants categorized as *kulaks* were prevented from joining collective farms and deported to special settlements in Siberia or arrested and either shot or sentenced to the Gulag.[63] In the novel, Makarenko portrays the boys as having an instinctive disdain for the local peasants, whom he labels *kulaks* and describes as shifty, acquisitive, and dangerous. He thus paints the children as predisposed to proletarian consciousness, requiring only political education and the experience of the collective to become true Soviet citizens.

Taught to see themselves as a collective and to make that collective the colony's supreme authority, engaging in farm labor and political education, the colonists came to adopt what Makarenko saw as a proletarian identity even as they worked in agriculture:

> The members of the colony had begun proudly to consider themselves proletarians, and thoroughly understood the difference between their own position and that of the village youth. Intensive, and often onerous, work on the land did nothing to disturb their profound conviction that quite different activities lay ahead of them.
>
> The oldest of them were already able to describe in some detail what they expected from their future, and what they aspired to. And it was the youthful forces of the town and not of the village, which played the leading role in the crystallization of these dreams.[64]

However, once they had developed this consciousness, Makarenko wrote, they could no longer be content with the "idyll" of rural life. Even though agriculture was their "principal work," the colonists "regarded farming merely as a means of livelihood and the improvement of our life, and the workshop as a means of gaining skill."[65]

In the *Poem,* Makarenko recounts how former colonists, returning from their studies in the city, expressed such sentiments.

63 Cathy A. Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia* (New York, 1993), 116–60; Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York, 1996).

64 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 2:400.

65 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 1:375.

"Oh, how I love work in the fields! What a pity that there's no sense in it, damn it! Wouldn't it be nice if you could work in the fields, and reap, and have textiles growing up, and boots, fields of machines, tractors, accordions, spectacles, watches, cigarettes waving in the wind . . . My, my! . . . Why didn't the rotters consult me when they made the world!" Another says, "Our fellows, the waifs, as we're called, are proletarians, it's industrial work they need. Of course, it's jolly and all that to work in the fields, but what do we get out of the fields? If we go into the village, it means we join the petty bourgeoisie, that seems a shame."[66] Readers in the 1930s would recognize this emphasis on the necessity and utility of industrial work as consistent with the Stalinist policy of industrialization, which relied on the forced collectivization of agriculture by facilitating extraction from the peasantry in order to accumulate the resources necessary to establish factories.[67] Agricultural labor is here presented as routine, "jolly," and ultimately meaningless, denying its value, even though such things as textiles, boots, and cigarettes could not, of course, be produced without the raw materials agriculture supplied. But Makarenko's inclusion of this conversation makes a more specific point about the nature of his colony. The idea of the earth producing tractors and cigarettes is a fantasy, but Makarenko hints here that his methods had made agricultural land fulfil one function of an urban space: producing proletarian people.

Although by 1924 the colony at Trepke was thriving, Makarenko portrayed the environment as dangerous to the future development of Soviet citizens. Although he contended that the collective won over the local youth by its wealth, its cultural level, and the thriving, joyful colonists themselves, he also expressed the fear that individuals who grew to love agriculture would be lost to the Soviet cause: "Just look round, and you'll see there are more kulaks every day. How can the colony go on living here?"[68] Even the voluntary collective farms that appear in the book are viewed as disorganized or contending for resources in a petty-spirited manner. This negative judgement may have been made at the time of the events

66 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 2:257-8.

67 Wendy Z. Goldman, "Blood on the Red Banner: Primitive Accumulation in the World's First Socialist State," *International Review of Social History* 67 (2022): 211–229.

68 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 2:257-8. The word rendered as "kulak" in this translation is the more informal *kurkul'* in the original Russian. This scene is set during the period of the New Economic Policy, during which some Soviet leaders encouraged peasants to enrich themselves; it predates the period of dekulakization under Stalin.

recounted, in the early to mid-1920s, reflecting Makarenko's no-nonsense persona. Alternatively, it may be an instance of Makarenko in 1935 retroactively writing Stalinist priorities into his story: collectivization in the 1930s was a means to bring agriculture under state control, not merely to change from an individual to a collective ownership model.[69]

Agriculture alone, then, was not enough to satisfy nascent proletarians; they needed to be active and useful builders of socialism. To Makarenko, this would eventually mean participating in Stalin's great project of industrial development in a factory-based children's commune. First, though, in 1926, the Gorky Colony took on the challenge of socializing a large group of abandoned and uncooperative children at the "7th of November" colony, organized by the Children's Aid society on the former site of a celebrated seventeenth-century monastery at Kuriazh, near Kharkiv (Fig. 2). Although the labor would be agricultural, the cultivation of the Kuriazh children would constitute the real "work for the State, work the Soviet government needs."[70] The 120 Gorky colonists joined those already living at Kuriazh. Many of the original residents left rather than submit to labor and discipline, but in April 1927, the relocated Gorky Colony counted 353 colonists – three more than the official capacity.[71]

In Makarenko's narrative, discredited religious beliefs on the one hand, and ineffective pedagogical work on the other, combine in the very ground of Kuriazh to make it an unhealthy and malodorous place in need of purification. "The first thing which struck me was the stench prevailing in the colony. It was a complex blend of privies, cabbage soup, dung, and . . . incense."[72] By including fragrant incense in a list of foul odors, the author categorizes religion, despite its pleasant facade, as harmful and distasteful, to be discarded by Soviet society.

Although the monks had dispersed, Makarenko was faced with both material and human traces of their work. The monastery's "broken-down dirty church" continued to operate in the midst of the colony.[73] Makarenko lobbied to have it shut

69 For more on the fate of early Soviet communes and collectives, see Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York, 1989), 207-212, 241.

70 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 2:324.

71 RGALI f. 332 op. 1 ed. khr. 55, Report to the Presidium of the All-Ukraine Executive Committee from the Kharkiv regional executive committee, n.d. [1927].

72 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 2:308.

73 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 3:295.

Figure 2. In this 1927 photograph of Gorky Colonists at the site of the former Kuriazh Monastery, uniformed youth in a military-style marching band contrast with the old religious architecture in the background, embodying the new Soviet order and new meanings superimposed upon the space. Source: Anton Makarenko, *The Road to Life*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1955), plate opposite page 358.

down and the building used as a meeting space, but his efforts succeeded only after he himself left the colony in 1928.[74] Other elements of the monastery, however, were successfully repurposed. Pilgrims had previously visited the monastery's spring, renowned as miracle-working; the Gorky Colony used it prosaically for washing. The "old walls, saturated with the stench of sweat, incense and bugs, oozing with the filth of waifdom" were pulled down and the bricks reused to build a pigsty.[75] The walls, representing the closed-mindedness of religious belief, as well as forming a physical barrier, keeping foul odors in and clean air out, were judged fit only for swine.

The first attempt to try to reclaim the former monastery for Soviet purposes had failed abjectly and the Gorky Colony found it necessary to purify the place of the "bestial, biological ruin" of demoralized children living in filthy, lousy conditions. Yet altering the material environment was impossible until the children's attitudes could be changed. In Makarenko's narrative, this "conversion" happened suddenly, within the space of three hours, with the arrival of the

74 Alla Stankevich, "Istoriia obiteli," *Kuriazhskii monastyr'*, July 25, 2020, https://kuryazh.kh.ua/sample-page/, accessed November 5, 2024.

75 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 3:60, 3:217.

120 Gorky Colonists from Trepke.[76] Makarenko and a small "advance detachment" had come to Kuriazh several weeks previously and carried out planning and preliminary work, but none of the children had been willing to join them. In the book, it is not Makarenko himself, but the collective as a living, thriving entity, that transforms degraded and criminal children. Immediately after the group's arrival, Makarenko relates, the Kuriazh children happily submitted to washing and haircuts, and their lice-ridden bedding and clothing were treated in a disinfecting chamber.[77]

In Makarenko's view, the socialist collective made up for the children's dysfunctional or absent families, but unlike the founders of Mettray he never used familial terms as official nomenclature. A 1932 article in the NKVD newspaper *Dinamo,* however, praised the "paternal abilities" of a "communard father" — one of the older boys in Makarenko's second project, the Dzerzhinsky commune — who had taken an "incorrigible" younger boy under his wing, describing them as "A 'son' of nine, and a 'father' of eighteen."[78] Later, former colonists described Makarenko himself as a substitute father to them. One, A. M. Tubin, declared, "My own father deserted my mother when I was four years old. I don't remember him, and have come to hate him. My real father was Anton Makarenko.[79] Delivered after the conservative turn of the late 1930s, this statement reflects an official recentering of the nuclear family and of paternal authority in Stalinist social policy after the more radical experiments of the 1920s. However, the living quarters of the Gorky Colony and, later, the Dzerzhinsky Commune, were never intended to replace or imitate family homes as had been the case at Mettray.

Even as the Gorky Colony's reputation grew and it became a model institution, attracting foreign and Soviet visitors, pedagogical experts who distrusted Makarenko's charismatic influence and his military methods accused him of creating an unhealthy "cult of personality" and worked to have him removed as director.[80] Makarenko experienced this defeat as

76 Makarenko, 3:229.

77 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 3:231.

78 M. Bukshpan, "Vypolniaem zavet Feliksa Edmundovicha," *Dinamo*, 1932, RGALI f. 332 op. 2 ed.khr. 58.

79 A. M. Tubin speaking at Makarenko's funeral in 1939, quoted in *Makarenko, His Life and Work*, 43.

80 RGALI, f. 332, op. 1, ed. khr. 55, Extract from protocol no. [. . .] of the meeting of the presidium of TsB KDR, 13 July 1928.

a profound "loss" and searched for a new position. In part through the intervention of Maksim Gorky, who had adopted him as a protégé, in 1927 he was appointed director of the NKVD's Dzerzhinsky Commune in Kharkiv.[81] Like the Gorky Colony, it housed lawbreaking and homeless children, offering schooling together with vocational training, but instead of agricultural work, here the children were trained in the commune's factory, where they produced electric drills and cameras, requiring skill and precision. The commune was converted into an ordinary factory just prior to the outbreak of war in 1941.[82]

Conclusion

Both the Mettray and Gorky Colonies took rural spaces and reshaped them to provide solutions to urban problems, housing children categorized as urban and replacing local traditions with modern scientific knowledge and organization. Demetz and Brétignières pursued these goals while espousing a romanticized and nostalgic view of rural virtues, intending their wards to become lifelong rural residents, shunning the dubious freedoms of the city. Makarenko, believing the urban proletariat to be the revolutionary class, and knowing it formed the base of political support for the Soviet regime, painted rural life as idyllic but dangerous, threatening to promote stagnation and produce *kulaks*.

Mettray's custom-designed architecture contained numerous elements designed to funnel colonists into desired behaviors and attitudes, and sometimes to prevent any possibility of rebellious actions. The Gorky Colony moved into sites created for other purposes, claiming them in the name of the proletariat. Rather than redesigning the spaces to control them, Makarenko allowed the colonists to reshape spaces for their needs, including spaces that belonged to others. At the end of the *Pedagogical Poem,* he describes a procession of colonists marching into the city on a day of celebration, walking on the

81 Correspondence between Makarenko and his future wife, and between Makarenko and Gorky, cited in Nevskaia, "'Pedagogicheskaia Poema' i proza zhizni Antona Makarenko," 5-10. Makarenko resigned definitively from the Gorky Colony in 1928, and with Maksim Gorky's support focused on finishing his novel.

82 Oscar Fricke, "The Dzerzhinsky Commune: Birth of the Soviet 35mm Camera Industry," *History of Photography* 3 (1979): 135–155; see also Makarenko, *Flags on the Battlements*.

tramlines and forcing the vehicles to match their pace, having a "joke" with the townsfolk, their "own folk": "we go about the town like its masters, not 'asylum boys,' but colonists, Gorkyites."[83] Having established order in the benighted countryside, Makarenko claims for the children an urban identity.

Makarenko's narrative of the collective shaping both its members and the spaces they occupied does not, of course, imply that each individual child had agency or freedom any more than the colonists of Mettray did in their rigid regime. In fact, by ceding authority to the collective, Makarenko legitimized methods, sometimes including ostracization and violence, that he and his teachers were forbidden to use.[84] Yet both Makarenko and Demetz understood that children and adolescents, especially when subjected to a demanding regime, often needed opportunities to exert agency. Indeed, one striking similarity between these two very different institutions is the way each sometimes strategically gave up control over their wards. At Mettray, much was made of the lack of walls surrounding the colony. When Brétignières asked a boy why he did not try to escape, he replied, "because there are no walls."[85] When Makarenko wanted to stop a spate of thefts from supply cupboards, he instructed employees to remove the padlocks.[86] Walls and locks only tempted children to test their skills, and removing the challenge took the fun out of the game.

Both the Mettray and Gorky Colonies were, for a time, model institutions turning out a certain number of young adults who looked on their leaders as substitute fathers and adopted the values they had been taught. Both, after the initial charismatic leaders had died or left, and, for those who were singled out for punishment, even during their tenure, were sites of surveillance, coercion, and sometimes abuse. In each case, it was when they understood children's need for agency that the colonies were most successful.

Mettray operated by the principle of "amending the child by the land, and the land by the child," using child labor to bring

83 Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 3:396.

84 The exception was an incident at the very outset of the Gorky Colony where he hit a boy in the face for his attitude, and unexpectedly won over the whole group, although he claimed this was a singular incident. Makarenko, *Road to Life*, 1:43-46.

85 AD37 1Y 106, Assemblée générale des fondateurs de la Colonie de Mettray, 12 March 1843, 17.

86 Tokarev, "Vospominaniia."

idle land into a productive state as its directors trusted in the rural environment and the carefully planned living spaces to teach boys to act in approved ways. Because Soviet ideology emphasized the leadership role of the urban proletariat, Makarenko was suspicious of the land's effect on the child, and instead used the child to amend the land and its people by introducing modern, efficient agricultural practices and keeping the colony's rural neighbors in line. Both colonies thus shaped their rural environments to serve the needs of an urban population.

Anna Christine Grant works on transnational histories of Modern France and Russia/the USSR, focusing on incarcerated youth. She is a Visiting Assistant Professor of European History at Occidental College, Los Angeles. She has published articles on urban housing reform and on youth detention in the *Journal of Urban History* and the *Journal of the Western Society for French History*. Her current book project focuses on penitentiary agricultural colonies, from their inception in nineteenth-century France to their adoption in Tsarist Russia and their persistence into the early Soviet Union.

How We Forget about the "Environment": The United Kingdom's Department of Environment, 1970

Yat Shun (Juliana) Kei
University of Liverpool

I. Introduction

Marsham Street, Westminster, is not a remarkable area in central London: it is a narrow street mostly consisting of brick buildings from the 1920s, a church, and a few multi-story residential blocks completed in the early 2000s. This type of fragmented urbanscape engendered by piecemeal redevelopment can be found throughout central London, a city that is known for the absence of major urban planning interventions in its modern history.[1] If one looks carefully, however, on one side of Marsham Street there is a sign for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Home Office, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. These government departments determine everyday life in the U.K.: the Home Office decides who is deemed part of the country's population, while the other two departments shape the daily environments.

1 Michael Hebbert, *London: More by Fortune than Design* (London, 1998)

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This government building, also known as 2 Marsham Street, is barely distinguishable from its surroundings. (See figure 1.) The most noticeable architectural intervention is the extensive use of louvres on the façade for reducing energy emission and consumption. Alongside the well-designed landscape features, these elements supposedly signifying care for the environment.[2] In addition to government offices, the 2 Marsham Street development includes shops, affordable housing, and a nursery. The architect, Terry Farrell, introduced small passageways between the government offices to create a more democratic and transparent look. This hodgepodge design can be attributed to the fact that the development is a result of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) mechanism introduced by the United Kingdom's government in the 1990s.[3] The private sector was incentivized to fund public sector buildings and infrastructure. For 2 Marsham Street, the design was created with the assumption that a private developer might later take over the buildings if the government agencies decided to move out. In other words, the government agencies that shape the environments of the U.K. are housed in an architecture that they barely control themselves.

The current physical manifestation of these government departments is noticeably different from its predecessor. In November 1970, the British government established the Department of the Environment (DoE) through a merger of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG), the Ministry of Transport (MoT), and the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works (MPBW).[4] The creation of the DoE was significant because it was supposedly the world's first central governmental environmental department, predating the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of the United States by a few weeks.[5] The DoE was a direct result of the reorganization of the British civil service following the recommendations of the report of the Fulton Committee (1966–1968).[6] Its creation has therefore been examined in studies on British political science and history.[7]

2 "Home Office to move to £311m complex," *The Guardian* (UK), March 26, 2002, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/mar/26/immigrationpolicy.

3 "Ugly sisters facelift tightens PFI spreads with triple-A secured bonds via Barclays and RBC," *Euroweek* (22 March 2002): 65.

4 The Secretary of State for the Environment Order 1970 (1970, No. 1681). Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1970/1681/made.

5 The planning for the EPA started in 1969 but the Agency was formally established on 4 December 1970. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "The Guardian: Origins of the EPA," *EPA Historical Publication* 1 (Spring 1992), https://www.epa.gov/archive/epa/aboutepa/guardian-origins-epa.html.

6 *The Civil Service Report of the Committee 1966-68*, United Kingdom Command Papers, Cmnd. 3638; Geoffrey K. Fry, *Reforming the Civil Services: The Fulton Committee on the British Home Civil Service of 1966–1968* (London, 1993).

7 Paul Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.* (London, 1977).

Figure 1. Current government office building on the 2 Marsham Street site, London, designed by architect Terry Farrell; photographed by the author, October 2024.

At the time of its founding, the physical presence of the DoE reflected its significance: in 1971, the DoE moved into its new headquarters on Marsham Street. The Marsham Street Towers, as the original headquarters was often called, consisted of three 200-foot high-rise blocks connected by a four-story podium (see figure 2). The Marsham Street Towers were designed by Eric Bedford, the then–Chief Architect of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, who became known most notably for his design of the Post Office Tower in central London (later the BT Tower).[8] The Marsham Street Towers bore the hallmarks of postwar architectural modernism: they were reinforced concrete structures in the form of linear slab blocks, completed with concrete mullions and repetitive windows that further accentuated the scale of the building and the bureaucracy it contained.[9] Almost as soon as they were completed, the Towers drew fierce criticism, including a review describing the building as "a crude piling up of accommodation." The irony that the DoE, which oversaw research, standards, policies, and other decisions about the built environment, was housed in "the most inappropriate building in London," was not lost on journalists, historians, and former

8 Paul Lewis, "Eric Bedford, Who Changed London's Skyline, Dies at 91," *New York Times,* 31 August 2001.

9 H.E. Mills, "Government Offices, Horseferry Road, London SW1," *The Structural Engineer* (October 1967), 337-349.

Figure 2. Photo of the Marsham Street Towers in 1974. There are very few pictures that captured all three towers because the street is too narrow. RIBA Photo Collection. Photographed by Bill Toomey. Reproduced by permission.

government officials.[10] Architectural historian Elain Harwood, for example, observed that "Marsham Street had been violently disliked by a series of environment secretaries" and was unpopular among its occupants, too.[11] The Marsham Street Towers, which gained the nickname "the Three Ugly Sisters," remained the DoE's headquarters until 1997 and were later demolished in 2002.[12]

The original intentions behind the creation of the DoE, alongside the demolished Marsham Street Towers, are now mostly forgotten in British environmental debates. Pollution reduction and ecological protection, which are the current Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' prime concerns, were not high priorities in 1970. Instead, the original purpose of the DoE can perhaps be better described as improving life in the U.K. through the environment. This purpose was articulated in "The Reorganisation of Central Government," the 1970 white paper announcing the creation of the DoE:

> It is increasingly accepted that maintaining a decent environment, improving people's living conditions and providing adequate transport facilities all come together in the planning of development. These are among the main functions of local authorities and are having an ever-increasing impact on ordinary

10 David Rock, "The Architecture of Compromise," *Built Environment* 1 (1972): 448–453, 451.

11 Elain Harwood, Susie Barson, and Emily Cole, "Tall Buildings: Aspects of Their Development and Character in England," English Heritage Historical Analysis & Research Team Reports and Papers 59 (London, 2002), 81.

12 Matthew Richard, "Bye Bye Blunder," *Building*, 17 May 2002, https://www.building.co.uk/focus/bye-bye-blunder/1018420.article.

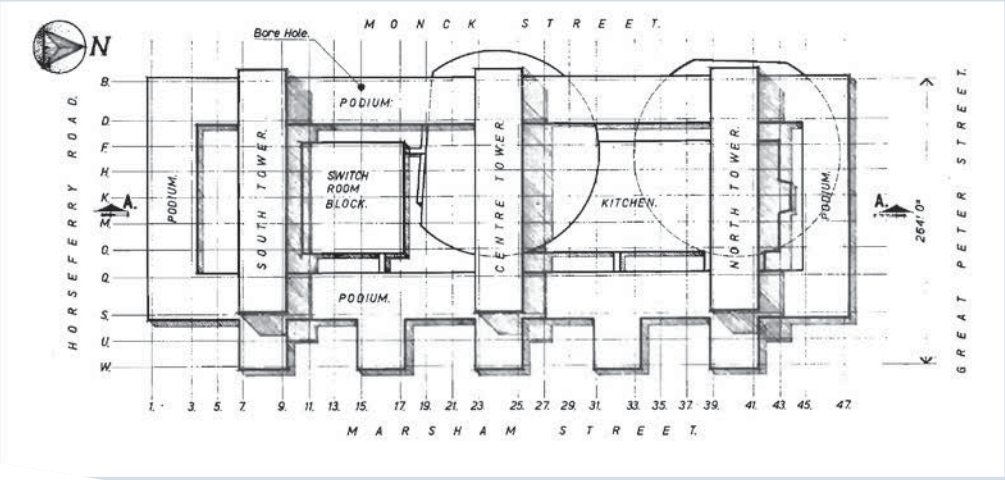


Figure 3. Roof plan of the Marsham Street Towers showing the towers and the podium. From: *The Structural Engineer* 45 (October 1967), 337.

> people, in town and country and especially in and around the large urban areas. Because these functions interact, and because they give rise to acute and conflicting requirements, a new form of organisation is needed at the centre of the administrative system . . . the new department will be responsible for the whole range of functions which affect people's living environment.[13]

In this effort, the white paper explained, a new "super" department would be created through the merger of the Ministries of Housing and Local Government (MHLG), Public Buildings and Works (MPBW), and Transport (MoT). These three ministries could broadly be described as the governmental agencies that directly intervened in the built environment in the U.K., through the planning, construction and management of buildings, infrastructure, and also entire towns and cities.[14] In this paper, we will grapple with different articulations of the environment and their supposed effects on the population. What was the British government's environmental agenda in 1970? How does the vision become forgotten?

We approach these questions by focusing on the construction and representation of the DoE in its early years. By centering the Marsham Street Towers, we will parse out the roles played by architecture and urban planning, which may shed more light on the British government's ability, or lack thereof, to use the environment to shape human behavior. Then, we will examine the DoE's attempts to represent itself as an institution and the difficulties it encountered. In each part

13 *The Reorganisation of Central Government.* United Kingdom Command Papers, cmnd 4506. Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.*, 8-9.

14 It is important to note that the DoE's remit varied across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. We will refer to "the United Kingdom" for simplicity, while aware there are details that we cannot address within the scope of this paper.

of this paper, we consider how the making and unmaking of knowledge about the environment, the civil service government bureaucracy, and the DoE destabilized one another. Through this triangulation, we hope to comprehend the reasons behind, and the implications of, the current obscurity of the original articulation of the meaning of "the environment" in the creation of the DoE.

II. The Architecture of the Environment

As an architectural historian, I am interested in definitions of the environment because modern architectural and urban theories have been shaped by competing narratives about the environment. The use of the environment and nature to justify the beauty and value of architecture can be traced back to the nineteenth century, through theorists including John Ruskin.[15] In the early twentieth century, the importance of controlling the environment was reinstated by Patrick Geddes, who incorporated biological ideas in his sociological and town planning research.[16] Scholars have shown that the ways British planners, conservationists and governmental officials shaped towns and cities, in different parts of the world, drew from concepts defined as "ecologies" and "ecosystems."[17] Later, in the second half of the 20th century, mobilizations for environmental protection, pollution reductions, and conservation established the environment as a primary concern in architecture and urban design. In turn, buildings, infrastructure, and urban interventions modify the environment, and even unrealized architectural proposals can shape perceptions of the environment. Architectural design and research acknowledge the fluidity of the concepts of the environments: environments are relative to what they environ.[18]

In British architectural history, the political nature of the creation and management of the built environment has been well examined. For example, there are ample studies on the instrumental role played by the Ministry of Housing and

15 John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849; London, 1989)

16 Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London, 1990).

17 Peder Anker, *Imperial Ecology: Environment Order in the British Empire, 1895–1945* (Cambridge, MA, 2018); Simone Schleper, *Planning for the Planet: Environmental Expertise and the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1960–1980* (New York, 2019).

18 Necdet Teymur, *The Environmental Discourse* (London, 1982).

Local Government in twentieth-century British architecture and urbanism.[19] There are also investigations into the works of local authorities like the London County Council or semi-independent organizations such as the Building Research Station.[20] Both the local councils and research institutes would later be incorporated within the DoE. Scholarship on preeminent British architects has often touched upon their roles as agents of the state, particularly during and after the First and Second World Wars and in the (former) colonies.[21] These complex relationships suggested that not only architecture is governed by policies; but public opinion, scientific discovery and professional expertise also influenced the ways the government envisaged places and spaces.[22] Existing studies have revealed there were competing environmental articulations leading up to the creation of the DoE. For example, in the late 1950s, a group of prominent architect-planners positioned themselves as "the Environmentalists" in their effort to frame urban renewal debates.[23] The label of the environment, in this effort, was to review and improve on the wholesale demolition-and-rebuild approach commonly employed during post-war reconstruction.[24] Then, in the early 1960s, the publication of the influential *Traffic in Towns* report, shed more light on the complexity of the urban environment.[25] *Traffic in Towns* highlighted the economic, social, and demographic implications of the increased presence of motor vehicles. The report called

19 John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing* (London, 2018); Otto Saumarez Smith, "Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment in Britain," *The Historical Journal* 58 (2015): 217–244. Another often-cited example is the published diary of Richard Crossman, the Secretary of the State of Housing and Local Government which bears significant insight into Harold Wilson's government: Richard Crossman, *The Crossman Diaries* (London, 1991).

20 Anthony Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture: A History of Modern Architecture in Britain* (Toronto, 1970), 166–180; Mark Swenarton, "Breeze Blocks and Bolshevism: Housing Policy and the Origins of the Building Research Station 1917-21," *Construction History* 21 (2005): 69–80.

21 Gordon Cherry and Leith Penny, *Holford: A Study in Architecture, Planning and Civic Design* (London, 1986); Iain Jackson, "Tropical Architecture and the West Indies: From Military Advances and Tropical Medicine to Robert Gardner-Medwin and the Networks of Tropical Modernism," *Journal of Architecture* 22 (2017): 710–738.

22 Aggregate, *Governing by Design: Architecture, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh, 2012).

23 Lionel Brett, "The Environmentalists," *Architectural Review*, May 1959, 303–305.

24 John R. Gold, "A SPUR to Action? The Society for the Promotion of Urban Renewal, 'Anti-Scatter' and the Crisis of City Reconstruction, 1957–1963," *Planning Perspectives* 27 (2012): 199–223.

25 Colin Buchanan and Geoffrey Crowther, *Traffic in Towns: A Study of the Long Term Problems of Traffic in Urban Areas* (London, 1963).

for more sophisticated methods in forecasting, planning, and controlling the ways people moved around. In other words, at the time the term "environment" was commonly associated with the concerns for urban renewal and vehicular mobility, both which could be understood as reactions towards challenges brought by urbanization and modernization in postwar Britain. Following a series of governmental interventions in research and higher education, the term "environment" was then used to suggest the disciplines of architecture, town planning, and construction were adopting a more scientific approach. For example, a proposal for a Research Council of the Built Environment was put forward by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 1964.[26] Although this proposal was rejected, a semi-independent research institute called the Centre for Environmental Studies was established in 1967, with a focus on research into regional planning and large-scale urban modeling.[27] Various architectural schools in universities were also restructured or renamed as schools of the Built Environment or Environmental Studies in the 1970s.

Despite these ongoing explorations, the concept of the "environment" created substantial confusion during the establishment of the DoE. The 1970 "The Reorganisation of Central Government" white paper, for instance, stated the potential benefits of the merger of different ministries but did not explain why "Environment" was the title under which the three ministries coalesced. Various DoE documents from the first years of its creation highlight this absence. For example, a 1971 pamphlet for new employees began by asking "The Department of the Environment. What sort of creation is it?" The draft pamphlet stated "Having an organisation named the Department of the Environment does not give much indication of its objectives and scopes."[28] Although these statements were removed from the final version of the pamphlet, they nonetheless reflected the confusion among the DoE staff. For example, in 1971, civil servant J. A. L. Gunn, who was tasked with reviewing the DoE's achievements in its first year, argued

26 RIBA, "Research into Problems of Planning and Construction: RIBA Statement," *RIBA Journal*, March 1964, 112.

27 Juliana Yat Shun Kei, *Inventing the Built Environment* (London, 2024), 104–120.

28 "Draft: The Department of the Environment: An Introductory Pamphlet for New Entrants," June 1971, AT 1/81, The National Archives (Kew, UK), hereafter abbreviated TNA. Archival sources from the National Archives of the United Kingdom cited in this paper include records of the Department of the Environment (designated AT), the Department of Economic Affairs (EW), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (HLG).

that one of the major challenges in his work was to determine the remit of the department's mission. Gunn stated that one could take a "narrow" view of the government's intervention in the environment, which was to "palliate or prevent things that are obnoxious to the sense." Alternatively, one could employ a "broad" definition considering the DoE's control over "the whole ambience in which our fellow citizens live, work, move and enjoy themselves."[29] The "Reorganisation" white paper that announced the creation of the DoE seemed to lean towards the "broad" definition, proposing that the Department would mobilize planning and the built environment to improve the life of the country's population. In Gunn's terms, we may also argue that the current U.K. government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' portfolio, focusing on pollution reduction and ecological protection, may in fact be interpreted as a narrowing of the government's environmental mission.

To consider how the U.K. government jettisoned the "broad" definition of the DoE's agenda, I build on social anthropologist Mary Douglas' study into how institutions "forget." In her critique of the functionalist approach, Douglas observed that institutions and disciplines discarded and then forgot aims and goals, sometimes simply because of distractions.[30] "Institutions," she explained, "create shadowed places in which nothing can be seen, and no question asked. They make other areas show finely discriminated detail, which is closely scrutinized and ordered."[31] At stake is that the forgotten things might also create and reinforce order and discipline. Douglas' argument is particularly useful for my analysis, which considers the DoE both as a bureaucracy and as the creator of knowledge about the environment. We should note that the environment is by nature a relative concept – it depends on what it environs. To put it bluntly, the environment of an individual is different from the environment of the individual in a group. The environment changes as one moves and when time passes. The shifts in the environment, importantly,

29 J. A. L. Gunn to IP Bancroft, "The Environmental Function," memorandum, 14 April 1971, AT 1/121, TNA.

30 Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse, NY, 1986), 81–90.

31 Douglas, *How Institutions Think,* 69–70.

may also engender transformations in what it environs. We therefore have to confront the unstable nature of the notion of "the environment" while trying to retrieve the original intentions in the creation of the DoE.

Before moving further, it is worth highlighting that most of the staff working in the DoE were civil servants, a term first devised to distinguish civilian employees from military personnel working for the U.K. government. By the nineteenth century, the "civil service" was introduced to refer to the non-political officers of the central government.[32] It has been associated with the permanent employees of the government, too. However, the civil service, just like the environment, should be understood as an institution that is open to interpretation. The DoE was established following the recommendation of the Fulton Committee on the Civil Service (1966–1968).[33] The Committee reassessed the expansion in civil services staffing and organization after the Second World War. Its final report suggested that combining ministries with similar portfolios could increase efficiency and eventually reduce the size of the civil services. The 1970 white paper announcing the creation of the DoE, whose full title was *The Reorganisation of Central Government*, stated explicitly that "government has been attempting to do much." It argued that, in the government's view, this situation had exerted undue burdens on industry and the United Kingdom's population at large. The reform, they envisioned, would redefine "the proper sphere of government in a free society."[34] In other words, the establishment of the DoE was also part of a redefinition of governmental functions, alongside a new articulation of "the environment."[35] The planning and execution of these reforms was carried out by both the Labour (1964-1970) and Conservative-led (1970-1974) government, indicating cross-party interests in the matter. Also worth noting is that this redefinition of the civil services happened at a time when economic downturns and slow growth had prompted the U.K. government to reconsider the postwar welfare state. At the time, the U.K.'s geo-political

32 Gavin Drewry and Tony Butcher, *The Civil Service Today* (Oxford, 1988), 13.

33 *The Civil Service Report of the Committee 1966-68*, Cmnd. 3638; Fry, *Reforming the Civil Services*.

34 *The Reorganisation of Central Government*, Cmnd. 4506, p. 3.

35 Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London, 1989), 222.

importance was shrinking as a result of decolonization and high Cold-War tension.[36] Therefore, when we consider how the DoE forgot about its earlier agenda, we will also look for the context in which these environmental debates unraveled, and how they manifested in the physical realities in the U.K.

One of the immediate contradictions in the creation of the DoE was that despite the rhetoric about "less government," the reorganization did not lead to an immediate reduction in the number of civil servants affiliated with the DoE. Moreover, although there were notable overlaps among the three ministries' portfolios, in the first years of the DoE, there were few substantial changes in their duties. (See table 1.) The three ministries were simply renamed "wings" and maintained their physical separation when they moved into the Marsham Street Towers in 1971.[37] One may even argue that the merger drew more attention to the bulk of the government, as witnessed by colloquial references to the Secretary of State of the Environment as an "overlord" – a senior minister who oversaw several departments.[38] This bulk also manifested itself physically in the skyline of London through Marsham Street Towers' dominating presence in the neighborhood. Because the three 200-foot buildings stood only half a mile away from the Palace of Westminster and other significant historic buildings along the Millbank of the River Thames, the rectangular and repetitive massing of the Towers contrasted strongly with the historical skyline of central London. Up close, the four-story podium occupied the full extent of the site and thus had an overwhelming presence in an area mostly made up of small streets and four to five-story buildings. The Marsham Street Towers created a perplexing urban experience: because of the narrow streets, the towers were in fact largely obscured from pedestrians' view. (See figure 3.) Hence, despite their height and importance, the Marsham Street Towers were not widely regarded as a landmark in London. In short, the Marsham Street Towers hardly created or projected an appealing built environment in central London.

36 Peter Hennessy, *Winds of Change: Britain in the Early Sixties* (London, 2019), 21.

37 Pamphlet on Work of DOE. AT 1/81. TNA.

38 Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.*, 1.

Mapping of the Portfolios of the DoE and the Three Preceding Ministries

DoE	Ministry of Housing and Local Government	Ministry of Transport	Ministry of Public Buildings and Works
Transport Industries	Land Use Planning	Transport Planning	
Local Government and Development	Housing policy and programmes + Land use planning		
Housing and Construction	Housing policy and programmes		Construction industry sponsorship
[Environmental Protection]	[Protection of the environment]	[Major public sector land use development]	[Major public sector land use development]

Table 1. Table produced from text in Paul Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.* (London: 1977), 5.

However, we need to contextualize the Marsham Street Towers' reputation within the changing attitude towards postwar architectural modernism at the time.[39] The design and construction of the buildings between 1962 and 1971 occurred at a pivotal moment in architectural history in the U.K. The mid- to late-1960s were the highwater mark of modernist high-rise construction. In the mid-1960s, the completion of notable modernist commercial buildings such as New Zealand House (1963) and Space House (1965) in central London, as well as the Bull Ring in Birmingham (1964), seemed to suggest a paradigm shift in the urban environment. These constructions reflected the real estate market's boom-and-bust cycle between the late 1960s and 1970s. The fact that the volatility of the market was largely found in commercial real estate – which many were built in the modernist style – in turn tainted the public valuation of modernist towers.[40] In 1968, the partial collapse of Ronan Point, a high-rise council block following a gas leak, ignited further opposition towards modernist standardized construction.[41] By the time the DoE moved into the Marsham Street Towers, not only did the skyscrapers no longer convey a forward-looking image; they provoked skepticism about the government's ability to control construction safety, building standards, and the real estate market's adverse effect on the built environment.

39 Hardwood, Barson, and Cole, "Tall Buildings," 84.

40 David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain: 1957–1962* (London, 2014), 633-647.

41 Holly Smith, "The Ronan Point Scandal: Architecture, Crisis and Possibility in British Social Democracy, 1968-93," *Modern British History* 34 (2023): 805-834.

In the postwar context, modernist architectural and urban design had been presented as an integral part of the emerging welfare state. Postwar new towns, public housing, schools, and community amenities were often planned and constructed according to modernist principles. This approach could be attributed to a myriad of causes: architects' and planners' aspirations, international influences, and the parallel pursuit of the modernization and industrialization of the construction and building industries.[42] The rapid growth in the demand and provision of transportation also lent weight to the popularization of modernist architecture and planning.[43] However, in the 1960s, modernist architecture became a visible scapegoat for disappointment with the postwar welfare state. In some cases, modernist design did create alienating and repetitive environments; yet as historian Guy Ortolano and others have suggested, some of the critiques of modernist planning and architecture might be attributed to inevitable issues in large-scale development.[44] New towns took time to become populated and well-run places. It is also not uncommon for newly completed buildings to require additional building work and maintenance, regardless of their style. However, in the mid and late 1960s, because there were so many towns and buildings being built and completed, there seemed to be endless issues associated with modernist planning, design, and construction.[45] The assessment of the architecture of the Marsham Street Towers can thus be attributed to the disappointments with the design and construction carried out by the DoE and its predecessors.

Architectural historians have also made a comparison between the Marsham Street Towers with an unrealized scheme for Whitehall, the historic seat of the United Kingdom central government, which was developed at around the same time.[46] Located less than a mile apart, the two schemes represented two notably different approaches to modern government architecture. The Whitehall scheme was designed by renowned architect-planner Leslie Martin, known for his

42 Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, and Dirk van den Heuvel, ed., *Architecture and the Welfare State* (London, 2015); Adrian Forty, "Being or Nothingness: Private Experience and Public Architecture in Post-War Britain," *Architectural History* 38 (1995): 25–35.

43 Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London, 1980), 262–280.

44 Guy Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism through an English New Town* (Cambridge, UK, 2019).

45 Peter Mandler, "New Towns for Old: The Fate of the Town," in *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945–1964,* ed. Becky Conekin and Frank Mort (London, 1998), 208-227.

46 James Dunnett, "Let's Demolish Whitehall," *Architectural Review,* 24 February 2014, https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/books/lets-demolish-whitehall.

leadership in advanced architecture research.[47] Although Martin's scheme was not realized, it remained an important manifestation of the "science and socialism" vision in 1960s U.K. The project design coincided with Prime Minister Harold Wilson's call to "harness socialism to science to lead to a Britain that is going to be forged in the white heat of scientific revolution."[48] Part of Wilson's "science and socialism" vision was to strengthen the importance of centralized planning, through incorporating advanced research and technological development.[49] Martin's Whitehall commission was first made by the previous government under Conservative leadership, but its design period spanned across Wilson's term. Its association with Wilson's "science and socialism" vision perhaps had little to do with the scheme or the architects' political outlook. Instead, such an assessment should be attributed to Martin's research-driven and experimental approach, presenting architectural design as a scientific endeavor. The design was derived from typological and geometrical experimentation: the proposed buildings carried forward the courtyard configurations of the existing surrounding structures. The buildings were stacked on top and interlocked with each other, forming a sort of a concrete lattice across the site. Martin argued that governmental departments should be able to expand and change more readily through the flexibility provided by the large, interconnecting floorplans in the mat building.

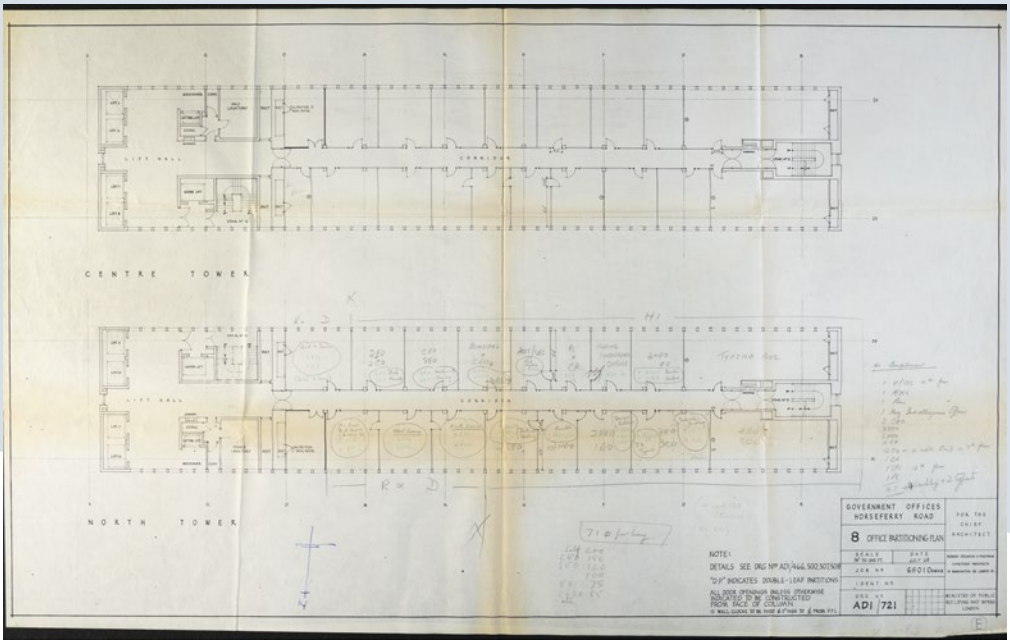
With hindsight, Martin's concern for flexibility was not misplaced: the small floorplates and rigid column grid of the Marsham Street Towers created significant problems for the DoE. For example, the department struggled to fit a large meeting table in the boardroom designated at the top of the north tower. (See figure 4.) The original intent of having a meeting room high up in the building for the enjoyment of the panorama of London did not work in reality because of the slow elevators as well as security and privacy concerns.[50] Moreover, unlike the Whitehall scheme, which was conceived as architectural

47 Adam Sharr and Stephen Thornton, *Demolishing Whitehall: Leslie Martin, Harold Wilson, and the Architecture of the White Heat* (Farnham, UK, 2013).

48 Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, 336; Harold Wilson, "Extract from the 1963 Scarborough Conference," 1963. British Library Sound and Vision Blog. https://blogs.bl.uk/sound-and-vision/2023/10/recording-of-the-week-harold-wilsons-1963-pledge-to-harness-the-white-heat-of-a-scientific-revolutio.html

49 Glen O'Hara, *From Dreams to Disillusionment: Economic and Social Planning in 1960s Britain* (Basingstoke, UK, 2007).

50 "New Crown Offices, Horseferry Road," HLG 124/113, TNA.



research into how central government should be organized, the Marsham Street Towers signified a top-down and dated approach to the built environment. The rigid and deterministic outlook of the Towers obscured the fact that the DoE was overseeing a significant portfolio of interdisciplinary research, especially after the closure of the Ministry of Technology.[51] In contrast, although the Whitehall plan was not realized, it was deemed a manifestation of the forward-looking ethos of 1960s Britain in the eyes of architectural historians.[52]

The fate of Martin's Whitehall plan and the reputation of the Marsham Street Towers was both shaped by a competing environmental narrative that was emerging at the time. In the mid- and late 1960s, architectural and urban preservation was an issue that was drawing significant attention among the public, professionals, and politicians in the U.K. In part, the interest in the maintenance of old structures could be seen as a reaction against the demolish-and-rebuild approach commonly found in postwar reconstruction projects. Self-proclaimed "environmentalist" architectural professionals championed the incorporation of building rehabilitation and conservation as part of urban renewal and redevelopment.[53] Moreover, building preservation intersected with other political issues such as mobilizations for the rights of squatters, migrants, and workers; and with the policy question whether the

Figure 4. Typical floor plan (1968) of the Marsham Street Towers for the allocation of workspaces, showing the narrow column grid and room division. Source: "Allocation of space: standards for staff entitlement and positioning of strategic branches" (dated 1969), HLG 124/117, The National Archives of the UK (TNA), London.

51 "DoE: Reiners Moves Up," *The Architects' Journal,* 28 July 1971, 184.

52 Dunnett, "Let's Demolish Whitehall."

53 Brett, "The Environmentalists"; Gold, "A SPUR to Action?"

government should subsidize owners of historic buildings to maintain their ageing properties.[54] These concerns elevated preservation to a matter that garnered wide-spread support. Martin's Whitehall Plan was delayed and eventually canceled in part because of opposition from preservation groups.

Meanwhile, it was ironic that the DoE – which inherited and expanded the architectural preservation portfolio from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government – was housed in a structure that demonstrated blatant disregard for its surrounding contexts. However, one could argue that the Marsham Street Towers were the victims of the arbitrariness of the planning system in the United Kingdom, too. Buildings on the Marsham Street site required approval from the Royal Fine Arts Commission, which evaluated the visual coherence of buildings and environmental interventions in central London. When a proposal for a governmental building was first made in the 1950s, the architect Robert Atkinson proposed a mid-rise courtyard structure with a pyramidal massing that would visually reduce the height of the building. The proposed design shared the same scale as nineteenth and early twentieth-century buildings around the site and would likely have been constructed with similar materials. But the Royal Fine Arts Commission disliked the bulkiness of the proposal and suggested that "a vertical character of a group such as the Rockefeller Centre" would be more suitable for the site.[55] Therefore, this earlier recommendation from the Royal Fine Arts Commission, which became part of the conditions for planning approval, directly shaped the final design of the Marsham Street Towers.

The issues encountered by the Marsham Street Towers and the Whitehall Plan also shed new light on the difficulties in examining how the government used the built environment to manage the population. In both schemes, we find different articulations of how architecture would be a driver for modernization, either urbanistically, technologically, or politically. The design had to respond to contemporary debates and to the complex

54 Wayland Kennet, *Preservation* (London: 1972); Theo Crosby, *How to Play the Environment Game* (London, 1973).

55 "Letter from the Royal Fine Arts Commission," 14 November 1950, HLG 79/979, TNA.

conditions found in the building's physical context. Moreover, the architect-planners also had to consider the layers of policies, standards, and controls implemented by previous governments and authorities. In other words, in envisioning how the environment could be mobilized to shape human behavior, the government would have to account for the time needed for the design and construction. As the Marsham Street Towers show, by the time such a process was completed, the building might express a dated vision. These two government headquarters designs can be understood as microcosm of the issues at stake in shaping and managing the built environment.

III. Department of ___

Looking at the Marsham Street Towers more closely, contradictions between the physical condition of the building and the government's environmental vision come to the fore. In addition to the overlaps in their portfolios, another aspect of merging Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Ministry of Public Buildings and Works and Ministry of Transport in the Marsham Street Towers was that they were the three ministries with the most dire need for office space in London.[56] The Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, for example, had serious overcrowding issues, while the staff of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government was scattered in no less than 13 buildings across the city.[57] But the overlap in portfolios and their respective tasks also became a source of tension. Even during the planning stage of the Marsham Street Towers, correspondence among officers described the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and Ministry of Public Buildings and Works as "ill-matched bedfellows." Disputes about who could claim which tower, who controlled the main telephone line, and how to communicate among each other erupted almost immediately.[58] There were also fierce debates about the allocation of the towers. Because of the tight urban site and complicated underground conditions, the entrances and exits of the Marsham Street Towers were concentrated on the

56 "The organization of MHLG and its interface with MoT," AT 1/4, TNA.

57 "Letter from W. Dawson 'Horse-ferry Building,'" 12 November 1965, HLG 124/114, TNA; SWC Philips to K. Newis, 15 August 1964, HLG 124/113, TNA.

58 See S.H. Godsell to S.W.C. Philips," 12 April 1965, and other files in HLG 124/113, TNA.

south side towards Horseferry Road.[59] The three ministries all claimed that their staff had responsibilities for the physical environment outside of the towers and fought over the occupation of the South Tower.[60] Moreover, since each of the former ministries occupied a separate tower, the merger at Marsham Street still did not dramatically enhance their collaboration. Civil servants working there complained about the long corridors and slow elevators, all of which resulted in long circulation and waiting times.[61] The discontent in the Marsham Street Towers seems particularly jarring considering that the DoE positioned itself as "the Department most concerned with improving the quality of living in our country. The happiness of each individual family will be very much affected by our decisions and by our actions."[62]

However, these day-to-day skirmishes could hardly account for the unraveling of the environmental vision behind the creation of the DoE. In fact, one might argue that by the time the Department occupied the Marsham Street Towers, this vision had already been jettisoned. In late 1969, when the potential reorganization of the civil services was first mooted, civil servants envisioned that the merger would result in a "Department for Local Government and Planning," or "Department for Local Government and Environmental Planning."[63] The insertion of the term "Planning" in the 1960s is worthy of highlighting. Since the closure of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning in 1951, there was a view among architect-planners, academics, and political figures that the government had overlooked the importance of physical planning in promoting regional and national developments.[64] By the early 1960s, the comparatively slow economic growth in the U.K., in comparison to other European countries, led to renewed interest in national and regional planning. In response, the Conservative government led by Harold Macmillan established the National Economic Development Council (NEDC) in 1962. When Labour came into power in 1964, they created the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), as well as several

59 The Marsham Street site was once a nineteenth-century gas work plant which left behind two large holes in the ground. The holes were subsequently reinforced with 12-foot-thick concrete walls for military purposes, known as the North and South Rotundas. The podium was designed to cover these underground structures. As a result, there was a severe limitation on ground-floor access.

60 "Notes of Staff Side's deputation," 28 March 1963, HLG 124/113, TNA.

61 Hardwood, Barson, and Cole, "Tall Buildings," 80-85.

62 Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.*, 120–121, citing Peter Walker, "Secretary of State's Message," Department of the Environment, 12 November 1970.

63 "Background to the Changes in Ministerial and Departmental Responsibility," AT 1/2, TNA.

64 F. J. McCulloch, ed., *Land Use in an Urban Environment: A General View of Town and Country Planning* (Liverpool, 1961).

regional Economic Planning Boards, to draw up specific plans for implementing economic and physical planning at both the national and regional levels.[65]

Within the Department of Economic Affairs, "Environment Groups" made up part of the regional Economic Planning Boards, mostly comprised of architects and town planning experts to work out housing, urban renewal, and urban planning matters with regional and national development in mind.[66] The "Environment Group" focused on identifying physical planning issues that might require specific accommodations in the existing governmental organization, such as the integration of education provisions in economic and physical planning.[67] For example, the location of schools would affect the ways families lived and moved around, thus affect housing, transport, and economic activities of an area. Similarly, the balance between work and leisure, for the "Environment Group," required cross-departmental efforts. In other words, in the years leading up to the creation of the DoE, the environment was conceived as a signifier for a more holistic approach towards economic and physical planning. Although there were multiple iterations of the naming of the new Department throughout 1969 and 1970, one of the consistent frameworks was to use the "environment" to reinforce "planning."[68]

In the end, however, the actions of the Department of Economic Affairs were crippled by political skirmishes, economic downturns, and the government's lack of financial commitment to large-scale industrial and population mobilization.[69] The Department of Economic Affairs and its affiliated organizations were disbanded in 1969. The former Department of Economic Affairs staff were transferred to Ministry of Housing and Local Government. In part, this incorporation could be attributed to Ministry of Housing and Local Government's experience in New Town and housing construction, which had engendered notable population and industrial movements in the postwar era. In 1970, the Department of

65 O'Hara, *From Dreams to Disillusionment*.

66 "North West Economic Planning Board – Environment Group," 22 January 1968, EW 11/152, TNA.

67 F. Kendall to J. Goldberg, 28 August 1968, EW 11/152, TNA.

68 See files in AT 1/20, TNA.

69 O'Hara, *From Dreams to Disillusionment*.

Economic Affairs was subsequently absorbed within the DoE.[70] In fact, during the establishment of the DoE, the dissolution of the Department of Economic Affairs and the planning boards was one of the most substantial changes to staff organization. In other words, when the three ministries merged and moved into the Marsham Street Towers, the environmental mission around which they were supposed to coalesce had already been modified. The goal of introducing more comprehensive planning, through inter-departmental interdisciplinary collaborations, was no longer a priority. Then, staff within the Marsham Street Towers were tasked to undermine the institutions that executed the planning efforts. For example, in 1972, the DoE introduced the Local Government Act, which resulted in the reduction of the number of local authorities (the smallest unit of government in the United Kingdom) by more than two-thirds.[71] Although the prime justification of this change was to reduce the sphere of government, in effect, it greatly hindered the mechanism for national and regional planning that had been articulated in the previous decade.

We can further reflect on the meaning of the "environment" in the DoE through the history of the ministries it inherited. In 1968, Dame Evelyn Sharp wrote a history of MHLG, which she headed as permanent secretary between 1955 and 1966.[72] In the book, Sharp traced the history of MHLG back to the earlier part of the twentieth century, when the Ministry of Health had been responsible for matters related to both public and personal health. The Ministry of Health oversaw issues ranging from population control, housing, and town planning to the National Health Service (NHS). Specific environmental controls such as building development rights and the management of waterways and sewage were part of the Ministry of Health's portfolio as well. Then, in 1943, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning was created to manage the immense task of postwar reconstruction.[73] In 1951, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning was replaced by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. The names of each

70 Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.*, 4.

71 G. W. Jones, "The Local Government Act and the Redcliff-Maud Commission," *The Political Quarterly* 4 (1974): 154–166.

72 Kevin Theakston, "Evelyn Sharp (1903–85)," *Contemporary Record* 7 (1993): 132–148.

73 W. S. Morrison, "The Work and Establishment of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 11 (1945): 5–9.

of these previous ministries reflected the specific commitments of the U.K. government to its population. For example, in the 1940s, the name of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning highlighted the potential significance of town planning for industrial and resource planning during and after the Second World War. In the postwar period, the expansion of public housing and new town programs was reflected in the naming of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. To put it more straightforwardly, each of the previous ministries named what the government could tangibly provide for the population: health, housing, or the effort of town and country planning.

The "environment," by contrast, was a more elusive concept. One might consider the environment, in comparison to planning or local authorities, as something that can exist regardless of the government's efforts. Sharp expressed such a view, stating that she considered "environment" a "horrible word."[74] This brief recollection of the names of the ministries reveals the government's shifting approach towards its population: first moving from an effort to improve the health of individuals to an emphasis on creating and managing places and spaces for individuals and groups. The subsequent rebranding of the ministry as focused on the "environment," in comparison, put forward a less deterministic and paternalistic approach. But it also steered away from the specific commitments made through the previous ministries. We can situate this turn toward the environment in the political context of redefining the sphere of the government. Unlike health, housing or planning, all of which denote particular tasks, the "environment" can be conceptualized as a "sphere" that might contract or expand in relationship to its center.

The relative nature of the environment created confusion and difficulties during the establishment of the DoE, when the new Department tried to signify its presence in the physical environment. Soon after its creation, the DoE launched an unusual "corporate identity" campaign.[75] Within the DoE,

74 Evelyn Sharp, *Ministry of Housing and Local Government* (London, 1969), 11.

75 D. R. Serpell to Michael Cary, 25 March 1971, AT 1/38, TNA.

this was executed through the publication of a newsletter that circulated among employees. This newsletter was to facilitate communication among the far-flung parts of the DoE: in addition to the several thousand civil servants in the Marsham Street Towers, there were also various regional offices and research institutions affiliated with it.[76] Influenced by the marketing and advertising ethos of the 1970s, the DoE spent substantial energy exploring the "semiotics" of the environment, including creating a logo and "in-house" style for its publications and letters.[77]

The attempt to create a letterhead for the DoE gradually snowballed into signifying the whole of the government's presence and interventions in the physical world. In a narrow sense, the DoE needed to create a logo and a letterhead to replace those of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. However, in a broad sense, the DoE wanted to showcase the institutions – which were supposed to epitomize the new type of civil service organization – to the public. Due to the merger of the three ministries, the DoE inherited a substantial part of the United Kingdom's environment: from the offices and buildings of local authorities, housing, historic monuments, and highways to vehicles and barges owned by the Ministry of Transport. Their branding exercise was supposed to include uniforms, badges, and flags for DoE outposts across the country. This "corporate identity" campaign soon became an all-encompassing effort. Since, as part of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works' portfolio, the DoE took over the management of most of the offices and facilities of the UK's central government (see figure 5), the DoE would have to put their new departmental logo and signs on these governmental buildings, which would inevitably create confusion.[78] Ideas were therefore mooted that the DoE should oversee the design of logos and signs for the other governmental ministries and agencies to enhance visual clarity and coherence.

76 Draper, *Creation of the D.O.E.*, 98.

77 M. Mendoza to G.R. Young, 12 January 1971, AT 1/38, TNA.

78 Ibid.

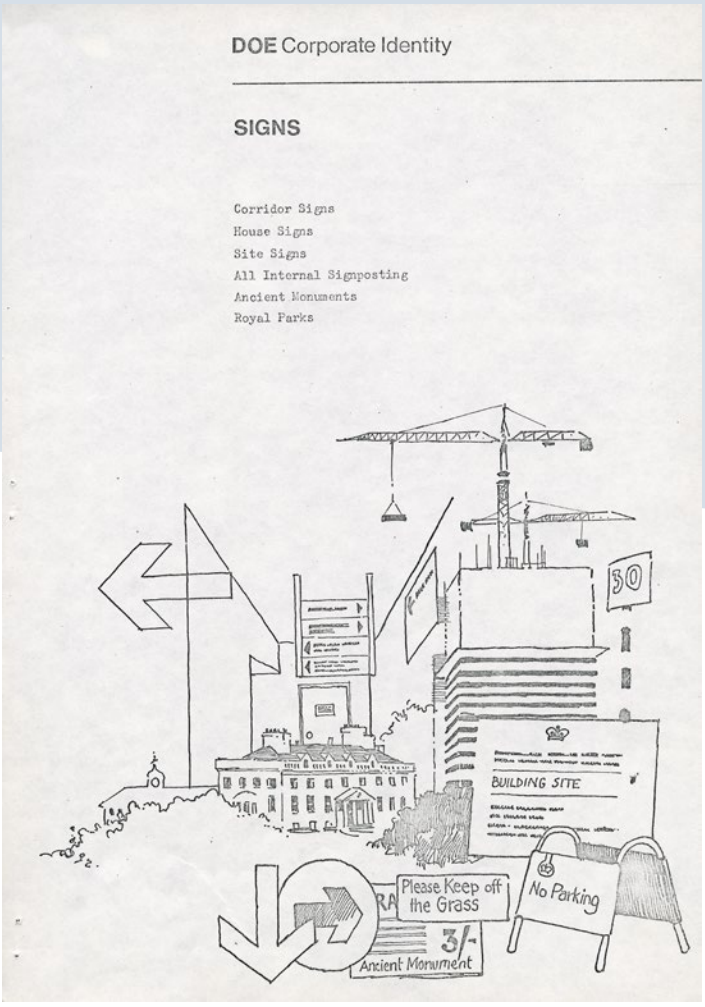


Figure 5. Diagram showing part of the "corporate identity" campaign of the DoE, showing the various type of signs that would have to be labelled, dated January 1971. Source: "Corporate Identity for Department of the Environment: proposals for Department of the Environment signs and symbols" (dated 1970-71), AT 1/38, The National Archives of the UK (TNA), London.

The debates regarding the scope of the DoE's "corporate identity" exercise lasted more than two years. By then, the DoE recognized that the public would have been familiar with the organization and canceled the campaign. This skirmish about "corporate identity" was not a paramount matter to the DoE but it reflected that, with the planning vision abandoned, the DoE struggled to identify its priority on the environment. It highlighted the complexities and contradictions in signifying the government machine that dealt with the physical environment. The DoE wanted to declare their presence in the U.K. environment. However, signposting many buildings, roadways, vehicles and open spaces across the country with the convoluted label of the "environment" contradict the call for reducing the "sphere" of the government. In short, the DoE was entrapped by its seemingly all-encompassing title.

To return to the question posed by this special issue: how does the government use the environment to shape human behavior? The DoE, as the first central governmental agency with an environmental profile, raises the fundamental question of whether the government can define what the environment is. The DoE inherited portfolios from former ministries that, regardless of their achievements, indicated clearly the means the government employed to manage the population: health, housing, planning, transport, public works and local governments. The creation of the DoE, one may argue, hinted at a withdrawal of the U.K. government's interventions in the physical environment, which was also reflected in the dismantling of the Department of Economic Affairs and the contraction of local authorities in 1972. By the late 1970s, further cutbacks of the local governments were introduced during Margaret Thatcher's prime ministership. Historian Peter Hennessey has highlighted the effects of this consequential policy. The U.K. central government had been relying upon the local authorities to carry out their environmental planning initiatives, such as new towns and housing developments.[79] The weakening of the local authorities, therefore, sabotaged the U.K. government's ability to intervene in the built environment. The physical separation of and administrative tensions among the three "wings" also set the scene for the DoE's ebbing, including the separation of the Ministry of Transport from the DoE in 1976. By the early 1980s, although the Marsham Street Towers remained a dominant presence in its immediate surroundings, the larger area around Victoria to the west was transformed by new corporate headquarters, media companies, and commercial skyscrapers, reflecting a major shift in the control of the built environment. Since the 1990s, various initiatives have been made to redevelop the Marsham Street Towers, all with the incentive of transferring control of the site from the government to private enterprises. Today, not only is the DoE housed in a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) development, but the project has also been refinanced as bonds through capital funds. In other words, investors can purchase a stake in

79 Hennessy, *Whitehall*, 439.

the government building.[80] Although the private fund and the bond are highly monitored, this mechanism reflects the drastic changes in the sphere of the United Kingdom government in the last half-century. As an institution, it turned itself into a "shadowy place" that can be hardly identified in the physical environment, and the financial market.

By studying the establishment of the DoE, we are imbued with the elusive nature of the environment. I was first drawn to the establishment of the DoE because it coincided with the boom of international environmental protection efforts. Following the creation of the DoE, the U.K. government created the Royal Commission on Environmental Protection in 1970.[81] This establishment partly explained why pollution control and conservation were not set as a designated division within the DoE. In the DoE, environmental protection did not constitute an independent division; instead, it was one of the matters that was directly overseen by the Minister (also known of the Secretary of the State)and required collaboration among the three wings. In fact, environmental protection issues remained a muddled issue in the first years of the DoE's history. Internal documents, for example, identified issues with the arrangement, including the "inevitable disjointedness of the organisational machinery" and the overburdening of senior staff.

Within the DoE, participation in international environmental protection collaboration had been regarded as "a distraction."[82] Before the DoE was established, the U.K. government had already started preparations for the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. The Conference, held in Stockholm, was a high-profile summit that presented environmental protection as a crucial matter for human survival and evolution. The DoE's concern was partially justified: archival documents reveal that much of the discussions in preparation for the UN Human Environment Conference were about Cold War politics such as how to ensure participation from both East and West Germany.[83] These were matters

80 "Ugly Sisters Facelift," 65.

81 Susan Owen, *Knowledge, Policy and Expertise: The UK Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution 1970–2011*. (Oxford, UK, 2015).

82 "Review of the Organisation for Environmental Protection, Note for the Secretary," AT 1/126, TNA.

83 See documents in FCO 61/559 and FCO 26/603, TNA.

of the environment that were in fact within the remit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and other agencies.

The DoE's involvement in the Human Environment Conference indicated how its environmental planning vision became further obscured. In the early stage of conference preparations, the DoE's steering committee articulated several types of environmental issues, including the physical environment (referring to pollution control and conservation) and the social environment (including urbanization as well as the social consequences of technological innovation and population growth).[84] Concerns for the psychological environment were mooted, too.[85] This framing carried forward the environmental intentions of the DoE, which encapsulated the multitude of issues related to the physical conditions in towns and cities. The DoE also directed an in-house research and exhibition team to support these efforts.

These environmental framings were well illustrated in the DoE publication representing the United Kingdom's contribution to the conference. The publication, entitled *How Do You Want to Live?*, documented how people living in different parts of the country perceived, modified, and reacted to their environment.[86] The publication invited influential figures in planning, conservation, education, traffic, recreation, as well as industry and commerce to contribute their views. The book's epilogue was written by Max Nicholson, a conservationist who had been known since the 1930s as a leading figure in championing national planning in the United Kingdom.[87] In short, the content and structure of *How to You Want to Live?* still reflected the interests in planning that remained within the DoE. However, as the preparations continued, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other agencies worried that the focus on the reciprocal relationship between the population and urban environment was too specific to the context of the United Kingdom. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office lobbed several letters at the DoE demanding the removal of issues such as housing and industrial development,

84 "Draft Office Circular: Problems of the Human Environment," 20 October 1969, FCO 61/559, TNA.

85 "Steering Committee Notes, 2–12 Sept 1969," FCO 61/559, TNA.

86 U.K. Department of the Environment, *How Do You Want to Live? A Report on the Human Habitat* (London, 1972).

87 Max Nicholson, "A National Plan for Great Britain," *The Week-end Review*, 14 February 1931.

economic and social planning, and public administration.[88] The Foreign and Commonwealth Office further suggested that they should focus on the potential of science and technology for solving physical and natural environmental crises shared by all humankind.

These communications between the DoE and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office offer more insight into how the socio-economic function of the environment was displaced. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's advice highlights another contradiction in how to define the sphere of the government, as well as the environment. The DoE's public opinion research, by centering the communities and citizens, could potentially lead to the exclusion and omission of groups and individuals. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's approach, focusing on science and technology, seemed to aspire to an environmental vision that would be universal for humankind. The conflict between the DoE and Foreign and Commonwealth Office positions leads us back to the dilemma of creating an environmental administration: how to define the "narrow" or "broad" scope of the institution. For the DoE, pollution control, natural conservation and other ecological measures were a "narrow" approach because they did not often interact with significant socio-economic matters in the built environment. But for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, these were "broad" matters that concerned international collaborations and affected populations beyond the United Kingdom. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's emphasis brought forth more potential conflicts: the measure of success for bureaucracy is inevitably anthropocentric, but efforts in ecological protection usually call for more care for other species, and thus can go against the grain of bureaucracy.[89]

How to consider the environment as an institution in relation to the climate crisis is beyond the scope of this paper. Our analysis ends with the displacement of the DoE's environmental vision. We have examined the U.K. government's

88 "Note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office," 22 July 1969, FCO 61/559, TNA.

89 Maarten A. Hajer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernisation and the Policy Process* (Oxford, UK, 1995).

national planning imperatives – including built environment research, planning and design – that were intended to enhance the productivity of the country's population and industry. The merger of the ministries and their move into the Marsham Street Towers were intended to demonstrate that civil services could be modernized and rendered more efficient. Ironically, however, the Towers actually illustrated the difficulties involved in utilizing architecture and town planning to shape human behavior. In addition to the time and professional expertise required to execute these visions, the Marsham Street Towers project also faced the challenges of changing political priorities. The buildings remind us of the importance of context: they were not unequivocally terrible architecture but they were completed at a time when disapproval of architectural modernism ran high. Moreover, its design, unlike Martin's Whitehall Plan, did not project the confidence that the government could employ architecture and urban design to engender political and behavioral change. The malleable and potentially confusing nature of the concept of the "environment" created further tensions with the Department. The DoE's "corporate identity" campaign and its struggles over how to present "the environment" at the 1972 Human Environment conference demonstrate how the department was, in fact, paralyzed by the notion of the environmental. In sum, this paper shows that when governments seek to use the environment to shape behavior, they ought to know what the environment is first.

Juliana Kei is a Senior Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in Architecture at the University of Liverpool. Her research considers architecture and design as apparatus of control. She published her first monograph, *Inventing the Built Environment: Planning, Science, and Control in British Architecture,* with Routledge in 2024. The book, through retrieving the origin of the 'built environment' term, draws attention to how discussions in social sciences and human ecology were employed to justify top-down planning efforts. She

is currently completing a Leverhulme Trust International Fellowship to conduct research on *Housing the Neoliberal Public: Postmodern Estates in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia,* which examines public housing design's role in shaping the population in Southeast Asian cities since the later part of the twentieth century.

Paradise Postponed: Dreams and Realities in Leipzig's Coalfields before 1989[1]

Andrew Demshuk
American University, Washington DC

In our Anthropocene Age, humans have become "geological" agents who can never truly master the outcomes of the forces they have unleashed.[2] This intervention into the complexities of planetary geology is perhaps most starkly apparent when one considers the massive open-cast pit mines that have proliferated across the Earth's surface since 1945. From the 1920s onward, German landscape planners dreamed of transforming the sprawling brown coal (lignite) pit mines south of Leipzig into a recreational lake district. Visitors today are typically astonished when they discover that this charming recreational district was once a "moonscape" of dusty pits populated by colossal digging machines, hemmed by sulfur-dioxide-belching smokestacks, and host to sickly vegetation and villagers. Brochures and guides about today's attractive "Neuseenland" of lakes, beaches, forests, hiking and biking trails, and new ecosystems typically ignore the formulation of

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2 Much literature has drawn attention to the unintended consequences humans have provoked through the unequalled modern scope of their remaking of the natural world. See for instance Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 197–222, here 206–207.

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Figure 1. Zwenkau open-cast brown coal pit, January 1989. Photographer: Thomas Thiel. Reproduced by permission.

development proposals during communism. Both before and after communism, campaigns to "recultivate" soil and water after coal extraction have been fraught and filled with surprises.

Through its investigation of how recultivation of former mining areas was both imagined and practiced before 1989, this article informs present opportunities and challenges as Germany seeks to leave behind fossil fuels. Contemporary planners in the expansive brown coal region west of Cologne seldom acknowledge approaches to coalfield recultivation east of the Iron Curtain. Even in present-day Leipzig, the preceding history has been generally forgotten. No less a figure than Andreas Berkner, the longstanding head of the regional planning authority, claimed that the most recent proposal for recultivating the coalfields dated to 1973 and was already "hopelessly outdated" at the time, creating a "conceptual vacuum" for him and his fellow planners to fill.[3]

3 Leipzig-Westsachsen Regionaler Planungsverband, *30 Jahre Regionalplanung für Leipzig-Westsachsen zwischen Rückblick, Positionsbestimmung und neuen Herausforderungen* (Leipzig, 2022), 117. Authorities around the world have sought to recultivate anthropogenically ruined landscapes. For the transformation of New York's largest trash dump into a parkland and methane source, see Karrie Jacobs, "How the World's Largest Landfill became New York's biggest new park," *Curbed* (September 13, 2016), https://ny.curbed.com/2016/9/13/12891320/freshkills-park-nyc-staten-island-engineering-design, accessed October 27, 2024.

Contrary to such assertions, Cold War-era planning for mining areas was hardly fruitless. The 1973 regional plan was part of a long chain of proposals that influenced postcommunist planners, some of whom (like Berkner) had started out in the 1980s. The 1960s planning and 1970s realization of the Kulkwitzer lake next to Leipzig's enormous Grünau high-rise district likewise disproves Berkner's strange postulation that "for decades, serious ambitions for water tourism in Leipzig's waterways remained without prospect."[4] Many of the problems inherited from coal mining that continue to damage the ecosystem were anticipated, experienced, and even gradually mitigated under communism. In effect, one cannot understand the success of postcommunist landscape planning in devastated pit mining regions without considering the planning process, landscaping experiments, and irreversible ecological damage that had transpired under the communist coal economy.

4 Leipzig-Westsachsen Regionaler Planungsverband, *30 Jahre Regionalplanung*, 191.

This article presents a chronological outline for how recultivation and landscape planning emerged through the 1960s and 1970s into a dynamic force that realized substantial, if proportionally insufficient, recultivation outcomes. It is informed by the evolving interplay between, on the one side, industry-oriented mining leaders and Berlin officials, and on the other side Leipzig district (*Bezirk*) and subsidiary county (*Kreis*) officials, inspectors, planners, scholarly agronomists, and local actors like farming collectives. Keeping in mind rapacious wartime autarchic industrial and mining exploitation, followed by postwar Soviet reparations extraction, — conditions that hindered the development of initial recultivation plans — I begin with the lacking recultivation of mining areas before 1956. Already by 1950, the greater Leipzig region was producing 100,850,000 tons of brown coal per year — roughly equivalent to the combined output in the East German Lusatian and the West German Rhenish brown coal regions. Although the other two regions steadily increased their production, the Leipzig region sustained and even slightly

increased this level before its production collapsed to less than 20 percent of its peak production after 1989.[5] Notwithstanding a 1951 regulation in the GDR lawbook (Gesetzblatt) mandating that coal collectives that operated the mines restore exhausted mining areas for use in agriculture and forestry, central officials only acknowledged the unsustainability of the sand-swept wasteland amid the East Bloc thaw that accompanied destalinization. By then, four hundred hectares of exhausted mining land stretched as an acidic desert without topsoil; only eleven hectares had been recovered for future use.[6] From 1956 onward, commissions and inspections repeatedly produced recommendations, until they gained some traction and a response from higher authorities. Mining officials – taking their cues from the Coal and Energy Ministry's production imperatives – tried to ignore recultivation advice (in contravention of national laws) so they could maximize resources for mining and industrial output. But they faced new planning and inspection bureaucracies whose explicit purpose was to compel them to do so anyway.

This creeping influence from district planners and experts ensured steady long-term improvements in recultivation planning, informed by soil and landscaping experiments whose outcomes were published in scholarly journals. Such experts were informed by ambitious and evolving *Bezirk*-level plans for a future lake district that was to one day replace the moonscape.

Notwithstanding East German planners' and experts' genuine successes in arresting the almost uncontrolled spread of sandy wastelands which had prevailed in the 1950s, by the 1980s recultivation efforts could not keep up with the exponential increase in pit mining and industrial output from outdated and decaying industrial facilities. By the mid- to late-1980s, it seemed clear that the establishment of a beautiful lake district planned since the 1950s would be postponed well into the future. This outcome fueled ever more radical unrest from engaged citizens who feared that, in place of a

5 Statistik der Kohlenwirtschaft, e.V., "Braunkohlenförderung," https://kohlenstatistik.de/, accessed January 6, 2024.

6 "Stenographisches Protokoll der Sitzung der Abgeordnetengruppe der Volkskammer des Bezirkes Leipzig am 12.12.1956 im Kulturhaus des VEB Kombinat ‚Otto Grotewohl' in Böhlen," SächStAL 20237 Bezirkstag/Rat des Bezirkes Leipzig, Nr. 00248, 25–78, here 39–40.

flourishing landscape with extensive recreation opportunities, they and future generations would reap a devastated moonscape that compromised their health.

After 1989, a triumphalist narrative prevailed that — only emphasizing late-communist *lapses* in recultivation — overlooked the recultivation achievements in planning and execution that East German officials had in fact attained over the course of forty years. By restoring the role of recultivation experts and political actors before 1989, this article better explains how and why the "Neuseenland" became possible in the new millennium. It also positions East German recultivation planning as no less dynamic than in West Germany, where pit mining also permanently altered the environment with enduring anthropogenic consequences.[7]

Scholarship on coalfield recultivation is dominated both by generalists whose surveys cannot delve into local realities and by contemporary planners vested in valorizing their own approach; neither approach considers key personalities who were seldom famous. Joachim Radkau's influential survey *Age of Ecology* argues: "For cost reasons and especially after 1973, the central plans for the mining sector increasingly neglected recultivation, just as greater care for the 'topsoil' was becoming more and more necessary. In this respect, too, lethargy prevailed in the latter days of the GDR: the environment ministry seems to have done next to nothing, and Leipzigers were hard put to halt lignite mining at the gates of their city." While Radkau rightly takes note of the 1973 oil crisis as a factor in changing national economic priorities, he wrongly presumes that SED plans (which generally came from district offices, rather than Berlin) were not anticipating recultivation, and he only gives agency to "the environment ministry": a centralized state actor that appears hapless. In fact, Hans Reichelt's Environmental Ministry was both *well-informed* and *actively complicit* in the state's economic production goals, which were incompatible with the ecological responsibility demanded by diverse *Bezirk* and *Kreis*-level officials and actors. In like

7 This East-West comparison will feature more concretely in my forthcoming book *Cold War Coal Pits*.

manner, "Leipzigers" appear as a uniform and helpless mass of people, a cliché that erases repeated efforts by local officials, scholars, and engaged citizens to improve the recultivation situation. Radkau continues: "In a way, nature shifted for itself: huge pitholes gradually filled up with water, coming to resemble natural lakes and even offering new leisure opportunities."[8] This also fails to correspond with reality. The Kulkwitzer See was an expensive SED-state effort deliberately created to give Leipzig a recreational lake. Most of the other pit holes were still being pumped due to mining, or they were filled in with overburden—acidic sand that had covered nearby coal deposits—to make way for forestry or farming (by the late 1960s). Where groundwater did collect in abandoned mines, it was usually too acidic to be safe for recreation or any other use.

In sum, whole branches of state planning were obsessed with recultivation. Lethargy had nothing to do with the actual planning offices at the time. And failures to effectively recultivate the land or reduce air and water pollution — repeatedly protested by local officials, experts, and residents — were deliberate outcomes of mining collectives heeding centralized demands for meeting coal quotas. Unfortunately, Radkau's narrative is not uncommon.[9] Most recently, Julia Ault's scholarship on East German ecology narrates how "the GDR's environmental policies and impotence to fully address its own failings left a troubling legacy when the SED lost power in 1989."[10] Although Ault's book investigates state practices and protest cultures, further nuance is needed when

8 Joachim Radkau, *Age of Ecology* (Cambridge, UK, 2014), 368.

9 Radkau cited Christoph Bernhardt's scholarship on recultivation in Lusatia as proof of "lethargy," although in fact Bernhardt's data reveals an extensive amount of recultivation planning in the creation of the Senftenberger See. See Bernhardt, "Von der 'Mondlandschaft' zur sozialistischen 'Erholungslandschaft': Die Niederlausitz als Exerzierfeld der Regionalplanung in der DDR-Zeit," in *Die Niederlausitz vom 18. Jahrhundert bis heute: Eine gestorte Kulturlandschaft?*, ed. Günter Bayerl and Dirk Maier (Münster, 2002), 313. For other rare studies that feature local planning activism, see Torsten Meyer and Axel Zutz, "Auf dem Weg zum Senftenberger Seengebiet: Protagonisten und Institutionen der Rekultivierung von Braunkohletagebauen in der Niederlausitz, 1920–60," in *Paradigmenwechsel und Kontinuitätslinien im DDR-Städtebau: Neue Forschungen zur ostdeutschen Architektur- und Planungsgeschichte*, ed. Frank Betker, Carsten Benke, and Christoph Bernhardt (Erkner, 2010); and Martin Baumert, "Eine 'Synthese aus Natur und Technik'? Entwicklung und Anwendung von Bodenmeliorationsverfahren im Braunkohlenbergbau der DDR 1949 bis 1974," in *Bergbau und Umwelt in der DDR und BRD: Praktiken der Umweltpolitik und Rekultivierung*, ed. Helmuth Albrecht et al. (Berlin, 2022).

10 Julie Ault, "Aquatic Conundrums: The GDR's Water Woes and Soviet Bloc Cooperation, 1963–1989," in *Ecologies of Socialisms: Germany, Nature, and the Left in History, Politics, and Culture*, ed. Sabine Mödersheim, Scott Moranda, and Eli Rubin, 201–226 (Berlin, 2019), 226.

one addresses "GDR environmental policies" and "failings," namely by looking at concrete plans and practices outside of central offices in East Berlin. Markus Schwarzer's 2013 dissertation barely comments on the East German period at all (apart from its runaway ecological devastation) before celebrating recultivation achievements after 1990, overlooking continuities in personnel and recultivation approaches before and after 1989.[11]

11 Markus Schwarzer, *Von Mondlandschaften zu Vision eines neuen Seenlandes: Der Diskurs über die Gestaltung von Tagebaubrachen in Ostdeutschland* (Wiesbaden, 2014).

By disassembling "the GDR" as a hegemonic top-down entity and exploring the debates and practices as they unfolded amongst a myriad of local actors, this article deconstructs the "troubling legacy" that has seemed so self-evident in hindsight. Obviously, East German recultivation had failed to keep up with the rate of devastation by 1989, but neither in theory nor in practice had the planners and practitioners of recultivation been idle. How could local officials, scholars, and grassroots actors be said to have "failed," if many of their ideas and even practices laid the basis for "successful recultivation" in East German coalfields after 1989? Failure stemmed from insufficient investment from centralized offices, along with the *active* efforts by mining collective leaders, who *succeeded* in their primary objective of securing raw materials for the coal-dependent East German economy, while also increasingly attaining a basic recultivation program that still benefits the region today. Had utter failure been the story of recultivation, practically everything between Borna and Leipzig would have been a desert, whose acidic sandstorms would have poisoned all the surrounding forests and farmland outside designated mining areas. This was a nightmare very much on the minds of officials who experienced this sort of disaster area in the proportionally much smaller mining area in 1956. However bad the "moonscape" south of Leipzig appeared in 1989, it could have been much worse had recultivation remained at the dismal levels they had held into the 1960s.

I. Mining Dreams, Laws, and Reality before 1956

Experts have long observed the deleterious effects of lignite mining. In their 1807 forestry lexicon, Carl Adam Heinrich von Bose and Friedrich Gottlob Leonhardi noted that *landscapes damaged by the mining of "Erdkohle"* could at best be turned into a pond or marsh, and "far more seldom to be laid out as a field because of a lack of decent soil."[12] As small holes dug out by hand expanded into machine-harvested pits starting in the 1920s, a new science of recultivation emerged, led by experts such as Joachim Seidemann at the Leipzig University Institute for Soil Melioration. By 1954, the monthly paper *Das Magazin* fantasized about Markkleeberg (a town adjoining Leipzig's southern city limits) sitting at the edge of a lake by 1975. In 1956, the Leipzig University Geographical Institute produced a map of this lake district. A Leipzig drafting office's 1959 "Development Plan for Brown Coal Pits and Post-Mining Landscapes for the Leipzig-Borna-Altenburg Region" produced the region's first scholarly recultivation plan.[13]

Such dreams of a lake district hemmed by productive farmland and forests (on filled-in pits) clashed with geological and chemical realities. From the 1920s onward, experts had urged filling in abandoned mining pits with the mass of tertiary sands laden with oxidizing pyrite and marcasite and then covering these phytotoxic soils with rich topsoil separately stored on special heaps. Instead, most of this topsoil – generated for centuries in the four-to-five-meter-deep "Auenlehm" along the Weiße Elster and Pleiße rivers and their tributaries – was dumped onto the bottom of overburden heaps, lost forever, while the ample sands landed on top. This lowered the pH level to the level of vinegar. As scholarship at the time and since has demonstrated, a one-meter layer of separately stored topsoil was needed to produce farmland (two meters for forestry), while organic or mineral fertilizers were essential to produce even low yields from carefully rotated

12 Carl Adam Heinrich von Bose and Friedrich Gottlob Leonhardi, *Neues allgemein praktisches Wörterbuch der Forstwissenschaft* (Remagen-Oberwinter, 1807; repr., Kassel, 2016), 271–272.

13 Andreas Berkner and Kulturstiftung Hohenmölsen, eds., *Bergbau und Umsiedlungen im Mitteldeutschen Braunkohlenrevier* (Beucha, 2022), 22.

Figure 2. Plans for postmining landscape. „Bergbaufolgelandschaft," 1959, Andreas Berkner papers. Reproduced by permission.

(less lucrative) crops in the early years to begin to overcome adverse conditions for plant growth.[14] Filled-in pits not only disrupted groundwater distribution: they also leached toxic sulfide residues to other areas of land and into future lakes, if these were not fed by streams instead.

14 Albrecht Krummsdorf, "Utilization and Development of Post-Mining Landscapes," Tempus JEP No. 4988-92/1, *Nitra* 1993: 79–81.

The first attempt at a stream-fed lake came with the Senftenberger See, completed in Lusatia in 1972.[15] Along with earlier alkaline melioration with lime, East German recultivation experts such as Manfred Seela pioneered the use of lignite byproducts (notably filter ash) to make the filled-in pits' acidic soils productive. Building on the scholarship of East German experts, contemporary experts have concurred that, "when pyrite- and lignite-containing sites are ameliorated well and revegetated with trees, pedogenesis and overall water and elemental budgets eventually approach normal development after several decades." As will be shown, however, proper soil amelioration was limited to test plots well into the 1960s, meaning that the most effectively restored land was only just becoming more productive at the moment that East Germany collapsed, in effect enabling post-communist planners to claim "success" for landscape development, even though its seeds had literally been sown in the 1970s and 1980s.[16]

The legal basis for recultivation was already established in the December 6, 1951 *Gesetzblatt der DDR* (issue 146): "Verordnung über die Wiedernutzbarmachung der für Abbau- und Kippenzwecke des Bergbaues in Anspruch genommenen Grundstücksflächen," which decreed that mining collectives were obligated to make land usable again for agriculture or forestry. Paragraph two explicitly demanded the complete storage and reuse of topsoil, while paragraph four only excluded the inevitable land deficits left after coal extraction (*Restlöcher*) from its rule that all post-mining terrain was to be leveled and graded for productive use. In most cases, the land deficits would one day become lakes.[17] In contravention of this law, very little topsoil reclamation (*Mutterbodenwirtschaft*) took place in East Germany through most of the 1950s. The land reclamation mandate was simply at odds with the production quotas demanded of agricultural and forestry collectives. Although in 1951 an attempt was made "on the pit mine management's own initiative" at Espenhain to use a conveyer

15 Reinhard Hüttl, "Ecology of Post Strip-Mining Landscapes in Lusatia, Germany," *Environmental Science and Policy* 1 (1998): 129–135, here 131.

16 Julia Krümmelbein et al., "A History of Lignite Coal Mining and Reclamation Practices in Lusatia, Eastern Germany," *Canadian Journal of Soil Science* 92 (2012): 53–66, here 58.

17 "Verordnung über die Wiedernutzbarmachung der für Abbau- und Kippenzwecke des Bergbaues in Anspruch genommenen Grundstücksflächen," *Gesetzblatt der DDR* 146 (December 6, 1951): 1133-1134.

bridge to remove topsoil, this small-scale operation ended in 1954, when a larger overburden spreader (*Großabsetzer*) was sent to the expanding pit at Schleenhain. Henceforth, Espenhain could only produce a bit of *Mischboden,* a barely usable mélange of topsoil with toxic sands. Espenhain's new director Karl Förster begged Berlin for "considerable investments" in machinery, dedicated train infrastructure, and personnel to allow for topsoil reclamation without damaging coal production, and he warned that "if we stick with present conditions, about 90% of the valuable alluvial loam will be dumped into the depths and lost."[18] By 1956, Espenhain's entire history of topsoil reclamation, achieved by its own initiative, had merely yielded 11 hectares of sandy-clay *Mischboden*, most of which might require half a century to produce usable yields. The plant management concluded: "*further achievements were not possible, because of the high impositions from the plan.* Despite numerous presentations, a meager reduction in production requirements for the benefit of the topsoil program was not approved back then by the SAG Brikett, and moreover financing for this was rejected."[19] Meanwhile, despite attempts at forestation, by 1953 a huge slag heap of toxic sands prone to landslides had emerged next to Espenhain, while those pits which had been filled in were generally released for "recultivation" without topsoil. Although thin strips of topsoil were sometimes sandwiched between the dead fields, they were ineffective for forestry, much less farming, as they were rapidly coated by toxic dust storms from the surrounding wasteland. Worse still, the pits were rapidly spreading.[20]

Even in this bleak epoch of recultivation failure, experts and officials insisted that recultivation was an essential task for the sake of economic productivity and future generations — a narrative they would sustain with creeping success through the coming years. A May 1952 *Gesetzblatt* resolution, following up on the 1951 recultivation law, granted *Kreis* and *Bezirk* officials limited authority to inspect mining areas in consultation with the Agricultural and Forestry Ministry, and they

18 VEB Kombinat Espenhain, "Aufgabenstellung zur Projektierung 1957," Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Außenstelle Leipzig, Bestand 20237 Bezirkstag/Rat des Bezirkes Leipzig (hereafter SächStAL 20237), Nr. 00248, 8, 11.

19 Emphasis in original, VEB Kombinat Espenhain, "Mutterbodenwirtschaft bzw. Kulturbodenwirtschaft auf den Innenkippen des Tagebaues Espenhain," November 9, 1956, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 00248, 17.

20 VEB Kombinat Espenhain, "Rekultivierungsplan: Stand am 31.12.1953," SächStAL 20237, Nr. 00248, 212.

repeatedly cited the 1951 law in their rejection of dismal recultivation outcomes.[21] Although the Technical Mining Inspection (TBBI) (under the oversight of the Ministry for Heavy Industry) had attempted to impose topsoil quotas starting in 1952, at an October 1953 meeting between the TBBI, various mining representatives, and regional county-level officials, a TBBI official lamented that "at present a great deal of topsoil is taken from agricultural usage. There exists no or only a very poor topsoil reclamation process." The result, he argued, was hundreds of hectares of lifeless land. Observing numerous protest letters, he concluded: "the population should have no cause to complain about a poor topsoil reclamation process." The reality, however, was the near-total loss of topsoil under dumps of tertiary sands, while trains meant for topsoil reclamation were diverted to meet quotas for moving overburden before coal extraction.

A member of the Borna mining leadership agreed in principle that, despite insufficient equipment and personnel, all mining leaders should do their best to save topsoil, as this "is a matter for the whole *Volk*. Our descendants must not be faced with wastelands (the sandstorms of Espenhain)." A Borna County leader added that "when topsoil is lost, it is lost forever."[22] An inspection of the Borna lignite topsoil cultivation operation on November 13, 1953, unfortunately concluded that clay-filled and otherwise "extremely poor-quality" soils were being dumped along with topsoil. High coal production at Borna was damaging present and future agricultural productivity.[23] By August 11, 1956, the Berlin district attorney denounced mining operations for totally failing to satisfy the 1951 law, to which the TBBI added: "since its founding to the present day, no recultivation work has been taken up in the Espenhain plant. Several hundred hectares extend here that are only covered by sterile tertiary soils. With strong winds, the fine sands are carried away for kilometers to coat agricultural tracts. These sandstorms also have an impeding effect on traffic and pedestrians." Notwithstanding years of complaints to Berlin, the TBBI concluded, "no change has yet

21 "Durchführungsbestimmung zur Verordnung über die Wiedernutzbarmachung der für den Abbau- und Kippenzwecke des Bergbaues in Anspruch genommenen Grundstücksflächen," *Gesetzblatt der DDR* 61 (May 20, 1952), 369–370.

22 "Protokoll über die Sitzung betr. Mutterbodenwirtschaft im Revier Borna am 15.10.1953," October 15, 1953, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07124, 8–13.

23 Ebersbach, Stellvertretender Abteilungsleiter Abteilung Land- und Forstwirtschaft, an das Braunkohlenwerk Borna, "Mutterbodenwirtschaft," November 14, 1953, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07124, 5.

been attained to the present day," which meant that the three-to-five-meter-high topsoil near the doomed village of Stöhna in the Pleiße watershed would also surely "not be secured, because up to now the Espenhain plant lacks available equipment and laborers."[24]

It was a scandal for local officials, farming collectives, and residents that central ministries in Berlin, such as the Coal and Energy Ministry and the Agriculture and Forestry Ministry, had long been aware of the situation and taken no meaningful action, not just at Espenhain, but in mines across the region. Although the latter ministry's chief of plant production, Fritz Weißhaupt, promised to personally intervene to improve the topsoil situation at high-level meetings, no change occurred.[25] Though East Germany's second five-year plan explicitly demanded increases in agricultural production, central plans for recultivation competitions amongst the mining collectives failed because coal production sustained the highest priority. So desperate was the situation that, in its report dated November 30, 1956, Leipzig's district council (Rat des Bezirkes) broke the taboo in acknowledging that "damage to the landscape's fabric did not just originate during the capitalist era, but rather also after 1945" in mining operations like Böhlen and Espenhain. In Borna County alone, 288.4 hectares of land had been lost *each year* from 1951 to 1955, of which only 42.5 hectares had been recultivated with any sort of topsoil. In Bezirk Leipzig, over 1300 hectares of *Ödland* (unrecultivated wasteland) had come into being, and only about half of the terrain used by mining had received any sort of new function. Of the roughly one-quarter of all mining territory that received supposed topsoil recultivation, most emerged with "highly variable quality," which was bureaucratic language for *poor* quality.[26]

II. 1956: A Storm of Bluster with Winds of Change

Evaluations directed to the highest levels like the November 1956 Bezirk report (in concert with a stream of protest letters

24 Staatsanwalt Wunsch, Der Generalstaatsanwalt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik an die TBBI Freiberg/Sa., "Verstürzung von Mutterboden," August 11, 1956, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 00248, 3; Ankes an den Generalstaatsanwalt der DDR, "Verstürzung von Mutterboden: Ihr Schreiben vom 5.9.1956," Zeitz, September 11, 1956, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 00248, 4.

25 Rat des Bezirkes Leipzig, "Bericht über die Mutterbodenwirtschaft im Bezirk Leipzig für die Abgeordnetengruppe der Volkskammer des Bezirkes Leipzig," November 30, 1956, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 00248, 5–6.

26 Rat des Bezirkes Leipzig, "Bericht über die Mutterbodenwirtschaft im Bezirk Leipzig für die Abgeordnetengruppe der Volkskammer des Bezirkes Leipzig," November 30, 1956, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07130, 1–5.

from local officials, state inspection teams, and the populace) brought the stalemate between state officials/inspectors and mining officials to a head amid the political thaw in 1956. On December 12, 1956, East German People's Chamber (Volkskammer) President Johannes Dieckmann chaired a meeting with high-level officials at the Böhlen Cultural House that included the bellicose Bezirk SED party chairman Paul Fröhlich (an ally in such high favor he was targeted as a likely successor to Walter Ulbricht). Although the meeting's indignant theatrics and seeming bureaucratic impotence might at first glance have foreboded only more of the same, the very fact that many of East Germany's most powerful officials gathered at ground zero of the ongoing mining devastation implied that, in the future, the state desired gestures toward change.

The meeting commenced with Berlin's bureaucrats asserting their dominance. Dieckmann opened with a furious attack against the presumption that high-level bureaucrats "don't have a clue about things." A variety of leaders had just undertaken a tour "through this moonscape," after all, meaning they had spontaneously attained "special knowledge."[27]

By calling in sick or otherwise failing to come, the region's mining officials apparently wished to escape blame from the gathered Technical Mining Inspection representatives, Bezirk leaders, and Berlin officials. Only Espenhain's young new director Förster showed up to blame Nazis and their capitalist friends for every wrong, since after all they had designed and built the Espenhain facility for their war economy; and he celebrated how his staff had planned installations capable of removing all of the sulfur dioxide gas that wafted from the plant – a promise so fantastic that even Dieckmann interjected his astonishment. Admitting that Espenhain had only reclaimed 16.5 hectares of land, while four hundred hectares had been left naked, the minutes indicate Dieckmann was further shocked when Förster revealed that this enormous quantity of wasteland was *only* the result for Espenhain and did not include the enormous wastelands left by other pits

27 "Stenographisches Protokoll der Sitzung der Abgeordnetengruppe der Volkskammer des Bezirkes Leipzig am 12.12.1956 im Kulturhaus des VEB Kombinat 'Otto Grotewohl' in Böhlen," SächStAL 20237, Nr. 00248, 25–78, here 27.

that pockmarked the region. Even this minimal recultivation, Förster noted, was only possible through much free labor and use of unbalanced funds and materials.[28]

Whether or not such brave proletarian efforts had actually taken place, Förster's demands for more funds and materials (also in the name of other mining collectives across the region, which inspection representatives likewise noted had attained "no recultivation work") met with intransigence from the high officials. Dieckmann merely noted that either the mining installations had to abide by the 1951 law, or the laws had to change. He failed to care that either outcome was unlikely. After hours of bickering, the Volkskammer president was ready to wash his hands of the whole meeting and return to Berlin.

Such seeming indifference also came from Paul Fröhlich. Like Dieckmann, the SED Bezirk chairman first had to vent his outrage at "almost a wheelbarrow full" of resolutions and paperwork and reject the Berlin state prosecutor's desire to charge the mining leadership with violations of the 1951 regulation in court. "Sometimes," Fröhlich acceded, "there are, objectively seen, things that despite the best intentions and abilities of those in charge — also in the government — cannot be resolved." And this meant that sometimes one had to accept "unpleasant things" in the name of a stable economy dependent on coal.[29] In any event, Fröhlich noted, it was "beyond the competence of today's meeting" to allocate millions in funds for topsoil reclamation. This was not an outcome he preferred, of course, but rather the fault of nameless officials in Berlin, "who have such strange recommendations like making Leipzig itself disappear. These people have said: the best coal is sitting under there. Is that for fun? They only see their coal." Already Markkleeberg was vanishing, Fröhlich blustered, and he concluded by derailing the meeting with a promise (seconded by Dieckmann) that this sort of "soulless" campaign "to erase whole cities" had to end — without any sign of how this might happen.[30] When officials such as

28 "Unbalanced" funds and materials typically came from "reserves" that were not in official ledgers. "Stenographisches Protokoll . . . in Böhlen," 37–40.

29 "Stenographisches Protokoll . . . in Böhlen," 63–64.

30 "Stenographisches Protokoll . . . in Böhlen," 67.

Agriculture and Forestry Ministry representative Weißhaupt tried to use lines from Marx and Lenin to push Fröhlich for separate funds and materials for topsoil recultivation to ensure agricultural quotas, Fröhlich scoffed that they could plant "bananas" on the reclaimed soils for all he cared. His joke reiterated that the state (led by his close ally Walter Ulbricht) would never deploy investments for recultivation. Dieckmann closed the meeting by accentuating that they had not come to pass resolutions, but merely to discuss and plan more meetings.[31]

Even when it was obvious that the existing system did not work, powerful figures failed to take action. Paul Fröhlich railed against Berlin tyrants, even though he himself was one of those tyrants (tagged as Ulbricht's potential successor). Although Fröhlich and Berlin elites supported coal production at all costs, however, they did not leave Böhlen expecting *inaction* from local players. Without a functioning topsoil recultivation program, East Germany would face declining agricultural and forestry output, to say nothing of quality of life for residents. For high officials like Fröhlich, someone had to find a solution for the recultivation problem. They little cared who did it or how, so long as they were not asked to make substantial contributions.[32] And henceforth — before and especially after his premature death in 1970 — Fröhlich's own Bezirk offices would help lead the charge for an effective recultivation of Leipzig's dusty moonscape, even as they were hamstrung in practice by the lack of central support Fröhlich had foretold.

After 1956, the quota-obsessed coal installations continued to offer mere lip service to changing their ways, because Berlin seldom equipped them with special machinery and personnel, nor classified topsoil reclamation as part of their expected "productivity." Expert advice, carefully assembled and directed, thus failed to gain traction in centralized planning. By the same token, however, the December 1956 meeting yielded new expert commissions and resolutions whose

31 "Arbeitstagung der Abgeordnetengruppe der Volkskammer des Bezirkes Leipzig am 14. November 1956 in Leipzig," SächStAL 20237, Nr. 00248, 80–160.

32 Fröhlich was hardly "lethargic"; recultivation was simply less important to him than the coal economy. And he was extremely active in other matters, such as ensuring the demolition of Leipzig's University Church. See Demshuk, *Demolition on Karl Marx Square: Cultural Barbarism and the People's State in 1968* (Oxford, UK, 2017).

coherent platforms proffered innovative approaches to recultivation, empowered by the 1951 law and informed by cutting-edge science that made use of very poor resources. Real change in recultivation (or even tree planting) thus arose gradually and with much improvisation by engaged officials and experts who learned to work around the centralized system, even as the worsening ecological situation lowered productivity in agriculture and forestry, and mining concerns proved content to merely pay damages to farmers, foresters, and residents when forced to do so. Well into the 1980s, rhetoric about saving the natural world for its own sake (rather than for human uses) rarely appeared in "recultivation" discussions. Notwithstanding the fact that in 1972 East Germany was only the second European country to establish an environmental ministry, most complaints about ecological degradation from pit mining were framed in terms of human health and economic losses for agriculture and forestry, rather than environmental protection.[33]

33 East Germany's Ministerium für Umwelt und Wasserwirtschaft (MUW) was founded two years before West Germany's Umweltbundesamt appeared in 1974, and at least on paper East Germany promised substantial investment in environmental protection. Thomas Höpel, *Opposition, Dissidenz und Resistenz in Leipzig, 1945-1989* (Leipzig, 2018), 163.

34 Chairman Gerhart Ziller, Wirtschaftsausschuß, to the Büro des Präsidiums des Ministerrates u.a., January 9, 1957, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07139, 77–78.

III. Creeping Progress despite Top-Down Priorities, 1957–1971

On January 9, 1957, a new Volkskammer special economic committee with representatives from the Leipzig city council and "other state institutions" sent a list of demands "for the recovery of topsoil in the excavation areas of the Leipzig District" to the Coal and Energy Minister, Agriculture and Forestry Minister, the Chair of the State Planning Commission, and the State Secretary of the Ministerial Council. Their eight bullet points for improving topsoil reclamation included greater departmental coordination, construction and deployment of special recultivation machinery, support for research institutes, and the incorporation of topsoil reclamation as a firm component of pit-mining operational plans.[34] It was a well-timed expert committee proposal to the highest offices for solving the problems Paul Fröhlich had deemed unresolvable. Had they been fully heeded, these demands —

which recurred through the following years of struggle in letters from experts, inspectors, and local officials — might have substantially softened the region's ecological and ultimately economic-political crisis. Given the fact that committee chairman Gerhart Ziller committed suicide a few months later, allegedly because his critiques about economic policy failed to find resonance with the Ulbricht regime, it is clear that efforts to change course were challenged from the start. But they did not stop. From 1957 until he was deposed on trumped-up political charges in 1961, longstanding Leipzig University Institute for Soil Melioration director Seidemann pushed for a practical economic approach (*Zweckwirtschaft*), in which a plot of recovered land would be planted with crops that would infuse more nutrients into the soil and not be required to meet production quotas.[35] Although insufficient materials and manpower continued to hamper recultivation quotas through the early 1960s, the implementation of this *Zweckwirtschaft* (responding to complaints by local agricultural collectives (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften*, or LPG) yielded isolated successes.

This period also saw the first overall plan for the future of the Leipzig-Borna-Altenburg region in 1963, followed over the next seven years by a series of studies on how to form recreational lakes out of the mining pits. The biggest result here was the Leipzig District Council's confirmation of plans for recreational areas around the former Kulkwitz pit twelve kilometers west of the Leipzig city center.[36] Given that the recreational lake area actually came into being adjacent to the enormous Grünau housing development, this panacea proves that when resources were effectively allocated, East Germany was perfectly capable of producing an attractive lake out of a mining pit.

Further progress came with a Ministerial Council resolution "for the protection of farmland and soil and the securing of socialist agricultural use of soil" on December 17, 1964, in

35 Rat des Kreises Borna Abteilung Land- und Forstwirtschaft, "Beschluß Nr. 39/960 über die Errichtung einer Zweckwirtschaft," SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07134, 66.

36 Horst Walter, "Landeskultur in Bezirk Leipzig," in *Bodennutzung und Umweltschutz: Beiträge aus dem Braunkohlenbergbau*, ed. Albrecht Krummsdorf (Leipzig, 1975), 15–16.

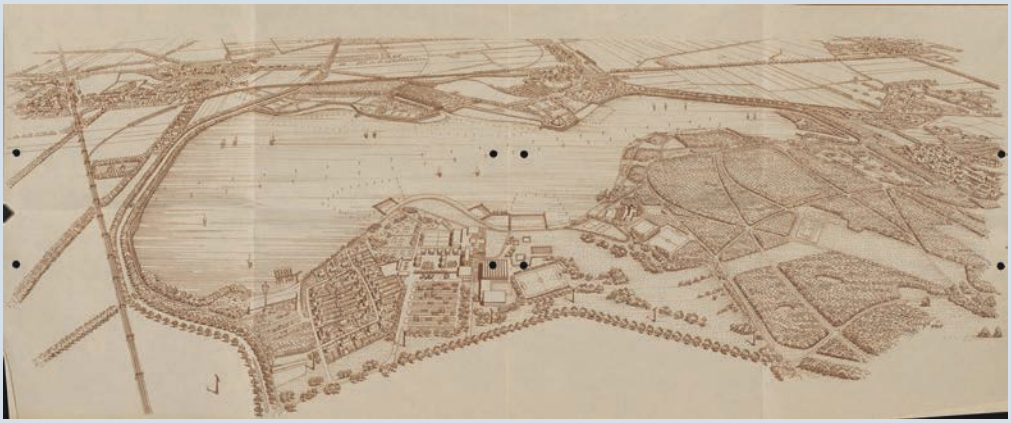

Figure 3. Plans for recreational area in Kulkwitz, 1969. Rat des Kreises Leipzig, Abteilung Jugendfragen, Körperkultur und Sport, Arbeitsgruppe Naherholungsgebiet Kulkwitz, "2 Bebauungsplanskizzen Naherholungsgebiet Kulkwitz," August 1969, SächStAL 20237 Bezirkstag/Rat des Bezirkes Leipzig, Nr. 04720, 68.

which central authorities in Berlin replaced the existing system (having allegedly failed to meet the 1951 regulation's goals) with more rigorous enforcement mechanisms. The 1964 resolution, agricultural expert Konrad Werner (from Halle's Melioration Institute) urged Berlin, needed to incentivize mining operations by integrating recultivation quotas into coal production quotas. By 1965, agricultural experts kept up their complaints that poor harvests were resulting, because mining goals were opposed to recultivation. Mining leaders, they concluded, should be compelled to implement scholarly recultivation methods "in the interest of all of society," and barred from passing on blame for their failure to satisfy their legal obligations.[37]

Local commissions also became more combative. Building on the work of Seidemann and informed by the scholarship of Albrecht Krummsdorf among others, in April 1966 a commission of experts led by Paul Kaluza (since 1961) alongside Konrad Werner and Krummsdorf's student Manfred Seela (at the time chief agronomist in the Borna County Council on Agriculture [(Kreislandwirtschaftsrat]) demanded that "agriculture should hold fast and give no land to coal [mines], if coal [mining] has given no land back in return" — a revolutionary overturning of laws in place since 1918 (the state was legally permitted to dispose of the earth underneath a farmer's land). Such provocative statements were prompted by the crisis that many LPG members — frustrated with dwindling land, destroyed infrastructure, and the poor quality of recultivation — were quitting. To break out of this economically perilous cycle,

37 "Vortrag von Dr. agr. Konrad Werner, gehalten am 15.4.1965 in Schwarzheide anläßlich der Tagung der Expertengruppe 'Probleme der Wiedernutzbarmachung von Kippen und Halden des Bergbaues' des Forschungsrates," SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07132, 14–33, here 17, 21–22.

the Bezirk Planning Commission was urged to impose recultivation deadlines on the biggest lignite collective (VVB Braunkohle).[38] The commission's demands, submitted to the Rat des Bezirkes on July 20, 1966, convinced Berlin to order coal enterprises to compensate LPGs with damages and ensure that basic infrastructure remained intact even as a region was mined.[39] In 1967, the Bezirk agricultural ministry decreed that henceforth mining companies had to ensure that land became arable again after mining rather than placing the burden of productivity on the agricultural collectives. Mining companies, though stricken with shortages in materials and manpower, were tasked with remediation by plowing filter ash sometimes mixed with lime into acidic post-mining soil and greening the edges of pits to keep them from eroding.[40]

IV. Increasing Destruction, Increasing Recultivation: the 1970s

A new generation of Bezirk- and Kreis-level officials supported such expert recommendations and exerted pressure on mining operations. The timing was crucial, as increased recultivation coincided with increased lignite output when the global oil crisis cut off East German access to subsidized Soviet oil and gas, further worsening air and water pollution as the condition of mining and carbo-chemical facilities degraded. Upon the death of Fröhlich in 1970, his successor Horst Schumann made the Bezirk more responsive to local needs, while Roland Wötzel, as chair of the Bezirk Planning Commission after 1971, sought to pair increased coal production with recultivation of agriculture, forestry, and recreation. That same year, agronomist Manfred Seela founded his Borna-based state recultivation initiative (Zwischenbetriebliche Einrichtung Rekultivierung). Though such institutional pressures failed to satisfy agricultural collectives, local residents, or recultivation experts, new commissions, resolutions, and administrative departments created qualified authorities

38 Rat des Bezirkes Leipzig Abteilung Allgemeine Landwirtschaft, "Aktennotiz über den operativen Einsatz der ständigen Kommission zur Ausschöpfung örtlicher Reserven in der Landwirtschaft am 19.4.66. Untersuchung des Standes der Wiederurbarmachung im Braunkohlengebiet Borna," April 20, 1966, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07132, 63–71, here 70.

39 "Stellung an Landwirtschaftsrat mit Schreiben vom 5.1.1966 zum Entwurf der 2. DB zur Bodennutzungsverordnung," SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07151, 182–184.

40 Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, "Aktennotiz: Probleme der Wiederurbarmachung und der Beeinflussung der Landwirtschaft durch den Bergbau," April 6, 1967, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07151, 118–120, here 119.

dedicated to recultivation with the best techniques possible under shortage conditions. Able to cite and apply resolutions as well as longstanding wish lists for improving recultivation, these experts pushed against mining operations still bolstered in their intransigence by the Coal and Energy Ministry and Politburo. Although recultivation outcomes failed to approach experts' ideals, by 1989 their efforts had ensured continued recultivation of farms and forests, as well as projection of recreational spaces, some of which found realization in post-communist plans.

Traveling south of Leipzig in May 1973, East German Environmental Minister Hans Reichelt celebrated the (limited) recultivation outcomes at Regis by the Phönix brigade with the declaration: "we mustn't only destroy; instead, after coal mining is complete, we have to make the landscape capable of use again for future generations, and, if possible, form it even more beautifully than before. This speaks to our honor as miners. We will not tolerate any moonscapes!"[41] Much as Reichelt's ministry excelled at platitudes for recultivation and ecology, it devoted far more energy to helping the Stasi classify environmental data and persecuting free-thinking environmental activists.[42]

Greater planning action came in November 1973 from the Leipzig district council (Rat des Bezirkes) Resolution 143/73 ("Conception for shaping the post-mining landscape in the region between Leipzig and Altenburg"), whose "conditions and development criteria for recultivation [*Wiederurbarmachung*] and excluding terrain, in essence a landscape after mining," was to "possess validity for decades." These goals were to be coordinated by the district Department for Environmental Protection and Water Management (Abteilung Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft beim Rat des Bezirks), which was also formed in 1973. Given the unfolding oil crisis, however, the district council already had to substantially amend the plan in July 1977 to reflect a far more expansive projected pit-mining landscape.[43]

41 Reichelt, quoted in Dieter Lange and Werner Steinert, "Komplexer Brigadeeinsatz in der Wiederurbarmachung des VEB Braunkohlenkombinat Regis," in *Wiedernutzbarmachung devastierter Böden*, ed. Kommission für Umweltschutz beim Präsidium der Kammer der Technik (Leipzig, 1977), 128.

42 Alongside data about Reichelt and classification in my forthcoming book *Cold War Coal Pits*, see the assessments in Christian Möller, *Umwelt und Herrschaft in der DDR: Politik, Protest und Partizipation in der Diktatur* (Göttingen, 2020), 248–251.

43 "1. Ergänzung und Präzisierung der Konzeption zur Gestaltung der Bergbaufolgelandschaft im Raum zwischen Leipzig und Altenburg," July 15, 1977, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07137, 1–16, here 1.

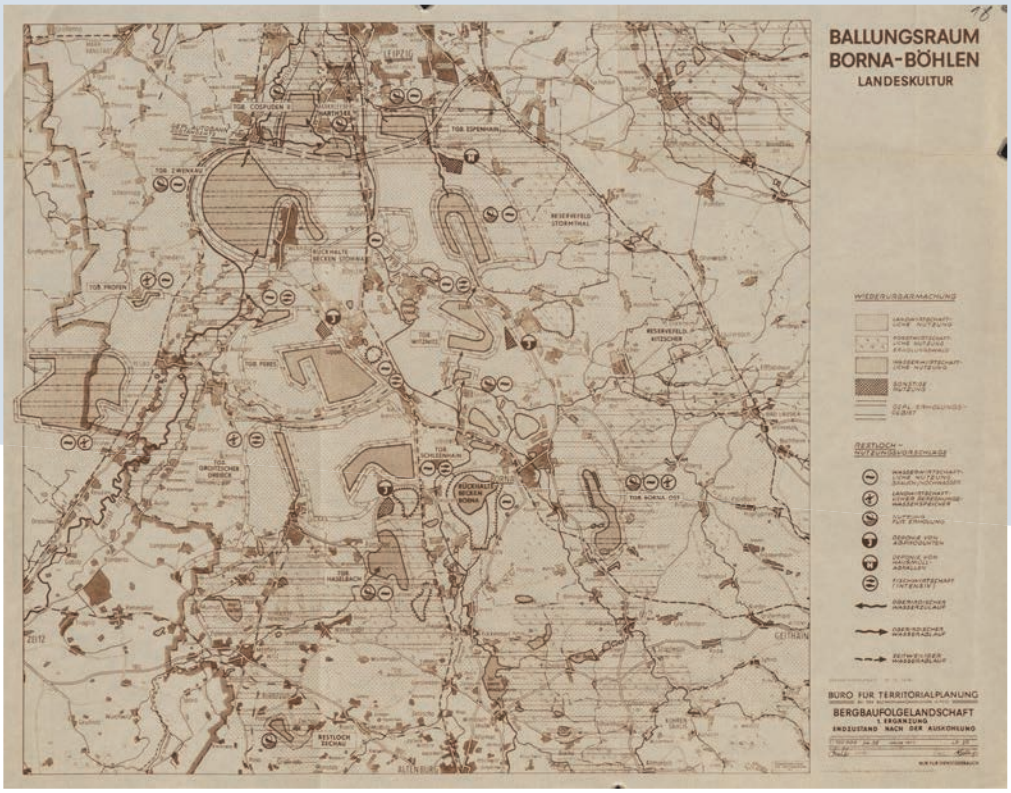

Figure 4. Plan for postmining landscape in the Borna-Böhlen area, 1977. Büro für Territorialplanung bei der Bezirksplankommission Leipzig, "Bergbaufolgelandschaft 1. Ergänzung, Endzustand nach der Auskohlung," January 1977, SächStAL 20237 Bezirkstag/Rat des Bezirkes Leipzig, Nr. 07137, 18.

One cannot understand post-1989 recultivation and landscape planning without taking these plans into account.[44] Quite obviously, they anticipated the post-1989 "Neuseeland." And they demanded that recultivation take place "at the same tempo" as excavation. They projected that the last backlog of wasteland would be covered with topsoil by 1985. Because mining (and thus the pumping of groundwater) was expected to continue and even expand across the region well into the new millennium, the 1970s-era timeline staggered the anticipated completion of specific lakes from the 1990s through 2040.

New recreational areas akin to the Kulkwitzer Lake were desperately needed to replace the many natural escapes Leipzigers had lost because of pit mining, such as the southern Auwald and Harth forest. The "Harthsee," for example, in the Zwenkauer pit west of Gaschwitz was to be completed by 1985. The Bockwitzer Lake (Borna-Ost) was to be completed by the late 1990s, while in the year 2000 the Cospudener Lake was expected to fill the new pit projected to cut deep into southern Leipzig itself. The future Markkleeberger Lake would not open until 2030, while the Zwenkauer Lake and

44 For the physical plans, see Büro für Territorialplanung bei der Bezirksplankommission Leipzig, "Bergbaufolgelandschaft 1. Ergänzung," December 1976-January 1977, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07137, 17–18.

future Störmthaler Lake would only open in 2040. The plan also sought to address future agricultural problems, including a scarcity of water and the loss of farmland due to the shifting of the Elster river and the construction of a major railway line along with many roads.[45]

A great deal of the projected triumphs in the 1970s plans for recultivation and landscape formation drew from years of expert research such as from the Leipzig University Melioration Institute. Some of the scholarly efforts to resolve recultivation and landscaping questions were published in collections from the Kammer der Technik, such as in the 18th volume devoted to *Wiedernutzbarmachung devastierter Böden* with contributions from Albrecht Krummsdorf on using lime to ameliorate acidic soils and from the mining engineer Horst Walter of the new Bezirk environmental department expounding on the historic development of the Kulkwitz recreational area.[46] Krummsdorf himself borrowed heavily from the series when he produced his 1981 popular synthesis on recultivation goals and achievements. "The spanning bleakness of a pit mine" with naked slag heaps and endless "moonscapes" did indeed present "a deeply depressing experience," Krummsdorf began, but he assured his readers that "our landscape in lignite areas will pass through a purgatory before they appear young, with new beauty, diverse and profitable."[47] At first glance, such a vision can seem prophetic today. Indeed, landscape planners like Krummsdorf helped to guide the region's passage through purgatory over the twenty years after 1989. Even as his book appeared in 1981, however, top-down mining plans were in the process of pushing off paradise into the near indefinite future. And purgatory, if it goes on forever, can resemble hell.

V. Planning for Post-Mining Landscapes on the Eve of Revolution

Amendments to the 1973 Bezirk plan through the 1980s – compelled by Berlin and implemented by the District Planning

45 "1. Ergänzung und Präzisierung der Konzeption zur Gestaltung der Bergbaufolgelandschaft," 2–4.

46 Albrecht Krummsdorf, ed., *Bodennutzung und Umweltschutz: Beiträge aus dem Braunkohlenbergbau* (Leipzig, 1975). Albrecht Krummsdorf, Gottfried Saupe, and Gottfried Schnurrbusch, "Möglichkeiten und Erfahrungen der meliorativen Verbesserung bodenphysikalisch schwieriger Kippmergelböden," in *Wiedernutzbarmachung devastierter Böden*, ed. Kommission für Umweltschutz beim Präsidium der Kammer der Technik, 140–148 (Leipzig, 1977). As a testament to the limited distribution of these books to experts and officials, rather than the public, the book I acquired was stamped as an ex-library copy for the internal use of the Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam.

47 Krummsdorf, *Landschaft vom Reißbrett*, 6.

Figure 5. Plan for postmining landscape in the area between Leipzig and Altenburg, 1982. Büro für Bergbauangelegenheiten bei der Bezirksplankommission Leipzig, "Geplante Bergbaufolgelandschaft im Raum zwischen Leipzig und Altenburg," June 1, 1982, SächStAL 20237 Bezirkstag/Rat des Bezirkes Leipzig, Nr. 33437.

Commission – forestalled the lake district into a future utopia to (somehow) be created by distant generations, to the chagrin of planners and regional officials who rightly feared that, by consigning a recreational paradise to the drawing board, they were intensifying the disquiet among workers and residents who suffocated amid the surrounding moonscape. To sustain East Germany's industrial economy and provide power and heating to its population, those at the highest levels demanded further expansion of the coal fields, even as lignite quality declined and pollution surged from installations that were literally collapsing. Revised recultivation maps in 1981 and 1982 literally erased key recreational features from 1973/77 that had been projected for the immediate future in favor of industrial or less expensive outcomes. The proposed Harthsee, for example, was replaced by a forest primarily intended to satisfy logging needs. Perhaps one day it could also accommodate local hikers, among whom only the very elderly might sustain memories of any forests Leipzigers had once enjoyed south of their city.[48]

In July 1981, the district's Office of Territorial Planning reflected these exploitative state priorities in its ranking of

48 Büro für Bergbauangelegenheiten bei der Bezirksplankommission Leipzig, "Bergbauliche Entwicklung im Raum zwischen Leipzig und Altenburg," January 1, 1981, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 33437.

post-mining landscape objectives. The top three were agriculture, forestry, and water resources management. Though "recreation" came next, it was closely followed by "trash dumps," and lastly "environmental protection objects" (*Naturschutzobjekte*). At the meeting, the officials justified their plan's number one change, "the cancellation of the recreational Harth Lake (ca. 140 ha)," due to its sixty-million-mark price tag — never mentioning that the district had fought (and failed) to keep the lake after a lengthy legal dispute with the mining concerns. Parallel to the demise of the Harthsee, the district was also losing the Waldbad Lauer, a popular natural lake, because the Cospuden pit was extending deep into the city limits. Their hope for compensation through a recreational lake in the city's southern Lößnig-Dölitz neighborhood (ultimately a park situated atop much older subterranean mines) never came to pass. Only with the completion of the Cospudener See after the year 2000, they concluded, would the loss in recreational space worsened by the elimination of the Harthsee truly be corrected. In like manner, a proposed lake along the city-facing northern fringe of the Espenhain pit was also replaced by a forest, "because filling it with water demands an effort that can hardly be economically defended," not least because it required cleaning up the Pleiße river and pumping in water from either the Mulde or Weiße Elster, both of which were also heavily contaminated.[49]

Meanwhile, the pits were expanding too quickly for the planners to determine what use might be given to them all, whether recreational or industrial, at some distant future date. The sheer scope of this expansion is clear in maps at the time, which projected where the pits were to go into the new millennium. A November 1982 meeting of the same district planning office yielded a new conception of the "post-mining landscape" explicitly based on the tenth SED party congress, which demanded even more coal production by 1985 and therefore the creation of new coal pits that, in Bezirk Leipzig alone, would raise coal output from 52 million tons to 67 mil-

49 Wagner, Direktor, Büro für Territorialplanung bei der Bezirksplankommission Leipzig, "Thesen zur Überarbeitung der Konzeption 'Bergbaufolgelandschaft südlich Leipzigs,'" 1982, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 33436, 1–6, here 2.

lion tons per year. The planning office admitted: "The loss of the Harth forest and parts of the Auewald will have an especially unfavorable effect, as they have a high value for recreation and regional culture as well as a large number of specific, sometimes unique plants." Along with recreational plans, recultivation itself suffered setbacks due to the sheer extent of projected mining. Of the 700 hectares projected as lost each year, 600 would be farmland.[50] After a tour of the mining region, the Kammer der Technik warned that, although the steady replacement of trains with conveyer belts to transport topsoil and overburden had increased the efficiency of coal extraction, it was diminishing the quality of topsoil used for recultivation. This was, by default, the meager *Mischboden* mélange of topsoil, acidic sands, and clay.[51]

On the eve of the end of East Germany, the extreme tension between coal-hungry Berlin and local demands for a sustainable landscape had reached a breaking point. The increased number and lifespan of coal mines not only threatened the annihilation of cities like Zwenkau and Pegau; the trend also dictated the seemingly indefinite delay of a delightful recreational landscape explicitly meant to satisfy "the demands of humans."[52] Although they never expected the SED dictatorship to end, no one aware of the new plans could imagine they were sustainable. In the final days of 1988, the district chairman of Farming, Forestry, and Foodstuffs complained to the District Planning Commission that the present plans failed to satisfy recreational or even agricultural and forestry needs that had been recommended by major East German scholarly institutes (Akademie der Landwirtschaftswissenschaften; Institut für Landschaftsforschung und Naturschutz, Halle; Arbeitsgruppe Finsterwalde). He noted that, by the year 2000, the district would lose 4,300 hectares of farmland to new pits and failed recultivation. The lack of "decisions from leadership" had prevented the implementation of new recultivation technology essential "to form an ecologically stable and productive landscape that guaranteed an intensified use as well as

50 Wagner, Büro für Territorialplanung, "Konzeption zur Gestaltung der Bergbaufolgelandschaft in den Braunkohlenabbaugebieten des Bezirkes Leipzig," November 17, 1982, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 33436, 1–21, here 2.

51 Kammer der Technik BFA Forsttechnik/BFA Wiederurbarmachung/Bodenschutz, "KDT – Standpunkt: Schlußfolgerungen aus der Fachexkursion 'Probleme der Widerurbarmachung von Braunkohlenkippen für die forstwirtschaftliche Folgenutzung im Raum Leipzig-Altenburg' am 9.10.81," SächStAL 20237, Nr. 33436, here 1.

52 Wagner, "Konzeption zur Gestaltung der Bergbaufolgelandschaft," 3.

the protection of natural resources." Forests required decades to develop, and so the loss of mature forests to mining would yield "a *long-term decline* of the ecological situation and recreational conditions."[53]

Even as officials discussed the dire situation behind closed doors, engaged local citizens proposed alternative solutions for environmental degradation. To name one of many examples, environmentally-themed religious services had taken place annually since 1983 in the most devastated villages south of Leipzig to offer both information and possible approaches for redress; in 1985, this event focused on recultivation and took place in Pötzschau — a largely abandoned village slated for destruction by mining — where engaged citizens entered into a podium discussion with state experts like Manfred Seela and district lignite planning chairman Roland Holzapfel.[54]

Despite keen regional awareness of the need to invest in recultivating farmland, forests, recreational spaces, and a stable ecology, documentation over the course of 1989 exposes a centralized leadership that held back even remedial efforts to secure the cliff lines that would become shores for future lakes or to ameliorate soil conditions. To feed the coal economy, Berlin was ready to bequeath to future generations a weedy acidic landscape of collapsing shores, illegal dumps, and unhealthy pools of vinegar-like water where people were sure to bathe anyway — and, of course, a stockpile of paper plans for a distant-future lake district. Drawing data from post-mining areas that had been left to wild vegetation and erosion, one report warned that, because "a dedicated, sensible [landscape] development with special techniques and technologies is, according to the current state of knowledge, materially and economically not possible," the abandoned pits and slagheaps scheduled to sit "for over fifty years represent an incalculable risk. Experience has shown that the shaping of a post-mining landscape [*Kippenlandschaft*] must begin as fast as possible. *The so-called mining relics will*

53 Voigt, Stellverteter des Vorsitzenden für Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft to Poppe, Bezirksplankommission, December 13, 1988, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 33437.

54 See chapter five in Demshuk, *The Filthiest Village in Europe: Grassroots Ecology and the Collapse of East Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 2026).

Figure 6. Mining landscape in Cospuden ("Tagebau Cospuden"), 1989. Photographer: Thomas Thiel. Reproduced by permission.

increasingly turn into an expensive regional burden with long-term consequences," such as the inevitable illegal recreational use of unsecured slopes and mounds of acidic sands.[55] Nevertheless, early 1989 meetings of the district planning offices confirmed that mining needs (radically expanding pits) and insufficient funding to secure future lake sites meant that the proposed Espenhain lake would only appear sometime around the year 2090, long after the present decisionmakers and even their grandchildren were dead and buried.[56]

Conclusion: Cultural Landscapes from Lignite Moonscapes

Just months before Leipzig's Peaceful Revolution, district planners were foreclosing on the idea of a recreational

55 Emphasis in original, VE BKK Bitterfeld HA Projektierung Leipzig, "Standpunkt zur Niederschrift über die Beratung am 23.1.89 zur Kippenentwicklung im Großtagebau Espenhain," February 15, 1989, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 33437.

56 Büro für Territorialplanung bei der Bezirksplankommission Leipzig, "Entwurf der Ratsvorlage Beschlußgegenstand: Veränderung der Bergbaufolgelandschaft im Bereich des Brückenschlauchs an der nördlichen Markscheide des Tagebaues Espenhain," February 7, 1989; idem., "Niederschrift über die Beratung 'Varianten zur Kippenentwicklung im Tagebau Espenhain' als Vorbereitung des Antrages auf Standortgenehmigung zur Weiterführung des Tagebaues Espenhain im Zeitraum 1991–95, am 31.3.89 im Büro für Territorialplanung," March 30, 1989, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 33437.

wonderland and accepting one hundred years of wild moonscape devastation which would never have allowed for the creation of the lake district the region enjoys today. GDR-era plans and scientific knowledge informed the creation of Leipzig's "Neuseenland" precisely *because* of the unexpected end of communism and resulting closure (rather than expansion) of most of East Germany's pit mining and carbochemical infrastructure, in tandem with unimaginable financial and material assistance from West Germany. Many of Leipzig's post-1989 planners had received training and experience during the East German period, just as the concrete dream of a lake district south of Leipzig transcended the divide of 1989 as a seemingly self-evident goal in the multifaceted planning that emerged over the 1990s.[57]

57 Detailed assessment of post-1989 planning will feature in the book that results from my ongoing comparative project entitled *Cold War Coal Pits*.

This paper has shown how one can trace the evolution of East German recultivation science and praxis through several discrete phases. After poor recultivation outcomes through the mid-1950s, a range of scholars and experts were able to plan and start implementing efforts to save and enrich topsoil for agricultural and forestry uses. These included Rostock geology professor Albrecht Krummsdorf and his student Manfred Seela, who spearheaded creation of a recultivation operation (Zwischenbetriebliche Einrichtung Rekultivierung (ZBE)) south of Leipzig in Borna in 1971, and by the 1980s implemented use of lime with lignite filter ash collected from power plants to ameliorate acidity in recultivated land (Domsdorfer *Aschemeliorationsverfahren*). Such experts were informed by ambitious and evolving Bezirk-level plans for a future lake district that was to one day replace the moonscape. Building on earlier plans, a sweeping 1973 Bezirk-level "Conception for Shaping the Post-Mining landscape in the region between Leipzig and Altenburg" was revised in 1977 to project a "Leipzig-Altenburger Lake District." Unfortunately, the further plans which followed in the 1980s were not mere revisions, but rather substantial alterations that presumed ever more destruction of productive land for coal mining and

less recreational capacity for the public. In sum, it is hardly surprising that centralized planning, with its emphasis on coal production at virtually all costs, limited and ultimately inhibited Bezirk-level landscape planners from crafting a Neuseenland during the communist period. Yet to overemphasize failures dictated from above would overlook the dogged determination of geological and agricultural experts of global standing, whose conceptions were increasingly entertained by Bezirk and Kreis-level officials.

Increased bureaucratic pressure to implement recultivation unfortunately coincided with the 1970s oil crisis. Intent on phasing out coal in favor of cheap Soviet oil and gas, the East German regime had neglected repairs to its coal installations during the 1960s, and then overtaxed them when, alongside an end to subsidized raw resources from the USSR, the Honecker administration encouraged greater consumption that relied on coal production. Recultivation efforts—though more extensive and advanced than those implemented in the 1960s—could not keep up with the exponential increase in pit mining and industrial output from outdated and decaying industrial facilities. By the mid- to late 1980s, the beautiful lake district planned since the 1950s was forestalled well into the future.

Such an outcome was dangerous, experts protested: if contemporary mining operations failed to make basic preparations such as stabilizing pit cliffs, neutralizing acidic soils, ensuring sufficient topsoil, and caring for water distribution, the lake district's acidic waters hemmed by collapsing shorelines would be bequeathed as more of a liability than an asset to their great-grandchildren in one hundred years' time. This forestalling of a viable new landscape coincided with exponentially increasing grassroots unrest over the clear and present danger of industrial pollution and runaway pit mining. Agitated local residents (who often relied on the coal industry that was destroying their *Heimat*) typically attacked regime incompetence without differentiating between blockading

central ministries and regional officials and experts who had been fighting for recultivation all along. After 1989, this triumphalist narrative of uniform regime incompetence and public victimhood became common knowledge.

Many communist-era concerns remain current: the struggle to neutralize lake pH levels, the devastation of the water table, soil infertility, the instability of shorelines, competition over groundwater between farming and recreational uses, and more.[58] Furthermore, just as communist-era recultivation experts struggled with technical and natural challenges, even the most spectacular achievements of recultivation since 1989 have confronted the limits of human ability to control nature after it has been degraded through our prior exploitation. In May 2013, planners realized the "concrete dream" of a canal connecting two nearly completed lakes. Right where just twenty years earlier the Espenhain mine's dusty, unkempt overburden heaps had towered with acidic sands, recreational boaters were now able to pass between the newly crafted Markkleeberger and Störmthaler lakes, via a canal and lock system that overcame a four-meter height difference. Just a few years later, however, some literal cracks appeared in this seeming triumph of post-mining recultivation. In March 2021, the canal was closed indefinitely. Alongside mistakes in construction, it appears that planners had failed to appreciate the challenges that could occur when groundwater rose again through the sandy overburden that had been dumped after mining.[59] Notwithstanding considerable preparation that had included compressing the newly shifted soils along the sides of the canal, the cement-lined edges of the lock were deemed unstable.

Today the closed canal has devolved into an expensive mess of fences, weathering cement walls, aging equipment, and stagnant water. While two of the three sightseeing boats have been restricted into each separate lake, the third was recently sold by the owner due to declining tourist revenues. Work on another canal between the nearby Cospudener and Zwen-

58 "1. Ergänzung und Präzisierung der Konzeption zur Gestaltung der Bergbaufolgelandschaft im Raum zwischen Leipzig und Altenburg," July 15, 1977, SächStAL 20237, Nr. 07137, 4–16, here 16.

59 Björn Meine, "Wer blockiert den Harthkanal?" *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, July 14, 2022, 16.

Figure 7. The Störmthaler-Markkleeberger lock, August 2022. Author's photograph.

kauer lakes (from the neighboring Böhlen/Zwenkau pit mine) has been overshadowed by the calamity. In a worst-case scenario, the lock could fail, and water from the topographically higher Störmthaler Lake could come gushing through into the lower Markkleeberger Lake to flood nearby Connewitz and possibly even a swathe of central Leipzig.[60]

As this story exemplifies, even the most innovative planning and generous investment could not repair the fundamental damage that pit mining had done to the natural world. This is not to downplay recultivation outcomes like the lake district south of Leipzig. On the contrary: this article has upheld recultivation planning and all-too-limited achievements under communism, just as it celebrates the overcoming of the dystopian mining landscape that had prevailed across much of the region in 1989. It is nonetheless the case that humans have irrevocably altered geological substructures, aquifers, soil chemistry, archeological traces, and rich cultural landscapes. The new landscape is unruly, because its damage runs so deep. Even as Cold War-era landscape scholars and planners had chided mining collectives for failing in their duties to recultivate what they had left behind, they had

60 "Bauarbeiten an Kanuparkschleuse—Seesperrung im Leipziger Neuseenland," February 2, 2022, https://www.kanu-sachsen.de/2022/02/03/bauarbeiten-an-kanuparkschleuse-seensperrung-im-leipziger-neuseenland/, accessed August 16, 2024.

remained firm in their belief that they could produce something better than the world as it had existed before mining. This was hubris. Such destruction could not somehow prefigure the creation of a new paradise that exceeded the natural beauty, productivity, and cultural richness of what had come before. Reading the enthusiasm of contemporary tourist and landscape-planning brochures, one cannot escape the sense that this hubris lives on today.

Andrew Demshuk is Professor of History at American University in Washington, DC. His research on forced migration after World War II, state-civic relations in East Germany, and the politics of urban planning in Cold War Poland and divided Germany has appeared in leading scholarly journals, as well as four books: *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory* (Cambridge, 2012); *Demolition on Karl Marx Square: Cultural Barbarism and the People's State in 1968* (Oxford, 2017); *Bowling for Communism: Urban Ingenuity at the End of East Germany* (Cornell, 2020); and *Three Cities after Hitler: Redemptive Reconstruction across Cold War Borders* (Pittsburgh, 2021), which won the 2023 Alice Davis Hitchcock Award from the Society of Architectural Historians. His scholarship has been supported by the DAAD and Humboldt Foundation, among others. His next book, *The Filthiest Village in Europe: Grassroots Ecology and the Collapse of East Germany* (Cornell University Press, 2026), explores how local environmental engagement undermined late communist authority and then flourished amid German reunification. His current research project compares political, economic, and ecological outcomes of extensive open-cast pit mining west of Cologne (in West Germany) and south of Leipzig (in East Germany) during and after the Cold War.