

TOWARDS A CONTEXT - PUBLIC ART AND
THE FORUM DES HALLES



David Patten 27th March 1987

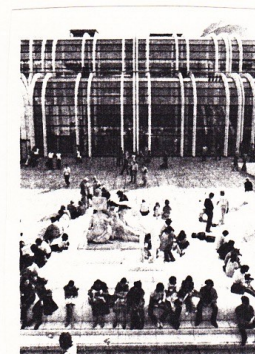
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INTRODUCTION

....the heroism of **modern life** surrounds and presses upon us....The painter, the true painter for whom we are looking, will be he who can snatch its epic quality from life today, and can make us see and understand....how great and poetic we are in our cravats and our patent-leather boots.

Baudelaire on the Salon of 1845

The format of this paper follows, as closely as possible, that used in writing a 'site-specific feasibility study', i.e. site research is juxtaposed with public consultation towards developing a comment which would support a design or a maquette. In this instance, there is no design or maquette to support, site research has been hampered by lack of access to quality information and it is only the nature of the 'public consultation' that rescues this paper from being pedestrian.



The Forum des Halles, Paris

THE SITE - LES HALLES

The Les Halles and La Villette sites have been ideological playgrounds for Europe's architectural avant-garde for the past ten years or more. Literally hundreds of schemes have been prepared for these huge chunks of Paris in response to whole strings of competitions, both official and unofficial. Now at last their futures are fixed, all the discussion, the theorising, the Utopian dreaming and the political manoeuvring is at an end and work is well under way.

No doubt it is the sheer size of these sites that has made them so indigestible by the normal processes of development and has made them so attractive to the kind of architect who likes to think big, if only in theory. The final results are as extraordinary in their way as the most outlandish of the competition entries. The city of Paris is about to be blessed with a superabundance of what are usually known as "cultural and leisure facilities".



The Batiment Lescot and St Eustache



Glass pyramids above the underground leisure centre

For the foreign visitor to Paris, an evening walk around the Latin Quarter is a cultural and leisure experience in itself, but the inhabitants, it seems, or at least their political masters, want more. In fact they seem to want one of everything: at Les Halles a music, dance and drama centre, a library, a "house of poetry", an art gallery, a children's garden, a swimming pool, an auditorium, a sports hall, and some sizeable chunks of commercial development for good measure - all this right next door to that huge existing cultural powerhouse, the Pompidou Centre; at La Villette, to the north, just inside the Peripherique, an enormous museum of science and technology, a hall for pop concerts, an exhibition hall, a cinema with a spherical screen, a "city of music" and a "park for the 21st century".

It all made some kind of sense in the context of the Universal Exhibition which was to have taken place in Paris in 1989. Now that the exhibition has been abandoned, it begins to look like French paternalistic socialism gone mad.

Colin Davies: Building/August 1985

Paris' central market settled on its present site around 1110. Around 1183, under Philippe Auguste, it was extended and permanent buildings and a surrounding wall were built.

By the 16th century, and with a population of some 300,000 to serve, the food market assumed a paramount importance, replacing all other types of trade in the market.

By the 19th century the great market was in urgent need of reconstruction. As Rambuteau and Haussmann thrust wide avenues through the quarter (Rues de Rivoli, du Pont-Neuf, du Louvre, des Halles, Etienne Marcel), a battle royal had begun about the Halles Centrales.

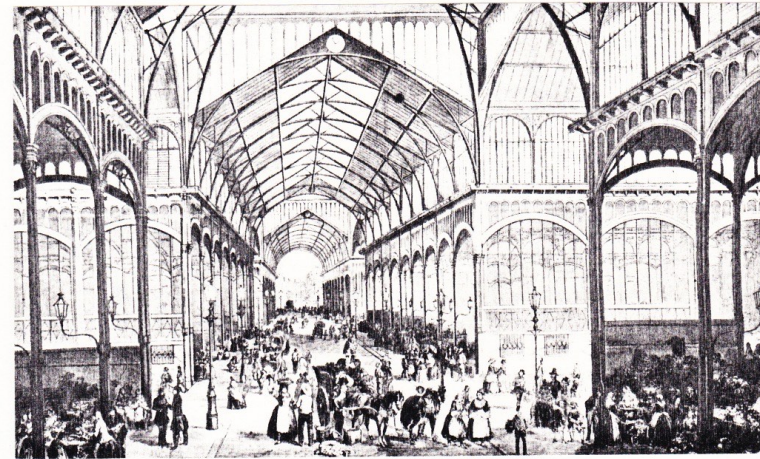
Victor Baltard had been commissioned in 1843 to submit a sketch. He delivered it in 1845, and it was accepted. Hector Horeau, meanwhile and uninvited, made a counter proposal, a "brilliant design" under one large vaulted roof of glass and iron, spanning about 100 meters. Horeau's design was turned down, and Baltard was appointed. The foundation stone was laid in 1851, but the resulting monumental and conventional stone pavilion was found to be unsuitable and was very quickly demolished.



Hector Horeau: design for les Halles Centrales 1845

Baltard, in collaboration with F.Collet, then developed plans for a hall of iron girders and skylight roofs, reminiscent of the Gare de l'Est, and these were accepted by Napoleon III. The rationale of Baltard's second scheme was that the plan consisted of pavilions - fourteen in all - connected by tunnel-vaulted arches, the parts all glazed and each pavilion accommodating one type (or some types) of produce.

The building was begun in 1853 and opened in 1858. By 1870 ten of the pavilions were ready when Georges Augustus Sala, in 1879-80, described it as 'an Exposition Universelle of Victuals', and Huysmans called it 'une des glories du Paris moderne'.



Victor Baltard: Halles Centrales 1853

Two further pavilions were added in 1936, but by the late 1960's the authorities decided to demolish Baltard's creation and so started one of the most bitter farces in modern French architecture. There is a degree of pleasure to be gleaned from a retrospective glance at the details of this farce, and, for your enjoyment, I here provide some quotes from the main characters. On a more serious note, the following has obvious implications for a consideration of public art on the present site.

So how exactly did this extraordinary phenomenon come about? In 1968 the Plateau Beaubourg...was officially included in the redevelopment plan scheduled for the nearby Les Halles sector. A year later President Pompidou was announcing plans for a cultural centre that was designed to act as a magnet for all those interested in the arts, and to restore Paris to what he saw as its rightful place as the world's leading art capital.

Paris Guide Book

He (Richard Rogers) saw no prospect for producing a building that would be anything other than a monument to the highly centralised, autocratic French presidential system....the Beaubourg was of course entirely dependent on the power and prestige of the French presidency for the speed with which it was built.

Royal Academy: New Architecture 1986

And so to Les Halles, which was for so long what the 19th century novelist Emile Zola dubbed 'the belly of Paris'. But in 1979 an astute publicity campaign recoined Zola's famous phrase to claim in jubilation: "The belly of Paris has become the city's heart!"

Paris Guide Book

Today any mention of the 1968 plans is accompanied by a degree of embarrassment. It is hard to enumerate all the mistakes when, on occasion they are as great as the plan itself. Nevertheless, here are some major of all those plans:

-total absence....

-heedless extension....

-the 'new town in open countryside' attitudes....

-excessive density....

-another disadvantage....

-the competitors all behaved like 'artists', along the line of the image of the 'artist-hero', who decides by divine right.

....pointless and dreary monumentality, paranoid posturing and first-year students' building games gave way to broad compositions dominated by the fumbblings of lyrical historicism.

Adrien Rosner: Projects for Les Halles

We are going to create at Les Halles a new world of sensuality, pleasure and joy. The wealthy will flock there in droves to experience the Paris of their dreams. The citizens of Les Halles with their work, legitimate or not, will have a new market in which to sell their wares. There will be excitement, movement, vitality; crimes which require the participants of their victims - prostitution, gambling, revolution - will flourish in the streets to the great delight both of the victim....and of the criminal.

Project 666

A plan that fell victim to the intellectual terrorism that holds sway in the small world of architecture. Chirac wanted a dull plan for ordinary people, a plan which would blend into the landscape he was magnifying at the time. And once again the submarine Les Halles, sunk into the Ocean of Technocracy with the APUR Trench and the Limited Consultation Fault. What can one say about all this? The land was cut up into slices, by APUR, and these slices were the object of mini consultations. The architects worked on them in a blinkered fashion, without knowing anything at all about what was happening in the neighboring or opposite slice. Gathering up the winners, APUR put them together, and that is how architecture is made, how architects go along with such charades, for a share in power and its repercussions. The surrealist technique of technocracy. An exquisite corpse. And a bitter victory surrealism. What can be said of a society which builds its heart without a symbol?...Its values become farcical and 'power' becomes a merchant in the minimarket.

Adrien Rosner: Projects for Les Halles

My approach was not therefore to aim at all costs for some unique, surprising, original, ambitious and illustrious piece of architecture and town planning, but more simply, more quietly, and in accordance with what I believe to be the feelings of the local inhabitants and what I know to be the financial means of the State and the City, to envisage the creation of a public space of the highest possible quality, organised in terms of the church of St Eustache, the major monument, and bordered with buildings which harmonize with this environment.

Mayor Chirac/March 1979

So there's no hope for architecture? By refusing to discuss his official project, Chirac set this competition in motion, and it has caused the death of architecture. That is a good thing, because this situation, this state of affairs, in turn kills of Chirac.

Damian Hambye/Project 723



Urban Cowboys prowls Les Halles: The Guardian 27th March 1987

LE PIETON DES HALLES

In 1979, Fabio Rieti painted a larger than life image of a walking man. This was stuck in the top left hand corner of a huge wall on the corner of Rue Rambuteau and Forum des Halles. The figure was seen as if from above and, at the right distance, appeared to change the concrete wall into a massive pavement.

Rieti employed the technique of marouflage (applied canvas) and, because of its physical nature and strategic intent, 'le Pieton' was only temporary. If he was still walking his wall 'le Pieton' would be the central concern of this paper. As it is I can only allow myself a couple of comments.

Modernity lies here, in the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent.

Baudelaire: The Painter of Modern Life



Rieti: 'Le Pieton Des Halles' 1979

'Le Pieton des Halles' was enormously popular with the real pedestrians of Les Halles and was equally successful as a piece of inner-city public art. On the one hand it was pure theatre which demanded engagement with, and applause from, the passing audience. On the other, Rieti seemed to have successfully resolved the central problems of large scale mural painting i.e. the problems of dealing with that scale in terms of imagery and the problems of organising the mural spatially.

I saw 'Le Pieton des Halles' on two occasions (in 1979 not long after the figure was in place, and a couple of years later by which time Rieti had added two other figures and some passing pigeons which rather lessened the dramatic effect) but knew little about it until Herve Bechy gave an impromptu slide talk on French Public Art at the 1983 Mural Conference.

At the same conference, Deanna Petherbridge gave 'a critical survey of contemporary mural painting' during which she commented:

Trompe l'oeil....works by either endorsing the architecture, or negatively by deliberately setting up an alternative system, and therefore bringing the attention to the architecture - is it real? Is it like that?...more than any other form of painting a mural needs to retain the integrity of its two dimensional identity (or whatever is the given shape) to reassure the onlooker. Reassurance is needed because of the largeness of scale. Therefore great perspective depth, illusionism which cuts a hole into a wall doesn't make much sense.

Transcripts/National Mural Conference 1983

Later, in the same presentation, Deanna also enthused (I think we all were) about 'Le Pieton' saying:

It worked on so many counts: Because it did not attempt to use up all the wall space, but rather by only having one isolated figure to suggest the immensity of the wall - and of course suggesting that the vertical wall was horizontal space was very clever. And the loneliness of that one little man following his shadow through an immense concrete urban expanse was somehow very poignant - it made sense about the urban context and it made sense within that context.

Transcripts/National Mural Conference 1983

Four years on, and the full reality of the Forum des Halles all around us, it is probably more appropriate to set 'the loneliness of that one little man following his shadow through an immense concrete urban expanse' against the following quote from 'Art Within Reach'.

Anyone who is bored by High-Tec architecture, or whose tastes are jaded by its continual aesthetic stimulation, might welcome back the role of the traditional artist. But would this work today...the depressing statistics hide an even more unwelcome truth. There is no reason in an agnostic society to hire an artist, for what is there to express? The blank, repetitive, neutral facades are already a perfect expression of Economic Man....

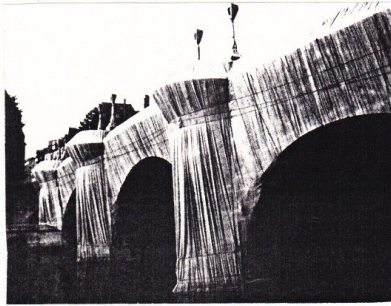
Charles Jenks: A Modest Proposal

CHRISTO AT PONT NEUF

In 1985, Christo wrapped the Pont Neuf. Like Les Halles, the Pont Neuf has a central role in the history of Paris, and like 'le Pieton' the project at Pont Neuf was temporary but its impact lasted longer than its 'objecthood'.

The project ingredients can be listed as such:

- 300 professional workers (U.S. engineers and French subcontractors)
- 440,000 square feet of woven polyanude fabric, golden sandstone in colour, which wrapped:
 - the sides and vaults of twelve arches
 - the parapets to the ground
 - the pavements and curbs
 - all the street lamps
 - the vertical section of the embankment
 - the esplanade
- 42,900 feet of rope secured 12.1 tons of steel chain
- crews of 40/60 'monitors' worked round the clock maintaining and providing information
- it took ten years to gain project approval from the City of Paris, the Department of the Seine and the state
- Christo funded the project (as he does all his projects) through the sale of drawings



Christo: Pont Neuf 1985

The Pont Neuf was under wraps for the period 22nd September to 7th October 1985 during which time 3 million people turned out to see it during the wrapping, wrapped and unwrapping stages.

Such a response seems to validate Baudelaire's quote (above) from 'The Painter of Modern Life' and suggests the accuracy of the following:

Two men were pushing a handcart along the boulevard. It had some enormous gold letters in it. The effect is so surprising that everyone stops to look. In this you have the origins of modern spectacle, based on everyday phenomena.

Leger: Functions of Painting

THE CITY AS SPECTACLE

The city as spectacle is central to modernism. The birth of modernism is 'understood' to have occurred in Paris at the time of Manet and during the period of rebuilding carried out by Haussmann.

By placing the following two quotes side by side, I hope to show the relationship between 'Haussmannization' and the recent development of the Forum des Halles. This relationship I consider to be central to a proper understanding of a rationale for contemporary public art in Paris.

Paris, like London, has become a centre for mass tourism, with the consequent and inevitable collapse of old patterns and standards. And there is the gradual spread of the cancer of Americanisation, the McDonalds at strategic points...the Burger Kings, and even - at the bottom of the Rue St Denis, the whores' hangout - a Love Burger.The old working class no longer inhabits central Paris. It now seems a very rich and bourgeois city. Yuppiefication proceeds apace. The great clearances of the 1970's that produced the awesomely dreadful shopping complex at Les Halles and the more benignly original construction at the Beaubourg have now ceased, to be replaced by endless beautification of the not-so-old. A terrible plague of pedestrian precincts has been visited on the city, leaving the centre preserved in aspic while its older inhabitants slink away to the suburbs, their children returning by fast commuter train to sell rubbish to each other in small boutiques.

Richard Gott: The Guardian 27th March 1987

The Argument. That it is tempting to see a connection between the modernization of Paris put through by Napoleon III and his henchmen - and the new painting of the time. A critic unfriendly to that painting, and particularly to its claim to strict optical neutrality, might be disposed to put the connection thus: It seems that only when the city has been systematically occupied by the bourgeoisie, and made quite ruthlessly to represent that class's rule, can it be taken by painters to be an appropriate and purely visual subject for their art. They see it as a space from which mere anecdote and narrative have been displaced at last, and which

therefore is paintable; but do they not mean by anecdote and narrative simply the presence - the pressure, the interference - of other classes besides their own? Haussmann's modernity, this critic would say, was philistine and repressive....Haussmann's modernity had been built by evicting the working class of Paris from the centre of the city, and putting it down on the hill of Belleville or the plains of La Villette, where the moon was still most often the only street light available. And what did the painters do except join in the cynical laughter and propagate the myth of modernity?

T.J.Clark: The Painting of Modern Life

Some attempt should be made at this point to establish what modernism is to public art and what public art is to modernism.

The process of modernism "to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself" (Greenberg) has, over the last one hundred years or so, informed public art through the achievements of modernist painting and sculpture (in the same period, public art has adopted the role of elastoplast to the accidents of modernist architecture!).

Differences in the contexts of production and consumption have meant that public art has never been elected a full member to, or fully shared the same ideology as, modernist painting and sculpture. The white-walled neutrality of aesthetic experience as context within which the modernist gallery displays to a selected audience the achievements of modernist painting and sculpture is a long way removed from the grubby-gutter reality of contemporary public art. (If Barnett Newman had been describing the public artist when he said 'Aesthetics is to the artist what ornithology is to the birds' I could have used it here.)

Public art is the result of the interchanges between artist, commissioner, site and audience, and its context can be understood to lie in the relationship of the artists skills and ambition, the intent of the commissioner, the nature of the site and the needs of the audience to the reality of the socio-political background to those interchanges.

Having said that, it should be noted that contemporary public art is a logical consequence of modernism. As T.J.Clark has pointed out:

....the end of its (bourgeoisie's) art will be likewise unprecedented....it will also involve - and has involved, as part of the practice of modernism - a search for another place in the social order. Art wants to address someone, it wants something precise and extended to do; it wants resistance, it needs criteria; it will take risks in order to find them, including the risk of its own dissolution.

T.J.Clark: Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art

The important interchanges in public art are those between artist and audience. The intent of the commissioner is usually a known quantity (and often measured by what sort of budget is available for the work) and the nature of the site is obvious and requires no more than simple research skills to uncover.

It is the less easily defined details of artist and audience which can make for the unexpected in public art.

The relationship between artist and audience is the accepted soap opera resulting from the divorce caused by modernism. With modernism, the audience of art, as society, refused continued responsibility for the iconographic programme for art. It felt "less and less able....to justify the inevitability of its particular forms" and "the accepted notions upon which artists....must depend in large part for communication with their audiences". The artist was "no longer able to estimate the response of his audience to the symbols and references" with which he worked. (Greenberg). So what is a French artist? And what is a French audience?

The Nouvelle Paris Biennale of 1985 was held in Le Grand Halle (also built by Baltard) and, because of significant changes to its organization, it can be seen as yet another element in the strategic campaign planned by French cultural powers 'to put Paris back on the international art circuit with a significance equal to that of Kassel or Venice'. Commentators on the show suggested that French artists exhibiting in the Biennale were suffering as a result of 'the overwhelming presence of Italo-German art, combined with an indigenous loathing of all things American and the conviction that the 100 Years War with England is still on'. (Virginia Whiles-Serreau/Artscribe 52).

It is certainly true that since the conclusion forced itself - much to his surprise - on Clement Greenberg 'that the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power', French artists have been in something of a mess.

While the French state has (and I hope it is now clear) entered the arena of international cultural warfare with the money-no-object intent of re-establishing Paris as the undisputed world champion of culture for the consumer, the French artist - the traditional producer of world culture - has had to come to terms with the fact that birthright is no longer enough to claim attention on the world stage. This has led to a period of painful self-analysis and a search for alternatives to the post-Cubist conception of abstract painting in the School of Paris.

I do not know much about French painting of the last couple of decades or so - I know even less about French sculpture of the same period - but it would seem that the position of the French artist has been marginalised by the status of Paris, with the degree of state intervention at the Beaubourg et al, the oppressive memories of early 20th century artists, and the unchanging Louvre and Ecole des Beaux Arts.

All this has led to a point where the role of philosophy, linguistics and anthropology in contemporary French art can not be ignored, and the French artist aims at something other than the satisfaction of aesthetic criteria familiar in the U.K..

It is worth considering what happened in France in 1968 at the very time, but not directly related to, the redevelopment of Les Halles was on the table. The social and political unrest in 1968 provided an opportunity for artists to play a leading role in a 'radical popular uprising'. Part of the inspiration for the events came from the Situationists (begun as an artistic socio-political group and including artists of the Cobra group) orchestrating many of the demonstrations as street theatre. A handful of years before (maybe less), and on the site of what is now the Pompidou Centre, the concepts of 'spectacle' and 'spectacular society' were developed as part of the theoretical work of the Situationist International.

(These) represent an effort to theorize the implications for capitalist society of the progressive shift within production towards the provision of consumer goods and services, and the accompanying 'colonization of everyday life'. The word 'colonization' conjures up associations with the Marxist theory of imperialism, and is meant to. It points to a massive internal extension of the capitalist market - the invasion and restructuring of whole areas of free time, private life, leisure and personal expression which had been left, in



Citroen Workers: Demonstration, Paris 1968

the first push to constitute an urban proletariat, relatively uncontrolled. It indicates a new phase of commodity production - the marketing, the making-into-commodities, of whole areas of social practice which had once been referred to casually as everyday life.

The concept of spectacle is thus an attempt - a partial and unfinished one - to bring into theoretical order a diverse set of symptoms which are normally treated, by bourgeois sociology or conventional Leftism, as anecdotal trappings affixed somewhat lightly to the old economic order; "consumerism", for instance, or "the society of leisure"; the rise of mass media, the expansion of advertising, the hypertrophy of official diversions (Olympic Games, party conventions, biennales). The Situationists were primarily interested, in ways which have since become fashionable, in the possible or actual crisis of this attempt to regulate or supplant the sphere of the personal, private, and everyday. They described the erosion of family controls in later capitalist society, and derided their febrile replacements - the apparatus of welfare, social work, and psychiatry. They put great stress on, and a degree of faith in, the signs of strain in just this area: the question of Youth, the multiplication of delinquent subcultures, the strange career of 'clinical depression', the inner-city landscape of racism and decay. The concept of spectacle, in other words, was an attempt to revise the theory of capitalism from a largely Marxist point of view. The most celebrated of Situationist metaphorsis meant more soberly than it may seem at first sight: 'The spectacle is capital accumulated until it becomes image'.

T.J.Clark: The Painting of Modern Life

The way forward for the French artist of the late 1960's must have seemed clear (as it did for artists of other countries) and it would seem to parallel events that occurred at the very death of the culture which preceded Haussmann, Manet and modernism.

....for the revolution of 1848 seemed to many artists to be the opening up of a new era. Contemporary documents tell us of the tremendous enthusiasm of artists and writers in the 'February Days' and, perhaps for the last time

in the 19th century, of their euphoria about the role they will play in shaping the society of the future. Now in place of the narrow patronage of Louis-Philippe, they initiated great schemes for public commissions, competitions and other means of exciting and giving sustenance to the arts....the regeneration of art was once again considered to be an inseparable part of a larger social and political regeneration.

Aaron Scharf: Art Against the Grain

A few years later Manet wrote to the Prefect of the Seine proposing to decorate the Municipal Council Chamber of the new Hotel de Ville with scenes from public and commercial life, including markets, railways, bridges, tunnels, race courses and public gardens. Typically, but unfortunately, he got no reply.



Manet: L'Exposition Universelle de 1867

And, what of the French audience? Well they of course are the 'colonized' consumers. In her article 'A Certain Style' (Guardian 27th March 1987), Sarah Mower describes the French as:

They may be rude, they may be arrogant - but by God, they're good to look at....to concentrate only on The Sights is to miss one of Europe's great free fashion shows and to blank out one of the key obsessions of the French psyche.

That fanatical concern with fashion news is but mere surface detail in a deep-rooted code for self-presentation which the French, particularly Parisians, learn at their parents' knees.

Sarah Mower: The Guardian 27th March 1987

Of course, 'they' have built a new museum about it - Musee des Arts de la Mode, 107 Rue de Rivoli.

This sense of self as spectacle is traditional. Baudelaire's dandy, the flaneur, was more than a stroller, more than a 'little man following his shadow'. The flaneur was involved in alert promenading, social encounters, visits to favourite parks and certain cafes.



Manet: La Musique aux Tuileries 1862

Perhaps we should end the idea of 'the city as spectacle' (and the role of public art in it) with a quote from Gautier. Because none of what should have happened in the 1860's happened, and none of what should have happened in the 1970's happened (in the U.K. we got community arts!) Writing about the new opera house in 1861, Gautier had this to say:

Let no one be afraid to make things too beautiful,

too rich, too vast. Paris is in the process of growing, and God knows where it will stop. The monument that is adequate today will tomorrow appear small, mean, and poverty-stricken. Let us think of this prodigious future and build with stone, marble, brass, iron and gold, without saving on space, a colossal theatre.

Gautier

IN CONCLUSION

Gautier's excited cry for modernism will sound hollow in the new post-modernist consumer reality of the Forum des Halles. There is a sense of disappointment in the end because, I suspect, the 'new Paris' has failed to deliver. The reasons for failure are many and complex - the loss of identity following World War 2, the manic growth of the consumer society and its related and protective state authoritarianism, and the loss of the generous and idealist optimism as evidenced in Gautier would number amongst them I am sure.

I maintain that an appropriate public art can still be created in Paris as we move into the 1990's - by describing Rieti's 'le Pieton' and Christo's project at Pont Neuf I have suggested an appropriate direction. But until the contemporary French artist can work again in the realm of the spectacle we will have to suffer the visual chewing gum, which passes itself off as public art, freely smudged across today's Forum des Halles.

For the purposes of this paper, two final quotes by way of conclusion. The first, by Thomas Crow, summarises the historic and socio-political reasons for the Forum des Halles. The second, by Clement Greenberg, offers some understanding on why the following works, all contemporary with the Forum des Halles, are so unspectacular.

- the pink marble sculpture of 'Pygmalion' (sic) by the Argentine Julio Silva
- the bronze low-relief representing the history of travel by Tremois, and
- the fresco of the evolution of man by Moretti.

The Second Empire, that is the period when acquiescence to political authoritarianism was followed by the first spectacular flowering of the consumer society. The two phenomena cannot in fact be separated from one another; the self-liquidation after 1848 of the classical form of middle-class political culture prompted a reconstruction of traditional ideals of individual autonomy and effectiveness in spaces outside the official institutions of society, spaces where conspicuous styles of 'freedom' were made available. That shift was bound up with increasingly sophisticated engineering of mass consumption, the internal conquest of markets, required for continuous economic expansion. The department store, which assumed a position somewhere between encyclopedia and virtual temple of consumption, is the appropriate symbol of the era. And we are just beginning to understand what a powerful mechanism for socialization it was. It served as one of the primary means by which a bourgeois public, often deeply unsettled by the dislocations in its older patterns of life, was won over to the new order being wrought in its name.

**Thomas Crow: Modernism and Mass Culture
in the Visual Arts**

Kitsch is a product of the industrial revolution which urbanised the masses of Western Europe and America and established what is called universal literacy. Previous to this, the only market for formal culture, as distinguished from folk culture, had been among those who in addition to being able to read and write could command the leisure and comfort that always goes hand in hand with cultivation of some sort....The peasants who settled in the cities as proletariat and petty bourgeois learned to read and write for the sake of efficiency, but they did not win the leisure and comfort necessary for the enjoyment of the city's traditional culture. Losing, nevertheless, their taste for the folk culture whose background was the countryside, and discovering a new capacity for boredom at the same time, the new urban masses set up a kind of culture fit for their own consumption. To fill the demand of the new market a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible

to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some kind can provide. Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of profit....The pre-condition for kitsch, a condition without which kitsch would be impossible, is the availability close at hand of a fully matured cultural tradition, whose discoveries, acquisitions and perfected self-consciousness kitsch can take advantage of for its own ends. It borrows from it devices, tricks, stratagems, rules of thumb, converts them into a system and disregards the rest.

Clement Greenberg: Avant-Garde and Kitsch

P O S T S C R I P T

In the absence of sufficient private patronage, most Western countries, over the last fifty years or so, have taken responsibility for 'fostering, promoting, maintaining and advancing' the arts. In the case of public art, the 'Percentage For Art' or, more commonly, 'The One Per Cent' rule came into operation. The ruling requires an agreed percentage (usually 1%) of total budget for any new public building project to be spent on commissioning art for that building, place or space.

It is a scheme which has never been formally implemented in the U.K., but things are starting to change - albeit slowly. France was one of the first countries to adopt the ruling - the idea was first discussed in 1936 but did not become law until 1951 - and, initially, 1% of budgets for new school buildings was set aside for 'decoration through the incorporation of art into architecture to enrich students' surroundings'. In 1972 the law was changed to encourage the employment of artists into public building projects at the design stage, so avoiding, it was hoped, the use of public art as architectural elastoplast. By 1975 £2.4 million had been spent on public art projects.

Unfortunately, the scheme has become clumsy and highly bureaucratic and has suffered from the over-involvement of the architect, nepotism, lack of matching monies from local sources, the ravages of inflation and so on.

David Patten 28th March 1987