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They encouraged his predilection for unqualified statements. “Genius,” he wrote, “is so visible in a person that even the least educated man walking around in Paris will, when he comes across a great artist, know immediately what he has found.” Delvau, Baudelaire’s friend and the most interesting among the minor masters of the feuilleton, claimed that he could divide the Parisian public according to its various strata as easily as a geologist distinguishes the layers in rocks. If that sort of thing could be done, then life in the big city was surely not as disquieting as it probably seemed to people. And the following questions by Baudelaire were just empty phrases: “What are the dangers of the forest and the prairie, compared with the daily shocks and conflicts of civilization? Whether a man grabs his victim on a boulevard or stabs his quarry in unknown woods—does he not remain both here and there the most perfect of all beasts of prey?”

For this victim, Baudelaire uses the term *duper*. The word refers to someone who is cheated or fooled, and such a person is the antithesis of a connoisseur of human nature. The more alien a big city becomes, the more knowledge of human nature—so it was thought—one needs to operate in it. In actuality, the intensified struggle for survival led an individual to make an imperious proclamation of his interests. When it is a matter of evaluating a person’s behavior, intimate familiarity with these interests will often be much more useful than familiarity with his character. The ability the flâneur prides himself on is, therefore, more likely to be one of the idols Bacon already located in the marketplace. Baudelaire hardly paid homage to this idol. His belief in original sin made him immune to belief in a knowledge of human nature. He sided with de Maistre, who had combined a study of dogma with a study of Bacon.

The soothing little remedies that the physiologists offered for sale were soon outmoded. On the other hand, the literature concerned with the disquieting and threatening aspects of urban life was destined for a great future. This literature, too, dealt with the masses, but its method was different from that of the physiologies. It cared little about the definition of types; rather, it investigated the functions which are peculiar to the masses in a big city. One of these claimed particular attention; it had been emphasized in a police report as early as the turn of the nineteenth century. “It is almost impossible,” wrote a Parisian secret agent in 1798, “to maintain good behavior in a thickly populated area where an individual is, so to speak, unknown to everyone else and thus does not have to blush in front of anyone.” Here the masses appear as the asylum that shields an asocial person from his persecutors. Of all the menacing aspects of the masses, this one became apparent first. It lies at the origin of the detective story.

In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in the position of having to play detective. Flânerie gives the individual the best prospects of doing so. Baudelaire wrote: “An observer is a
"prince who is everywhere in possession of his incognito." If the flâneur is thus turned into an unwilling detective, it does him a lot of good socially, for it legitimates his idleness. His indolence is only apparent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant. Thus, the detective sees rather wide areas opening up to his self-esteem. He develops reactions that are in keeping with the tempo of a big city. He catches things in flight; this enables him to dream that he is like an artist. Everyone praises the swift crayon of the graphic artist. Balzac claims that artistry as such is linked to quick grasp.—Forensic knowledge coupled with the pleasant nonchalance of the flâneur: this is the essence of Dumas' *Mohicans de Paris*. The hero of this book decides to go in search of adventure by following a scrap of paper which he has given to the wind as a plaything. No matter what trace the flâneur may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime. This is an indication of how the detective story, regardless of its sober calculations, also participates in the phantasmagoria of Parisian life. It does not yet glorify the criminal, though it does glorify his adversaries and, above all, the hunting grounds where they pursue him. Messac has shown how writers have attempted to bring in echoes of Cooper. The most interesting thing about Cooper’s influence is that it is not concealed but displayed. In the aforementioned *Mohicans de Paris*, this display is in the very title; the author promises readers that he will open a primeval forest and a prairie for them in Paris. The woodcut used as a frontispiece in the third volume shows a street overgrown with trees and shrubs that was little frequented in those days; the caption under this picture reads: “The primeval forest on the rue d’Enfer.” The publisher’s brochure for this volume limns the connection with a magnificent phrase which reveals the author’s enthusiasm for himself: “‘Paris’ and ‘Mohicans’... these two names clash like the *qui vive* of two gigantic unknowns. An abyss separates the two; across it flashes a spark of that electric light which has its source in Alexandre Dumas.” Even earlier, Féval had involved a redskin in the adventures of a metropolis. While riding in a fiacre, this man, whose name is Tovah, manages to scalp his four white companions so stealthily that the coachman suspects nothing. *Les Mystères de Paris* refers to Cooper in its opening pages, promising that its heroes from the Parisian underworld “are no less removed from civilization than the savages who are so splendidly depicted by Cooper.” But it is Balzac who, above all, never tires of referring to Cooper as his model. “The poetry of terror that pervades the American woods, with their clashes between tribes on the warpath—this poetry which stood Cooper in such good stead attaches in the same way to the smallest details of Parisian life. The pedestrians, the shops, the hired coaches, a man leaning against a window—all this was of the same burning interest to the members of Peyrade’s bodyguard as a tree stump, a beaver’s den, a rock, a buffalo skin, a motionless canoe, or a floating leaf was to the reader of a
novel by Cooper.” Balzac’s intrigue is rich in forms that fall somewhere between tales of Indians and detective stories. At an early date, there were objections to his “Mohicans in spencer jackets” and “Hurons in frock coats.” On the other hand, Hippolyte Babou, who was close to Baudelaire, wrote retrospectively in 1857: “When Balzac breaks through walls to give free rein to observation, people listen at the doors... In short, they behave, as our prudish English neighbors phrase it, like police detectives.”

The detective story, whose interest lies in its logical structure (which the crime story as such need not have), appeared in France for the first time when Poe’s stories “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” and “The Purloined Letter” were translated. With his translations of these models, Baudelaire adopted the genre. Poe’s work was definitely absorbed in his own, and Baudelaire emphasizes this fact by stating his solidarity with the method in which the individual genres that Poe embraced harmonize. Poe was one of the greatest technicians of modern literature. As Valéry pointed out, he was the first to attempt the scientific story, the modern cosmogony, and the description of pathological phenomena. These genres he regarded as exact products of a method for which he claimed universal validity. Baudelaire sided with him on this point, and in Poe’s spirit he wrote: “The time is approaching when it will be understood that a literature which refuses to proceed in brotherly concord with science and philosophy is a murderous and suicidal literature.”

The detective story, the most momentous of Poe’s technical achievements, belonged to a literature that satisfied Baudelaire’s postulate. Its analysis constitutes part of the analysis of Baudelaire’s own work, despite the fact that Baudelaire wrote no stories of this type. Les Fleurs du mal incorporates three of its decisive elements as disjecta membra: the victim and the scene of the crime (“Une Martyre”), the murderer (“Le Vin de l’assassin”), and the masses (“Le Crépuscule du soir”). The fourth element is lacking—the one that permits the intellect to break through this emotion-laden atmosphere. Baudelaire wrote no detective story because, given the structure of his drives, it was impossible for him to identify with the detective. In him, the calculating, constructive element was on the side of the asocial and had become an integral part of cruelty. Baudelaire was too good a reader of the Marquis de Sade to be able to compete with Poe.

The original social content of the detective story focused on the obliteration of the individual’s traces in the big-city crowd. Poe concerns himself with this motif in detail in “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” the longest of his detective stories. At the same time, this story is the prototype for the way journalistic information is used in solving crimes. Poe’s detective, the Chevalier Dupin, here works not with personal observation but with reports from the daily press. The critical analysis of these reports constitutes the
scaffolding in the story. Among other things, the time of the crime has to be established. One paper, Le Commercial, expresses the view that Marie Roger, the murdered woman, was done away with immediately after she left her mother’s apartment. Poe writes:

“It is impossible . . . that a person so well known to thousands as this young woman was, should have passed three blocks without some one having seen her.” This is the way of thinking of a man long resident in Paris—a public man—and one whose walks to and fro in the city have been mostly limited to the vicinity of the public offices. . . . He passes to and fro, at regular intervals, within a confined periphery, abounding in individuals who are led to observation of his person through interest in the kindred nature of his occupation with their own. But the walks of Marie may, in general, be supposed discursive. In this particular instance it will be understood as most probable that she proceeded upon a route of more than average diversity from her accustomed ones. The parallel which we imagine to have existed in the mind of Le Commercial would only be sustained in the event of the two individuals traversing the whole city. In this case, granting the personal acquaintances to be equal, the chances would be also equal that an equal number of personal rencontres would be made. For my own part, I should hold it not only as possible, but as far more than probable, that Marie might have proceeded, at any given period, by any one of the many routes between her own residence and that of her aunt, without meeting a single individual whom she knew, or by whom she was known. In viewing this question in its full and proper light, we must hold steadily in mind the great disproportion between the personal acquaintances of even the most noted individual in Paris, and the entire population of Paris itself.

If one disregards the context which gives rise to these reflections in Poe, the detective loses his competence but the problem does not lose its validity. A variation of it forms the basis of one of the most famous poems in Les Fleurs du mal, the sonnet entitled “A une passante” [To a Passer-by].

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d’une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l’ourlet;
Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l’ouragan,
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

Un éclair . . . puis la nuit!—Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m’a fait soudainement ressûrère,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l’éternité?
The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire

Ailleurs, bien loin d’ici! trop tard! jamais peut-être!
Car j’ignore où tu fus, tu ne sais où je vais,
O toi que j’eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais!120

[The street around me roared, deafening. / Tall, slender, in deep mourning, majestic in her grief, / A woman passed—with imposing hand / Gathering up a scalloped hem—

Agile and noble, her leg like a statue’s. / And as for me, twitching like one possessed, I drank / From her eyes—livid sky brewing a storm— / The sweetness that fascinates and the pleasure that kills.

A lightning flash . . . then night!—Fugitive beauty, / Whose gaze has suddenly given me new life, / Will I see you again before the close of eternity?

Elsewhere, very far from here! Too late! Perhaps never! / For where you’re off to I’ll never know, nor do you know where I’m going— / O you whom I could have loved, O you who knew it too!]

This sonnet presents the crowd not as the refuge of a criminal but as the refuge of love which flees from the poet. One may say that it deals with the function of the crowd not in the life of the citizen but in the life of the eroticist. At first glance this function appears to be a negative one, but it is not. Far from eluding the eroticist in the crowd, the apparition which fascinates him is brought to him by this very crowd. The delight of the city-dweller is not so much love at first sight as love at last sight. The word “jamais” marks the high point of the encounter, when the poet’s passion seems to be frustrated but in reality bursts out of him like a flame. He is seared by this flame, but no phoenix arises from it. The rebirth in the first tercet reveals a view of the event which in the light of the preceding stanza seems very problematic. What makes his body twitch spasmodically is not the excitement of a man in whom an image has taken possession of every fiber of his being; it partakes more of the shock with which an imperious desire suddenly overcomes a lonely man. The phrase “comme un extravagant” almost expresses this; the poet’s emphasis on the fact that the female apparition is in mourning is not designed to conceal it. In reality, there is a profound gulf between the quatrains which present the occurrence and the tercets which transfigure it. When Thibaudet says that these verses “could only have been written in a big city,”121 he does not penetrate beneath their surface. The inner form of these verses is revealed in the fact that they depict love itself as being stigmatized by the big city.122

Since the days of Louis Philippe, the bourgeoisie has endeavored to compensate itself for the fact that private life leaves no traces in the big city. It seeks such compensation within its four walls—as if it were striving, as a matter of honor, to prevent the traces, if not of its days on earth then at
least of its possessions and requisites of daily life, from disappearing forever. The bourgeoisie unabashedly makes impressions of a host of objects. For slippers and pocket watches, thermometers and egg cups, cutlery and umbrellas, it tries to get covers and cases. It prefers velvet and plush covers, which preserve the impression of every touch. For the Makart style, the style of the end of the Second Empire, a dwelling becomes a kind of casing. This style views it as a case for a person and embeds him in it, together with all his appurtenances, tending his traces as nature tends dead fauna embedded in granite. One must note that there are two sides to this process. The real or sentimental value of the objects thus preserved is emphasized. They are removed from the profane gaze of nonowners; in particular, their outlines are blurred in a characteristic way. It is no accident that resistance to controls, something that becomes second nature to asocial persons, displays a resurgence in the propertied bourgeoisie.—In such customs, one can see the dialectical illustration of a text which appeared in many installments in the Journal Officiel. As early as 1836, Balzac wrote in Modeste Mignon: “Poor women of France! You would probably like to remain unknown, so that you can carry on your little romances. But how can you manage this in a civilization which registers the departures and arrivals of coaches in public places, counts letters and stamps them when they are posted and again when they are delivered, assigns numbers to houses, and will soon have the whole country, down to the smallest plot of land, in its registers?” Since the French Revolution, an extensive network of controls had been bringing bourgeois life ever more tightly into its meshes. The numbering of houses in the big cities may be used to document the progressive standardization. Napoleon’s administration had made such numbering obligatory for Paris in 1805. In proletarian neighborhoods, to be sure, this simple police measure had encountered resistance. As late as 1864, the following was reported about Saint-Antoine, the carpenters’ neighborhood: “If one asks an inhabitant of this suburb what his address is, he will always give the name of his house and not its cold, official number.” In the long run, of course, such resistance was of no avail against the government’s effort to establish a multifarious web of registrations—a means of compensating for the elimination of traces that takes place when people disappear into the masses of the big cities. Baudelaire found this effort as much of an encroachment as did any criminal. Trying to evade his creditors, he went to cafés or reading circles. Sometimes he had two domiciles at the same time—but on days when the rent was due, he often spent the night at a third place with friends. So he roamed about in the city, which had long since ceased to be home for the flâneur. Every bed in which he lay became a “lit hasardeux” for him. Crépet has counted fourteen Paris addresses for Baudelaire in the years 1842 to 1858.

Technical measures had to come to the aid of the administrative control
process. In the early days of the process of identification, whose current standard derives from the Bertillon method, the identity of a person was established through his signature. The invention of photography was a turning point in the history of this process. It was no less significant for criminology than the invention of the printing press was for literature. Photography made it possible for the first time to preserve permanent and unmistakable traces of a human being. The detective story came into being when this most decisive of all conquests of a person's incognito had been accomplished. Since that time, there has been no end to the efforts to capture \textit{dingfest machen} a man in his speech and actions.

Poe's famous tale "The Man of the Crowd" is something like an X-ray of a detective story. It does away with all the drapery that a crime represents. Only the armature remains: the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man who manages to walk through London in such a way that he always remains in the middle of the crowd. This unknown man is the flâneur. That is how Baudelaire understood him when, in his essay on Guys, he called the flâneur "l'homme des foules" [the man of the crowd]. But Poe's description of this figure is devoid of the connivance which Baudelaire's notion included. To Poe the flâneur was, above all, someone who does not feel comfortable in his own company. This is why he seeks out the crowd; the reason he hides in it is probably close at hand. Poe purposely blurs the difference between the asocial person and the flâneur. The harder a man is to find, the more suspicious he becomes. Refraining from a prolonged pursuit, the narrator quietly sums up his insight as follows: "This old man is the embodiment and the spirit of crime," I said to myself. 'He refuses to be alone. \textit{He is the man of the crowd}.'"

The author does not demand the reader's interest in this man alone; his description of the crowd will claim at least as much interest, for documentary as well as artistic reasons. In both respects, the crowd stands out. The first thing that strikes one is the rapt attention with which the narrator follows the spectacle of the crowd. This same spectacle is followed, in a well-known story by E. T. A. Hoffmann, by the "cousin at his corner window." But this man, who is in his own home, views the crowd with great circumspection, whereas the man who stares through the window of a coffeehouse has a penetrating gaze. In the difference between the two observations lies the difference between Berlin and London. On the one hand, there is the man of leisure. He sits in his alcove as in a box at the theater; when he wants to take a closer look at the marketplace, he has opera glasses at hand. On the other hand, there is the anonymous consumer who enters a café and will shortly leave it again, attracted by the magnet of the mass which constantly has him in its range. On the one side, there is a multiplicity of little genre pictures which together constitute an album of colored engravings; on the other side, there is a view which could inspire a
great etcher: an enormous crowd in which no one is either quite transparent or quite opaque to everyone else. A German petty bourgeois is subject to very narrow limits, yet Hoffmann by nature belonged to the family of the Poes and Baudelaires. In the biographical notes to the original edition of his last writings, we read: “Hoffmann was never especially fond of nature. He valued people—communication with them, observations about them, merely seeing them—more than anything else. If he went for a walk in summer, something that he did every day toward evening in fine weather, there was hardly a wine tavern or a confectioner’s shop that he did not look in on, to see whether anyone was inside and who might be there.”

At a later date, when Dickens went traveling, he repeatedly complained about the lack of street noises, which were indispensable to him for his work. “I cannot express how much I want these [the streets],” he wrote in 1846 from Lausanne while he was working on *Dombey and Son*. “It seems as if they supplied something to my brain, which it cannot bear, when busy, to lose. For a week or a fortnight I can write prodigiously in a retired place, . . . and a day in London sets me up again and starts me. But the toil and labor of writing, day after day, without that magic lantern, is immense. . . . My figures seem disposed to stagnate without crowds about them.” Among the many things that Baudelaire criticized about Brussels, a city he hated, was something that filled him with particular rage: “No shopwindows. Strolling—something that nations with imagination love—is impossible in Brussels. There is nothing to see, and the streets are unusable.” Baudelaire loved solitude, but he wanted it in a crowd.

Poe, in the course of his story, lets darkness fall. He lingers over the city by gaslight. The appearance of the street as an intérieur in which the phantasmagoria of the flâneur is concentrated is hard to separate from the gas lighting. The first gas lamps burned in the arcades. The attempt to use them under the open sky was made in Baudelaire’s childhood; candelabra-shaped lights were installed on the Place Vendôme. Under Napoleon III, the number of gas lamps in Paris grew rapidly. This way of increasing safety in the city made the crowds feel at home in the open streets even at night, and removed the starry sky from the ambience of the big city more effectively than tall buildings had ever done. “I draw the curtain over the sun; now it has been put to bed, as is proper. Henceforth I shall see no other light but that of the gas flame.” The moon and the stars are no longer worth mentioning.

In the heyday of the Second Empire, the shops in the main streets did not close before ten o’clock at night. It was the great age of noctambulisme. In the chapter of his *Heures parisiennes* which is devoted to the second hour after midnight, Delvau wrote: “A person may take a rest from time to time; he is permitted stops and resting places. But he has no right to sleep.” On Lake Geneva, Dickens nostalgically remembered Genoa, where two miles
of lighted streets had enabled him to roam about at night. Later, when flânerie went out of style with the extinction of the arcades and gaslight was no longer considered fashionable, a last flâneur strolling sadly through the empty Passage Colbert had the impression that the flickering of the gas lamps indicated merely the flame's own fear that the gas bill would not be paid at the end of the month.136 This is when Stevenson wrote his plaint about the disappearance of the gas lamps. He muses particularly on the rhythm with which lamplighters would go through the streets and light one lamp after another. From the outset, this rhythm contrasted with the uniformity of the dusk, but now the contrast becomes brutally shocking with the spectacle of entire cities suddenly being illuminated by electric light. "Such a light as this should shine only on murders and public crime, or along the corridors of lunatic asylums, a horror to heighten horror."137 There is some indication that only in its late stages did people take an idyllic view of gaslight such as the one presented by Stevenson, who wrote its obituary. The above-mentioned story by Poe is a good case in point. There can hardly be a more uncanny description of this light: "The rays of the gas lamps, feeble at first in their struggle with the dying day, had now at length gained ascendancy, and threw over every thing a fitful and garish lustre. All was dark yet splendid—as that ebony to which has been likened the style of Ter-utillian."138 "Inside a house," wrote Poe elsewhere, "gas is definitely inadmissible. Its flickering, harsh light offends the eye."

The London crowd seems as gloomy and confused as the light in which it moves. This is true not only of the rabble that crawls "out of its dens" at night. The clerks of higher rank are described by Poe as follows: "They had all slightly bald heads, from which the right ears, long used to pen-holding, had an odd habit of standing off on end. I observed that they always removed or settled their hats with both hands, and wore watches, with short gold chains of a substantial and ancient pattern." In his description, Poe did not aim at any direct observation. The uniformities to which the petty bourgeois are subjected by virtue of being part of the crowd are exaggerated; their appearance is not far from being uniform. Even more astonishing is the description of the way the crowd moves.

By far the greater number of those who went by had a satisfied business-like demeanor, and seemed to be thinking only of making their way through the press. Their brows were knit, and their eyes rolled quickly; when pushed against by fellow-wayfarers they evinced no symptom of impatience, but adjusted their clothes and hurried on. Others, still a numerous class, were restless in their movements, had flushed faces, and talked and gesticulated to themselves, as if feeling in solitude on account of the very denseness of the company around. When impeded in their progress, these people suddenly ceased muttering, but redoubled their gesticulations, and awaited, with an absent and over-done smile upon the lips, the course of the persons impeding them. If jostled,
they bowed profusely to the jostlers, and appeared overwhelmed with confusion.\textsuperscript{138}

One might think he was speaking of half-drunk wretches. Actually, they were “noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, stock-jobbers.”\textsuperscript{140} Something other than a psychology of the classes is involved here.\textsuperscript{141} There is a lithograph by Senefelder which represents a gambling club.\textsuperscript{142} Not one of the individuals depicted is pursuing the game in the customary fashion. Each man is dominated by his affect: one shows unrestrained joy; another, distrust of his partner; a third, dull despair; a fourth evinces belligerence; another is preparing to take leave of the world. In its extravagance, this lithograph is reminiscent of Poe. Poe’s subject, to be sure, is greater, and his means are in keeping with this. His masterly stroke in the above description is that he does not show the hopeless isolation of men within their private concerns through the variety of their behavior, as does Senefelder, but expresses this isolation in absurd uniformities of dress or conduct. The servility with which those pushed even go on to apologize shows where the devices Poe employs here come from. They derive from the repertoire of clowns, and Poe uses them in a fashion similar to that later employed by clowns. In the performance of a clown, there is an obvious reference to economic mechanisms. With his abrupt movements, he imitates both the machines which push the material and the economic boom which pushes the merchandise. The segments of the crowd described by Poe enact a similar mimesis of the “feverish . . . pace of material production,” along with the forms of business that go with it. What the fun fair, which turned the average man into a clown, later accomplished with its bumper cars and related amusements is anticipated in Poe’s description. The people in his story behave as if they can no longer express themselves through anything but reflex actions. These goings-on seem even more dehumanized because Poe talks only about people. If the crowd becomes jammed up, this is not because it is being impeded by vehicular traffic—there is no mention of vehicles anywhere—but because it is being blocked by other crowds. In a mass of this nature, flânerie could never flourish.

In Baudelaire’s Paris, things had not yet come to such a pass. Ferries were still crossing the Seine at points where later there would be bridges. In the year of Baudelaire’s death, an entrepreneur could still cater to the comfort of the well-to-do with a fleet of five hundred sedan chairs circulating about the city. Arcades where the flâneur would not be exposed to the sight of carriages—which scorned to recognize pedestrians as rivals—were enjoying undiminished popularity. There was the pedestrian who wedged himself into the crowd, but there was also the flâneur who demanded elbow room and was unwilling to forgo the life of a gentleman of leisure. He goes his leisurely way as a personality; in this manner he protests against the division
Far, far from here! Too late! Or maybe never?
For I know not where you flee, you know not where I go,
O you whom I would have loved, O you who knew it too!

In a widow’s veil, mysteriously and mutely borne along by the crowd, an unknown woman crosses the poet’s field of vision. What this sonnet conveys is simply this: far from experiencing the crowd as an opposing, antagonistic element, the city dweller discovers in the crowd what fascinates him. The delight of the urban poet is love—not at first sight, but at last sight. It is an eternal farewell, which coincides in the poem with the moment of enchantment. Thus, the sonnet deploys the figure of shock, indeed of catastrophe. But the nature of the poet’s emotions has been affected as well. What makes his body contract in a tremor—“crispé comme un extravagant,” Baudelaire says—is not the rapture of a man whose every fiber is suffused with eros; rather, it is like the sexual shock that can beset a lonely man. The fact that “these verses could have been written only in a big city,” as Thibaudet put it, is not very meaningful. They reveal the stigmata which life in a metropolis inflicts upon love. Proust read the sonnet in this light, and that is why he gave to his own echo of the woman in mourning (which appeared to him one day in the form of Albertine) the evocative epithet “La Parisienne.” “When Albertine came into my room again, she wore a black satin dress. It made her look pale. She resembled the kind of fiery yet pale Parisian woman who is not used to fresh air and has been affected by living among the masses, possibly in an atmosphere of vice—the kind you can recognize by her gaze, which seems unsteady if there is no rouge on her cheeks.” This is the gaze—evident even as late as Proust—of the object of a love which only a city dweller experiences, which Baudelaire captured for poetry, and which one might not infrequently characterize as being spared, rather than denied, fulfillment.

VI

A story by Poe which Baudelaire translated can be seen as the classic example among the older versions of the motif of the crowd. It is marked by certain peculiarities which, upon closer inspection, reveal aspects of social forces of such power and hidden depth that we may include them among the only ones that are capable of exerting both a subtle and a profound effect on artistic production. The story is entitled “The Man of the Crowd.” It is set in London, and its narrator is a man who, after a long illness, ventures out again for the first time into the hustle and bustle of the city. On a late afternoon in autumn, he takes a seat by the window in a big London coffeehouse. He gazes around at the other customers and pores over adver-
tisements in the paper, but he is mainly interested in the throng of people he sees through the window, surging past in the street.

The latter is one of the principal thoroughfares of the city, and had been very much crowded during the whole day. But, as the darkness came on, the throng momentarily increased; and by the time the lamps were well lighted, two dense and continuous tides of population were rushing past the door. At this particular period of the evening I had never before been in a similar situation, and the tumultuous sea of human heads filled me, therefore, with a delicious novelty of emotion. I gave up, at length, all care of things within the hotel, and became absorbed in contemplation of the scene without.

Important as it is, let us disregard the narrative to which this is the prelude and examine the setting.

The appearance of the London crowd as Poe describes it is as gloomy and fitful as the light of the gas lamps overhead. This applies not only to the riff-raff that is “brought forth from its den” as night falls. The employees of higher rank, “the upper clerks of staunch firms,” Poe describes as follows: “They had all slightly bald heads, from which the right ears, long used to pen-holding, had an odd habit of standing off on end. I observed that they always removed or settled their hats with both hands, and wore watches, with short gold chains of a substantial and ancient pattern.” Even more striking is his description of the crowd’s movements.

By far the greater number of those who went by had a satisfied business-like demeanour, and seemed to be thinking only of making their way through the press. Their brows were knit, and their eyes rolled quickly; when pushed against by fellow-wayfarers they evinced no symptom of impatience, but adjusted their clothes and hurried on. Others, still a numerous class, were restless in their movements, had flushed faces, and talked and gesticulated to themselves, as if feeling in solitude on account of the very denseness of the company around. When impeded in their progress, these people suddenly ceased muttering, but redoubled their gesticulations, and awaited, with an absorber and over-done smile upon the lips, the course of the persons impeding them. If jostled, they bowed profusely to the jostlers, and appeared overwhelmed with confusion.36

One might think he was speaking of half-drunken wretches. Actually, they were “noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, stock-jobbers.”37

Poe’s image cannot be called realistic. It shows a purposely distorting imagination at work, one that takes the text far from what is commonly advocated as the model of socialist realism. Barbier, perhaps one of the best examples of this type of realism, described things in a less eccentric way. Moreover, he chose a more transparent subject: the oppressed masses. Poe is not concerned with these; he deals with “people,” pure and simple. For
him, as for Engels, there was something menacing in the spectacle they presented. It is precisely this image of big-city crowds that became decisive for Baudelaire. If he succumbed to the force that attracted him to them and that made him, as a flâneur, one of them, he was nevertheless unable to rid himself of a sense of their essentially inhuman character. He becomes their accomplice even as he dissociates himself from them. He becomes deeply involved with them, only to relegate them to oblivion with a single glance of contempt. There is something compelling about this ambivalence, wherever he cautiously admits it. Perhaps the charm of his "Crépuscule du soir," so difficult to account for, is bound up with this.

VII

Baudelaire was moved to equate the man of the crowd, whom Poe's narrator follows throughout the length and breadth of nocturnal London, with the flâneur. It is hard to accept this view. The man of the crowd is no flâneur. In him, composure has given way to manic behavior. He exemplifies, rather, what had to become of the flâneur after the latter was deprived of the milieu to which he belonged. If London ever provided it for him, it was certainly not the setting described by Poe. In comparison, Baudelaire's Paris preserved some features that dated back to the old days. Ferries were still crossing the Seine at points that would later be spanned by bridges. In the year of Baudelaire's death, it was still possible for some entrepreneur to cater to the comfort of the well-to-do with a fleet of five hundred sedan chairs circulating about the city. Arcades where the flâneur would not be exposed to the sight of carriages, which did not recognize pedestrians as rivals, were enjoying undiminished popularity. There was the pedestrian who would let himself be jostled by the crowd, but there was also the flâneur, who demanded elbow room and was unwilling to forgo the life of a gentleman of leisure. Let the many attend to their daily affairs; the man of leisure can indulge in the perambulations of the flâneur only if such he is already out of place. He is as much out of place in an atmosphere of complete leisure as in the feverish turmoil of the city. London has its man of the crowd. His counterpart, as it were, is Nante, the boy who loiters on the street corner, a popular figure in Berlin before the March Revolution of 1848. The Parisian flâneur might be said to stand midway between them.

How the man of leisure views the crowd is revealed in a short piece by E. T. A. Hoffmann, his last story, entitled "The Cousin's Corner Window." It antedates Poe's story by fifteen years and is probably one of the earliest attempts to capture the street scene of a large city. The differences between the two pieces are worth noting. Poe's narrator watches the street from the window of a public coffeehouse, whereas the cousin is sitting at home. Poe's observer succumbs to the fascination of the scene, which finally
lures him out into the whirl of the crowd. The cousin in Hoffmann’s tale, looking out from his corner window, has lost the use of his legs; he would not be able to go with the crowd even if he were in the midst of it. His attitude toward the crowd is, rather, one of superiority, inspired as it is by his observation post at the window of an apartment building. From this vantage point he scrutinizes the throng; it is market day, and all the passers-by feel in their element. His opera glasses enable him to pick out individual genre scenes. Employing the glasses is thoroughly in keeping with the inner disposition of their user. He confesses he would like to initiate his visitor in the “principles of the art of seeing.” This consists of an ability to enjoy tableaux vivants—a favorite pursuit of the Biedermeier period. Edifying sayings provide the interpretation. One can then view Hoffmann’s narrative as describing an attempt which at that time was being made. But it is obvious that the conditions under which it was made in Berlin prevented it from being a complete success. If Hoffmann had ever set foot in Paris or London, or if he had been intent on depicting the masses as such, he would not have focused on a marketplace; he would not have portrayed the scene as being dominated by women. He would perhaps have seized on the motifs that Poe derives from the swarming crowds under the gas lamps. Actually, there would have been no need for these motifs in order to bring out the uncanny or sinister elements that other students of the physiognomy of the big city have felt. A thoughtful observation by Heine is relevant here. “He was having a bad time with his eyes in the spring,” wrote a correspondent in an 1838 letter to Varnhagen. “On our last meeting, I accompanied him part of the way along the boulevard. The splendor and vitality of that unique thoroughfare moved me to boundless admiration, while, against this, Heine now laid weighty emphasis on the horrors attending this center of the world.”

VIII

Fear, revulsion, and horror were the emotions which the big-city crowd aroused in those who first observed it. For Poe, it has something barbaric about it; discipline barely manages to tame it. Later, James Ensor never tired of confronting its discipline with its wildness; he liked to depict military groups amid carnival mobs, and show them getting along in model fashion—that is, according to the model of totalitarian states, in which the police make common cause with looters. Valéry, who had a fine eye for the cluster of symptoms called “civilization,” has highlighted one of the pertinent facts. “The inhabitant of the great urban centers,” he writes, “reverts to a state of savagery—that is, of isolation. The feeling of being dependent on others, which used to be kept alive by need, is gradually blunted in the smooth functioning of the social mechanism. Any improvement of this
mechanism eliminates certain modes of behavior and emotions." Comfort isolates; on the other hand, it brings those enjoying it closer to mechanization. In the mid-nineteenth century, the invention of the match brought forth a number of innovations which have one thing in common: a single abrupt movement of the hand triggers a process of many steps. This development is taking place in many areas. A case in point is the telephone, where the lifting of a receiver has taken the place of the steady movement that used to be required to crank the older models. With regard to countless movements of switching, inserting, pressing, and the like, the "snapping" by the photographer had the greatest consequences. Henceforth a touch of the finger sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were. Haptic experiences of this kind were joined by optic ones, such as are supplied by the advertising pages of a newspaper or the traffic of a big city. Moving through this traffic involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous intersections, nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery. Baudelaire speaks of a man who plunges into the crowd as into a reservoir of electric energy. Circumscribing the experience of the shock, he calls this man "a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness." Whereas Poe's passers-by cast glances in all directions, seemingly without cause, today's pedestrians are obliged to look about them so that they can be aware of traffic signals. Thus, technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training. There came a day when a new and urgent need for stimuli was met by film. In a film, perception conditioned by shock [chockförmige Wahrnehmung] was established as a formal principle. What determines the rhythm of production on a conveyor belt is the same thing that underlies the rhythm of reception in the film.

Marx had good reason to stress the great fluidity of the connection between segments in manual labor. This connection appears to the factory worker on an assembly line in an independent, objectified form. The article being assembled comes within the worker's range of action independently of his volition, and moves away from him just as arbitrarily. "It is a common characteristic of all capitalist production . . ." wrote Marx, "that the worker does not make use of the working conditions. The working conditions make use of the worker; but it takes machinery to give this reversal a technologically concrete form." In working with machines, workers learn to coordinate "their own movements with the uniformly constant movements of an automaton." These words shed a peculiar light on the absurd kind of uniformity that Poe wants to impose on the crowd—uniformities of attire and behavior, but also a uniformity of facial expression. Those smiles provide food for thought. They are probably the familiar kind, as expressed these days in the phrase "keep smiling"; in Poe's story, they function as a mimetic shock absorber.—"All machine work," says Marx in the same pas-
sage cited above, “requires prior training of the workers.” This training must be differentiated from practice. Practice, which was the sole determinant in handcrafting, still had a function in manufacturing. With practice as the basis, “each particular area of production finds its appropriate technical form in experience and slowly perfects it.” To be sure, each area quickly crystallizes this form “as soon as a certain degree of maturity has been attained.” On the other hand, this same system of manufacture produces “in every handicraft it appropriates a class of so-called unskilled laborers which the handicraft system strictly excluded. In developing a greatly simplified specialty to the point of virtuosity, at the cost of overall production capacity, it starts turning the lack of any development into a specialty. In addition to rankings, we get the simple division of workers into the skilled and the unskilled.” The unskilled worker is the one most deeply degraded by machine training. His work has been sealed off from experience; practice counts for nothing in the factory. What the amusement park achieves with its dodgem cars and other similar amusements is nothing but a taste of the training that the unskilled laborer undergoes in the factory—a sample which at times was for him the entire menu; for the art of the eccentric, an art in which an ordinary man could acquire training in places like an amusement park, flourished concomitantly with unemployment. Poe’s text helps us understand the true connection between wildness and discipline. His pedestrians act as if they had adapted themselves to machines and could express themselves only automatically. Their behavior is a reaction to shocks. “If jostled, they bowed profusely to the jostlers.”

IX

The shock experience [Chockerlebnis] which the passer-by has in the crowd corresponds to the isolated “experiences” of the worker at his machine. This does not entitle us to assume that Poe knew anything about industrial work processes. Baudelaire, at any rate, did not have the faintest notion of them. He was, however, captivated by a process in which the reflexive mechanism that the machine triggers in the workman can be studied closely, as in a mirror, in the idler. To say that this process is represented in games of chance may appear paradoxical. Where could one find a starker contrast than the one between work and gambling? Alain puts this convincingly when he writes: “It is inherent in the concept of gambling... that no game is dependent on the preceding one. Gambling cares nothing for any secured position... It takes no account of winnings gained earlier, and in this it differs from work. Gambling gives short shrift to the weighty past on which work bases itself.” The work that Alain has in mind here is the highly specialized kind (which, like intellectual effort, probably retains certain features of handicraft); it is not that of most factory workers, and least of all