Tom Joashi

Maximilian Sternberg

A TALE OF THREE CITIES: DECONSTRUCTING THE CROSS OF GASTINES IN PARIS, 1571

Today's debates surrounding the preservation of monuments to Confederate generals and slave-owning merchants bear witness to the attempts of one era to grapple with the ethics of another. Proponents of removing these monuments insist that the past they commemorate is distant and, for that reason, wholly out of keeping with the present. Well over a hundred years––many of them steeped in the thinking of postmodernity—lay between the erection of the statue of Edward Colston in the British city of Bristol and its toppling during the Black Lives Matter demonstrations of 2020. Yet the distance between 'then' and 'now' has not always been measured in decades.

Indeed, by comparison, the time required for the Cross of Gastines to fall out of favour in sixteenth-century Paris was far shorter: the monument's construction in 1569 on the Rue Saint-Denis was followed just two years later by the decision to remove it, prompted more by a political shift than a regime collapse. The furore that ensued, however, seems hardly to have been diminished by the brevity of the Cross' public lifespan. Repeated acts of Catholic mob violence meant that the ostensibly simple task of transporting it to the nearby Cemetery of the Innocents was drawn out over several weeks in December of 1571, much to the chagrin of Charles IX.

It is thus hardly surprising that the riots surrounding the Cross' removal have been read as both a precursor and a contributing factor to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, during which thousands of Protestants were murdered in the capital.[1] The pillaging of Protestant homes is one clear feature from the former set of events to be replicated *en masse* during the

---

[1] See, in particular, B. Diefendorf, "Prologue to a Massacre: Popular Unrest in Paris", 1557–1572, *The American Historical Review* 1985, 90(5), pp. 1067–1091.

latter. The risk with such an approach, though, is that an independently rich moment in the history of early modern Paris may be dismissed as being secondary or subsidiary. Closing a chapter dedicated to the Cross in his 1938 monograph on the capital during the Wars of Religion (1562-1598), Pierre Champion writes: 'undoubtedly the episode we have just recounted would not deserve to go down in history, if it did not provide an insight into the mechanism of the riot, and if it did not foreshadow, one day, its wider development.'[2] And while, in more recent years, historians have since handled the monument with greater care,[3] it is our belief that room remains for a more specifically spatial analysis thereof.

In keeping with the theme of this special issue, we go about this task by examining the monument through a relatively contemporary lens. Centuries after the Cross was removed, only around five kilometres away, architect Bernard Tschumi collaborated with philosopher Jacques Derrida in the early 1980s to plan the Parc de la Villette, a landscape project in Paris' nineteenth *arrondissement*, featuring a series of red, gridded *folies.* As Derrida wrote in an accompanying essay, it was the *folies*' subversion of typical hierarchies of signification that testified to the way in which architecture could be 'deconstructed', in true poststructuralist fashion.[4] Our intention here is to suggest that reading the affair of the Cross of Gastines alongside this much later theorisation of built form raises productive questions. For the Cross, like many monuments, appears to have been far more semantically slippery than those who built it intended. This essay first draws out several key points from Derrida's analysis of La Villette before turning back to the early modern. It considers the protean nature of Paris in the late sixteenth century: a city of ceremonial order, of radical Catholicism, and, as the king saw it, of Neoplatonic harmony. After uncovering the reasons for which the Cross was first erected, it subsequently demonstrates the way in which the city's three images were brought to bear on one another once the monument's hollow foundations were revealed.

---

[2] P. Champion, *Paris sous les derniers Valois: Paris au temps des Guerres de Religion: Fin du règne de Henri II. Régence de Catherine de Médicis. Charles IX*, Paris 1938, p. 169. All translations are our own unless stated otherwise.

[3] See, for instance, J. Foa, *Survivre: une histoire des guerres de religion*, Paris 2024, pp. 102–103.

[4] J. Derrida, "POINT DE FOLIE — MAINTENANT L'ARCHITECTURE. Bernard Tschumi: La Case Vide — La Villette", 1985, *AA Files* 1986, 12, pp. 65–75.

DECONSTRUCTION

In spite of its material resonances, 'deconstruction' was far from an architectural concept at the point of its inception in the late 1960s in Jacques Derrida' work.[5] Derrida's approach was in many ways a reaction to the popularity of structuralism in the disciplines of linguistics, anthropology, and literary studies at the time. Observations made in a 1966 conference paper regarding the inherent instability of the binary semantic systems on which structuralists based their analyses may have sounded the death knell of this intellectual trend. Put very simply, Derrida concluded from a discussion of the paradoxical absence of stabilising centres in these systems that meaning was in fact far more open to interpretation than his illustrious colleagues, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, then thought.[6] He continued in this iconoclastic vein in *Of Grammatology* (1967) and *Writing and Difference* (1967), prising apart what he perceived to be the accepted binaries of Western thought.

Derrida's commentary on the Parc de la Villette differed from these earlier contributions in that the text presented the ways in which the project was a deconstructed one, instead of performing the task itself. The park (ills. 1 and 2) consists of a grid of thirty-five bright red *folies* superimposed over the landscape and existing structures, void of the central axis or clear sightlines typically associated with classical planning practices. Each *folie* resembles a fragment of a modernist, quasi-industrial building, its function unfixed and its form distinct from the next. In typical fashion, Derrida plays on the various meanings of the term in French. The 'madness' of these structures consists in their potential to subvert what he calls the four 'invariances' of architecture through which it signifies: architecture as dwelling, as embodiment of hierarchy, as functional object, and as aesthetic unity.[7] La Villette represents a deconstructed architecture insofar as it actively pushes back against each of these categories, offering itself to visitors as an open-ended entity of no stable signification. It is the architecture of 'now' ('maintenant'), which exists beyond the formal classifications that haunt twentieth-century architecture,

---

[5] For a discussion of architecture in Derrida's thinking, see F. Vitale, M. Senatore, *The Last Fortress of Metaphysics: Jacques Derrida and the Deconstruction of Architecture*, New York 2018, available online: http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cam/detail.action?docID=5321263 [accessed: August 11, 2025].

[6] J. Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in: *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass, London 2001, pp. 278–295.

[7] Derrida, *POINT DE FOLIE*, pp. 65–69.

such as 'modernist' or 'postmodernist'.[8] Meaning arises rather through embodied interaction with these giant edifices, in relation to the historical context of the present. The famed 'death of the author' in poststructuralist thinking is thus repackaged as an architectural experience in Derrida's analysis.[9]

Whether the philosopher's interpretation of the project is aligned with contemporary visitors' experience—or even in the heyday of French intellectualism, for that matter—is beyond the purview of this discussion. Nonetheless, we wish to emphasise the capacity of a deconstructed architecture to trouble established orders of meaning, as well as the notion that this process would hinge upon its spectators' or visitors' experience of presence, in the embodied here and now.[10] And while the labelling of Tschumi's work today

1. Guilhem Vellut, *Parc de la Villette @ Paris*, 2016, photograph, via Wikimedia Commons

---

[8] Ibidem, p. 65.

[9] R. Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in: *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. K.M. Newton, London 1997, pp. 120–123.

[10] Cezary Wąs describes this phenomenon in C. Wąs, "The Shadow of God in the Garden of the Philosopher: Parc de La Villette in Paris in the Context of Contemporary Philosophical Concerns". Part I, *Quart* 2018, 50, p. 94: 'The open structure of the Parc de La Villette, suspended between the ideological values of its theoretical planning and the real

2. Guilhem Vellut, *Canal @ La Villette @ Paris*, 2017, photograph, via Wikimedia Commons

as 'deconstructivist' may constitute an ironic rebuttal of Derrida's suggestion that such an architecture could exist beyond its 'isms', our invocation of this thinking in relation to the sixteenth-century Cross of Gastines would suggest that the spirit in which the pair approached the design of la Villette might in fact transcend a postmodern trend. To this end, some reflections on the protean state in which the French capital found itself on the eve of the Cross' removal are first in order.

THREE CITIES

With a population of around three hundred thousand inhabitants, Paris was perhaps the largest city in late sixteenth-century Europe (ill. 3).[11] In the midst of civil war, it was beholden, moreover, to the problems of cultural change. The spread of both Humanist thought during the French Renais-

---

skeleton grown into practical components, can be described endlessly, without the possibility of closing it into the usual logic of being only this, or only that one'.

[11] B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris*, Oxford 1991, p. 9.

3. Truschet and Hoyau, *Plan de Bâle,* circa 1550, map, reproduced from Basel University Library, via Wikimedia Commons

sance and Calvinism in the wake of the Reformation were to have profound effects on the face of an otherwise obstinately medieval urban environment.[12] These, in effect, make up the three cities encircling the Cross of Gastines respectively: Paris the nascent Renaissance city; Paris the radically Catholic city; and Paris the well-ordered, ceremonial city of the later Middle Ages. Of course, it would hardly be tenable to suggest that these images were perceived by contemporaries as being completely distinct from one another, nor that they were the only images in operation, but we believe it helpful to consider them individually before approaching the riots of 1571. Much as Liam O'Dowd and Milena Komorova have shown regarding the three 'narratives' of contemporary Belfast, the images discussed below were 'performed through

---

[12] B. Chevalier, *Les bonnes villes de France du XIVe au XVIe siècle*, Paris 1982, pp. 302–309. See also D. Richet, "Sociocultural Aspects of Religious Conflicts in Paris during the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century", in: *Ritual, Religion and the Sacred: Selection from the Annales*, eds. R. Forster, O. Ranum, Baltimore 1982, pp. 182–212.

spatial practices and […] given form by the material and visual city.'[13] For it is exactly this notion of the city as a performative category that is to be foregrounded in relation to the removal of the Cross.

As Barbara Diefendorf emphasises, the French capital under the pre-Absolutist *ancien régime* was subject to the authority of both the king and its own municipal government.[14] Various elite offices, such as those of the Provost of Paris and the Gouverneur, representing the interests of the monarch, and the Provost of the Merchants of Paris and his four Aldermen, representing the interests of the mercantile corporations, all exerted their own, often overlapping influence over the running of the city.[15] With an eye to the *Régistres des déliberations du bureau de la ville de Paris*, the city's municipal archives, it is clear that maintaining control over Paris was often an uphill battle, with issues of hygiene, circulation, and aesthetics frequently rising to the textual surface.[16] It is perhaps from this same context that grand civic displays drew much of their symbolic power, however, as the triumphs of order over the unruly. Robert Descimon has described the ritual significance of organised processions in the capital, which fused together the city's royal fealty, its municipal identity, and its ardent Catholic faith to reproduce the unified body social.[17] The descriptions given in the *Registres* of general processions typically stress the sequence in which the various dignitaries marched, the relics and sacred objects they carried, and the brilliance of their fineries. It was on days such as these that Paris' identity as a *bonne ville*, a prosperous, orderly urban centre of late medieval France, was made tangible.[18]

And yet, starting in the late 1550s, this vision of the well-ordered city was increasingly put to the test by the growing popularity of Protestant doctrine and the corresponding indignation of the Catholic populace. A crisis of violence developed, as incensed citizens grew prone to acts of vigilante justice,

---

[13] L. O'Dowd, M. Komarova, "Three Narratives in Search of a City", *City* 2013, 17(4), p. 527.

[14] Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, p. 22.

[15] Ibidem.

[16] *Registres des délibérations du bureau de la ville de Paris.*, eds. F. Bonnardot et al., 5 vols, Paris 1883–1921. Hereafter *RBVP*. See J.-P. Babelon, *Paris au XVIe siècle. 'Nouvelle histoire de Paris'*, Paris 1986, pp. 285–292.

[17] R. Descimon, "Le corps de ville et le système cérémoniel parisien au début de l'âge moderne", in: *Statuts individuels, statuts corporatifs et statuts judiciaires dans les villes européennes: (moyen âge et temps modernes): actes du colloque tenu à Gand les 12 – 14 octobre 1995 = Individual, corporate and judicial status in European cities*, ed. M. Boone, Leuven 1996, p. 74.

[18] Chevalier, *Les bonnes villes de France…*, pp. 270–274.

stepping in where authorities were perceived as being absent.[19] Denis Crouzet underlines the urgency of these endeavours, enacted for the sake of the sanctity of the urban environment.[20] Their polemic fuelled by the news of iconoclasm that occurred across the kingdom in the early 1560s (ill. 4), pamphleteers and preachers were insistent on the Protestants' destructive intentions and the threat they posed to the capital. Where, as Claude de Sainctes wrote, to be a Huguenot meant to be a destroyer of churches and a murderer of priests, to be a Catholic seems conversely to have meant populating the cityscape actively with God's likeness.[21]

Accordingly, the previously harmonising function of processional rituals now metastasized into something more exclusionary and militant (ill. 5).[22] In June 1569, for example, as part of the preparations for the city's upcoming Corpus Christi festivities, all homes along the procession's route were required, as usual, to be adorned with tapestries. To prevent 'any potential scandal or unrest', however, the city would now decorate the façades of any residents who refused to do so—presumably for reasons of faith—at the expense of the local parish church.[23] Likely the municipal authorities recalled the looting of tellingly austere homes that occurred on a similar occasion in 1562.[24] Further acts of violence were perpetrated more directly against offenders meanwhile, though it is remarkable to what extent they mimicked these established patterns. The poet Christophe de Bordeaux remarks with glee how, again in early 1562, the body of an executed Huguenot leader was snatched from the gallows and dragged by a group of children, 'crying, shouting joyfully', from Les

---

[19] N.Z. Davis, "The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France", *Past & Present* 1973, 59, p. 169; D. Nicholls, "The Theatre of Martyrdom in the French Reformation", *Past & Present* 1988, 121, p. 70.

[20] D. Crouzet, "Espace d'ici-bas et espace de l'Au-delà: la violence catholique à la recherche de la cité de dieu (France, 1560–1598)", in: *The Power of Space in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Cities of Italy, Northern France and the Low Countries*, eds. M. Boone, M. Howell, Turnhout 2013, pp. 163–183.

[21] C. de Sainctes, *Discours sur le saccagement des églises catholiques, par les hérétiques anciens, & nouveaux calvinistes, en l'an mil cinq cens soixantedeux*, Paris 1563, 22v–23r; O. Christin, *Une révolution symbolique: l'iconoclasme huguenot et la reconstruction catholique, le sens commun*, Paris 1991, pp. 177–239.

[22] D. Roussel, "L'espace public comme enjeu des guerres de Religion et de la paix civile. Réflexions sur la notion d'espace public et ses métamorphoses à Paris au xvie siècle", in: *L'espace public au Moyen Âge*, Paris 2011, p. 137.

[23] *RBVP*, v. 6, p. 110.

[24] P. de Paschal, *Journal de ce aui s'est passé en France durant l'année 1562 principalement dans Paris et la Cour*, Paris 1950, p. 43.

Veüe de l'Eglise de St Irenée telle quelle fut delaisée apres avoir été Pilliée, Sacagée, et Détruite par les Religionères; l'an de Jésus Christ 1562.

4. Anonymous, *Veue de l'Eglise de St Irenée telle quelle fut delaisée apres avoir été pilliée, sacagé, et détruite par les religionaires, l'an de Jésus Christ 1562*, 1562, engraving, reproduced from the Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon (public domain)

5. Anonymous, *Procession de la Ligue sur la Place de Grève,* c. 1590, oil on canvas, reproduced from the Musée Carnavalet, via Wikimedia Commons

Halles along the Rue de la Ferronnerie to the Cemetery of the Innocents.[25] It was via such theatrical statements that the Parisian public sphere was policed and indeed monopolised under the banner of Catholicism.[26]

Nonetheless, in spite of confessional conflict and the upheaval this brought about in late Renaissance France, an Italian-inspired, Humanist image of Paris does seem to have gained some traction simultaneously.[27] While many of the more sweeping interventions associated with the city's modernisation were not to occur until the beginning of the seventeenth century, under the aegis of Henri IV, the effects on the urban form of Renaissance culture at a reinvigorated court are not to be underestimated.[28] Various projects were to reflect a renewed emphasis on beauty and the arts in the capital, such as Fra Giocondo's reconstruction of the Pont Notre-Dame (ill. 6), completed in 1507, or the work carried out by Pierre Lescot and Jean Goujon on the Louvre, a new 'miracle of the arts', through the 1550s and 1560s.[29] Paris still lagged

---

[25] Chr. de Bordeaux, *Beau recueil de plusieurs belles chansons spirituelles, avec ceux des huguenots hérétiques et ennemis de dieu, et de nostre mère saincte église, faictes et composées par maistre Christofle de Bourdeaux*, Paris [n.d.], 14v.

[26] Roussel, *L'espace public comme…*, p. 136.

[27] André Chastel considers this theme specifically in A. Chastel, *The Crisis of the Renaissance, 1520–1600*, trans. P. Price, Paris 1968.

[28] For a discussion of Henri's reforms, see H. Ballon, *The Paris of Henri IV: Architecture and Urbanism*, Cambridge 1991.

[29] Babelon, *Paris au XVIe siècle…*, p. 116. J.-P. Babelon, "The Louvre: Royal Residence and Temple of the Arts", in: *Realms of Memory*. Volume 1: *Conflicts and Divisions*, eds. P. Nora, L.D. Kritzman, trans. A. Goldhammer, New York 1996, p. 254.

6. Anonymous, *Vue perspective des Illuminations du Pont Notre Dame en rejouissance du Rétablissement de la santé de Louis XIV le 30 de Janvier 1687*, c. 1750, engraving, reproduced from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (public domain)

far behind its competitors south of the Alps under the rule of the last Valois kings, but their vision for the city was undeniably a progressive one, at least theoretically in keeping with the intellectual trends of the day.

Indeed, with the conclusion of the third civil war in 1570, it was hoped that the main impediment to the kingdom's flourishing was behind it, and a French golden age would begin. The peace edict drawn up that year was a work grounded in the unificatory aspirations of Neoplatonic thought, a reflection of the enlightened stance of Charles IX and his mother Cathérine de Médicis during the 1560s more broadly.[30] And this stance was concretised, if temporarily, when Charles made his long delayed triumphal entry into the capital in March 1571. Simon Bouquet's florid description of the occasion gives a sense of how ephemeral obelisks and arches (ill. 7) transformed

---

[30] D. Crouzet, *La nuit de la Saint-Barthélemy: un rêve perdu de la Renaissance*, Paris 1994, p. 183.
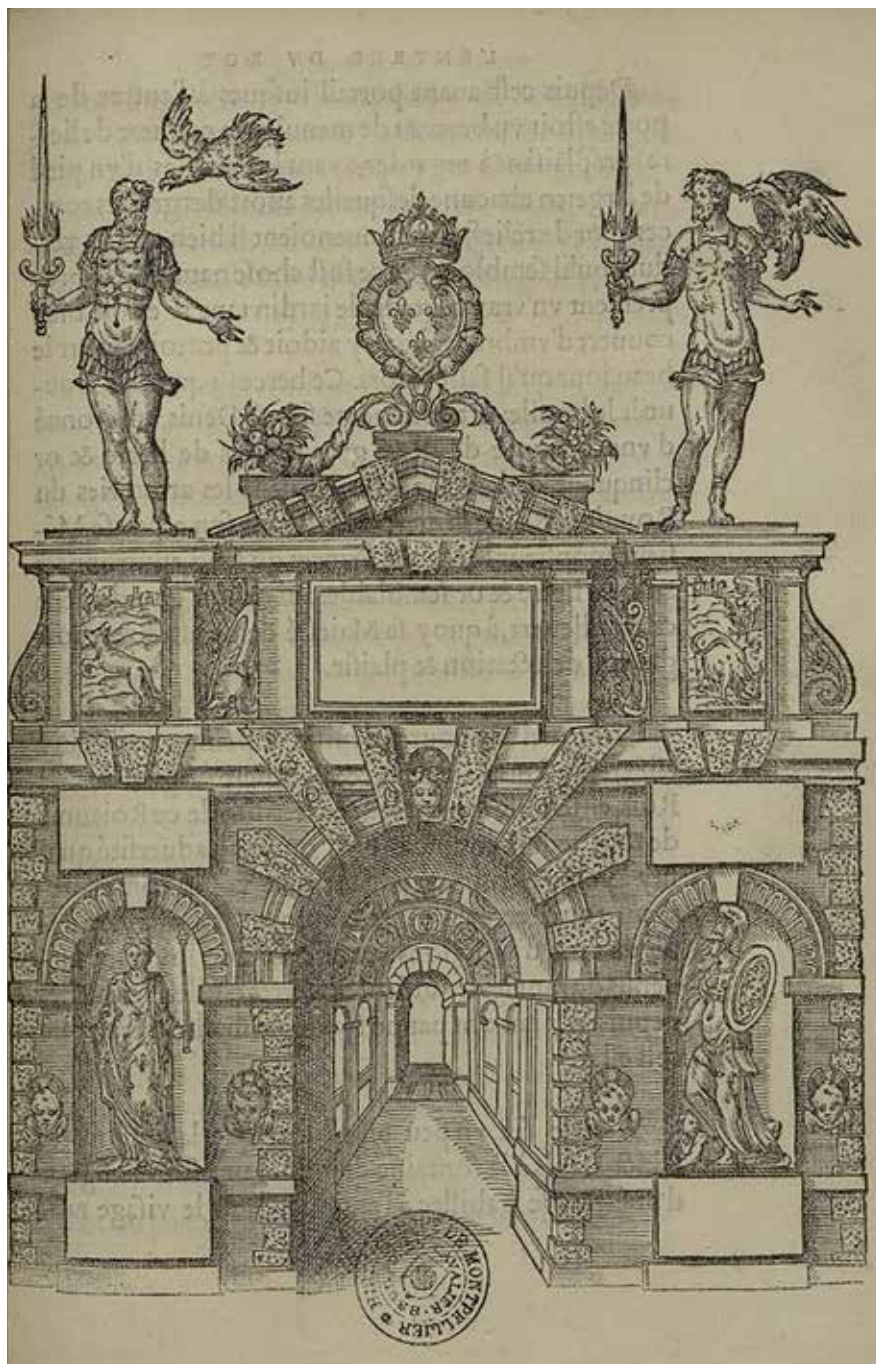
7. Simon Bouquet, engraving from the *Bref et sommaire receuil…* showing a triumphal arch at the Porte Saint-Denis, 1572, reproduced from Gallica (public domain)

Paris into a Humanist 'ville imaginaire'.[31] The royal cortege passed through the Porte Saint-Denis, down the arterial Rue Saint-Denis, over the Pont Notre-Dame, through the Ile-de-la-Cité to Notre-Dame Cathedral, and finally to the Palais de la Cité. The celebration's ideological programme, made up of poetry recitals, architectural inscriptions, and the iconography of the buildings themselves, preached unity in the kingdom.[32] It was via these arrangements, Bouquet writes, that the king's wishes were made manifest: that 'all past events be buried under the coffin of oblivion, and that a good peace, union, friendship, concord, and stable tranquillity remain eternally imprinted in the hearts of his subjects'.[33]

Evidently, idealised conceptions of the city did not then simply exist as stable categories of the mind: to produce the Paris of medieval urban order, militant Catholicism, or Classical harmony it was necessary to take to the streets and perform it. The procession is somewhat of a constant factor here. Walking collectively from one node to another was tantamount to defining the city's symbolic parameters. Other public acts, like the harassment of Huguenots and the construction of wondrous edifices, were additionally instrumental in achieving this goal. We will see shortly how the enactment of these visions of Paris around the Cross of Gastines both unearthed the latter's semantic instability on the one hand and sought to shore it up on the other. Just what exactly this monument stood for upon its construction first requires some unpacking, however.

MONUMENT

The story of the Cross of Gastines begins in the winter of 1569, when a Huguenot conventicle was discovered in the home of the wealthy merchant Philippe de Gastines on the Rue Saint-Denis. Six months later, on June 28th, Philippe, his son Richard, and his son-in-law Nicolas Croquet were all condemned by the Parisian Parlement to be hanged on heresy charges for their participation in the services. Reformed worship had been banned in the capital since the publication of the 1562 Edict of Saint-Germain, and the height-

---

[31] We borrow Françoise Joukovksy's phrase from F. Joukovksy, "Lyon ville imaginaire", in: *Il Rinascimenta a Lione. Atti Del Congresso Internazionale (Macerata, 6–11 Maggio 1985)*, eds. A. Possenti, G. Mastrangelo, 2 vols, 1988, I, pp. 421–441; S. Bouquet, *Bref et sommaire recueil de ce qui a esté faict et de l'ordre tenu à la joyeuse et triumphante entrée de... Charles IX... en sa bonne ville et cité de Paris...*, Paris 1572.

[32] Crouzet, *La nuit de la Saint-Barthélemy…*, p. 257.

[33] Bouquet, *Bref et sommaire recueil…*, 7r–7v.

8. Claude-Louis Bernier, *Croix Glastine* (sic), c. 1786, pencil drawing, reproduced from Gallica (public domain)

ened tensions caused by the third ongoing civil war likely did the three men no favours in court.[34]

By parliamentary decree, it was furthermore announced at major cross-roads and public squares that the offending dwelling would be razed, and from its materials a monument constructed; their crimes were to be immortalised in stone. An eighteenth-century sketch by the architect Claude-Louis Bernier (ill. 8) shows a large, decorated pyramid with a small cross and sculpted Christ figure placed at its peak. In this way, through a mixture of destruction and construction, Paris was cleansed of a small pocket of heresy that had polluted one of its most significant streets—and apparently for good. It was stated in the decree that this 'house of the Five White Crosses on the Rue Saint-Denis [would] serve *forever more* as a public place' (emphasis ours).[35] The resolve of the Parlement's decision was further accentuated by the additional stipulation that it was 'prohibited and forbidden to all people, irrespective of their quality or condition, to build here in perpetuity'.[36]

All things considered, how the good citizens of Paris were meant to interpret the meaning of the Cross of Gastines was thus probably somewhat self-explanatory. The building regulations surrounding the monument suggest that this meaning was certainly intended to be inviolable at that. Should any doubt have remained, however, the decoration of the Cross with inscriptions composed by the Pléiade poet Étienne Jodelle may have given passers-by a clearer sense of what constituted an appropriate response. Katherine Maynard locates this form of urban writing within a broader trend of rendering the city 'legible' among Antiquarian circles in Paris at the time. The inscriptions, as recorded in diarist Pierre de l'Estoile's (1546–1611) collection of miscellanea, 'were intended to write over—quite literally—the site of the Gastines' house with a narrative of a royal victory over heretics, and the motto of Charles IX, *Pietate et justitia*, appears in several different forms on his plans for the monument to confirm that message.'[37] It was through his verse that the poet '[sought] to stabilize collective memory within a tumultuous

---

[34] Barbara Diefendorf gives a particularly detailed account of these events in Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, pp. 84–88. As for the tense climate, see Diefendorf, *Prologue to a Massacre*, p. 1084.

[35] J. Crespin, *Histoire des martyrs, persecutez et mis a mort pour la verité de l'Evangile, depuis le temps des apostres jusques à present*, Geneva 1619, 776r.

[36] Ibidem.

[37] K.S. Maynard, "'Remarque En Toy Telle Marque': Étienne Jodelle's Parisian Inscriptions and Epitaphs in the French Wars of Religion", *French Studies* 2014, 68(3), p. 306.

urban setting by confirming royal authority through commonalities in civic, national, and religious identities.'[38]

Yet the extent to which the poet could have truly achieved quite such a task, in a city quite as contested, remains dubious all the same. That an anonymous Protestant author—whose bias is to be noted––describes Jodelle's Latin as having been 'so confusedly and obliquely formed that several people thought [its] composer […] to have been mocking both Catholics and Huguenots' is certainly of note.[39] In December 1571, this latent ambiguity seems to have come to a head when, after great prevarication, the city finally gave into Charles IX's orders and initiated the Cross' removal from the Rue Saint-Denis, to be reconstructed in the nearby Cemetery of the Innocents. City officials justified their decision––a tempering of the king's desire to get rid of the monument outright––by claiming that the Cross was to be honoured in its transferral from a 'profane space' to a 'sacred' one in this way, but this did little to assuage the ire of the city's indignant preachers and their congregations.[40]

The *Registres* present the so-called affair of the Cross of Gastines as having lasted roughly from December 2nd to December 23rd.[41] Associated quarrels both pre- and post-date this period, but it was during these weeks that Paris saw the greatest concentration of unrest. A picture of back and forth between officials and rioters is to be observed, with efforts to transfer the Cross repeatedly thwarted. Finally, however, the deed was brought to completion on the evening of December 19th, as the city stood draped in fog. Rioters returned on the morning of December 20th with a vengeance, marching on the Hôtel de Ville and attacking several known Protestant homes, but the administration's eventual resolve seems to have restored at least a semblance of order to the city. Claude-Louis Bernier's plan of the Cemetery of the Innocents (ill. 9) shows its southeasterly corner to be the monument's final resting place. In what follows, we return to our Derridean framework to examine how Charles' intervention undermined the Cross' purported infallibility, and how both the Catholic populace and the city authorities engaged in compensatory performances of meaning in response.

---

[38] Ibidem, p. 303.

[39] *Discours de ce qui avint touchant la Croix de Gastines, l'an 1571, vers Noël*, in: *Archives curieuses de l'histoire de France*, eds. L. Cimber, F. Danjou, Paris 1835, vi, p. 476.

[40] *RBVP*, VI, p. 404.

[41] *RBVP*, VI, pp. 398–435.
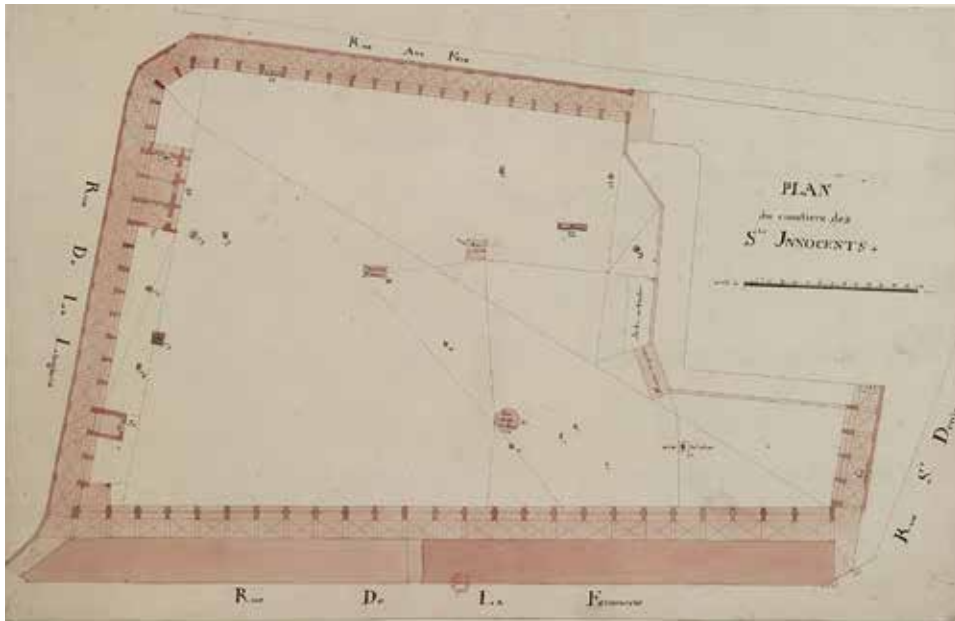
9. Claude-Louis Bernier, *Plan du cimitiere des Sts Innocents*, c. 1786, architectural plan, reproduced from Gallica (public domain)

PERFORMING PARIS

As previously noted, the 1570 Edict of Saint-Germain was published with the intention of fostering harmony through amnesia; to bring about peace in the kingdom, the Crown believed it necessary that all prior animosities between the two warring sides be forgotten.[42] Article 32 of the edict was clearly conceived in this vein: in addition to annulling sentences handed out during the war on grounds of religion, it stipulated that all monuments commemorating this persecution were to be razed.[43] That the magistrates of the Parisian Parlement took longer than a year to enforce this article and remove the Cross of Gastines is likely attributable to the outrage they knew such an act would cause.[44] Eventually, however, Charles' insistence grew too great to be ignored, and the authorities were forced to comply.

---

[42] On this policy of amnesia, see P.-A. Mellet, J. Foa, "Une « politique de l'oubliance » ? Mémoire et Oubli Pendant Les Guerres de Religion (1550–1600)", *Astérion* 2016, 15.

[43] D. Potter, *The French Wars of Religion: Selected Documents*, New York 1997, p. 88.

[44] Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, p. 84.

The Parisian cleric Jean de la Fosse suggests in a diary entry for September 1571 that the nefarious influence of the Huguenot leader Gaspard de Coligny lay behind the royal orders for the Cross' demolition, and there is certainly truth to the claim.[45] Nonetheless, we believe it necessary to read this intervention simultaneously in relation to the city in which it occurred. Fabrizio Nevola describes the way in which papal entries in Renaissance Italy were used as a means of showcasing recent architectural developments along their route, foregrounding the magnanimity of the pope who funded them.[46] The swift manner in which Paris' aldermen moved to address unseemly, irregular projections built onto homes following the entry of the bishop on 18 March 1565 suggests that questions of sight and the spectacular were comparably prominent on such occasions in France.[47] By the same token, it is worth questioning whether Charles' gaze simply glossed over the nearby monument of the Cross as he made his entry down the Rue Saint-Denis in 1571, past the Fontaine des Innocents and the opposing statue of the Greek god Hymen, or if its dissonance with the programme of peace and love was duly noted; ill. 10 gives a sense of the ceremony's proximity to the later contested site of the monument and cemetery. In the enacted city of Classical harmony, the commemoration of past violence was out of place, and the crisis of the Cross of Gastines was laid bare.

Two surviving sermons from the preachers René Benoist and Simon Vigor regarding the plans to remove the Cross give us a sense of some of the emotions that drove the mob to violence once the masons had gotten to work. Vigor's was more openly seditious. Preaching from the pulpit of Notre-Dame, he emphasised that maintaining the markers of God's victory was an act of worship, and that to neglect them was one of blasphemy. His interlocutor dangerously vague, Vigor fulminated: 'You say that the memory of victory must be removed, now that peace has been made. But how, wretch, do you wish to cease the praise of God?'[48] Benoist argued meanwhile that the destruction of churches and crosses that so haunted the Catholic imaginary was in fact

---

[45] J. de La Fosse, *Journal d'un curé ligueur de Paris sous les trois dernies Valois*, Paris 1865, p. 132.

[46] F. Nevola, *Street Life in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven 2020, p. 61. See also Maurizio Vesco's and Valeria Viola's similar discussion of processions in M. Vesco, V. Viola, "The Measure of Success. The Case of the Strada Maqueda in Palermo, 1600-1750", in: *Transforming Space: Visible and Invisible Changes in Premodern European Cities*, eds. J.E. Abrahamse, H. Deneweth, Turnhout 2022, pp. 125–138.

[47] *RBVP*, V, p. 500.

[48] S. Vigor, *Sermons catholiques sur les dimenches et festes depuis l'octave de Pasques jusques à l'Advent…*, Paris 1597, II, p. 237.

10. Map of Paris showing the location of the ephemeral edifices for the 1571 entry, the house of the Gastines on the Rue Saint-Denis, and the Cemetery of the Innocents, along with Charles' processional route. With thanks to Tom Hamilton for the GIS raster

a manifestation of God's anger at his flock. Only through acts of penitence and devotion, such as marital chastity, fasting, and general processions, could this anger be assuaged.[49]

---

[49] R. Benoist, *Advertissement du moyen par lequel aisement tous troubles et differens, tant touchant la croix, de laquelle y a si grande altercation en ceste ville de paris, que autres concernans la religion, seront assopis et ostez*, Paris 1571, 8r.

Perhaps the populace's very public displays of resistance to the Cross' transferral are to be understood similarly. That December, large groups of men, women, and children from the urban poor, accompanied by students from the University quarter, took to the streets to demonstrate their Catholic devotion. The *Registres* record how on December 8th a huge number of rioters broke down the doors of the Cemetery of the Innocents, using the fragments to fill in the pit dug for the monument's foundations, and forced the members of the city watch posted at the cemetery to flee under a hail of stones for the side-streets of Les Halles.[50] A day later, the home of a Protestant woman on the Pont Notre-Dame suspected of petitioning for the Cross' removal was attacked, as well as those of three officials. Further members of the mob attempted to drag out the defensive chains stored in Bourgeois residences along the Rue Saint-Denis, so as to block off the street.[51] Then, on December 20th, though the battle for the Cross was now lost, chaos erupted one final time with the renewed looting of several Protestant dwellings on the Pont Notre-Dame and the burning of their property in the middle of the bridge—along with what remained of the Gastines home further into the city. The rioters seem to have declared war on the city itself in their attempts to steal weapons from the Hôtel de Ville and their direct attack on Claude Marcel, Provost of the Merchants of Paris, in his home on the Pont au Change.[52] Whether consciously or not, these angry residents made themselves known at major public sites in the city in response to the void opened up by a monument marked for symbolic demolition. A threat to the security of the Catholic city required spectacular performances of this conception in response—the ransacking of Huguenot homes was in this sense a deeply constructive act.

The combined efforts of Paris' various administrative bodies to counter these outbursts were extensive throughout this period. It is striking just how clearly their functions were then articulated, particularly in identifying who exactly was moving through the city. An order dated December 8th from the Bureau de la Ville to Mathurin de Beausse, the municipal officer in charge of neighbourhood around the Rue Saint-Denis, specified that he was to ensure that all Bourgeois on the street were on standby at their doorways 'to see if they could not recognise any of people who were taking part in the sedition and popular emotion'.[53] It was reported in a letter to the king on December 10th that officials had made enquiries at the homes of local barber surgeons to

---

[50] *RBVP*, VI, p. 400.

[51] Ibidem, pp. 406–407.

[52] Ibidem, pp. 425–426.

[53] *RBVP*, VI, p. 404.

determine whether any wounded Parisians had recently sought their help.[54] Additional concerns were raised about a suspiciously large number of men who had ridden through the capital on horseback in recent days, their destination unknown.[55]

Owing to this uncertainty, traffic through the city was stemmed on December 15th by orders to close the wall's main gates and to lock up all boats moored at the various ports along the Seine.[56] An earlier decree forbidding civilian assemblies, limiting groups to no more than two people in the streets, as well as threatening any residents caught throwing stones with the razing of their home illustrates the city government's desire to assert its presence and reinstate its power over public space.[57] Mobilised responses to the threat of civil disobedience are demonstrative of the extent to which this power, in turn, reshaped the face of the city. In addition to the ramping up of patrols, troops were stationed during these tumultuous weeks at various strategic points throughout Paris. On December 9th, Mathurin de Beausse was told to house one hundred mounted men in hostels close to the site of the as yet unmoved monument on the Rue Saint-Denis, while other local authorities received similar instructions to find lodgings in Les Halles and near the Place de l'Apport-Paris.[58] By positioning armed men on both the Petit Pont and the Pont Saint-Michel, moreover, the authorities sought to stop any bands of students from crossing over from the University quarter.[59] Curiously, it was thus when faced with existential threat that the mechanisms of the well-ordered city seem to have functioned most efficiently. Responding to the performance of the mob with a ceremony of their own, the authorities' assertion of presence reshaped the capital as a site of vigilance and control.

Let us return to this discussion's theoretical framing. As we have seen, Derrida's plea for La Villette as a deconstructed work of architecture lay in the project's subversion of the typical hierarchies of built signification. The abstract, multi-function forms of the *folies* were praised for their eschewal of fixed, ordained meaning for the sake of the multiplicity of semantic free play. They were to be apprehended not through the dogma of criticism, but the embodied experience of the individual subject, as a form of open-ended architecture. Centuries before Derrida was to arrive on the scene, it might be said that the Cross of Gastines possessed something comparable to this

---

[54] Ibidem, p. 410.
[55] Ibidem, p. 413.
[56] Ibidem, p. 418.
[57] Ibidem, p. 411.
[58] Ibidem, p. 404.
[59] Ibidem, p. 428.

status. As opposed to the physical interventions of December 1571, its literal dismantling, we believe the Cross' deconstruction to have begun with a change in political climate, and with the new vision for Paris this brought about. Charles' order for the Cross' removal exposed the fallacy of semantic constancy at the monument's foundations—the fallacy both that the memory of Catholic victory it honoured was eternal, and that Jodelle's inscriptions, as Maynard argues, would maintain order over the urban terrain.

In a letter of December 17th to the Bureau de la Ville, the Queen Mother wrote that it was surely the delays in moving the Cross once and for all that were 'the cause of the popular uprisings that took place last Saturday and Sunday in Paris'—an interpretation we are inclined to believe.[60] Though the Cross still stood on the ceremonial Rue Saint-Denis, its open-endedness had been unearthed, and an eruption of signification took place around it as various actors sought to reassert or redefine its meaning. Borrowing Derrida's phrase, this was an architecture of presence. The monument's surface took on different connotations with the entry of the king earlier in the year; with the uprising of the Catholic populace who sought later to preserve it; and with the mobilisation of the city authorities who ensured its removal. We do not wish to suggest that its eventual reconstruction in the Cemetery of the Innocents was to restore order once and for all. Complaints about mud being thrown at Huguenot homes in February of 1572 suggest that the 'city of love' Charles sought to usher in with the monument's removal was just as fragile as the one before it.[61] But in detaching the Cross from its initial site, its potency as a polysemous monument was perhaps equally undone, and the city returned, for a while, to an uneasy sense of calm.

CONCLUSION

By locating this tumultuous episode squarely within a teleological reading, viewing it simply as a prelude to the massacre to come, there is a risk of assuming that the power dynamics active during the riots of 1571 were mirrored during the bloodshed of 1572, when thousands of Huguenots were murdered by the masses in the capital. Yet whether the latter can be compared quite as easily to so flagrant an act of sedition as the affair of the Cross of Gastines is dubious: Charles, not the mob, is widely believed to have initiated the violence on this later occasion. A further risk, one we have sought to

---

[60] *RBVP*, VI, p. 422.
[61] *RBVP*, VI, p. 442.

make clear in this essay, is that an early instance of monumental crisis in the history of architecture would be elided. Today, in the wake of the culturally fractious twentieth century, with its many wars and the dissolution and reinvention of empires, the task of designing an enduring, widely representative monument is believed to be a difficult one. It would seem, however, that this task has been difficult for some time. The eternity to which the Cross of Gastines aspired in sixteenth-century Paris was to last just over two years.

No doubt the comparison we have drawn here between the pre- and postmodern will raise questions. By performing a tentative reading of the former via the latter, as this special issue encourages, we have attempted nonetheless to emphasise the potential of such an approach. For one, might it be concluded that monuments in fact constitute the object *par excellence* of architectural deconstruction? The inevitability of cultural change means that the collective memory they seek to concretise or stabilise will one day fall out of favour––despite all claims to eternity. The possibility of incongruence, of an occupation of multiple semantic systems, is inscribed paradoxically in the fixity of their form. By this token, one wonders if the Parc de la Villette has now fallen victim to a similar dynamic. With the heady days of French poststructuralism increasingly far behind us, the architectural open-endedness heralded by Tschumi's great red *folies* appears ever more anchored to the moment in which they were conceived. We regard the lesson they impart as more timeless.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Babelon J.P., "The Louvre: Royal Residence and Temple of the Arts", in: *Realms of Memory.* Volume 1: *Conflicts and Divisions*, eds. P. Nora, L.D. Kritzman, trans. A. Goldhammer, New York 1996

Babelon J.P., *Paris Au XVIe Siècle. 'Nouvelle Histoire de Paris'*, Paris 1986

Ballon H., *The Paris of Henri IV: Architecture and Urbanism*, New York 1991

Barthes R., "The Death of the Author", in: *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. K.M. Newton, New York 1997, pp. 120–123

Benoist R., *Advertissement Du Moyen Par Lequel Aisement Tous Troubles et Differens, Tant Touchant La Croix, de Laquelle y a Si Grande Altercation En Ceste Ville de Paris, Que Autres Concernans La Religion, Seront Assopis et Ostez*, Paris 1571

Bordeaux Ch. de, *Beau Recueil de Plusieurs Belles Chansons Spirituelles, Avec Ceux Des Huguenots Hérétiques et Ennemis de Dieu, et de Nostre Mère Saincte Église, Faictes et Composées Par Maistre Christofle de Bourdeaux* (pour Magdeleine Berthelin, [n.d.])

Bouquet S., *Bref et Sommaire Recueil de Ce Qui a Esté Faict et de l'ordre Tenu à La Joyeuse et Triumphante Entrée de... Charles IX... En Sa Bonne Ville et Cité de Paris...* (Du Pré, pour O. Codoré, 1572)

Champion P., *Paris Sous Les Derniers Valois: Paris Au Temps Des Guerres de Religion: Fin Du Règne de Henri II. Régence de Catherine de Médicis. Charles IX*, Paris 1938

Chastel A., *The Crisis of the Renaissance, 1520–1600*, trans. P. Price, New York 1968

Chevalier B., *Les Bonnes Villes de France Du XIVe Au XVIe Siècle*, Paris 1982

Christin O., *Une révolution symbolique: l'iconoclasme huguenot et la reconstruction catholique*, Paris 1991

Crespin J., *Histoire Des Martyrs, Persecutez et Mis a Mort Pour La Verité de l'Evangile, Depuis Le Temps Des Apostres Jusques à Present*, Geneva 1619

Crouzet D., "Espace d'ici-bas et espace de l'Au-delà: la violence catholique à la recherche de la cité de dieu (France, 1560–1598)", in: *The Power of Space in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Cities of Italy, Northern France and the Low Countries*, eds. M. Boone, M.C. Howell, Turnhout 2013, pp. 163–183

Crouzet D., *La nuit de la Saint-Barthélemy: un rêve perdu de la Renaissance*, Paris 1994

Davis N.Z., "The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France", *Past & Present* 1973, 59, pp. 51–91

Derrida J., "POINT DE FOLIE — MAINTENANT L'ARCHITECTURE. Bernard Tschumi: La Case Vide — La Villette", 1985, *AA Files* 1986, 12, pp. 65–75

Derrida J., "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in: *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago 2001, pp. 278–295

Descimon R., "Le corps de ville et le système cérémoniel parisien au début de l'âge moderne", in: *Statuts individuels, statuts corporatifs et statuts judiciaires dans les villes européennes: (moyen âge et temps modernes); actes du colloque tenu à Gand les 12–14 octobre 1995 = Individual, corporate and judicial status in European cities*, ed. M. Boone, Louven 1996, pp. 73–128

Diefendorf B., "Prologue to a Massacre: Popular Unrest in Paris", 1557–1572, *The American Historical Review* 1985, 90(5), pp. 1067–1091

Diefendorf B., *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris*, Oxford 1991

"Discours de Ce Qui Avint Touchant La Croix de Gastines, l'an 1571, Vers Noël", in: *Archives Curieuses de l'histoire de France VI*, eds. L. Cimber, F. Danjou, Beauvais 1835, pp. 475–478

Foa J., *Survivre: une histoire des guerres de religion*, Paris 2024

Joukovsky F., "Lyon Ville Imaginaire", in: *Il Rinascimenta a Lione. Atti Del Congresso Internazionale (Macerata, 6-11 Maggio 1985)*, eds. A. Possenti, G. Mastrangelo, Roma 1988, pp. 421–441

La Fosse J. de, *Journal d'un Curé Ligueur de Paris Sous Les Trois Dernies Valois* (Didier, 1865)

Maynard K.S., "'Remarque En Toy Telle Marque': Étienne Jodelle's Parisian Inscriptions and Epitaphs in the French Wars of Religion", *French Studies* 2014, 68(3), pp. 299–312

Mellet P.A., J. Foa, "Une « politique de l'oubliance » ? Mémoire et Oubli Pendant Les Guerres de Religion (1550–1600)", *Astérion* 2016, 15

Nevola F., *Street Life in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven 2020

Nicholls D., "The Theatre of Martyrdom in the French Reformation", *Past & Present* 1988, 121, pp. 49–73

O'Dowd L., M. Komarova, "Three Narratives in Search of a City", *City* 2013, 17(4), pp. 526–546

Paschal P. de, *Journal de ce qui s'est passé en france durant l'année 1562, principalement dans Paris et la cour*, Paris 1950

Potter D., *The French Wars of Religion: Selected Documents*, New York 1997

Registres Des Délibérations Du Bureau de La Ville de Paris, Histoire Générale de Paris, 15 vols, eds. F. Bonnardot et al., Paris 1883

Richet D., "Sociocultural Aspects of Religious Conflicts in Paris during the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century", in: *Ritual, Religion and the Sacred: Selection from the Annales*, eds. R. Forster, O. Ranum, Baltimore 1982, pp. 182–212

Roussel D., "L'espace public comme enjeu des guerres de Religion et de la paix civile. Réflexions sur la notion d'espace public et ses métamorphoses à Paris au xvie siècle", in: *L'espace public au Moyen Âge*, Paris 2011, pp. 131–146

Sainctes C. de, *Discours Sur Le Saccagement Des Églises Catholiques, Par Les Hérétiques Anciens, & Nouveaux Calvinistes, En l'an Mil Cinq Cens Soixante-deux*, Paris 1563

Vesco M., V. Viola, "The Measure of Success. The Case of the Strada Maqueda in Palermo, 1600-1750", in: *Transforming Space: Visible and Invisible Changes in Premodern European Cities*, eds. J.E. Abrahamse, H. Deneweth, Turnhout 2022, pp. 125–138

Vigor S., *Sermons catholiques sur les dimenches et festes depuis l'octave de Pasques jusques à l'Advent [- depuis l'onziesme après la Trinité jusques au Caresme], faicts par feu... Simon Vigor,... Mis en lumière et reveuz par M. Jean Cristi [sic],... et par M. Jean Érar [sic],...*, 2 vols, Paris 1597

Vitale F., M. Senatore, *The Last Fortress of Metaphysics: Jacques Derrida and the Deconstruction of Architecture*, Albany 2018

Wąs C., "The Shadow of God in the Garden of the Philosopher: Parc de La Villette in Paris in the Context of Contemporary Philosophical Concerns". Part I, *Quart* 2018, 50, pp. 67–98

Tom Joashi

Department of Architecture in Cambridge University

Maximilian Sternberg

Department of Architecture in Cambridge University

A TALE OF THREE CITIES: DECONSTRUCTING THE CROSS OF GASTINES IN PARIS, 1571

Summary

This article considers the erection and subsequent removal of the Parisian Cross of Gastines, a monument commemorating the execution of three Protestant men, between 1569 and 1571. It seeks to foreground the spatial qualities of this tumultuous

episode, with riots breaking out in December 1571, using the writing of Jacques Derrida on Bernard Tschumi's project for the Parc de la Villette. The monument is read in this light as an inherently unstable semantic object, as opposed to the fixed edifice it was claimed to be upon its construction in 1569. In this way, the case is made for interpreting the Cross and the surrounding upheaval as an independently rich moment in Paris' urban history, and not simply as a forewarning of the much-discussed St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572.

The article emphasises that Paris, in the midst of the French Wars of Religion (1562–1598), was a contested city: its late medieval image as a well-ordered *bonne ville* was challenged by the spread of both the learned, Humanist culture of the late Renaissance, which sought to classicize the city, and the militant Catholicism of the Counter Reformation, which sought to cleanse it of religious heterodoxy. All three of these categories were the product of urban performance, enacted via theatrical statements of identity in the public arena. Employing Derrida's description of a deconstructed architecture as one whose meaning is predicated on immediate, embodied interaction, it is shown how the Cross' meaning was tied up with this performative theme.

With the conclusion of France's third civil war in 1570, the peace edict subsequently drawn up decreed that all markers of past conflict were to be removed, including the Cross of Gastines, although it was perhaps the triumphal entry of Charles IX down the Rue Saint-Denis in 1571, past Classical arches, obelisks, and other decorations, as well as the Cross itself, that truly spelt the monument's symbolic end. Further performances followed: when, after much back and forth, the city administration finally obeyed the king's orders and initiated its removal to the Cemetery of the Innocents, the Catholic mob took to the streets to demonstrate that their faith was not so easily dismantled. Officials mobilised in response, enacting their own image of the city as one of control and order. As Derrida writes of the *folies* of La Villette, it was thus via that the many movements around the Cross that its various meanings were revealed.