



An Attempt At Exhausting A Place In Paris

Georges Perec

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DATE: 19 OCTOBER 1974 (SATURDAY)

TIME: 10:45 AM

LOCATION: TABAC SAINT-SULPICE

WEATHER: FINE RAIN, DRIZZLE

Passage of a street sweeper cleaning out the gutters.

What has changed here since yesterday? At first sight, it's really the same. Is the sky perhaps cloudier? It would really be subjective to say that there are, for example, fewer people or fewer cars. There are no birds to be seen. There is a dog on the plaza. Over the hôtel Récamier (far behind it?) a crane stands out in the sky (it was there yesterday, but I don't recall making note of it). I couldn't say whether the people I'm seeing are the same ones as yesterday, whether the cars are the same ones as yesterday. On the other hand, if the birds (pigeons) came (and why wouldn't they come) I'd feel sure they would be the same birds.

Many things have not changed, have apparently not budged (the letters,

the symbols, the fountain, the plaza, the benches, the church, etc.); I myself am sitting at the same table.

Buses pass by. I've lost all interest in them.

The Café de la Mairie is closed. The newsstand too (it won't open until Monday)

(I think I saw Duvignaud passing by, heading toward the parking lot)

An ambulance goes by, siren blaring, then a tow truck cowing a blue DS

Several women are pulling wheeled shopping bags

The pigeons arrive; there seem to be fewer of them than yesterday

Influx of human or automotive crowds. Lulls. Alternations.

Two "Parisian Coach" type of buses with platforms pass by with their cargoes of photophagous Japanese

A Cityrama bus (of Germans? Japanese?)

The rain stopped very suddenly; there was even a vague ray of sun for several seconds.

It is a quarter past 11

In search of a difference

The Café de la Mairie is closed (I don't see it; I know this because I saw it coming off the bus)

I'm drinking a Vittel water, whereas yesterday I was drinking a coffee (how does that transform the square?)

Did the Fontaine St-Sulpice special of the day change (it was fresh cod yesterday)? Probably, but I'm too far away to make out what's written on the slate where it's announced.

(Two buses of tourists, the second is called "Walz Reisen"): might the tourists today be the same ones as the tourists yesterday (does a man who goes round Paris on a Friday want to do so again on a Saturday?)?

Yesterday, there was a metro ticket on the sidewalk, right in front of my

window; today there is, not exactly in the same spot, a candy wrapper (cellophane) and a piece of paper difficult to identify (a little bigger than a "Parisiennes" wrapper but a much lighter blue).

A little girl goes by wearing a long red hat with a pom-pom (I already saw her yesterday, but yesterday there were two of them); her mother is wearing a long ski re-made of strips of fabric sewn together (not really patchwork)

A pigeon is perched on top of a streetlight

People are entering the church (to visit it? Is it time for mass?)

A stroller who looks a little like Michel Mohrt passes by the cafe again and seems surprised to see me still sitting at the table in front of a Vittel and sheets of paper

A bus: "Percival Tours"

Other people are entering the church

The tourist buses adopt different strategies: all come from Luxembourg by rue Bonaparte; some continue along rue Bonaparte; others turn onto rue du

Vieux-Colombier: this difference doesn't always correspond to the nationality of the tourists.

“Wehner Reisen” bus

Cop car

Pause

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DATE: 19 OCTOBER 1974

TIME: 12:30 PM

**LOCATION: ON A BENCH RIGHT IN THE SUN, AMONG THE PIGEONS,
LOOKING IN THE DIRECTION OF THE FOUNTAIN
(SOUNDS OF TRAFFIC BEHIND)**

WEATHER: THE SKY IS SUDDENLY CLEAR.

The pigeons are almost immobile. It is difficult to count them, though (200, maybe); some are asleep, feet tucked up. It's rime for their cleaning (with their beaks, they comb through their crops or their wings); some are perched on the rim of the third basin of the fountain. People are coming out of the church.

I sometimes hear car horns. The traffic is what one would call fluid.

There are four of us on four benches. A cloud hides the sun for a moment. Two tourists take a photograph of the fountain.

A double-decker Paris-Vision bus goes by

Pigeons are washing themselves in the fountain (the basins are full of water, but the lions' mouths aren't spurting out any water); they splash around and come out all ruffled.

The pigeons at my feet have a fixed scare. So do the people looking at them.

The sun is hidden. There's some wind.

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DATE: 19 OCTOBER 1974

TIME: 2:00 PM

LOCATION: TABAC SAINT-SULPICE

Passage of Paul Virilio: he's going to see *The Lousy Gatsby* at the Bonaparte.

I've been sitting here, without writing, for forty-five minutes; I ate a sausage sandwich and drank a glass of Bourgueil. Then coffees. Next to me half a dozen clothing merchants chatter, satisfied with their small business.

With a menacing eye I watch the birds, people, and vehicles pass by.

The cafe is packed

A distant acquaintance (friend of a friend, friend of a friend of a friend) passed by in the street, came over to say hello, had a coffee.

A Paris-Vision bus goes by. The tourists have headphones

The sky is gray. Fleeting sunny spells.

Weary vision: obsessive fear of apple-green 2 CVs.

Unsatisfied curiosity (what I came here to find, the memory floating in this cafe...)

What difference is there between a driver who parks on the first go and another ("90") who only manages to do so after several minutes of laborious efforts? This provokes attention, irony, the participation of an audience: to see not just the rips, but the fabric (but how to see the fabric if it is only the rips that make it visible: no one ever sees buses pass by unless they're waiting for one, or unless they're waiting for someone to come off of one, or unless the Paris City Transport Authority pays them a salary to count them...)

Also: why are two nuns more interesting than two other passersby?

A man goes by, wearing a surgical collar

A woman goes by; she is eating a slice of tart

A couple approaches their Autobianchi's Abarth parked along the sidewalk.

The woman bites into a tartlet.

There are lots of children.

A man who has just parked his car (in the Autobianchi's spot) looks at it as if he doesn't recognize it.

A blue car, a yellow one, two blue 2 CVs

There is only one taxi at the taxi stand. The driver has opened his trunk.

The pigeons take a trip round the square

The cafe is almost empty

A young girl goes by; she is carrying a tennis racket under her arm (in a fabric cover in which one can also keep the balls)

An apple-green 2 CV

A folding stroller

A wheeled shopping bag

A group of boy scouts with knapsacks enter the church

A lady who has bought a long pole goes by

A driving school goes by

In a purely abstract manner, one could propose the following theorem: during the same lapse of time, more individuals walk in the Saint-Sulpice/rue de Rennes direction than in the rue de Rennes/ Saint-Sulpice direction.

Several women in shades of green.

The scouts leave Saint-Sulpice in single file.

One of them who came over here to use the telephone runs back to rejoin them; he climbs the stairs of the church and comes back down them four by four, carrying his knapsack and the patrol's flag (I do have a good view)

Policeman no. 5976 comes and goes along rue du Vieux-Colombier. He bears a certain resemblance to Michael Lonsdale.

The "Coches parisiens"

The man with the surgical collar (just a moment ago he was on rue du Vieux-Colombier, now he is on rue Bonaparte)

Preceded by 91 motorcycles, the mikado passes by in an apple-green Rolls Royce

Cityrama: a Japanese woman absorbed in her headphones

I hear: "it's a quarter after three"

A man in a raincoat makes big gestures

Some Japanese on a bus

The bells of Saint-Sulpice begin to ring (this would be, I believe, a baptism)

Three birds make a trip round the square

The two meter maids from yesterday pass by again; they seem worried today.

A bit of liveliness in the cafe, in the street

A man who has just bought a pack of Winstons and a pack of Gitanes tears off the crystal (cellophane) envelope of the pack of Winstons

Slight change in the light

Some Japanese on a bus; they don't have headphones; the attendant is Japanese

All the pigeons settle on the plaza.

The lights turn red (they do this often)

Scouts (same ones) pass by the church again

An apple-green 2 CV with a l'Eure-et-Loir registration number (28)

A bus. Japanese.

Gathering of some individuals in front of Saint-Sulpice. I can make out a man at the top of the steps, sweeping (is it the beadle?). I know there is going to be a wedding (from two customers who just, in fact, went over to attend it).

A little girl, flanked by her parents (or by her kidnappers) is weeping

A bus (Globus) three-quarters empty

A lady who has just bought an ugly candleholder goes by

A small bus goes by: Club Reisen Keller

Bus. Japanese.

I'm cold. I order a brandy

A car goes by, its hood covered in dead leaves

A motorcyclist goes by, pushing a very new red Yamaha 125

For the umpteenth time the 79 rue de Rennes auto-driving school car goes by

A little girl with a blue balloon goes by

For the second time a meter maid in slacks goes by

Beginnings of a traffic jam in rue Bonaparte

Lots of people, lots of cars

A man goes by, eating a cake (the reputation of the neighborhood confectioners is not to be doubted)

A bus: Paris-Sud buses: are they tourists?

The bells of Saint-Sulpice begin ringing, maybe for the wedding. The big doors of the church are open.

Paris-Vision bus

The bridal procession enters the church

Traffic jam in rue du Vieux-Colombier

The buses are at a virtual standstill on the square

Fourth passage of Michel Mohrt's distant double

Distant Right of pigeons.

A purple cape, a red 2 CV, a cyclist.

The bells of Saint-Sulpice stop ringing

In the distance, two men are running.

A police car slows down to a dead stop: the force of inertia makes the side door close, which a hand reopens and keeps open.

The cafe is full.

A jam-packed bus goes by, but no Japanese.

The light is beginning to fade, even if this is still barely noticeable; the red of the stoplights is increasingly visible.

Lights come on in the cafe.

Two buses, Cityrama and Paris-Vision, are unable to get by each other. The Cityrama eventually takes rue Bonaparte, the Paris-Vision would like to take

rue du Vieux-Colombier. Policeman no. 5976 (“Michel Lonsdale”), at first confused, ventually grabs his whistle and intervenes—effectively, in fact.

A man walks by with his nose in the air, followed by another man who is looking at the ground.

A man with a can of Ripolin goes by

people people cars

An old lady with a very beautiful Sherlock Holme-style waterproof fitted coat

The crowd is dense, almost no more lulls

A woman with two baguettes under her arm

It is four thirty

An Attempt At Exhausting A Place In Paris



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