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Rosemary Wakeman, *The Heroic City: Paris, 1945-1958*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009. xiii + 401 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$35.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-226-87023-6.

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Among scholars of postwar France, a common assumption is that 1945 marked a distinct break with the urban past.[1] In this interpretation, state officials and private businessmen transformed the Paris region according to their versions of architectural modernism and economic modernization. Those programs, in turn, led to “an emptying out of the richness and complexity of collective life and public space” (p. 7). The *quartier* gave way to high-rise developments in working-class districts of the city and its suburbs, and people lost a sense of community as they folded in on themselves. Rosemary Wakeman rejects this paradigm, arguing instead that between 1945 and 1958 “the public spaces of Paris flourished” as residents revived and recreated old rituals, such as student rag parades, and engaged in protests and strikes (p. 8). By public space, Wakeman means not only the major *places*, boulevards, and gardens (Haussmann’s Paris) but also the small squares, neighborhood streets, marketplaces, and virtually any site where people could congregate. In a tour de force of wide-ranging research, Wakeman moves beyond direct public engagement to examine contemporary sociological, literary, cinematic, and televised portrayals of the city and the ways in which those discourses both reflected and molded images of public space, thus linking cultural studies with empirically grounded history. In the end, argues Wakeman, the idea of modernity itself was reshaped as observers envisioned the city in terms of “poetic humanism,” a phrase that Wakeman uses to define “the spirit of this imagined landscape...a sumptuous collective domain that was vivid, daring, highly subjectified, and ultimately heroic” (p. 13).[2]

Wakeman’s title, *The Heroic City*, is a reference to the Liberation. Resistance fighters, print journalists, and filmmakers depicted the freeing of the capital as a popular insurrection in which the *petit peuple de Paris* seized control of the city’s public spaces. Almost immediately, argues Wakeman, the Liberation assumed mythic status. In 1944 and 1945 Armistice Day, May Day, V-E Day, and the *fête nationale* became massive celebrations in spite, or perhaps because, of the desperate conditions of daily life. On these memorial holidays, at least, people could try to forget the lack of food, fuel, and decent housing and instead focus on Liberation visions of national unity and a better life. Well into the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, conditions remained difficult, especially for members of the working class. Expectations for material improvements and a more equitable society ran headlong into persistent shortages and rigid class lines. The expulsion of Communists from the government in 1947 and the conflicts in first Indochina and then Algeria exacerbated the situation, sparking a dizzying series of protests, including the strikes of 1947, the Ridgway riots of 1952, and the demonstrations that accompanied the collapse of the Fourth Republic in 1958. The homeless and ill-housed also found an outlet in the Abbé Pierre’s campaign of 1954. Public space was contested space.

Wakeman is quick to note, however, that the largest squares, even those with symbolic importance (such as the Place de la République and the Place de la Bastille), were not seen as the locus of the working class and proletarian action. Rather, it was the *quartier*, the neighborhood where people lived and where many also worked. In the novels of Léo Malet, the poetry of Jacques Prévert, the

photographs of Willy Ronis, the films of Marcel Carné, the music of Yves Montand, the articles of *L'Humanité*, the sociological treatises and televised documentaries of Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, and the urbanism of Robert Auzelle, working-class neighborhoods—their streets, marketplaces, cafés, parks, dance halls, open-air concerts, and community festivals—were transformed into sites of human warmth and mutual aid. Such spaces and activities became politicized symbols of a united, liberated citizenry especially for the Communist Party and its supporters, thus reviving the spirit of the Popular Front.

As the partial list above indicates, Wakeman mines an impressive array of sources to show how contemporary observers imagined the spaces of Paris. With a few exceptions, though (such as Yves Montand), most of these *flâneurs* were bourgeois. In several instances, Wakeman draws on the recollections of working-class participants, such as street singer Lily Lian. By noting the number of festivals, dances, and protests, as well as levels of participation in them, Wakeman also demonstrates that large numbers of workers occupied and appropriated public space. As Wakeman reconstructs this panorama, she utilizes Jürgen Habermas's idea of the "publicity of representation" as well as the theories of the production and appropriation of space elaborated by Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau.[3] However, what working-class Parisians thought about these spaces—how workers imagined these sites and their own activities in them—is less clear. Even the columns of *L'Humanité*, which Wakeman has researched thoroughly, provide more of an indication of the perspective of Communist Party leaders than rank-and-file members. The question of *le peuple's* vision of public space is, of course, a difficult one to answer, though some indication might be found in arrest reports on protestors.[4]

In her final chapter, Wakeman demonstrates that the discourse on the working-class *quartier* shaped the version of "modernism" embodied in the city and regional plans adopted in the early 1960s. When state officials proposed industrial decentralization and reconstruction of large sections of the capital, municipal officials of the left and the right countered with the humanistic and particularist vision elaborated in the preceding years. The result was compromise, first embodied in municipal council president Bernard Lafay's proposal of 1954 and then in the official plans adopted later. The central districts of Paris were preserved. However, many of their working-class residents were forced to relocate to the outer *arrondissements* and the suburbs. In the former a number of working-class neighborhoods were leveled to make way for high-rise developments, while in the latter huge modernist housing estates were built (thereby reshaping the so-called Red Belt). In the process, concludes Wakeman, "The poetic vision of the capital was largely stripped of its social and political militancy" giving way to a touristic vision of an eternal Paris (p. 294).

*The Heroic City* is masterful. Wakeman resurrects and reconstructs images of Paris's public spaces at a pivotal moment in time, shedding new light on the history of the city during the Fourth Republic. Wakeman's book is intellectually stimulating and beautifully written, rendering it ideal for scholars and student alike. It is highly recommended.

## NOTES

[1] See, for example, Olivier Piron, ed., *Ministère de la reconstruction et de l'urbanisme, 1944-1954: une politique du logement* (Paris: IFA-PCA, 1994) and Kristin Ross *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

[2] Wakeman's "poetic humanism" is similar to Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar's "poetics of culture," the category of analysis which they use to analyze Paris during the Popular Front. Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005).

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[3] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[4] One thinks of David Pinkney's use of the records of the police and the Commission des Récompenses nationales to determine the occupations and motives of street fighters in the Revolution of 1830. David H. Pinkney, *The French Revolution of 1830* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), chap. 8.

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