Hygienic Promenades

The Montagnes Russes as Medical and Urban Artifacts

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Abstract • Postrevolutionary Paris witnessed a brief flowering of commercial gardens, precursors to the modern-day amusement park, which cultivated nature, exercise, and health in an urbanizing context. Bridging the eighteenth-century jardin-spectacle and the Second Empire network of public parks, pleasure grounds such as the Grand Tivoli and the Beaujon garden offered a range of activities including gymnastic games, bicycling, and, most strikingly of all, exhilarating rides on early roller coasters known as montagnes russes. Situated on the periphery of a rapidly densifying city and abstracting natural forms for urban consumption, these rides integrated discourses of hygiene and recreation. Analyzing these short-lived curiosities from the vantage points of medical, cultural, and urban history, this article argues that the montagnes russes helped disseminate modern conceptions of health and gender in popular culture.

Keywords • exercise, hygiene, nature, Paris, parks, roller coasters, urbanism

In his Topographie médicale de Paris of 1822, Dr. Claude Lachaise offered a critical assessment of the changes that had recently been enacted in the capital. Prevalent since the late eighteenth century, medical topography was a discipline in which scientists and doctors mapped, charted, and described various geographical locations, both urban and rural, to link their physical features to conditions of health and disease. In an era of urbanization, industrialization, and widespread epidemics, medical topographies offered the promise of both analysis and remedy—of documenting and understanding current conditions to better identify the necessary improvements and changes to be made. Reviewed and lauded by the Royal Academy of Medicine, Lachaise’s book begins with an overview of Paris’s geography, climate, and natural history; investigates the various factors influencing the salubrity of each arrondissement; and culminates with an examination of the physical and moral condition of the Parisian resident. While acknowledging the numerous positive changes that had already been effected in Paris—such as the widening of roads, the construction of elegant new buildings, the creation of large squares, the multiplication of public fountains and sewers, and the displacement of insalubrious industries out of the city—Lachaise
highlights the necessary improvements that still remain to be made. In describing each arrondissement, Lachaise focuses predominantly on the qualities of ventilation, aeration, and sunlight, noting the existence (or lack thereof) of gardens and promenades, whether the width of roads permit the free circulation of air, and the distancing of residences from humid or malodorous substances.²

Having presented a detailed assessment of the urban landscape, Lachaise turns his attention toward the residents of the city. This last section reveals the prevailing medical belief in the power of the environment to shape its inhabitants and the accompanying faith in regenerating men and women through public health measures. He characterizes the typical Parisian resident as often physically underdeveloped and morally prone to an excess of sensibility compared to their rural counterpart. For the laboring classes, the problem lies in their exposure to unhealthy atmospheres in their work and living environments, as well as in the constraining nature of labor that requires repeated and limited muscular activity. In the case of the upper classes, Lachaise faults the idle and sedentary tendencies encouraged by luxury and wealth, and devotes a chapter to the importance of healthy exercise. Deploiring the inactivity of young women in particular, he recommends that they frequent festivals in the surrounding countryside and mourns the early demise of the montagnes russes, such as those of the Beaujon garden and the Saut du Niagara at the Ruggieri garden.³

This lament can serve as an interesting entry point into the complex relationship between nature and metropolis in the early nineteenth century. At the time of Lachaise’s publication, the disappearance of various gardens and “Russian mountains” (proto–roller coasters) seemed to leave no other alternative to the health-seeking citizen than the countryside. Lachaise’s words depicted an elegant capital, a modern capital, yet one that, for all its advancements, was consequently denatured. The bygone gardens mentioned by the physician were the hinge on which this transition occurred. In the period when the field of public health was being institutionalized, and as the movement of Romanticism was rediscovering the beauty of French landscapes, these venues first helped integrate nature ever more closely into urban culture, before ceding space to the forces of urbanization called forth by rising property values. These gardens may appear to prefigure Second Empire urbanism, in which the city was effectively turned inside out and social life increasingly took place on orderly and tree-lined boulevards, squares, and public parks. Yet the changing design of these pleasure grounds into picturesque enclosures that turned away from their urban context, their carnivalesque atmosphere, and women’s unexpected appearances therein reveal a subversion of rational, scientific principles. This article explores the interaction of landscape, gendered bodies, and medical theory in these spaces, arguing that both the hygienic impulse of leisure gardens and their ultimate failure were instrumental in shaping the modern city and the modern social order.
Nature in the Metropolis

Most of the urban development in Paris until the turn of the eighteenth century had taken place within the interior boulevards. Closer to the periphery, building plots had not yet been subdivided and were dotted with aristocratic mansions, many of which boasted sprawling gardens. Entrepreneurs of the revolutionary and postrevolutionary eras appropriated such private estates to create the genre of urban commercial park. In occupying that undeveloped territory, these pleasure grounds complemented the extant public gardens of the Tuileries, Luxembourg, and Jardin du Roi (today, the Jardin des Plantes) in terms of location, design, and use. Geographically, they extended the footprint of nature in the city, anticipating the outward momentum of urbanization. Stylistically, they advanced picturesque landscape designs in vogue in private gardens from the late eighteenth century. Programmatically, they introduced a curious mix of activities to the populace that jumbled hygienic precepts with entertainment.

The gardens of aristocratic residences (hôtels particuliers) had served as liminal zones between the private and public spheres in the eighteenth century, mostly in visual terms. Even when physically closed off from their surroundings, these hôtels often took advantage of abutting open spaces to give the illusion of greater expansiveness to their property. The Hôtel Bru- noy, which was designed by Étienne-Louis Boullée in 1779, is one such example: it had an iron grille around its garden to allow the owner a view into the neighboring Champs-Élysées, a feature that effectually broadened the latter’s visual territory. At the same time, the porosity of the grille permitted passers-by to glimpse the private, enclosed garden, which became part of the public landscape and city ornamentation available for visual consumption.

During the Revolution, this optical interchange became a spatial relationship as entrepreneurs took over. Opening private gardens to the public at large, entrepreneurs established what became known as jardins-spectacles in the estates of émigrés and the guillotined that were seized by the state and either sold or eventually returned (see Figure 1). As shown on the map below, most gardens were located just within the northwestern boundary of the city, where many of the hôtels particuliers were situated. For example, the Grand Tivoli was located in the former country retreat of the wealthy financier Simon-Charles Boutin (1720–1794), the Folie-Boutin, which the government expropriated when its owner emigrated to England in 1793 (he was guillotined in 1794). In light of the garden’s success, a group of entrepreneurs rented the property of Marchioness Henriette-Françoise de Marbeuf (also executed during the Revolution) from her heirs and transformed its folly into the competing Idalie garden in 1797. The grounds of the Hôtel Bondy, originally designed in 1771 by the architect Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart for Pierre-Marie Taillepied, the Count of Bondy, became the popular Frascati garden in 1800. Similarly, the picturesque garden surrounding the Élysée Palace was opened to public amusement when its owner, the
Duchess of Bourbon, rented out the grounds following her restoration to favor in 1797. In total, around 11 such Parisian gardens of varying sizes were created from confiscated or abandoned property during the Revolution. With this appropriation of aristocratic grounds, what had formerly been private, idyllic retreats for the privileged classes were made accessible to a paying public as verdant enclaves for various diversions. Gilles-Antoine Langlois, the primary historian of these French follies and gardens of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, has described this transformation as marking the birth of modern Parisian urbanism, in which the provision of nature and large, open spaces became a necessary supplement to the increasingly congested urban condition. Many of these private gardens had been designed with amusement, variety, and theatricality in mind, as Anglo-Chinese follies in fashion at the moment of their creation in the eighteenth century, and they retained this character even as they lost their exclusivity. Created for profit (unlike the Tuileries or the Luxembourg gardens), these commercial gardens offered relief and distraction from recurrent political turmoil that was gripping the nation. Referencing the sadness, mourning, and violence that had marked the Terror, the entrepreneur Claude Ruggieri witnessed the return of higher spirits during the Directory when “the young abandoned politics for dancing, the carrousel and the swing.” At the Apol-
lon, in the garden of the former convent of the Capucines, magic lantern shows, panoramas, and phantasmagoria displays served collectively as a form of escapism. While commonly featuring balls and concerts, these gardens also staged thrilling spectacles, the most novel of which were fireworks and aeronautic flights with hydrogen-filled balloons.

As Langlois has observed, the popular life of both fairgrounds and urban streets invaded the noble retreats of yore, creating an incipient mass culture. These gardens were the early mixing grounds of varied classes and genders, attracting “crowds of pleasure-seekers,” from “smart ladies and their attendant dandies . . . to the humbler classes of society.” Admission fees ranged from one to two francs, depending on the social segment the owners aimed to attract, and certain gardens, like Frascati, were even free, generating revenues by selling refreshments. Foreign tourists flocking to Paris after the Peace of Amiens in 1802 frequently remarked on the social gamut to be found in these venues: a “confusion of classes” that nonetheless did not disturb the “harmony of the ensemble,” in the words of Sir John Carr. Across the ranks, these revelers found common ground in their pursuit of nature, thrills, and action.

In the initial discourse surrounding the creation and use of these gardens, the language of pleasure and excitement, rather than that of health and hygiene, predominated. As indicated by their name, these jardins-spectacles were best known for introducing fireworks displays and other illusory spectacles to a mass audience, and the garden served mainly as an attractive backdrop, removed from the noise and bustle of the city center. As the forces of urbanization encroached on these spaces in the early nineteenth century, however, they transitioned to an early version of the modern-day amusement park, in which landscape played a more instrumental role. Increasingly embedded in a city whose noxious conditions made their existence an exigence, commercial leisure gardens deliberately turned their backs on the metropolis impinging on their boundaries while the rhetoric of health, exercise, and movement pervaded their designs and programs.

The Tivolis, 1796–1841

Charting the development and representations of one of the largest and most popular of these venues, the Tivoli gardens, helps illustrate the nexus of nature, city, and hygiene informing this transition. There were three successive Tivolis in total between 1796 and 1841. The original Grand Tivoli was located at the Folie-Boutin, as mentioned above, at the corner of the rue Saint-Lazare and the rue de Clichy between 1796 and 1810. The second Tivoli briefly succeeded the first on a neighboring site, which was on the grounds of the former Hôtel de Richelieu, but in 1812 it moved back to the original property, where it operated until 1826. A third and final iteration between 1826 and 1841, called the Nouveau Tivoli, was situated in the nearby Folie-Bouëxière, which was immediately north of the second Tivoli.
Boutin’s property at the city periphery was extensive, containing three different styles of gardens: a classical French garden, a terraced Italian garden, and a picturesque English garden complete with false ruins. From its earliest existence, this private estate had been called Tivoli, after the famed country retreat, the site of Hadrian’s villa, on the outskirts of Rome. Following the government’s expropriation of this property and Boutin’s execution in 1794, Gérard Desrivières, a member of the Council of Five Hundred, rented the property and organized public festivals in its park. While the gardens themselves were not much altered, each part of the estate was programmed for a different activity under Desrivières’s management. The Grand Tivoli offered fireworks spectacles, aeronautic displays, balls, and entertainers such as exotic dancers and ventriloquists. During the Directory, this garden was especially popular with the notorious Incroyables and Merveilleuses, an upper-class subculture that flaunted decadent, outrageous, and often ridiculous fashions in the détente following the Terror.11

While the Tivoli’s successive managers improved the grounds by multiplying outdoor lighting and plantings as the garden’s popularity grew, images and descriptions of the first Tivoli tended to focus on the activities and revelers themselves, often divorcing them from their built context, or, at most, incorporating trees to mark an enclosure.12 Boutin’s gardens had always been admired, but in this commercialized incarnation the novelty of its modes of occupation was more striking. A popular tourist destination, Tivoli was featured in numerous travel accounts that described such recreations:

A number of elderly and genteelly dressed people were riding on roundabouts;—many hundred couples were arranged on the grass-plots playing at battle-dore and shuttle-cock;—others were balancing each other on boards, which moved on a centre; . . .—some bold adventurers were attempting to proceed along a pair of ropes attached to the bases of two triangles, by grasping a third rope extended from vertex to vertex.13

The heirs of Boutin successfully reclaimed their rights to the Tivoli property in Year VI after a lengthy legal battle, and they continued to operate it as a public park under the management of several entrepreneurs.14 By 1810, financial difficulties induced the Tivoli’s then-administrator, a musician named Baneux, to attempt to rent out the property and move the festivities to a smaller, neighboring site: the former folly of the Marshal of Richelieu. This second version of Tivoli does not appear to have met with great financial success, and Baneux’s inability to find a renter for the Boutin grounds led him to return the Tivoli brand to its original location in 1812. To increase its mass appeal and marketability during this stage of the Tivoli’s existence, Baneux introduced new features, of which thrilling rides on the “aerial promenade” of the Tour d’Eole (a reference to Aeolus, ancient Greek god of the winds) and montagnes russes were the most noteworthy (see Figure 2). In images of these vertiginous rides, the novel apparatuses of pleasure integrate themselves into the environment and even form entire new landscapes. No
Figure 2  The *promenade aérienne* and *montagnes anglaises* at the second Tivoli, 1812–1826. Courtesy of Musée Carnavalet—Histoire de Paris, Topographie 141D.
longer merely a backdrop for activities, the garden landscape became part of
the recreational offering, a direction attaining heightened significance as the
surroundings urbanized in the 1820s.

The design of the third and final iteration of Tivoli, which was differen-
tiated from its predecessors as the Nouveau Tivoli, furthered this integration
of space and practice, of landscape and recreation, as it developed along-
side a construction boom that increased the value of nature as an urban
commodity. In 1826, Boutin’s heirs sold their property to the real estate
speculators Jonas-Philip Hagerman and Sylvain Mignon, who immediately
subdivided the site for urban development. This project was part of the 1820s
building frenzy experienced in several French cities, including Bordeaux,
Nantes, and Lyon. While the Prefecture of the Seine played an important
role in determining the parameters and quality of new constructions, most
of the impetus came from private enterprises and speculators assisted by the
void in municipal governance in Paris during this political interlude. Building
activity peaked between 1821 and 1826, with major development sites
concentrated beyond the *grands boulevards* on the right bank. Entire new
urban neighborhoods took shape during these years, specifically the *nouveaux quartiers* of Beaujon, François-Ier, Saint-Georges, Poissonnière, and, of
particular interest here, Hagerman and Mignon’s development of the Quar-
tier de l’Europe on the site of the former Tivoli. This construction created a
denser urban fabric by replacing open spaces in the city, such as gardens and
former aristocrats’ mansions, with five- and six-story apartment blocks.

The creation of the *nouveaux quartiers* was emblematic of both the modern-
ization of the city and its denaturing. These urban transformations took shape
against a burgeoning interest and concern with public health, which expressed
itself through various institutions and publications, including Lachaise’s *To-
pographie médicale*. During the 1820s building boom, the Paris Health Coun-
cil’s reports often emphasized the loss of healthful open spaces, gardens, and
courtyards, as shoddy constructions were quickly raised to accommodate the
growing populace. In one report from 1827, the Council urged the govern-
ment to establish building codes that would prevent new construction from
affecting the public health of the city. It further suggested the desirability of
establishing at the center of each quarter “a spacious square planted with trees
and surrounded by a fence, where children of all classes can engage in exer-
cises suited to their age, without fear and without particular surveillance on
the part of their parents, and where residents of all ages could go to enjoy the
sun’s influence and breathe a purer air than in their homes.”

In an 1829 report from the *Recherches statistiques de la ville de Paris*, Louis
Daubanton, the general inspector of roads for the Prefecture of the Seine,
observed that the most congested districts had experienced the least re-
building, so that certain *arrondissements*, such as the fourth and the seventh
(around the present-day first and fourth), deplorably lacked gardens, plazas,
public promenades, and airy thoroughfares. Echoing the Paris Health Coun-
cil’s 1827 report, Daubanton’s recommendations for future action included
regulating the height of new buildings and size of courtyards, widening of
narrow streets, and establishing communal open spaces. Similar concerns about aeration, ventilation, and sunlight were expressed in the journal *Annales d’hygiène publique et de médecine légale*, which was founded in 1829 and quickly became the unofficial organ of the public health movement.

The Nouveau Tivoli emerged at the height of this building boom and related public health concerns and with the Quartier de l’Europe—its name suggesting the novelty and cosmopolitanism sought by Hagerman and Mignon—taking shape at its doorstep. Following the demise of the second Tivoli, a Belgian entrepreneur named Étienne-Gaspard Robert (known as Robertson), who had made a name for himself with phantasmagoria displays and balloon flights in the various pleasure gardens of Paris, established a new venture in the neighboring, ten-hectare site of the Folie-Bouëxière. As real-estate developers subdivided other leisure gardens of the city, the Nouveau Tivoli safeguarded its enclosure. During its transition from private architecture to public grounds, the eighteenth-century neoclassical landscape gave way to a picturesque garden. While the symmetrical *allées* and perspectival vantage points of the former would have situated the private estate in its greater geography, its linear axis linking it symbolically back toward the city on whose peripheries it lay, the reconfigured plan of the Nouveau Tivoli featured an inwardly focused panoply of richly programmed spaces (see Figure 3). In a site plan dated 1835, circular pathways and periph-

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**Figure 3** The Nouveau Tivoli, ca. 1835. Notable programs included the *montagnes* surrounding a skating rink (to the right of the entrance), a dance hall facing the main pavilion, gymnastic games (H), and a shooting range (S). Courtesy of BnF Estampes, VA-283(3)-Fol.
eral tree groves promote a centripetal impulse that would have constantly redirected visitors to the interior life of the garden. The third Tivoli offered programs of both recreational and hygienic value, such as gymnastics, skating, and horseback-riding, alongside other games and rides on the *montagnes anglaises* (a version of the *montagnes russes*) in the open air. Activities formerly practiced in the countryside were parceled into programs within an urban enclosure. In a densifying city rife with new social, moral, and physical dangers, from the growth of the laboring classes to unprecedented epidemics, the leisure garden thus constituted one of the intermediate, “‘public-private’ forms of sociability and action” that historians have identified with the postrevolutionary era. While accommodating participants of mixed classes and genders, commercial gardens presented an alternate space of controlled interaction and revelry that responded to its transforming, at times threatening, context.

**The Hygienic Promenade**

The hygienic discourse increasingly pervading the amusements of leisure gardens is best exemplified in an activity that became all the rage in Paris during the early years of the Restoration: the *montagnes russes*, which were mentioned by Lachaise in conjunction with these gardens and offered at both the second and third Tivoli iterations. These were early roller coasters, artificial mountains in the urban landscape on which people hurtled down in wheeled cars on rails, and which drew inspiration from a Russian winter pastime that was apparently introduced to French soldiers during the Napoleonic Wars. As Parisians adopted it for entertainment purposes, what had been a rural seasonal sport became a perennial urban activity. Between 1816 and 1818, these rides proliferated in leisure gardens, their names attesting to the influx of European cultures witnessed in Paris after Waterloo. The first *montagnes russes* were just beyond the Barrière du Roule, the *montagnes anglaises* at the Nouveau Tivoli, the *montagnes suisses* at the Jardin de la Grande Chaumière, the *montagnes égyptiennes* at the Jardin du Delta, the Saut du Niagara at the Jardin Ruggieri, and even the *montagnes lilliputiennes* at Paphos. In total, ten “mountains” of varying names were constructed in the city. Although the *montagnes* enjoyed a relatively brief flowering during the Restoration and only reemerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century as modern roller coasters, they serve as curious artifacts for interrogating the ways in which notions of hygiene, recreation, and urbanism intersected at this politically charged, transitional moment in history.

The largest, most popular, and best represented of these were the *montagnes françaises* installed in the Jardin Beaujon. Opened in 1801, the Beaujon was the Tivoli’s greatest competitor. It was located in the former estate of the banker Nicolas Beaujon alongside the as-yet undeveloped Champs-Élysées, and was at the time still on the fringes of urban development. The garden’s
initial range of offerings included dances, fireworks, and pantomimes. Not especially noteworthy during the Empire, the Beaujon reached the height of its popularity during the Restoration, when, in 1817, its proprietors installed the grandest “aerial mountains” seen yet in Paris (see Figure 4). This construction was over twenty-four meters tall and allegedly allowed passengers to experience speeds of up to sixty kilometers per hour. Prints and engineering drawings indicate a structure of architectural and urban pretensions, including a neoclassical entrance pavilion and picturesque landscaping in the central space formed by the ramps. The belvedere at the summit was mounted by a beacon to illuminate the setting even at night. While deploying modern construction and technology, the montagnes allowed the insertion of “nature” into the urban context, purportedly supplying both amusement and health benefits.

In an epistolary novel entitled The Fudge Family in Paris (1818)—a satirical look at post-1815 European society—Thomas Moore aptly captured a foreigner’s perspective on the pleasures and thrills of the Beaujon. As the daughter of the family, Biddy Fudge, enthuses in a letter to a friend:

Last night, at the Beaujon, a place where—I doubt
If its charms I can paint—there are cars, that set out
From a lighted pavilion, high up in the air,
And rattle you down, Doll.—you hardly know where.
These vehicles, mind me, in which you go through
This delightfully dangerous journey, hold two.
Some cavalier asks, with humility, whether
You’ll venture down with him—you smile—’tis a match;
In an instant you’re seated, and down both together
Go thund’ring, as if you went post to old Scratch!

![Figure 4](image-url)
The popularity of the Jardin Beaujon even enticed Louis XVIII to visit on 2 August 1817.

Beyond their thrills and delights, these rides also became the subject of medical inquiry on the part of certain doctors, who claimed that the “bath of air” provided by an aerial promenade on the montagnes had hygienic advantages. Nineteenth-century hygienists frequently discussed carriage rides and other gentle forms of vehicular transportation as a lighter variety of gymnastics in their promotion of bodily movement. Most notably, the doctor François-Frédéric Cotterel claimed that the motion of the montagnes’ cars counteracted the general deficiency of exercise and open-air activity from which his contemporaries suffered. In Cotterel’s assessment, “the undulatory promenades, in lifting, as it were, our lung in an aerial pool, in a free and rapidly renewed atmosphere, saturate us, increasingly soak us in oxygen or vital air: they regenerate us.” The hygienic tenor of these words; the metaphors of promenades, washing, and pools; and Cotterel’s portrayal of the surrounding garden as a healthful counterpoint to other sites of entertainment in the city, whether “stifling” theaters or the “narrow alleys” of existing boulevards, all underscore a medical conceptualization of the montagnes as an antidote to urban life.

Garden proprietors propagated this hygienic discourse in their advertisements. The montagnes françaises at the Jardin Beaujon were frequently described as an “aerial promenade” offering rich panoramic views at the summit. A promotional print for the montagnes russes, “dites de Santé,” near the Barrière du Roule claimed: “Your beauties are satisfied with this salutary and moderate exercise (I know several ladies who make use of the montagnes the way a good gastronome eats oysters at Balaine).” No mere cheap thrill, these rides even purportedly offered digestive aid, a beneficial side effect mocked by Moore: “And think, for digestion, there’s none like the Russian; / So equal the motion—so gentle, though fleet— / . . . The fiend, Indigestion, would fly far away.”

Versions of the montagnes were even incorporated into the design of gymnasiums and medical clinics from the 1820s. In describing the equipment necessary to complete his military gymnasium on the Place Dupleix, the first such created in France in 1820, Colonel Francisco Amoros included mention of an “artificial mountain” that could be used for climbing, sliding, and racing exercises. Similarly, orthopedic clinics of the 1820s and 1830s for both boys and girls drew inspiration from these rides and their surrounding discourse. Patients would roll up and down wooden slopes in cars to promote physical movement, which was seen as being integral to strengthening one’s constitution and activating “nutritional movement.” Describing his visit to an orthopedic institute in Paris, Dr. Joseph-Henri Reveillé-Parise wrote: “Some launch themselves into the air and traverse space with a rapidity that astonishes, while others ride chariots . . . either on the ground or on types of montagnes russes.” As at the leisure garden, this artificial landscape in gymnasiums and clinics served as a remedy to the bodily ills caused by an urban lifestyle.
Travel accounts that described the *montagnes* from female perspectives and the gendered emphasis of many of their advertisements underscore the particular popularity of this “exercise” among women, who were generally acknowledged as having fewer opportunities for hygienic activity than men. While gardens were social spaces where the two sexes could mingle, they were notable for providing a relatively protected public environment for respectable women to perambulate. Caricaturists of the period produced numerous prints of women participating as both actors and spectators in the pursuit of health and recreation. In foregrounding these dynamic females, the various portrayals of the *montagnes* reveal these constructs to be active moments in the negotiation of new gendered norms in the public sphere.

The Thrill and the *Ennui*

By promoting exercise, rides, and games in landscaped environments, which were then popularized in prints and literature, leisure gardens cultivated a vision and model for hygienic recreation in a city suffering through the birth pangs of urbanization and industrialization. Yet with their *montagnes russes* and *vélocipède* (early bicycle) experiments, they fostered the practice of not only health but also of speed, one of modernity’s defining characteristics. The “inconceivable velocity” experienced therein ultimately complicates the sanguine hygienic discourse traced above, with its aspiration to social order and improvement. After all, the intrepid young ladies depicted hurtling down the *montagnes* were not anemic invalids attempting to improve their digestion or circulation under doctors’ orders. In foregrounding women boldly indulging in this exercise, popular portrayals not only mocked those purported health benefits, but also reveal these artifacts to be materializations of the dialectics of modernity: the simultaneous desire to rationalize and reenchant the world.

The hygienic conceit of the *montagnes* was satirized in a number of popular culture forums. In a one-act vaudeville titled *Les Montagnes russes, ou Le Temple de la Mode* (“The Russian Mountains, or the Temple of Fashion”), first performed in 1816 at the Théâtre du Vaudeville in Paris, Eugène Scribe particularly made fun of this fad’s alleged therapeutic qualities (see Haynes, Figure 1 on p. 57 in this issue). One of the characters, Dr. Desboudoirs, spends his mornings at the garden exclaiming: “The mountains, the mountains . . . I don’t know anything else for health! . . . The mountains figure in all my prescriptions, and I hope, before long, to have them taken as an emetic and vaccine.” Unfortunately, this optimistic prediction is undermined by a series of accidents that punctuate the end of the play.

The *montagnes’* dubious health effects rendered the suitability of women’s participation in them questionable for many observers—an impropriety slyly accentuated by the pun on the doctor’s name, *des boudoirs* (“from the bedroom”). In a print entitled “The Indiscreet Zephyr, or the Charms of the
Montagnes Russes,” bourgeois women hurdle precariously down the slope alongside men, their skirts flying up immodestly (see Davis, Figure 1 on p. 14 in this issue). In this new urban space, the mobile female body could circulate, quite literally, and transgress the delicate boundary between display and exposure. What was at stake was not merely offended propriety, but possibly something far more lasting. Commenting on the revolutionary-era jardins-spectacles in 1798, the writer and government administrator Fabien Pillet had denounced them as “nothing but an open school of scandal and prostitution,” the closure of which would benefit public morals. In light of this comment, Dr. Cottereel’s specification that the beacon atop the montagnes françaises dispelled darkness and prevented any female concerns over modesty raises misgivings even as it aims to reassure. Similarly, Biddy Fudge’s blithe description of the “matches” made through these “delightfully dangerous journeys” suggests an undercurrent of sexual danger. In Scribe’s vaudeville, the doctor’s young nephew Léonard eventually decides against marrying his intended upon her insisting on going for a ride on the montagnes in the company of a crowd of revelers: “Seeing my future wife / Descend gaily with them / I said: No more wedding / For marriage is a voyage / that is only meant for two.” In the carnivalesque atmosphere reigning in these gardens, a world veritably turned upside down, reputations—and perhaps worse—might be damaged.

In practice, then, the supposed hygienic benefits of the montagnes, seemingly in the service of a rebalanced and reordered society, were simply a conceit used to promote an activity that catered primarily to seekers of thrill and excitement. In the various popular descriptions and discussions of these rides, one of the most striking aspects is the very pleasure derived from fear. This sentiment is highlighted in Moore’s chronicle of the Fudge family, in which the young daughter observes the other girls in line for the ride: “The impatience of some for the perilous flight, / The forc’d giggle of others, ‘twixt pleasure and fright.” The lure of danger even appeared in advertisements, as in that of the Jardin Ruggieri: “The Saut du Niagara is truly frightening, and in order to decide to attempt it, it does well to persuade yourself that the police would not have permitted this amusement if it could compromise citizens’ lives.” Female tourists venturing on these rides acknowledged this sense of danger. Anna Eliza Bray likened a ride on the Tivoli’s montagnes to “being shot from a gun,” writing to a friend in 1818 that “the car passes under some artificial rocks . . . which, although far above the head, appear, in the velocity of the descent, as if they would dash out your brains.”

What are we to make of this union of pleasure and fright? The actual attractions and uses of the montagnes russes ultimately portray complexities related not only to urban ills, but also to larger social and political discontents, allowing us to use this discrete artifact as a window into Parisian society of the early nineteenth century. Perhaps the more accurate, if unavowed, “medical” benefit of the thrills and fears of the montagnes was toward that endemic malady of the Romantic era: ennui. The close association between the physical and the moral expounded in Enlightenment philosophy and
developed in hygienic theories had led to the inclusion of ennui and related emotions in early-nineteenth-century medical texts. Doctors such as Jacques-Louis Moreau considered ennui and inaction to be the frequent causes of indisposition and ill health. A thesis submitted to the Paris Medical School in 1831 addressed melancholy as a medical condition that might be treated by exercising both mind and body.

Yet this sentiment also invaded politics, philosophy, literature, and culture at large, shifting in tone alongside contemporary events. The political and social uncertainties following the fall of the First Empire contributed to this mood of despondency. Koenraad Swart has linked France’s loss of power and stature in Europe after Napoleon, as well as the tensions accompanying industrialization, to the sense of disenchantment and even despair that pervaded the Romantic era. In his study of women’s fashion, the fin-de-siècle writer Octave Uzanne described the Restoration as sounding a note “of melancholy, of lost illusions, of sadness which made all earthly pleasures hollow. . . . Women . . . wandered in search after strong sensations and sudden emotions, [carrying] her weariness (ennui) with her.” Urbanization and public health pressures, culminating in the crisis of the 1832 cholera epidemic, aggravated the national mood. Passions and emotions were even thought to permeate beyond bodily boundaries and to color an entire social, cultural, and built landscape. In the Nouveau tableau de Paris au XIXe siècle (“New Portrait of Paris in the Nineteenth Century”), produced by the publishing house of Béchet between 1834 and 1835, the trope of triste Paris is ubiquitous. This adjective, triste, is ascribed indiscriminately to people, architecture, images, and the moral climate, from the “sad walls” of a prison, the “sad effects” of the commercial crisis, and the general “sadness of these times,” to the young generation of Paris, who are described as “sad in their repose, sad in their pleasures.”

The sense of stagnation and restlessness pervading public sentiment regarding France’s diminished position in Europe continued into the July Monarchy. “France is bored,” the writer and politician Alphonse de Lamartine famously proclaimed in an address to the Chamber of Deputies in January 1839, in order to voice his dissatisfaction with the pacifist foreign policy of Louis-Philippe’s government: “You must not believe, gentlemen, that because we are weary of the great upheavals which have rocked the century and ourselves, others too are weary and fear the slightest change. The generations which are rising up round us are not weary; it is their turn to demand action.” Invoking the limitations imposed by the Congress of Vienna, and the seeming impotence of the July Monarchy to carry out the task that was begun in 1789, Lamartine rooted the ennui and disillusionment of contemporary French society in the nation’s recent past.

In a period when political, demographic, and spatial transformations were outpacing the ability to manage them, the nineteenth-century hygiene movement offered the promise of ordering and recalibrating society from multiple vantage points. Yet the contemporaneous output of Romanticism,
with its cultivation of passionate emotions, the fearful, and even the ma-
cabre, reveals the contradictions that were ever-present in the seemingly
steady march of modernity. Against this context, the subversive use of “hy-
gienic promenades” as thrill-inducing instruments place Parisian pleasure
gardens in a new light. In a world allegedly governed by science and reason,
advancements in physics, chemistry, and engineering were exploited to in-
duce wonder, and even fear, in the masses—through fireworks, illusions,
phantasmagoria, and hair-raising rides. The seventh volume of Paris, ou le
livre des cent-et-un (“Paris, or the Book of 101 [Vignettes],” 1832) features
a chapter on “La faction des ennuyés” (“The Bored Faction”), which is de-
scribed as comprising some of the first people to indulge in the montagnes
russes. Uzanne claimed that in the wake of the sorrow caused by the 1832
cholera epidemic all of Paris flocked back to such amusements as offered by
Tivoli, the Grande Chaumière, and the montagnes françaises. In describing
the healthful advantages of these rides, Dr. Cotterel relied on phrases such
as “this admirable wonder (féerie)” and “enchancements.”

Could we perhaps interpret this pursuit of thrill and excitement in pop-
ular culture as one manifestation of a search for an “enchanted” modernity?
France may have been fatally bored, but this glimpse into aspects of its urban
life demonstrates that enchantment was both the outcome of and the rem-
edy for that ennui. Yet in the end, these marvels served as crystallizations of
the very ennui that they sought to dispel. What the montagnes offered, after
all, was a “perpetual voyage.” Scribe describes them thus: “There is nothing
else. . . . One ascends and one descends.”

From Gardens in the City, to the City in the Garden

The brief history of the montagnes russes and leisure gardens illustrates how
questions of urbanism, hygiene, and gender were embroiled in the dialectics
of modernity. While demarcating a wholesome enclosure in opposition to
the metropolis, these gardens were nonetheless urban in their genesis and
development, responding to threatening conditions in the city and cater-
ing to the emerging needs of its residents. While thus claiming to advance
modern hygiene in the urban sphere, ostensibly partaking in a rationalizing
project of social order and discipline, they also served as sites where women
often circulated in a most alarming way, prefiguring unexpected potentials
for female activity in the public sphere. And although seemingly immersed
in a scientific discourse of medicine and health, and even deploying modern
knowledge of physics and engineering in the activities offered for public
consumption, these spaces cultivated a lingering, or perhaps rekindled, de-
sire for thrills and excitement that revealed deep-seated anxieties and dis-
contents about the contemporary social and political order.

In the end, despite their claims of healthy exercise, the montagnes gained
notoriety for the frequent accidents, and even deaths, that ensued. In July
1818, two visitors died from falls off the *montagnes françaises*, and the Jardin Beaujon closed in 1824. The rising value of these properties contributed to the early extinction of leisure gardens as well after a period of roughly 20 years. The popularity of the venues and the diverse crowds that they had summoned disclosed the real estate potential of this urban periphery. During the financial speculation and construction fervor of the 1820s, many of these properties were completely re parcels and developed as urban neighborhoods. The very failure of privately run leisure gardens thus played an important role in the development of Parisian urbanism. The eventual disintegration of their enclosures paved the way for Paris’s subsequent modernization, in which ideals of hygiene and landscape permeated the metropolis and exteriorized social life, creating new venues for mixed-sex interactions, both respectable and otherwise.

Traces of the gardens lived on in the city streets developed on these sites. As seen above, Hagerman and Mignon transformed the Grand Tivoli into the Quartier de l’Europe in 1824, urban streets supplanting the pathways of Boutin’s various gardens. Similarly, the picturesque garden lanes of the Jardin Beaujon were concretized with the urbanization of this district in the mid-1820s, during which the *montagnes*, mill, and playgrounds were replaced by individual lots surrounded by private gardens. The Nouveau Tivoli met a similar fate in the 1840s. The primary artery of the former Folie-Bouëxière lingered through the *lotissement* of this quarter, the Place de Vintimille (today, the Place Adolphe-Max) occupying what had formerly been the central green space facing the park pavilion. Through these projects, the sprawling aristocratic grounds of the past were privatized anew, subdivided at a scale that reflected the increasing bourgeoisification of the city.

The very excesses of the activities pursued in leisure gardens played a formative role as well, establishing new boundaries of healthful moderation that would shape the next generation of government-sponsored public parks in Paris. Numerous prints from this period bear witness to the lively social scene of these gardens, where different genders and classes freely mingled in pursuit of health and amusement. The social cosmos was reproduced in miniature, illustrating a heterotopic counterpart to the increasingly denatured metropolis beyond its boundaries. As theorized by Michel Foucault, heterotopias are “counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.” In this vein, early-nineteenth-century leisure gardens constituted a parallel urban space that made nature, entertainment, and revelry possible in a city under duress due to political revolutions, social upheavals, and public health crises. In contradistinction to this world of the festival, the carnival, and the unexpected, the urban landscapes-to-come of the Second Empire aspired to a controlled, disciplined, and sanitized city. With their technological manipulation of nature, prescribed paths, and embodied social codes, those later parks presented a stark contrast to, and consequently an implicit critique of, the jumble of
activities and bodies that had invaded the preceding leisure gardens despite their pretensions to hygienic and orderly recreation. These overlooked curiosities of early-nineteenth-century Parisian life thus illustrate how nature was imbricated into the urban and social order of the city at one moment of its history and ultimately paved the way for another model.

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Notes

3. Lachaise, Topographie médicale, 293.
4. A few owners made their gardens accessible to the public, such as the famed writer Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, who allowed curious visitors into his residence and grounds near the Bastille.
6. This number refers to the gardens opened between 1789 and 1804: Tivoli, Frascati, Idalie, Monceau, Élysée, Bagatelle, Biron, Apollon, Hanovre, Paphos, and Beaujon.
8. Quoted in Langlois, Folies, tivolis, 96.
11. On the social and political significance of this faction, see Elizabeth Amann, *Dandyism in the Age of Revolution: The Art of the Cut* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 95–133.
12. Examples can be found in Musée Carnavalet—Histoire de Paris, Topographie 141D.
19. For example, see Louis-René Villermé, “De la mortalité dans les divers quartiers de la ville de Paris, et des causes qui la rendent très différente dans plusieurs d’entre eux, ainsi que dans les divers quartiers de beaucoup de grandes villes” [Mortality in various neighborhoods of Paris, and some reasons for the differences between several of them as well as between various neighborhoods of many other big cities], *Annales d’hygiène publique et de médecine légale* 1, no. 3 (1830): 294–339.
21. Claude Ruggieri, *Précis historique sur les fêtes, les spectacles et les réjouissances publiques* [Historical summary of festivals, shows and public celebrations] (Paris, 1830), 97. Ruggieri does not include the *montagnes anglaises* at the Nouveau Tivoli (listing only the first one at the second Tivoli).


23. Musée Carnavalet—Histoire de Paris, Topographie 35C.


27. Ibid., 9.

28. BnF Estampes IF–1(1)–Fol. 3205.

29. BnF Estampes IF–1(1)–Fol. 3204.


35. Many of these prints were published in Pierre de la Mésangère, ed., *Observations sur les modes et les usages de Paris* [Observations on fashions and customs in Paris] (Paris: Chez l’éditeur, 1817), also known as *Le Bon Genre* [Fashionable trend].


37. Anna Eliza Bray, *Letters Written during a Tour through Normandy, Brittany, and Other Parts of France in 1818* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), 54.


39. Fabien Pillet, *Melpomène et Thalie vengées ou Nouvelle critique impartiale et raisonnée tant des différents théâtres de Paris que des pièces qui y ont été représentées pendant le
cours de l’année dernière, deuxième année [Second edition of Melpomene and Thalia avenged or a New, impartial, and reasoned review of the different Paris theaters as much as of the shows that have been performed there during the past year] (Paris: Marchand, Year VII), 67–68.


42. My thanks to Victoria E. Thompson for her comments on the dark underside of the montagnes for the panel “Roller Coasters of Restoration-Era Paris” at the Society for French Historical Studies Annual Conference, 21 April 2017.

43. Moore, *Fudge Family*, 45.

44. BnF Estampes, Va-283(8)-Fol.


47. Auguste Louis Hyacinthe Sébire, “De la mélancolie, considérée comme tristesse habituelle sans dérangement de la raison” [Melancholy, diagnosed as chronic sadness without loss of reason] (Medical diss., Paris School of Medicine, 1831).


