



*Londres, 1700-1900. Naissance d'une capitale culturelle*

Ed. Jacques Carré

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Reviewed by Thomas Dutoit, Université de Lille 3

A splendid collection of coherently articulated, usefully informative and thoroughly researched contributions, this book of essays in French by French and British scholars, published in the series entitled «Britannia» run by Marie-Madeline Martinet, both fills the need for a single volume on cultural and artistic institutions in London and creates the desire for extended investigation in the areas it brings to the fore. That desire, amply whet by the individual essays, is also satisfied by a bibliography detailing such areas as Architecture, London Gardens, Social Life, the Art World, Shows and Spectacles, and Representations of London. The need for this kind of a systematic picture of the cultural institutions of London is met by a savvy organization in three separate parts, devoted, respectively, to the shift from *popular* culture to the *commercialization* of culture, to how cultural institutions articulate the *private* sector with *public* interest, and finally to the role such institutions played in creating the *cultural hegemony* of London, relative both to England and other European capitals.

The individual essays of *Londres, 1700-1900* are first of all very well served and instigated by a perspicacious panorama on the specificity of London cultural life in the 18th and 19th centuries by its editor, Jacques Carré. Succinctly outlining how the commercialization of culture produced new, hybrid and distinctly British types of artistic production, how artists' initiatives, more than any from the State, drove the formation of art academies and institutions (in contrast to the Continent), evoking the unique status of London as world-city and as teeming heterogeneity and social multiplicity, its residential segregation yet simultaneous cultural mixture by dint of commercial venues, or stressing how for example the British elite opened London to foreign influences, and helped to engender it as cosmopolitan capital, the introduction accompanies the reader into the uniquely *cultural* and *commercial* emporium that London was and that this book celebrates.

The book begins joyously, with a long essay by Adrien Lherm on the particular history of holidays, festivities, feasts, fairs, festivals or other special occasions for making merry. Studying the growth of spaces for entertainment that were really only accessible to a relatively well-off population, while detailing also how changes to the calendar for religious holidays greatly modified the rhythm of work, the author records how London became an intellectual and cultural capital satisfying the most educated, and solvent, part of the population. Such restriction to spaces occasioned some degree of segregation, and the development of two separate worlds for festivities and entertainment. Lherm thus also revisits

the history of the places where a sub-culture thrived, where an unprivileged population attended executions, animal combats, boxing, or indulged in betting and drinking. Breezy, this article pays special attention to the relation between time off from working and civil and political unrest.

In her study of coffee-houses and of their transformation into clubs, the specialist of this question Valérie Capdeville retraces the numerous particularities of coffee-house culture in the period 1690-1730, followed by the major social change that consisted in their relative disappearance in the face of private, and elite, clubs. The coffee-house as a locus that filled the gap left by a collapsed Court culture, its particularity as a gathering place for out-of-towners during the «Season», its status as products of a cleansing, a pacifying, and a gentrifying of urban space, are some of the social manifestations of the coffee-house whose very existence, though predicated upon the distribution of a highly tropical produce, came to epitomize London. The author also dwells on the coffee-house's economic, indeed financial, role, as the Royal Exchange ceded its place to them as veritable places for such kind of exchange. Existing as proto-social networking, too, the coffee-houses *founded* new modes of conversation, new standards of critical thinking, the creation of a *common*, in the sense of public, opinion, enabling a city-wide transmission of information that was consubstantial with the emergence of the newspaper.

Insisting on the singularity of London when compared to other capitals, Peter Borsay provides a cartography of the hubs of London's specificity, mapping it according to six basic concepts that are central for this book as a whole, and useful for thinking «London». London was a place that received: people, merchandise, and culture from the entire world. London was the place for the commercialization of culture: leisure commodities of a vast diversity attested an industrialization of London leisure that was to be reproduced throughout the nation. Indeed, London became the template for culture, the cultural industry, for manufacturing and design, across British society. Being able to replicate its model in other cities was the correlative of London being the world in itself, with its marvelous density of diversity and heterogeneity, such that it assembled different nations, languages, customs, and trades, in the patchwork of its neighbourhoods, districts, and zones. By dint of its size and plurality, London also favoured alternate behaviours, heterodoxy, thereby changing norms, in particular in the realm of sexuality. Finally, London was always already a representation of London, and Borsay illuminates the numerous ways (in architecture, art, theatre, literature) in which Londoners were the spectators of themselves acting in their city.

In an explicit theorization of how London was the object of its own gaze, Dana Arnold very interestingly scrutinizes particular examples such as tourist guide books on London of the period 1700-1900, dioramas and panoramas that miniaturized the city, and the many arcades that flourished in the nineteenth century. Building constructively and astutely on Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault, Arnold convincingly explains how the city functioned as an object of consumption (fitting well into the general paradigm of the book that so often locates how to read London in terms of the articulation of culture and the cultural industry), and how the capital of culture produced the dividends of cultural capital.

The second part of the book, devoted to how London cultural institutions mediated, in particular British fashion, the private and the public, Isabelle Baudino and Jacques Carré highlight, respectively and in a way as two sides of a coin, the academic movement and in particular the Royal Academy of Arts, and the British Institution. In her richly detailed study, Baudino shows how the many actors whose efforts over decades led to the creation of the Royal Academy of Arts succeeded in liberalizing their profession, in establishing their art as

liberal profession, freeing themselves from a patron or royal paradigm. Her analysis of how they instituted themselves as financially self-sufficient, and her details on how artists allied with merchants (the example of the Thomas Coram Foundation for Children and William Hogarth) specify the particularity of eighteenth century London. Necessary counterpart to her study is Jacques Carré's analysis of the British Institution from 1805 to 1867, of how this private association of art lovers from among the wealthy landed elite and business moguls organized annual exhibits of British artists, necessary because they display two different ways of encouraging British art, from the liberal professional way of artists to the rich *amateurs* of art who could be seen as resuscitating in the nineteenth century an earlier tradition of aristocratic patronage. Carefully distinguishing its patriotic and financial motivations, and pinpointing the concrete organization of the British Institution, Carré shows how it represented a centre of stability in the turmoil of the early nineteenth century economic and social changes, and inscribes its actions in a larger context of philanthropic actions led independently of the British Institution by some of its members. In this comparison of attempted management of economic or social sectors (relative to artists and to the poor), the article opens a new perspective, a new articulation, for understanding nineteenth century London.

In a fascinatingly-narrated and properly illuminating article, Hugues Lebailly reconstructs the origins of the London Photographic Society from 1852 to 1862. Spotlighting the main characters of Henry Fox Talbot (whose refusal, reluctance and final acceptance to relinquish his patent determined the development of photography), Roger Fenton (in the creation of the Society but also of its Journal), Frederick Scott Archer (the inventor of new techniques for which he sought no hold of patent), and finally the debate between professional photographers such as a certain Laroche and Talbot, revolving around the patent held by Talbot and the need for its being lifted if photography was to develop freely, the article by Lebailly traces key institutional acts, such as the founding Assembly of the Photographic Society in 1853 and publication of first issue of *Photographic Society Journal* in 1853. By examining its issues over ten years, he shows how the statutes of the Society included the possibility of women as members, adjudicated or simply let prosper debates on the style and the function of photography, in relation to aesthetic theories in particular regarding painting, situating photography relative to the other arts of which it was not yet a fully accepted sibling. Lebailly touches down on the role of Victoria, over forty years, from 1854 to 1894 with the transformation of the society into the Royal Photographic Society, and the great success of its first major exhibition of photography, in 1854, and the many spinoffs from it (books, journals). Lebailly also studies how the wave of enthusiasm for photography in the wake of the Queen's keen interest and even practice of the art not only inspired people in Britain but also far abroad. This article is also chock full of interesting theoretical and practical problems that accompanied the emergence of photography as a subject studied in schools and universities and as a form of technology both in the fine arts and the industrial arts.

Focusing on the genesis of public-supported fine arts in eighteenth and especially nineteenth century London, Cécile Doustaly provides an essential piece in the overall pattern of this book. Her basic context is the creation of public cultural institutions, a ministerial division for the Arts, and the origins of the public collections in the nineteenth century. The article elucidates the formation of the Royal Academy, but more significantly of the British Museum, the National Gallery, the South Kensington Museum, and to a lesser extent, the National Portrait Gallery and the Tate Gallery, highlighting both the 1830s and the period of 1850-1873 or more precisely the role of Henry Cole, the inventor of the civil state and whose

great status as administrator explains how he ushered in the era of the public museum over this quarter century. Doustaly contextualizes the opening of the British Museum (1805), later compared to its European counterparts, and furnishes important political and economic background information on why ruling members of society had it in their financial interests to support the knowledge of art among working and middle classes as a means for stimulating British industry. She clarifies also how the great *public* collections of London and of Britain in London came into being, through a sort of mixed economy and transfer of art from rich bourgeois merchants to national treasures. Equally important in her article is the careful tracing of the role of Cole, from the World Exhibit of 1851, its stimulation of a public interest and ultimately public ownership of art, to the teaching of art and decorative arts under ministerial supervision. Her article allows one to see the map of London's museums in rich historical detail and, indeed, one wonders what, if anything one saw (or sees) hitherto without this knowledge.

In three richly imbricated articles, Muriel Pécastaing-Boissière, Emmanuel Roudaut and Annie Cornic trace, respectively, the breadth and depth of the theatre in Victorian London, the rise, flourishing and decline of the London music-halls, and the practice of popular music in London during the nineteenth century. The first half of nineteenth century London saw a rapid expansion of theatres, in particular small theatres, concentrated precisely in the East End, the delayed effect of the building of the dockyards in the first quarter of the century. Indeed, from 1826 to 1843, numerous theatres open to meet the demand of the world's greatest concentration of workers. Pécastaing-Boissière resurrects the fascinating competition between established and upstart, West End and East End theatres, in which each vied with the other, through borrowing, imitation and comparison: the 1840s being crucial both for how minor theatres marched on Westminster demanding theatre for the workers, and for how the Theatre Regulation Act ended the monopoly on entirely-spoken plays in the established theatres; the 1860s and beyond being important for the phenomenon of the «Long Run», the specialisation of theatres, and a breaking down of generic boundaries under the influence of the music-halls. In his superbly researched account of the emergence, from the 1860s onwards, of the music-halls, Roudaut, noting Charles Morton's transformation of his pub, the Canterbury Arms Public House, into the Canterbury Hall, shows how this amateurish beginning (a place to go sing, a «free-and-easy») gave way to the music-hall proper, that is, to a separate building specifically for musical entertainment performed by professionals. From 1855 to 1870, the music-halls went from a capacity of 1500 to 3500, shifting a small-scale makeshift outfit to big business, with thirty three music-halls being constructed in London, and a vast network of performers in rotation across its establishments. Roudaut shows how music-halls and theatres competed, in terms of programming, each incorporating particularities of the other, and his investigations into programme-content reveal surprises about what was possible for staging in aristocratic West End venues. Dovetailing with Roudaut's study of the music-halls, Annie Cornic's panorama of the practice of popular music in nineteenth century London documents the tremendous development of choral music and of brass bands, the dramatic increase in professional musicians driven by the urban and suburban population explosion, the essential role played by music publishers in an era of widespread musical literacy, and the epoch-characterizing contributions of impresarios such as Henry Wood of the Promenade Concerts at Queen's Hall or Louis-Antoine Jullien at Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Cornic devotes particular attention to the role of music publishers, from 1808 onwards (Joseph Williams in 1808, Chappell, Boosey, Cramer, Novello in his wake), and the age of musical literacy is certainly a defining characteristic of the nineteenth century London

that she re-animates: it was the foundation for the vast musical culture and musical industry of London and Londoners.

This book on London cultural and artistic institutions from already in the 17th century and extending into the 20th century is certainly to be included on any reading list for courses devoted to representations of London (indeed, it is on mine), but also should receive a wide readership, from those interested in the life and history of London, to students, teachers and researchers working on the cultural and artistic *lieux de mémoire* in London and Great Britain.