

Les Halles:

A Series of Unfortunate Events

June 2011

By Rachael McCall



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A trajectory of architecture, urbanism and politics tied to the question of creative and cultural risk at Les Halles.

Despite many layers of good intentions, 'the history of Les Halles reads like a serial melodrama of politics, architecture and urban design'¹. Les Halles is a quarter or area in the first arrondissement of Paris (see figure one), between the Pompidou Centre and the Louvre. This area started life as the central market, 'the heart of gastronomic and political life'² in the city and was converted into a 'universally condemned'³ major metro/transport interchange, shopping centre and public space in the 1970s. The mixture and tensions between social, cultural and commercial functions at Les Halles have created a melting pot of ideas and opinions, bubbling and boiling over a number of times throughout its history since the site's foundation by King Louis VI in the early 1100s⁴.

This essay will argue that political views, opinions and pressures from the governing bodies of Paris have largely influenced the resultant design proposals for Les Halles, in their form, context and attitudes to the site, over its long history. The historic development and proposed schemes for Les Halles will be traced chronologically, to show that in some schemes political influence has engendered remarkable urban and architectural design and at other times fearful and tame political decisions have led to 'lacklustre'⁵ developments.

There will be three focal points on the historic trajectory discussed. After tracing the development of the market from the 1100s to the 1850s, Baltard's second design that began construction in 1854, will be used as an example to argue that the political pursuit and push of Napoleon III and Haussmann developed a positive architectural and urban scheme on the site. Napoleon III and Haussmann empowered Baltard's design enabling him to achieve improved commercial, social and aesthetic regulation at Les Halles⁶. The second focal point surrounds the long running debate in the 1960s and 1970s regarding the future of Les Halles. The political instability and numerous government changes during this era resulted in a lack of political confidence and mediocre scheme⁷. Finally, the latest scheme produced through design competitions in 2004 and 2007, instigated by Parisian Mayor Delanoë, will be argued to have once again proven the adverse effects of conservative political decisions, on what could be considered one of the most important urban schemes in "The Belly of Paris"⁸. Here a Mayor has made tactful decisions fearful of any opposition or creative risk, resulting in a scheme absent of architecture⁹. Creative risk on a political part may be needed to rehabilitate this site. As the trajectory will show, there is no doubt that the site will continue to be remodelled and evolve. Wakeman concludes her article with the statement, 'transience, restless flux and transgression'¹⁰ are now seen as features of Les Halles, as will be demonstrated in this essay.

¹ Rosemary Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," *French, Politics, Culture and Society* 25, no. 2 Summer (2007): 50.

² Ibid.: 53.

³ Ibid.: 59.

⁴ Arnaud Paquet-Jolibois, "Les Halles De Paris: Decouverte," <http://www.entre.architecture.ecriture.0fees.net/b2a.leshalles.htm>.

⁵ Sarah Whiting, "Bellyache," *Log* 4, no. Winter (2005): 5.

⁶ Anthony Sutcliffe, *The Autumn of Central Paris: The Defeat of Town Planning, 1850-1970* (London: Edward Arnold, 1970), 21.

⁷ Norma Evenson, "The Assassination of Les Halles," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 32, no. 4 (1973): 312.

⁸ Emile Zola and Brian Nelson, *The Belly of Paris, Le Ventre De Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁹ Nicolai Ouroussoff, "A Rich Menu to Choose from for 'the Belly of Paris'," *The New York Times* 2005.

¹⁰ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 72.



Figure One: Les Halles, quarter in the first arrondissement of Paris between the Pompidou Centre and Louvre.



Figure Two: Evolution of urban fabric at Les Halles.

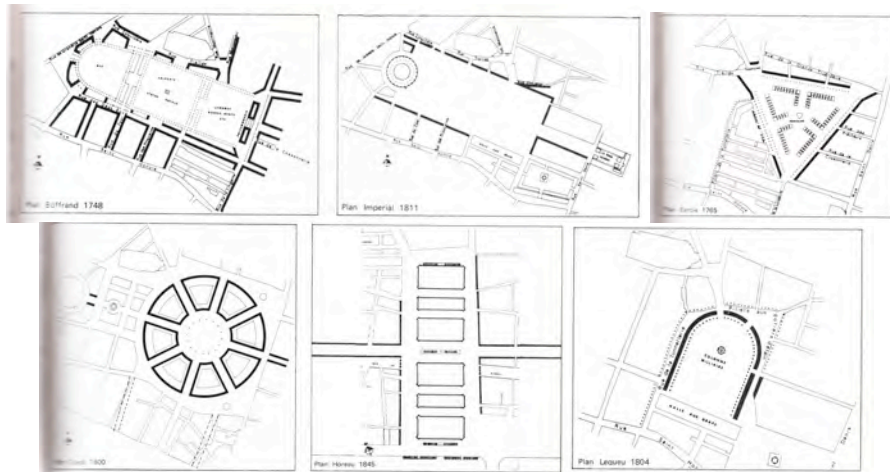


Figure Three: Influential schemes for Les Halles 1748 – 1845.

The early history of Les Halles involves intense settlement and densification of the area between the 1100s and 1300s. It is quite unique that an area of Paris maintained its function from the Middle Ages for such a long time. The location for the market was chosen at the crossroads of two major trade routes by King Louis VI¹¹. In 1183, King Philippe II Auguste enlarged the markets and built the first shelter¹². There were different covered areas enclosed by walls of arcades. By the 1300s the area around Les Halles was almost completely built up in a regular street pattern, except along the fortification line established in the 1100s (see figure two). The markets stopped trading during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) but were back in business by the 1500s, when traders purchased the land and renovated the markets in 1543, taking down the old market walls¹³ (refer Appendix B – Poster, for diagrams of the site’s development over time).

Much of the residential character of Les Halles was built up between 1500 and 1700, with a huge amount of development focussed in the 1570s¹⁴. The area was incredibly dense compared to surrounding suburbs and remained one of the densest areas of Paris until the 1960s. Mansions were next to shop houses and typical housing for market tenants of the 1570s was listed in the first *Inventaire* of 1964, which considered the residential housing of the area historic before Jeanne Huguenev and Louis Chavilier showed interest in Baltard’s market buildings in 1968¹⁵. The *Palais Royale* and numerous *Hôtels* were part of the developments of the 1570s¹⁶. There was so much growth in the area that the King had to sell some plots to create available land¹⁷. The area continued to grow as a commercial centre between 1600 and 1800.

In 1740, it was acknowledged that Les Halles needed major renovation or replanning. Jallot proposed to decentralize the markets as early as 1740¹⁸. Instead, the market site was expanded from one hundred and fifty square meters to two hundred and forty square meters due to the demolition of *Hôtel de Soissons* in 1748¹⁹. During the late 1700s the site became the focus for *Prix de Rome* candidates and many other schemes were proposed for the area. Some important schemes include; Plan Boffrand of 1748, Plan Barbie of 1765, Plan Duval of 1800 and Plan Lequeu from 1804 (see figure three). The many plans presented for the site between 1748 and 1811, lead to important site planning by Napoleon I.

Napoleon I, was influenced by Boffrand’s plan from 1748 and designated a new boundary for the site to be renovated, as well as, setting up a crucial axis from the circular corn exchange building built in 1767. Boffrand discussed the area as a ‘forum’²⁰, which has influenced the urban form for centuries to come. Boffrand’s idea of a ‘forum’ was to use ‘rational ordering to create harmonious efficient and nonconflictual space’²¹. This design sentiment was passed on to Baltard’s pavilions placed along this axis and further to today’s landscape scheme by

¹¹ Paquet-Jolibois, "Les Halles De Paris: Decouverte."

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Françoise Boudon, "A History of Les Halles 1400-1950," *Architectural Design* 9/10 (1980): 5.

¹⁵ Alice Thomine, "About Les Halles in Paris: The Leading Role of the Historian in the City (1960-1971)," *The Journal of Architecture* 9, no. 2 (2004): 212.

¹⁶ Boudon, "A History of Les Halles 1400-1950," 5.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.: 8.

²⁰ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 50.

²¹ Ibid.



Figure Four: Baltard's First Scheme

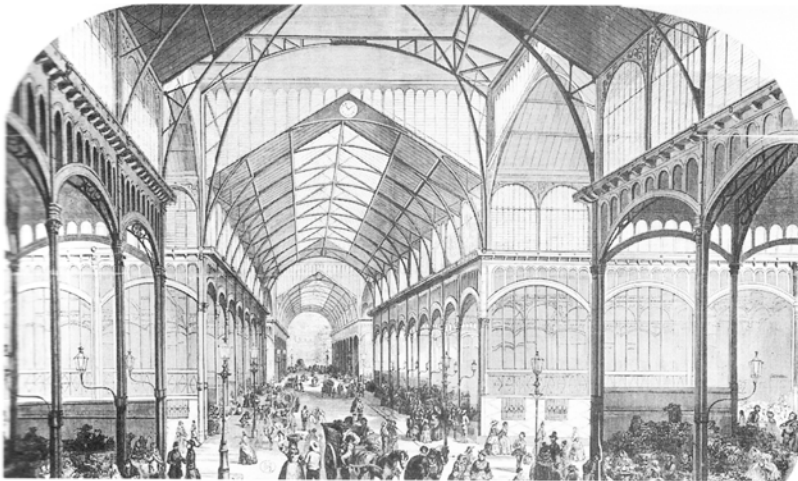


Figure Five: Baltard's Second Scheme

David Mangin. Boudon describes Les Halles between 1740 and Baltard's pavilions of 1854, as a state of 'permanent theoretical competition' for redesign ideas²². Les Halles has since lapsed into this state again from 1940-1980 and again between 2004 and 2011. This lapse into debate seems to be a recurring theme between politics, planners and the community, involved in developing the site's urban form and linking to surrounding existing context.

The work of Napoleon I in the early 1800s, set Les Halles as a national priority and raised debate about the area. This debate continued with the proposal of many other plans until 1843 when the council set up a commission to run the project and named Victor Baltard as the chief architect²³ (for further details – refer Appendix A). Under Rambuteau's lead Baltard's first scheme, of monumental stone markets, began construction in 1851 and continued until new leader Napoleon III called a halt to their construction in June 1853²⁴. Benjamin describes Baltard's first design as a 'miscarriage...an unfortunate combination of masonry and ironwork'²⁵. Workers named the scheme the *Fort de la Halle* in which 'the vegetables themselves were enclosed in a citadel'²⁶. Napoleon III and Prefect Haussmann ordered the structures to be pulled down as they didn't fill the needs of a modern market place. Large spans, light, ventilation and street fronts for vendors to display their wares, were desired for the future form of the market.

The relatively new use of iron and glass in building construction was seen as desirable for the functions and context of Les Halles in the early 1850s. Haussmann instructed Baltard to redesign using 'iron, iron, nothing but iron'²⁷. Napoleon III requested 'big umbrellas and nothing more'²⁸. The change between Baltard's first and second schemes was immense (see figure four and five), and is a clear example of how risk and pressure of the state, changed the form of Baltard's architecture to an innovative scheme that suited its context in the 1850s.

Napoleon III and Haussmann really had to push Baltard. Many claimed the revised scheme lacked originality and linked it to Paxton's Crystal Palace in London of 1851 and the Parisian new train station *Gare de l'Est*²⁹. By the end of construction of the pavilions Baltard claimed unjust 'exclusive credit' for the buildings³⁰. Fourteen pavilions were planned, each specializing in a different type of produce. They were connected by a grid of streets along the axis set by Napoleon I, with the streets covered by clear glazing. Ten of the pavilions were built between 1854 and 1888, and a further two pavilions added in the 1930s. The ordered grid of the scheme aimed to regulate 'commerce and commercial behaviour'³¹ and clean up the morals of the area.

²² Boudon, "A History of Les Halles 1400-1950," 8.

²³ Meredith TenHoor, "Architecture and Biopolitics at Les Halles," *French, Politics, Culture and Society* 25, no. 2 Summer (2007): 78.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin and Rolf Tiedemann, "Iron Construction," in *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), 162.

²⁶ Sigfried Giedion, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete* (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995), 114.

²⁷ Evenson, "The Assassination of Les Halles," 308.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ TenHoor, "Architecture and Biopolitics at Les Halles," 79.

³⁰ Howard Saalman, "The Rebuilding of Paris, 1852-1870," in *Haussmann : Paris Transformed* (New York: G. Braziller, 1971), 18.

³¹ TenHoor, "Architecture and Biopolitics at Les Halles," 79.

* Invited competitors in the 1967 competition

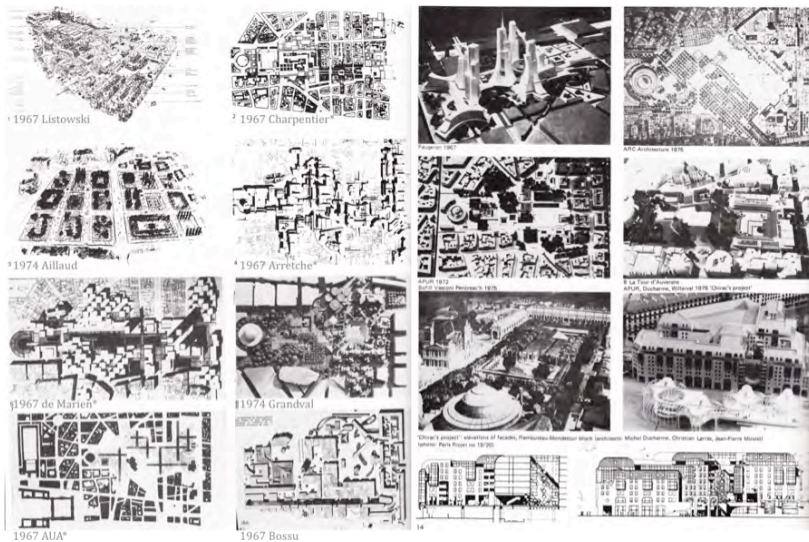


Figure Six: Various projects 1967 – 1979, including schemes from the 1968 competition.

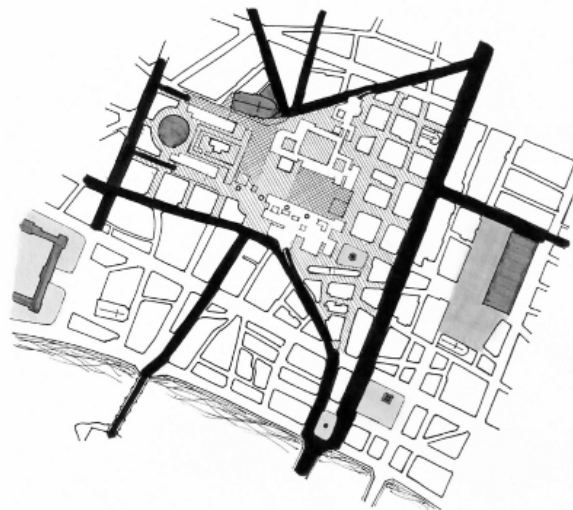


Figure Seven: World Trade Centre Scheme, 1972-1974.

Hector Horeau and Eugene Flachat also proposed a number of important iron and glass schemes for Les Halles (refer Appendix A - Timeline). Numerous critics including Giedion and Huguency, preferred their schemes³². However, Baltard as city architect and long-term friend of Haussmann³³, carried out his scheme under close supervision of the state. This supervision is now seen as a time of positive influence of the state, in order to create a scheme that suited its context.

Leading up to the second focal point on the trajectory, the activity of the 1960s and 1970s, Les Halles was subject to many street-widening schemes in the early 1900s (refer Appendix A – Timeline). Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin was influential in 1925, hypothetically flattening the markets to make way for sixteen of his skyscrapers³⁴. By the late 1930s and early 1940s it was obvious due to increased density and traffic, the market once again required serious renovation and replanning. During the 1950s a commission was set up to discuss the renovations. In 1963, de Gaulle’s government announced its decision to move the market to Rungis³⁵, signalling great change for the site, a flurry of proposals and protest.

As Wakeman suggests, Les Halles is ‘a site rich in ironies born from political battle, diverse conflicting interests and the compromises between modernism and historic preservation’³⁶. Creating a modern Paris became increasingly difficult towards the late 1960s with the emergence of historic and preservation ideals, political instability, as well as the failure of other modern projects in the city such as Tower Montparnasse. After much analysis and many brutalist proposals (refer Appendix A – Timeline), the de Gaulle government set up a design competition for the new Les Halles in 1968. The schemes of the 1968 competition (see figure six) and other schemes proposed at the time faced much public outcry. The public claimed that the schemes ignored the needs of the local people, culture and identity, and did not respond to the site and the nearby Seine was ‘ignored’³⁷. This instance of political ignorance set the tone for much of the 1970s.

De Gaulle’s work on the Les Halles project abruptly ceased in 1968, at the same time as extreme student riots in the area. Following the riots, the market holders were moved out to the new market at Rungis, which was more than fifty times larger³⁸. Historian Chevalier describes February 27th, 1969 as the ‘public execution’ of Les Halles, in what he labels ‘the assassination of Paris’³⁹. The shift of the shop owners, led to three glorious years between 1969 and the market building’s demolition in 1971, where the old buildings were spontaneously used for social and cultural events⁴⁰. It was during these years, that value and historic importance of Baltard’s buildings was uncovered for many Parisians, in what’s been labelled ‘a counter-culture movement’⁴¹. It is estimated that

³² Thomine, "About Les Halles in Paris: The Leading Role of the Historian in the City (1960-1971)," 214.

³³ Spiro Kostof and Greg Castillo, *The City Assembled: The Elements of Urban Form through History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 97.

³⁴ Louis Chevalier, "Introduction," in *The Assassination of Paris*, ed. David P Jordon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), xiii.

³⁵ Chevalier, "Introduction," xvi.

³⁶ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 61.

³⁷ Ibid.: 62.

³⁸ Sutcliffe, *The Autumn of Central Paris: The Defeat of Town Planning, 1850-1970*, 227.

³⁹ Chevalier, "Introduction," xvi.

⁴⁰ Thomine, "About Les Halles in Paris: The Leading Role of the Historian in the City (1960-1971)," 216.

⁴¹ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 58.

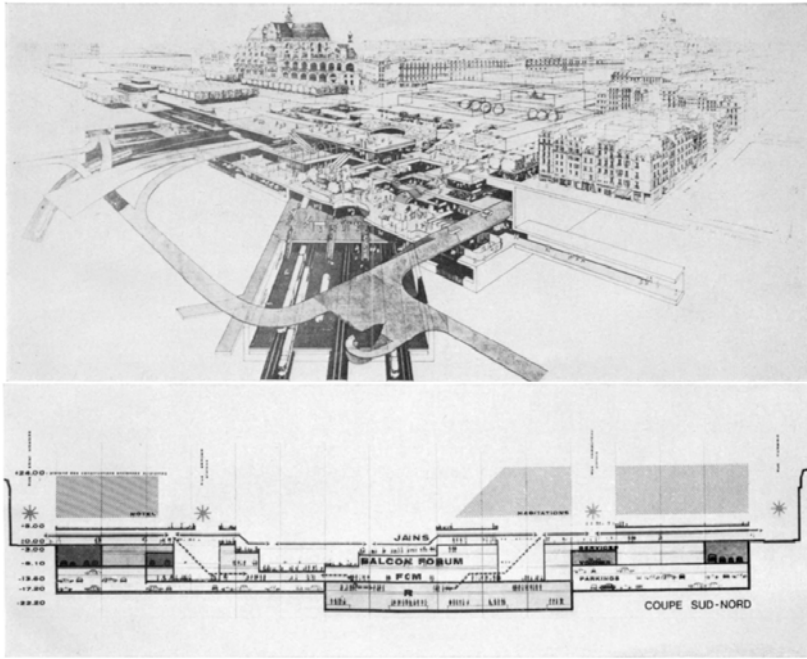


Figure Eight: *Forum des Halles* by Vasconi and Pencreach, 1973.

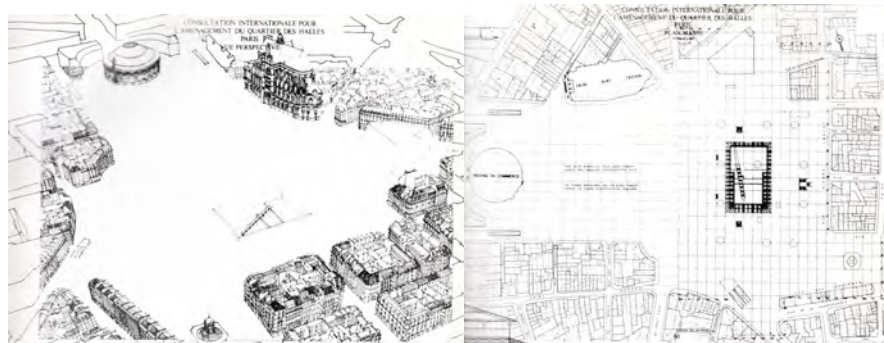


Figure Nine: International Consultation – perspective and plan issued with competition brief, 1979.

more than two and a half million people visited the market buildings during these years, there were seventy thousand visitors to a Picasso exhibition alone⁴².

The success of the context and multipurpose use of the buildings and urban framework between 1969 and 1971, could have been a key indicator for the type of architectural or urban plan for the site in the future. Wakeman suggests, that Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers channelled this emergent need for a multipurpose cultural space into the Pompidou Centre, under construction nearby⁴³. The flexibility of Baltard's 'umbrellas' can be linked to the flexibility of Piano and Roger's scheme⁴⁴. During Pompidou's presidency, 1969-1974, a 'world trade centre' scheme was proposed for the Les Halles site, which caused 'serious opposition' from the public⁴⁵. This proposal included high-density office space, very tall buildings and required many of the buildings around the perimeter of the site to be demolished (see figure seven). Other plans were presented at the time but Pompidou considered many of them 'too conservative'⁴⁶ – a contrast to the following government.

The demolition of Baltard's Halles took place between August 1971 and 1973. Before further planning action had taken place, Pompidou died and was soon replaced by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing who brought Les Halles' progress to a quick halt. Shortly after the election Giscard cancelled the world trade centre scheme. Collard describes his cancellation as 'abusive' and 'against the wishes of the *Conseil de Paris*'⁴⁷. Apparently Giscard also wanted to stop the Pompidou Centre but was convinced against this cancellation by Jaques Chirac, due to Chirac's allegiance to Pompidou⁴⁸. Supporters of Giscard claim the oil crisis of 1973, was the impetus for the world trade centre scheme's cancellation⁴⁹. Thomine describes the handling of Les Halles between 1969 and 1986 as tided to 'major events and personalities' involving the judgement of politicians, planners and *patrimoine*⁵⁰ (inheritance and heritage).

Giscard was personally less interested in Architecture, compared to previous French presidents⁵¹. Hence, in 1974 Giscard held what is known as the first architect's conference, there were fourteen participants. The new government demanded all functions to be planned underground with green space above, a major alteration to the brief⁵². Jean Claude Benard's scheme was a clear public favourite but Giscard used his political power to override and choose Bofill's project and demand Bofill work with Tour d'Auvergne⁵³. This move is another example of the adverse effects of political decisions to Les Halles during the 1970s. Pencreach and Vasconi had won a previous round of the competition in 1974, for their underground *Forum des Halles* (see figure eight). This scheme was maintained and completed in the late 1970s, while the state of the urban form above remained in turmoil.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.: 86.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Anthony Sutcliffe, *Paris: An Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 177.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁷ Sue Collard, "Politics, Culture and Urban Transformations in Jaques Chirac's Paris 1975-1995," *French Cultural Studies* 7 (1996): 12.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 58.

⁵⁰ Thomine, "About Les Halles in Paris: The Leading Role of the Historian in the City (1960-1971)," 209.

⁵¹ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 60.

⁵² Sutcliffe, *Paris: An Architectural History*, 179.

⁵³ Adrien Rosner, "Projects for Les Halles 1950-1979," *Architectural Design* 9/10 (1980): 13.

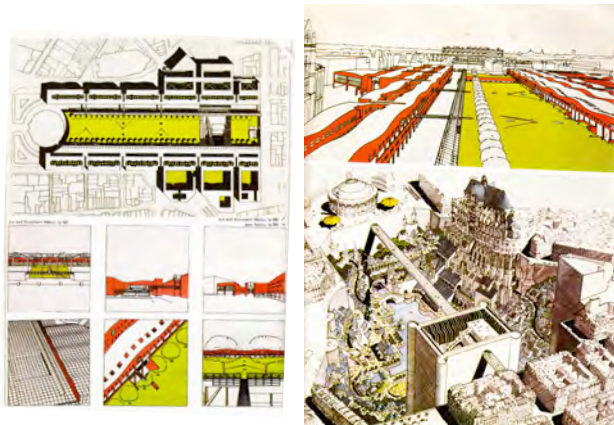
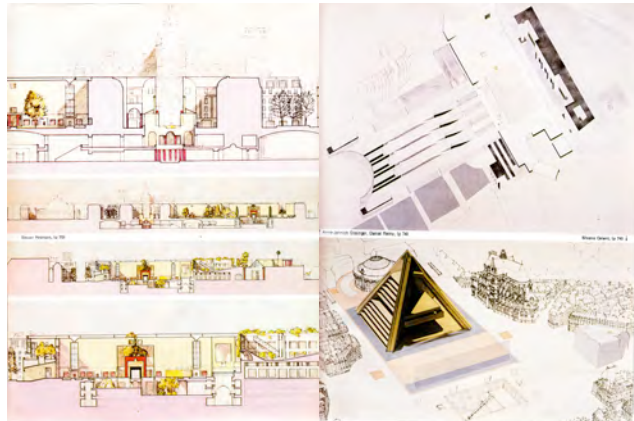
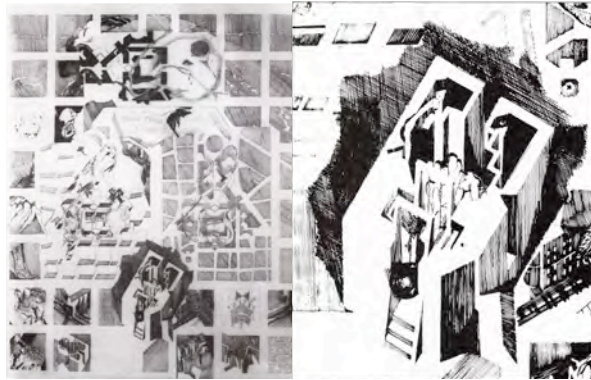


Figure Ten: Various projects from the International Consultation , 1980.

Giscard's choice of Bofill's project was the beginning of four schemes presented by the combined Bofill/d'Auvergne team. These schemes were approved but resubmitted annually for four years between 1974 and 1978. During this time Les Halles was 'used as a parking lot', while 'officials squabbled over its fate'⁵⁴. Although much of the back and forth of the project of these years was hidden from the public, the lack of building progress and consistent change to the schemes by the politicians during the 1970s was very wearing for the public and eventually wore out their confidence⁵⁵. Many of these tepid political decisions affected the public's view of architecture in the 1970s, which reached a post-war low. Creative and cultural risk taking decisions were generally stomped out due to a lack of confidence and favour towards preservationist ideals.

In 1977, there was a restructure of the government and Jacques Chirac became Paris' first mayor, giving him power over the city but still a need to consult with the State regarding budgeting. The aim of the restructure was to resolve a lot of the tension between the State and the City governments. Chirac claimed to be 'the saviour and chief architect of Les Halles'⁵⁶ and consequently stopped Bofill's scheme in October 1978, only six months after it had begun construction. This move incited more public anger, as the small amount of construction work was the first they had seen in the decade. This halt led to a new series of events, which further demoralised the relationship between the Mayor and his urban project.

Mayor Chirac presented his own proposal in late 1978, which focussed on creating public spaces in 'voids' rather than 'solids'⁵⁷. It was known as a project of emptiness, an 'over simple reaction'⁵⁸ to the events and schemes throughout the 1970s. Rosner labelled Chirac's plan as 'a dull plan for ordinary people'⁵⁹. Architects and planners were so worried about the state of the Halles project, as well as the general lack of confidence in architecture towards the end of the 1970s, that the *Association pour la Consultation Internationale pour l'Amenagement du Quartier des Halles* was set up by the *Syndicat de l'Architecture de l'Île de France* to host an international design consultation⁶⁰.

The consultation aimed to make the problems and site of international concern. They also aimed to prove to the government that there were still many alternate solutions for the project even though function and boundaries were quite defined⁶¹. More than six hundred counter projects were received, judged and displayed at a public symposium in January 1980, where many politicians were invited (see figures nine and ten). However there was an underlying doubt throughout the whole process that the Mayor would back down from his original scheme. Chirac tried to cause 'as few political ripples as possible'⁶² but his scheme went ahead, seemingly unaffected by the

⁵⁴ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 60.

⁵⁵ Norma Evenson, "Heart Surgery: The Renovation of Les Halles," in *Paris : A Century of Change, 1878-1978* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1979), 301.

⁵⁶ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 61.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Rosner, "Projects for Les Halles 1950-1979," 13.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Sutcliffe, *Paris : An Architectural History*, 179.

⁶¹ Luciana Miotto, "Foreword," *Architectural Design* 9/10 (1980): 3.

⁶² Collard, "Politics, Culture and Urban Transformations in Jaques Chirac's Paris 1975-1995," 13.

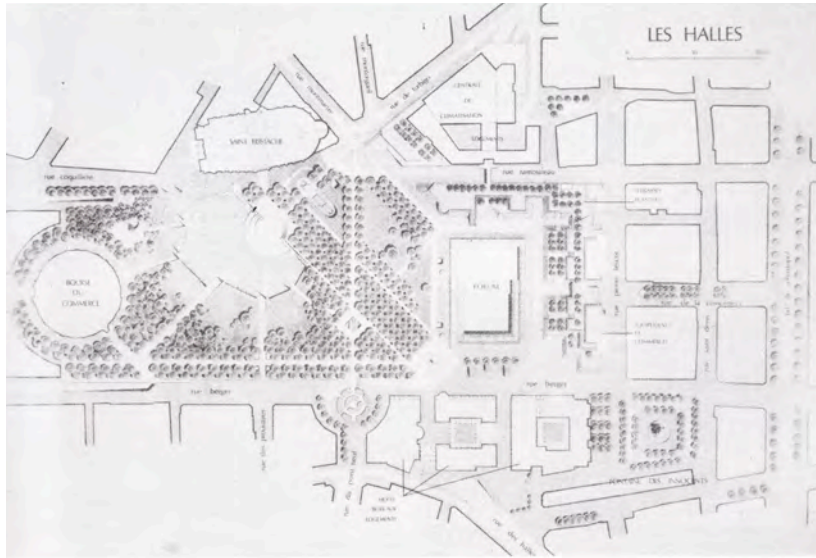


Figure Eleven: Chirac's project, 1979.

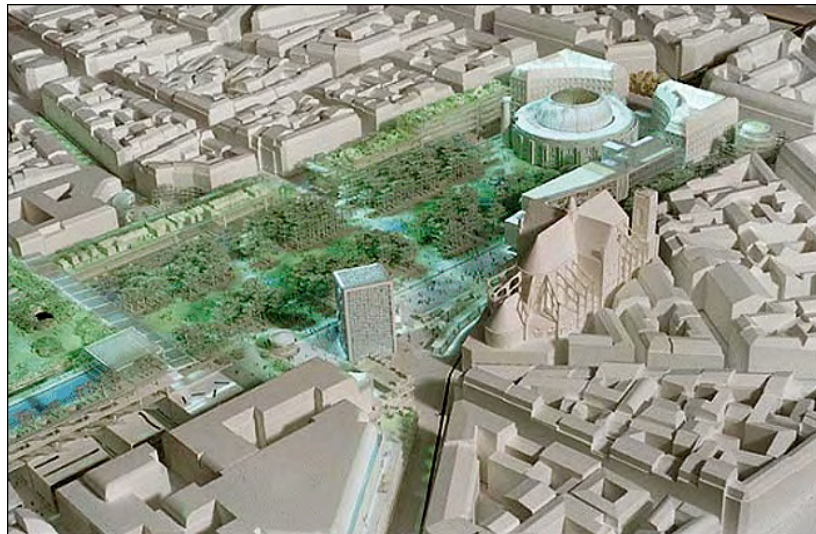


Figure Twelve: Jean Nouvel's competition scheme, 2004.

international consultation and was completed in 1988. (see figure eleven). The *Forum des Halles*' 'mediocrity'⁶³ has been greatly criticized since its completion, which leads to the final and latest focal point of the trajectory.

The architectural and social fabric of Paris was once again influenced by politics in 2004 when socialist Mayor Patrick Delanoë, decided it was time to rethink the unsuccessful urban centre at Les Halles. Delanoë claimed he wanted to 'undo the authoritarian traditions of French urban planning' and try to make decisions regarding Les Halles 'open and democratic'⁶⁴. Delanoë organised a design competition and four finalists were chosen to participate, French architects, Jean Nouvel and David Mangin (SEURA) as well as Dutch architects, Rem Koolhaas (OMA) and Winy Maas (MVRDV). Lots of politicians tried to influence the choice of their favourite entry for competing and conflicting political reasons⁶⁵. There was a struggle between democratic new ideas and 'traditional unilateralism of French urban planning' tied to the recurring debate between history, ingenuity and buildability of the site⁶⁶.

Nouvel's project (see figure twelve) was labelled 'the most spectacular scheme'⁶⁷ but at the same time 'lacklustre' and too dense⁶⁸. The French architect had proposed three levels of garden in three dimensions. The highest hanging garden was proposed at twenty-seven meters, and would offer great views of the city⁶⁹. The scheme was inventive but thought to 'deprive the neighbourhood of light,'⁷⁰ the opposite to the main goals of the competition – to improve light and access to the metro station five stories below the ground.

The second French architect, David Mangin's scheme (see figure thirteen) was the most human of the four. Wakeman described his proposal as a 'giant public garden of light'⁷¹. It included green spaces, children's play areas, space for food shops and seemed to be the only scheme that had listened and responded to the needs of the community⁷². Architectural critics thought the scheme lacked architecture, as it was essentially four subtly different lawns. Whiting describing it as an 'urban letdown'⁷³.

Rem Koolhaas presented a scheme that contained twenty-one glass pyramids (see figure fourteen). The idea was that these pyramids brought sections and fragments of different functions currently underground to the surface. Koolhaas' towers maintained the same scale and height limits imposed by Haussmann in the 1860s and made historic connections to the context of Alphand's large urban parks of the 1850s. These parks and Koolhaas' scheme were imagined to be 'innovative' yet 'respectful' of their surrounding context⁷⁴. Koolhaas was against the conservatism of the other schemes, claiming green modernity is not 'an excuse to carpet over everything with

⁶³ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 61.

⁶⁴ Ibid.: 63.

⁶⁵ Whiting, "Bellyache," 6.

⁶⁶ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 65.

⁶⁷ John Henley, "Architects vie to Remake Paris's 1970s Monstrosity," *The Guardian* 2004.

⁶⁸ Whiting, "Bellyache," 5.

⁶⁹ Henley, "Architects vie to Remake Paris's 1970s Monstrosity."

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 65.

⁷² Henley, "Architects vie to Remake Paris's 1970s Monstrosity."

⁷³ Whiting, "Bellyache," 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid.



Figure Thirteen: David Mangin's competition scheme, 2004.



Figure Fourteen: Rem Koolhaas' competition scheme, 2004.

grass⁷⁵. Winy Maas the second Dutch architect involved produced a scheme, which was criticised for being a huge glass roof covering forty percent of the site⁷⁶ (see figure fifteen).

In the end the conservatism Koolhaas had rejected won. Allegedly Delanoë and a number of city councillors preferred Koolhaas's scheme, but problems with the estimated length of construction (ten to twelve years) and closure of the existing Forum, lead to Mangin's project being chosen, it was thought to be the cheapest and 'least disruptive' proposal⁷⁷. Delanoë announced this decision in December 2004, six months after the expected decision date. Even at these early stages it was clear that the first stage of the renovation might not be complete in time for Delanoë's election in 2007⁷⁸. Hence, the winning scheme of the 2004 design competition is another example of conservative political decisions, forcing a conservative and purely functional scheme forward. In 2005, Whiting wrote that Mangin's scheme clearly lacked ambition, 'few things are more familiar than a lawn' and described Paris' predicament as a 'bellyache'⁷⁹. Ouroussoff saw Mangin's scheme as 'tepid' and 'gingerly tiptoeing around the social issues'⁸⁰ of the area, describing the decision as 'banal'⁸¹ by a government scared of risks. With this decision regarding Les Halles, Paris was suddenly scared of bold buildings, a complete turn around from the grand projects of the 1980s and 1990s. Ouroussoff writes 'the tragedy here is the low level of ambition, at least Mitterand failed on a grand scale'⁸². Mayor Delanoë seemed unable to commit to a more architectural scheme because he feared unpopularity and that it may go out of fashion. He prides himself on 'not conceding to fashion', but isn't the choice of the popular lawn in fact the opposite? It was in this situation that some creative risk on behalf of Paris' politicians was needed.

This risk was taken in 2005, when Jean Francois Legaret (Mayor of the First Arrondissement) revealed that the previous four design proposals were considered 'unrealizable monsters' and that Delanoë was abandoning parts of Mangin's scheme and organizing a separate design competition for a new canopy structure⁸³. In November 2007, the council approved plans by Patrick Berger and Jacques Anziutti for their canopy design⁸⁴ (see figure sixteen). Most of the garden scheme and overall project management remains in the hands of David Mangin, winner of the 2004 competition. The Berger and Anziutti canopy will replace existing above ground elements of the *Forum des Halles* and is an organic shaped translucent glass structure (four to twelve meters above ground by one hundred meters wide), which is made in prefabricated pieces⁸⁵. The canopy at Les Halles is being labelled 'the cities latest grand project'⁸⁶, at a cost of more than eight hundred million euro, it will be more expensive than London's 2012 Olympic Stadium or the Millau Viaduct in France by Norman Foster⁸⁷.

⁷⁵ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 65.

⁷⁶ Henley, "Architects vie to Remake Paris's 1970s Monstrosity."

⁷⁷ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 67.

⁷⁸ Ibid.: 46.

⁷⁹ Whiting, "Bellyache," 6.

⁸⁰ Ouroussoff, "A Rich Menu to Choose from for 'the Belly of Paris'."

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Alan Riding, "In Paris, a Cautious New Vision for Les Halles," *The New York Times*, Dec 16, 2004.

⁸⁴ Robert Such, "Paris Approves Revamped Les Halles," *Architectural Record* 196, no. 1 (2008).

⁸⁵ Reuters, "Dated Paris Shopping Hall Gets Multi-Million Makeover," *Skyscraper City* 2011.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

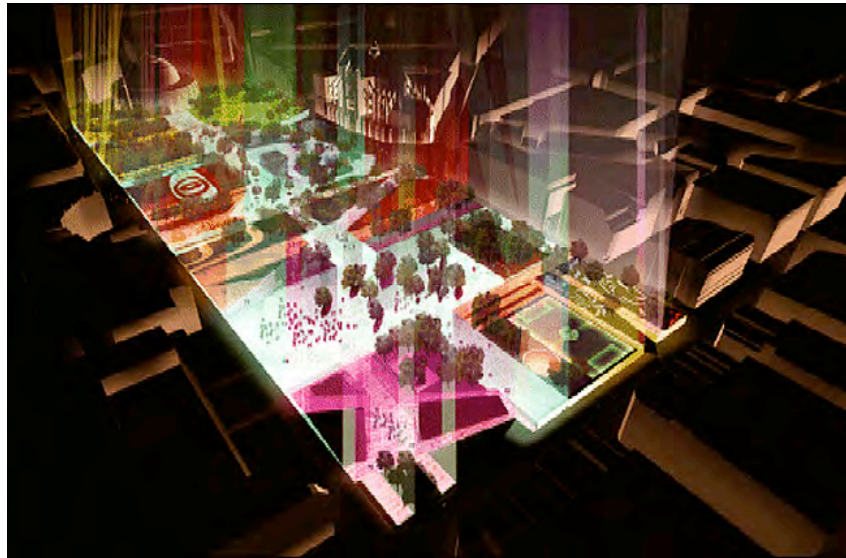


Figure Fifteen: Winy Maas' competition scheme, 2004.



Figure Sixteen: Berger and Anziutti Canopy, under construction - 2012-2016.

Delanoë's choice of the organic canopy scheme seems contradictory to his choice of Mangin' garden proposal that was chosen for its non-iconic aesthetic. With the latest scheme, Delanoë is criticised for falling into the trap of a luring seductive architecture, describing the new canopy as an 'artwork'⁸⁸. However, overall the 2007 canopy has been well received by the public compared with previous schemes⁸⁹. Active community group *Accomplir* continue to fight the scheme and believe each iteration of the scheme is accentuating the 'unnatural sunken glass void'⁹⁰. In September this year, a local resident suggested that Parisians were hoping for a scheme that was more ambitious, not architecturally but functionally or culturally⁹¹. The current design is such an open lawn, that it seems to remain open and invite future intervention, leaving the trajectory of events to continue. Parisian novelist Catherine Delor wrote, 'it should be time to end publically sponsored vandalism in this historic district', however she is 'wondering whether the architects have watched Star Wars one time too many'⁹²!

It seems with this scheme Delanoë has finally taken a risk. Demolition of the above ground elements of the *Forum des Halles* began earlier this year (see figure seventeen). Work is expected to reach competition in 2016 (see Appendix A - Timeline). As Wakeman suggests, 'Les Halles remains an urban stage for dramatic confrontation between rationalized utopian vision and the disorder of everyday life'⁹³. This statement is exemplified by the community groups fighting for everyday functions of the area such as food stores and play space, competing with the overarching goals of politicians and urbanists fighting for the larger urban form and context. Therefore, Les Halles is an important example in current debates about the shifting role of the architectural discipline, here its lack of ability to 'manage the relationship between the city, the markets and the citizens', is stimulating critical analysis of the 'biopolitical role' and significance of architects and urban planners in such schemes⁹⁴.

This essay has shown that works of urbanism and architecture in the Les Halles district of Paris have been a series of missed opportunities. Along the historic trajectory it has been noted that interesting schemes have been quelled, quashed and dismissed by politicians vying for each other positions, misreading or ignoring the public's requests. During the 1970s and 2000s politicians have been fearful of any risky or controversial decisions. However, amongst the gloom of recent works, Baltard's second scheme of 1854 was an example of how positive and successful architecture schemes can form out of nurtured and strong relationships between the state and the architects, and the state and the public. Haussmann and Napoleon are not valid examples for modern schemes because they had higher monachal power however, strong politicians seem to produce strong projects. Hopefully the recent series of unfortunate events for Les Halles, reverses towards a positive scheme addressing the multiple layers of function, culture, society, politics and design evident throughout this essay and trajectory of events. As TenHoor explains, the 'state, market and body remain intertwined at Les Halles'⁹⁵.

⁸⁸ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 68.

⁸⁹ Alan Riding, "For Paris, the Newest Look Is a Canopy," *The New York Times* 2007.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "Projet Les Halles," www.projetleshalles.fr.

⁹² Catherine Delor, "Les Halles: Yet Another Controversial Project in the Heart of Paris," *Versailles and More* 2009.

⁹³ Wakeman, "Fascinating Les Halles," 69.

⁹⁴ TenHoor, "Architecture and Biopolitics at Les Halles," 73.

⁹⁵ Ibid.: 81.



Figure Seventeen: Demolition of *Forum des Halles* taken October 20, 2011 & November 2, 2011.

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