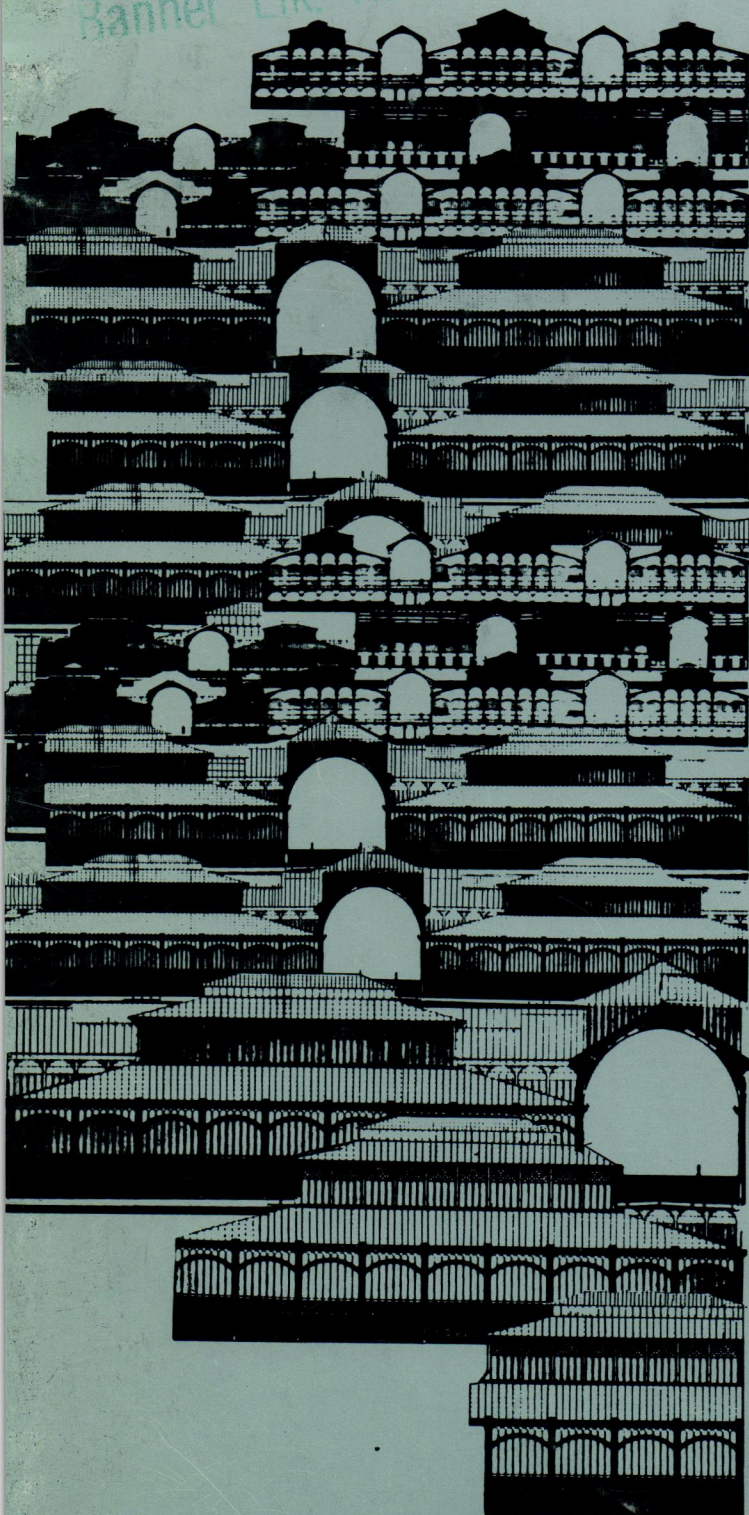


Urban Redevelopment: 19th Century Vision 20th Century Version

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Editor's Notes

DQ 85 juxtaposes two disparate views of the urban redevelopment question. In the first part of this issue Peter Wolf analyzes several 19th century utopian (or what Mr. Wolf refers to as "older and bolder") proposals for transportation/pedestrian linked planned developments for London and Paris, which contain ideas still applicable but, thus far, only tentatively applied to today's cities. Only Baltard's *Les Halles* development was brought to fruition and ironically, it is now in the process of being destroyed to make room for yet another "renewal" project whose efficacy has been widely disputed.

The idealism and concern for the general good contained in these early proposals is undeniable, yet when *Les Halles* was constructed (over a forty year period) thousands of people were displaced, but because of the lengthy construction time span there were no large-scale repercussions. The current redevelopment of *Les Halles*, and the consequent total destruction of its six pavilions, has been the subject of many editorials and the cause of street rioting, sit-ins and venomous polemics throughout Paris. This fiasco is yet another demonstration of an emerging fact of late 20th century urban sociology. Large-scale urban redevelopment is not going to be tolerated any longer, without consideration for both immediate and long-term consequences. The wholesale clearance of land for renewal projects that took place in urban America from 1950-70, with its attendant destruction of architectural landmarks and, more critical, its mindless dislocation of thousands of primarily poor and elderly people, is no longer a viable government or corporate practice.

Twenty years of urban renewal in the United States (under the 1949 Housing Act) produced primarily civic and corporate structures and little housing (and that primarily luxury and middle income). The majority of public civic projects (e.g. Lincoln Center, New York; The Golden Triangle, Pittsburgh; Charles Center, Baltimore; and Society Hill, Philadelphia), aside from their inherent qualities as architecture, are in almost all cases islands in a sea of urban chaos, and other than raising the tax base in some instances, have done little to alleviate the profound shortage of low-cost housing, public transportation, pedestrian amenities, public schools and recreation facilities so desperately needed in urban America.

The symposium on urban renewal, edited for presentation in the second part of this issue, brings together eight professionals with distinct approaches to redevelopment problems. Among the questions raised during the two days of the symposium were:

- 1) To what extent has urban renewal achieved community or societal goals and to what extent has it merely met bureaucratic or special interest objectives?
- 2) How can we resolve the conflict between planning on the basis of an overview of regional and metropolitan systems (the professional and academic approach) and planning done incrementally by local interest groups for limited areas (the political and conventional economic approach)?
- 3) What can metropolitan areas do to open housing opportunities outside the central cities and to what extent is such a policy important to future central city renewal efforts?
- 4) What are the possible alternative actions, programs and/or priorities to urban renewal as we know it or even as we hope it to be?

These are difficult questions and there are no pat answers, however, the conversations included here do illuminate some areas of concern to both professionals and laymen. The symposium participants raised a number of issues critical to any understanding of how large-scale programs function in our cities and how the citizenry can contribute in an effective way to the planning process.

Design Quarterly is grateful to Peter Wolf for the illustrational material included in his essay. We also wish to thank all of the participants in the urban renewal symposium for permission to publish portions of the two-day meetings. MSF

Urban Redevelopment 19th Century Style: Older, Bolder Ideas for Today

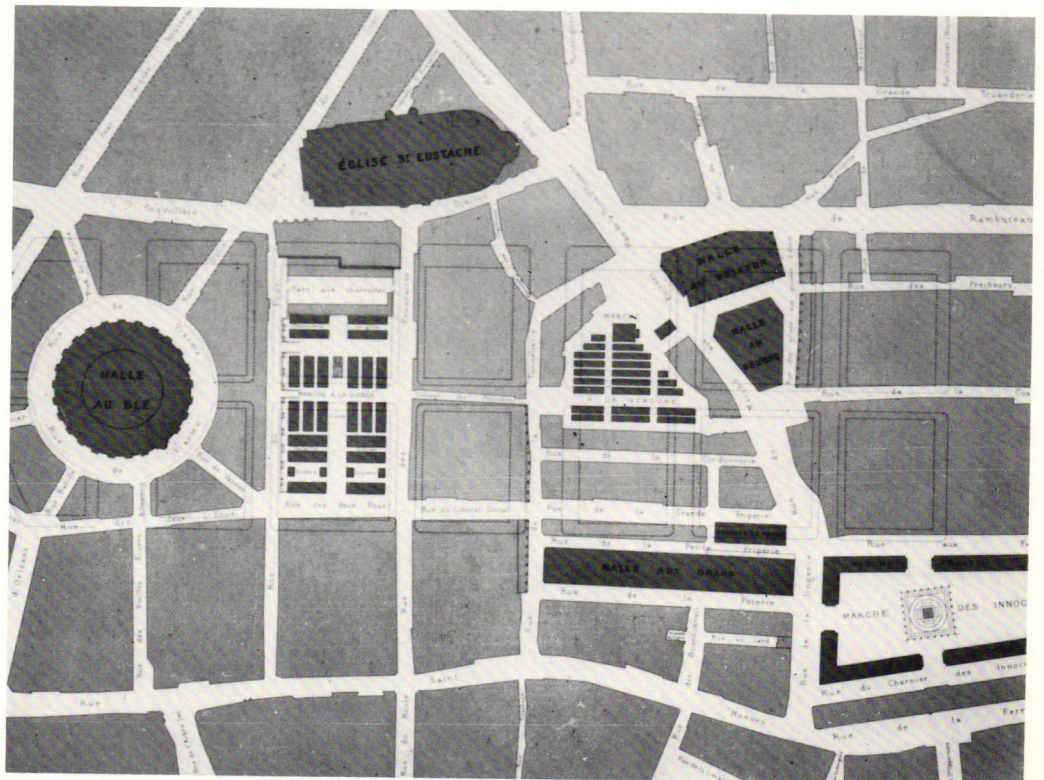
Today, when idealism and progressive social philosophy stimulate advanced urban planning and transportation schemes for existing cities, the plan is usually compromised or destroyed before it can be realized; obliterated by the exigencies of economic realism, protective legal structures, and a political conservatism supported by a system of representation generally responsive to well financed lobbying, representing the strongest organized appeal rather than the greatest public interest.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a period bolder than our own, possible solutions (now generally forgotten) linking transportation to urban "renewal" schemes were put forward in England and France by a succession of architects and optimistic amateurs who mixed varying measures of social idealism with devotion to urban life. Aspects of their work contain some regenerative qualities and ideas appropriate to our own time. Other aspects of these proposals suggest that the inherent contradictions involved in mixing plans for urban physical regeneration with the goals of social renewal have been with us longer than is generally recognized.

In this regard, it is seldom recognized that the massive building project and district reordering accomplished by the construction of *Les Halles Centrales*, in the heart of Paris, toward the middle of the nineteenth century was instigated as early as 1810 by Napoleon I, partially to clear and reconstruct a heavily populated, deteriorating *quartier* of central Paris (fig. 1). In his memoirs, Victor Baltard, principal architect and planner of the *Les Halles* structures and district, recalls that "... towards the close of 1810, visiting the *Halle au Blé* with the architects and some officers of his retinue... the Emperor glanced around at the area. He was struck by the reigning confusion and spontaneously traced an immense parallelogram with his fingertip, indicating the *rue St. Denise* at the base and the *Halle au Blé* at the summit."

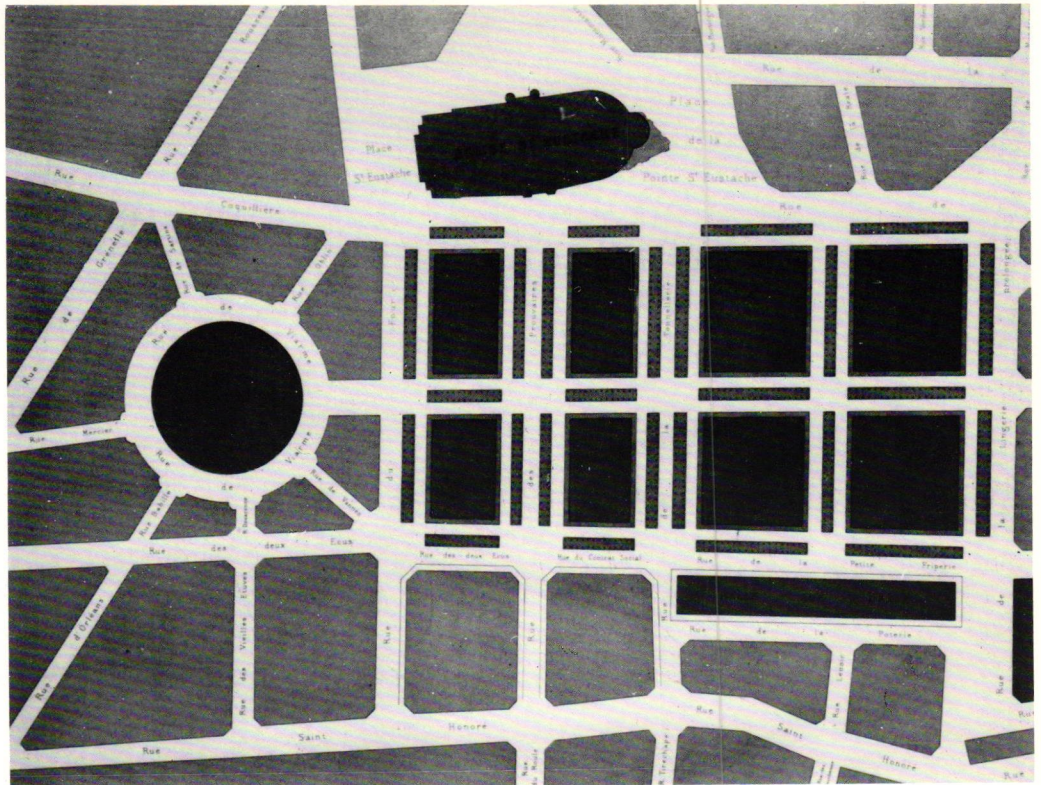
Thus the confines of an early nineteenth century urban "renewal" program were described, and the initiation of a program of well planned, high quality utilitarian structures followed, partially at the expense of existing area residents (figs. 2-7). Forty years later, with the former resident population scattered, construction was

Les Halles, the central market of Paris, was developed as an immense urban renewal project to clear a poor, heavily populated *quartier* in the center of Paris. Napoleon I, who instigated the scheme in 1810, was offended by the disorder in the area. At the expense of local residents, a vast redevelopment project produced one of the most useful and best planned central markets in the world.

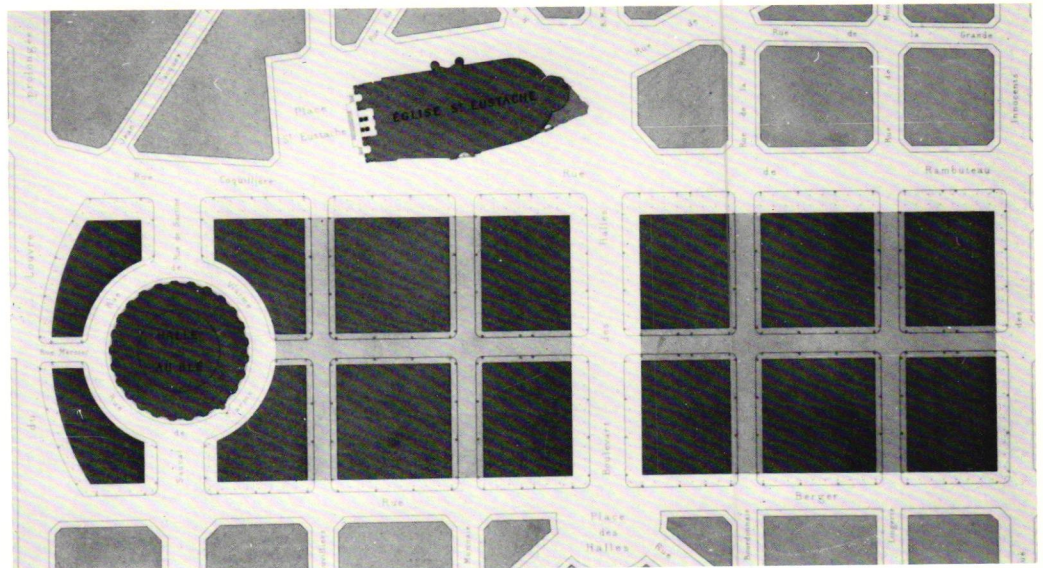


1 V. Baltard and I. Callet, *Les Halles quartier*, Paris, c. 1825

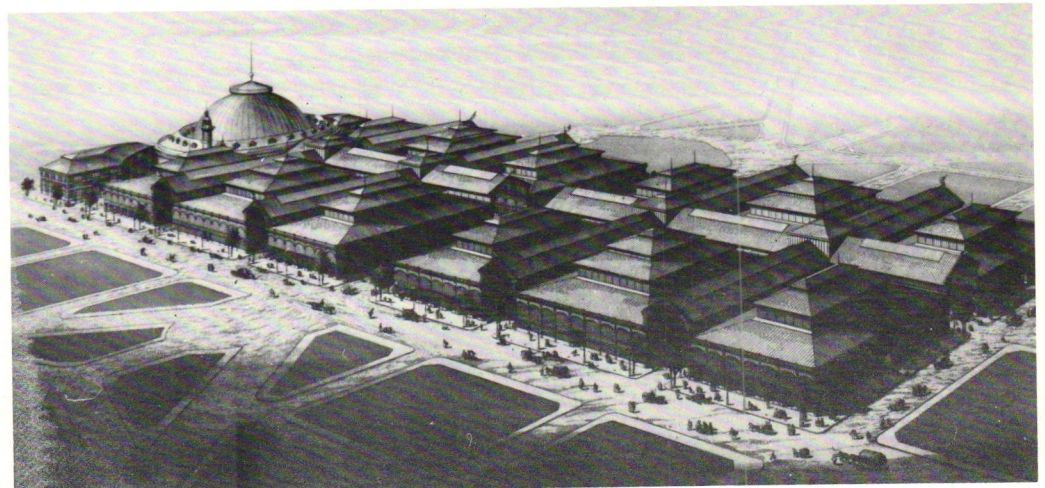
Victor Baltard's rather arid first idea was to build a regular grid street arrangement for eight blocks east of the *Halle au Blé* with broad, open, landscaped street passageways between the large block square market buildings.



2 V. Baltard and I. Callet, *Les Halles Centrales*, Paris, plan of c. 1847



3 V. Baltard and I. Callet, Plan, *Les Halles Centrales*, Paris, 1848-1850



4 V. Baltard and I. Callet, Perspective, *Les Halles Centrales*, Paris, 1848-1850