

# Introduction

PICTURE THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CITY. If the image that comes to mind first is Victorian London, you probably conjure up people struggling with dire poverty in decrepit, filthy tenements. Members of an apparently content but secretly anxious middle class avail themselves of the latest in urban leisure while observing the poor from a safe distance as philanthropists, government officials, and amateur ethnographers. Turn to Paris: once again, dark images of an underclass vie with the vivid flashes of modernity provided by street lights, railway stations, department stores, and museums. Men freely stroll the boulevards, mingling with the crowd and collecting impressions, but women enter the streets only at the risk of being taken for streetwalkers.

Now picture the nineteenth-century home. The very word “home” evokes English prototypes. Perhaps the tenement and the mansion come to mind, emblems of the social extremes produced by unfettered capitalism. More likely to emerge is the ideal home associated with the middle ground of domesticity. An interior first and foremost, this home’s many rooms abound in the furniture, decorations, and material goods that make it a self-contained world. Gathered around the inevitable hearth are women and children. Servants weave in and out, laboring intensively to maintain this domestic universe. Middle-class men enter this home only intermittently, spending most of their time in the competitive marketplace that funds the domestic oasis. This home is hard to situate in the larger spaces of street, city, village, or region, because it is by

definition abstracted from external influences; it is enclosed, built to hold only one family and to stand freely on its own plot of land.

Yet even as you recognize this picture, its limitations and contradictions assert themselves. Servants cross the home's borders and breach its hermetically sealed walls. The sociability that forms a necessary part of women's domestic business makes their total isolation impossible and undesirable. In the heart of the city, clubs provide domestic oases designed exclusively for men. Young middle-class women like "Caroline B." make daily treks across Paris to visit friends and relatives and record their movements in diaries that celebrate their "adventures" in the city's "muddy streets." Caroline's diary even suggests that the single-family house was neither the only nor the most desirable type of residence. Upon arriving at her family's dwelling in Lille, Caroline sighs, "My Lord but this big house is dismal"; on returning to their Parisian flat, however, she exclaims, "Ah! finally, here we are in this delicious apartment!"<sup>1</sup>

What is the story of that "delicious apartment," and how might it change our view of the relationship between city and home, public and private, women and men? Throughout the nineteenth century, the apartment house dominated the Parisian urban landscape, inspired and worried domestic ideologues and urban planners, and provided fiction writers with settings for farces, melodramas, supernatural tales, and realist novels. As a then uniquely urban form of housing that combined the relatively private spaces of individual apartment units with the common spaces of shared entrances, staircases, and party walls, the apartment house embodied the continuity between domestic and urban, private and public spaces. Unlike the isolated single-family house and the barely livable tenement, which opposed the city to the home, apartment buildings linked the city and its residences in real and imagined ways, and nineteenth-century discourses about apartment buildings registered the connections and coincidences between urban and domestic spaces, values, and activities. For their inhabitants and observers, apartment buildings were miniature cities whose multiplication of individual dwellings both magnified domesticity and perturbed its customary boundaries; in Paris, wrote Jacques Raphael, "each apartment house is a small city; each floor, a neighborhood."<sup>2</sup> Like the city, but on a scale more easily grasped, the apartment house provided a unifying frame for heterogeneity, for the simultaneous enactment of several different stories.

*Apartment Stories* presents a history of the city written from the point of view of houses that were not enclosed cells, sealed off from urban

streets, markets, and labor but fluid spaces perceived to be happily or dangerously communicating with more overtly public terrain. The discourses that praised, condemned, or neutrally accepted apartment houses often imagined them as sites for activities we now take to be exclusive to city streets. Apartment houses were vantage points for visual observation and exhibition, nodes of commercial and sexual exchange, and settings for the sensory overload and chance encounters associated with crowds. Attempts to separate the city and the home had to contend with powerful celebrations of the apartment house's capacity to make urban and domestic spaces continuous and often foundered on the impossibility of fully separating the city and the home. By dissolving the boundary between residential and collective spaces, the apartment house produced an urban geography of gender that challenges current preconceptions about where women and men were to be found in the nineteenth-century city, allowing us to see, for example, that the home was often a masculine domain, and that heterosexual imperatives demanded the presence of women in streets as well as homes.

The apartment stories told here supply us with new visions of Paris and London, the nineteenth-century home, and the location of men and women in public and private spaces. We recover the history of Paris from the 1820s through 1840s, when a city of permeable apartment buildings was supervised by female porters who became crucial representatives of urban knowledge and mobility. In Balzac's *Cousin Pons* (1847), we encounter an aged man who creates a secret museum in his apartment and a female porter who successfully schemes to expose her tenant's most private space. Haussmann's Paris comes into focus as a city where modernization and domestication went hand in hand, with planners, architects, and writers all striving to reconfigure urban spaces as enclosed, opaque interiors. In Zola's *Pot-Bouille* (1881) the drive to contain the family within the home faces multiple challenges from adulterous wives, cracking buildings, the noise and smell of neighbors, servants giving voice and giving birth, and authors who raid private life to write realist novels. A new London emerges in this book as well. Although the tradition of "An Englishman's Castle" may have led many a Briton to "boast to the Frenchmen that we do not pile our houses one upon another, to the eighth and ninth story," the simple fact that the Englishman did "not live . . . with a hundred people, and consign the key of his chamber to the hands of a prying porter" did not guarantee "that he enjoy[ed] more privacy or tranquility than the Frenchman."<sup>3</sup>

Rather, Londoners failed to materialize the domestic ideal of single-family houses—a failure encoded in popular stories of middle-class lodgings plagued by ghosts.

*Apartment Stories* concentrates on the middle decades of the nineteenth century, defined then and now as the “age of great cities,” and takes up a pair of cities that have been opposed for centuries, Paris and London, not only in order to study their differences but also to highlight their points of intersection.<sup>4</sup> Paris and London contrast most starkly with respect to the apartment house: against London, a city that expanded enormously throughout the nineteenth century, but whose landowners and builders concentrated on single-family houses, stands Paris, a city that also increased in population and dimensions, but whose housing stock consisted mostly of apartment buildings. Paris, the capital not only of France but, in Walter Benjamin’s formulation, of the nineteenth century, became an international symbol of urban modernity; London, despite its metropolitan status, was measured unfavorably against the idyllic rural images that defined the English nation. Parisians engaged in far more celebrations of their city than Londoners, who focused on how urban “slums” destroyed domestic life and suburbs redeemed it. Even in the scholarship of the past two decades, the major works on domestic ideology in nineteenth-century Europe have focused on England, while the paradigmatic studies of urbanism have converged on Paris.<sup>5</sup>

This book’s comparative approach aims not to invigorate these oppositions but to undo them by bringing to light the domesticity of Parisian urbanism and the urbanism of London’s domesticity. My comparative approach is not symmetrical; because my organizing device is the apartment house—typical of Paris but anomalous in London—the French material outweighs the British. But London does not operate here peripherally, as a foil or frame that by exemplifying the rule of separate spheres proves Paris to have been an exception. Rather, London appears at the center of this book because, in important and unrecognized ways, its residents failed in practice to sustain the domestic isolation they promulgated in theory. London also occupies a central temporal position in my overarching historical narrative because its investment in isolated domestic units played a pivotal role in both England and France, with Londoners reflecting on Paris and Parisians looking back at London. When London builders, residents, and architects commented on their city’s suburban expansion after the 1840s, they explicitly opposed the homes of the British metropolis to Parisian apartment-house life. Few English critics seemed aware that the Parisian model they rejected had

enjoyed its heyday only from the 1820s until the 1848 revolution. When France underwent a conservative backlash that lasted from 1851 through the 1870s, Parisian administrators restructured the city along lines they identified as those adopted by the British capital in the first half of the nineteenth century. Comparison thus reveals that statements contrasting the two cities were part of a larger dialogue connecting them.

Each of the book's three parts offers a new view of the relationship between urban and domestic life in nineteenth-century Paris and London. Part one, "Open Houses," shows discourses promoting urban mobility and legibility at work in Paris from 1820 to 1848, extending the visibility and fluidity of all urban space even to the homes and women who, in an ideology of separate spheres, would have been associated with sequestered private space. Those architectural and urban discourses made the apartment house and the female porter who managed it emblems of the continuity between the street and the home. Part two, "The City and the Domestic Ideal," argues that although the ideology of separate spheres infused almost all representations of Victorian London, and all the houses built there, it did not generate a corresponding set of dwelling practices in the metropolis. In the discourses that deplored those practices for leading to houses whose subdivision, flimsiness, and status as rental property prevented Londoners from realizing the British domestic ideal, the haunted house became the crucial emblem. Part three, "Interiorization and Its Discontents," demonstrates that from 1850 to 1880, Parisians became more receptive to English models for conceiving the entire city as a set of enclosed domestic spaces, built to retain not only women but also men within the home. For those new urban discourses, the apartment house posed the major obstacle to the creation of a private, domesticated city that would securely transmit patriarchal power.

*Apartment Stories* addresses itself to readers interested in feminist criticism and theory; geography; urban studies; architectural history; the novel; and interdisciplinary research on everyday life. Those fields set precedents for taking domestic life and architecture seriously: they place on several disciplinary agendas questions about how gender and class create unequal relationships to city and home, and they treat space, often relegated in philosophical discourse to the status of a passive background, as a fully historical and political dimension.<sup>6</sup> I also find polemical inspiration in landmark books that implicitly posit the city and the home as parallel realms incapable of coinciding. Take, for example, two

of the most important recent studies of Paris and its representations, T. J. Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life* and Christopher Prendergast's *Paris and the Nineteenth Century*. The list of sites they identify as urban includes parks, boulevards, sewers, cafés, monuments, barricades, markets, world's fairs, department stores, restaurants, hotels, transportation, and of course, streets, but the houses that dominated the built environments of Paris do not enter their lists of urban locations.<sup>7</sup>

The absence of residential spaces seems to go without saying in accounts of modernity, which define city life as the public life that takes place in collective spaces of exchange or display and describe home life as private, concealed, and self-enclosed, often taking their cue from Walter Benjamin's notion of the home as a hermetically sealed "interior," isolated from its surroundings.<sup>8</sup> Scholarship on domestic architecture tends inversely to isolate the home from its wider spatial context, focusing almost exclusively on the evolution of room distribution and changing styles of facade decor.<sup>9</sup> More broadly defined studies of the relationships among interior decoration, high art, and social history still depict houses as interiors removed from their urban, suburban, or rural surroundings.<sup>10</sup> And even work that argues for the interdependence of public and private spheres can reinstate a hierarchical opposition in which the public trumps the private. For example, Leora Auslander's *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* explains changes in the private, material spheres of consumption, taste, and household objects by referring to shifts in the public sphere, defined as political regimes, modes of production, institutional structures, and disciplinary forces. Although she notes the potential for resistance within the private sphere, that resistance reacts to and hence depends on the public sphere, which remains temporally, logically, and politically prior and dominant.<sup>11</sup> *Apartment Stories* joins forces with arguments for the relationship between public and private realms but seeks to reconceive public and private not as a temporal sequence of abstract causes and physical effects but as simultaneous and coincident entities, equally capable of taking conceptual or material form.

This book depends on and departs from a prior generation of feminist studies in history, political theory, and literary criticism that took the *gendered* separation of public and private spheres as an explicit topic of research and critique.<sup>12</sup> Feminist scholarship showed how a host of nineteenth-century discourses and practices defined the home as a private, cloistered space, advocated women's restriction to that space, and correspondingly excluded women from the easy commerce with the city's

public spaces that was the privilege of many men. Crucial as that demonstration was, it anchored those divisions too securely and fixed their extent too widely. Although critics like Janet Wolff and Griselda Pollock took a critical distance from the separation of public and private realms, their descriptions of women's exclusion from the spaces of Parisian modernity adhered with surprising absoluteness to an oppositional relationship between the city and the home, between public and private spheres, and between men and women. These feminist critics and others clearly called for an end to gendered splits between public and private in the future, but in so doing they overlooked crossings that already undermined those divisions in the past.

*Apartment Stories* seeks out those crossings and aligns itself in particular with a shift in feminist studies from critiques of the public-private opposition as ideological rather than natural to a critical skepticism about the very hegemony of those oppositions.<sup>13</sup> That skepticism emerges most emphatically in studies of working-class family life and housing that illustrate the impact of state policies on domestic space; point to the fluid relations among dwellings, streets, pubs, and cafés; and highlight the gap between bourgeois prescriptions and the quotidian culture of working-class and poor urbanites.<sup>14</sup> *Apartment Stories* suggests that we question the hegemony of separate spheres ideology not only because it applied to only one class, the bourgeoisie, but because it may not even have applied to that class. Throughout this book, I uncover variations on middle-class prescriptions and gaps within the bourgeoisie itself. I show that the middle class did not always represent the city and the home as separate gendered spheres; that juridical and literary discourses aiming to establish the home as a guarantee of masculine property also registered the many fault lines traversing their version of the home; and finally, that middle-class self-representations often failed to correspond to their spatial practices.

*Apartment Stories* examines how nineteenth-century discourses interpreted spaces as public and private, masculine and feminine but refuses to assume any foregone relationship among the key terms of liberal politics (public/private), gender construction (masculine/feminine), and the organization of space (interior/exterior). By refusing to collapse theoretically autonomous domains, I seek to make visible the relationships that separate-spheres frameworks occlude and to question totalizing claims (which still have scholarly currency) that create oppositions between men and women, public and private realms, and exterior and interior spaces, then conflate the opposing terms of each pair.<sup>15</sup> My point

is not that “the public,” for example, is an invalid concept, but that it is neither intrinsically nor historically aligned in any consistent way with a particular gender or spatial coordinate. Nineteenth-century discourses that welded masculinity to exterior spaces and the public sphere, or femininity to interiors and the private sphere, did so only tenuously and after an arduous process. Many nineteenth-century writers saw no necessary relationship between spatial interiors and privacy and did not even demarcate the home as a category distinct from the street. Contributors to anthologies about Paris in the 1830s and 1840s qualified as urban only those streets or buildings where women were present and available to view. French and English writers insistently demarcated the home as a masculine domain as well as a feminine one and enjoined both men and women to stay at home, though for different reasons.

Identifying the domains of politics, gender, and space as theoretically distinct and the relationships between their categorical terms as historically variable complicates our understanding of past and present initiatives to reform everyday life. Such projects often founder because they attempt to effect political, social, and spatial change by rearranging only one of those domains. The assumption of an interdependence tantamount to equivalence among gender, spatial, and political arrangements leads to the conclusion that radically altering one domain will automatically transform the others. However, precisely because these domains are distinct, the relations that obtain in one do not necessarily translate into the others. Thus, for example, the fluidity between exterior and interior space that governed perceptions and constructions of Paris from the 1820s through the 1840s did not produce a feminist city, because it was not accompanied by any equally successful project to create political equality between men and women.

*Apartment Stories* uses the sources and methods of cultural history and literary criticism to interpret the apartment houses of Paris and the subdivided homes of London. I discuss the effects of architectural styles, urban demography, rental markets, and property laws in shaping apartment houses, but my focus throughout is on the meanings that apartment houses had for their builders, occupants, and regulators. I find those meanings in architectural pattern books, urban encyclopedias, public health surveys, and fictional discourses of everyday life, particularly realist novels and urban ghost stories. The book as a whole also presents the story of those stories, the historical narrative of how the meanings



assigned to the apartment house varied over time, between national cultures, and even within apparently unified times and places.

As a cultural historian, I address writings by architects, doctors, government officials, journalists, and domestic advisors. I sift those texts for telling idiosyncrasies and representative patterns and show how the discourses they comprised were intertwined with economic and state formations and collective cultural fantasies. My focus throughout is on discourses about apartment houses, not on apartment houses themselves, and I assume that those discourses often produced the facts they claimed to describe.<sup>16</sup> I thus treat even architectural floor-plans and elevations as representations elaborated on the basis of institutional affiliations, rhetorical codes, and political objectives. Like many geographers, I view spaces such as the apartment house or the city as both social products and conduits for social production; I do not, however, consider them monolithic agents of social control.<sup>17</sup> Architectural determinism—the belief that spatial environments determine the social arrangements, daily behaviors, and political status of those who inhabit them—is here an object of historical critique, not a methodological assumption.<sup>18</sup> Hence, I provide accounts of the nineteenth-century arguments that attributed moral, psychological, and physical characteristics to environmental influences without replicating their belief in the intentional agency of space.

*Apartment Stories* follows many other critics in identifying the novel as a crucial discourse of everyday life and as a result takes literary criticism and cultural history to be entwined endeavors.<sup>19</sup> I approach literary works as discourses, articulating their institutional ambitions, audiences, and market positions and examining how they worked to define gender, domestic and urban space, and the relations between public and private realms. The conceptual frameworks of my literary interpretations emerge from my historical arguments, since the problems I analyze in the context of literature were equally problems for architectural manuals and works of metropolitan observation. The *portière*, the specter, and the insufficiently sealed interior appeared in works of urban fact and urban fiction alike. At the same time, I have deliberately selected literary texts with an eccentric relation to dominant cultural discourses, and in order to make good my particularizing claims about their divergence from discursive conventions, I use the tools of literary criticism: close reading; detailed attention to how texts engage literary precedents; and analysis of narration, characterization, and the internal structural relations produced by plot.<sup>20</sup> My choice of atypical texts is not an argument

for literature's oppositional nature but rather a heuristic device for conveying the range and complexity of nineteenth-century debates on domesticity and urbanism: Balzac's novel *Le Cousin Pons* decried the fluidity between public and private space that his contemporaries promoted; the authors of urban ghost stories encoded the failure of London's middle-class houses to embody the British domestic ideal; and Zola's *Pot-Bouille* derided the futility of widespread attempts to isolate the home from external disturbances.

While I treat nineteenth-century fiction as one discourse among the many others that sought to demarcate public and private, I also focus on the novel's generic specificity, which I locate in its attention to topography and to plot. By topography I mean the ways that narration itself (and not simply the events narrated) inscribes spatial relations—the ways that narration establishes zones as exterior and interior, mobile and fixed, global and local, publicly open and privately opaque. While an imbrication of spaces now commonly assumed to be distinct (city and home, public and private) characterized the *content* of all the discourses studied here, the novel blended public and private in its *form*, its narration and circulation. The omniscient and often impersonal third-person narration that constituted a hallmark of nineteenth-century British and French realist and naturalist novels was, on the one hand, aligned with the public sphere because such narrators spoke from a generalizing point of view to a general public, and because those narrators' boundlessness and bodilessness paralleled the open structure of public spaces and the immateriality of the public sphere. On the other hand, omniscient narration consistently focused on the delimited, concealed, inaccessible spaces of private subjects and domestic spaces and relayed the stories it uncovered to readers who, while part of a reading public, often consumed novels in private.<sup>21</sup> Because many nineteenth-century discourses emphasized how apartments either created a domestic form of publicness or undermined privacy, the apartment house was an available and apt emblem for novelistic depictions of the paradoxical interplay of public and private that structured their narrative procedures. The readings of literary texts here show that the apartment-house descriptions, plots, and characters generated by realist narratives often mirrored the realist narrator's tendency to simultaneously dissolve and maintain, invade and secure, the privacy of spaces and of persons.

Given the number of literary texts that exploited the homology between the formal paradoxes of realism and those of the apartment

house, I propose expanding previous typologies of realism to include the apartment-house plot. The apartment-house plot bridges the gap between novels identified with spaces of the home (the salon novel, the domestic novel) and with urban sites (the urban bildungsroman, the novel of the street and of the crowd).<sup>22</sup> I refer to the apartment-house *plot* and not the apartment-house novel because that plot was not exclusive to novels but also popular in short stories and plays, and because its characteristic feature was its concatenation of an apartment-house setting with a formulaic series of actions. Exemplified in its most schematic form by the popular plays and novels of Henry Monnier, Paul de Kock, and William Brough, the apartment-house plot took elements from comic and melodramatic modes—particularly random sexual encounters, cases of mistaken identity, and acts of voyeurism, eavesdropping, and spying—and situated them within a single apartment house or in neighboring and facing apartment buildings.<sup>23</sup>

Although highly episodic, apartment-house plots nonetheless followed a strict narrative sequence: the conversion of strangers into kin, either by marriage or the revelation of prior relationships, and the corollary transformation of randomness into structure. Thus, in Paul de Kock's *Les Bains à domicile* (1845), characters who initially seem unrelated and whose occupation of the same apartment building seems equally haphazard discover that they already know each other. The revelation of their prior relationship confers a metaphorical order onto their physical propinquity within the building. In de Kock's *La Demoiselle du cinquième* (1857), sexual liaisons among the tenants transform physical vicinity and social ties from casual distance into purposeful connection. The apartment-house plot thus combines the salon novel's emphasis on domestic interiors and microscopic social networks (think *Le Père Goriot*) with the urban novel's emphasis on chance encounters, the interplay between isolation and community, and the sudden transformation of strangers into kin (think *Oliver Twist*). As a result, the apartment house attached the city to the home as sturdily in literature as it did in architectural and urban discourse.

Although the apartment-house plot appeared most clearly in the now forgotten realisms of Monnier and de Kock, once identified it helps us to redefine what makes more canonical novels "urban." Novels that have been described as urban because they represent panoramas, streets, and crowds now can also be understood as urban because, in variations on the apartment-house plot, they situate the city's flow and multiplicity *inside*

the home. Read with the apartment-house plot in mind, urban fictions such as Balzac's *Illusions perdues* and *Histoire des treize*; Zola's *La Curée* and *L'Assommoir*; and Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Bleak House* emerge as city novels not only because they describe spaces conventionally associated with the city but also because they stage the eruptions of urban characters, actions, and events in the multiple and porous spaces of urban homes.

*Apartment Stories* focuses on fictional texts at odds not only with dominant cultural discourses but also with the conventional apartment-house plot. Balzac's *Cousin Pons* does not convert strangers into kin but makes kin into strangers; Zola's *Pot-Bouille* stages the dissolution of paternal and conjugal identities in the shared space of an apartment building; ghost stories depict one set of occupants driving out another. Because these texts focus on residential settings, they fail to correspond to our generic expectations of urban novels and have never before been proposed as epitomes of urban realism. Indeed, *Le Cousin Pons* and *Pot-Bouille* have received little critical attention relative to other novels by Balzac and Zola; *Pot-Bouille* is currently unavailable in English translation; and the British urban ghost stories I discuss, many of them out of print, are identified as a subgenre for the first time here. Their very lack of familiarity, however, endows these works with a capacity to surprise us and to complicate our received notions in ways that more canonical works by Balzac, Dickens, and Zola would fail to do.

The apparent obscurity of these texts does not prevent them from providing lenses through which to survey the novel in general. For example, the *portière* so central to *Le Cousin Pons* can help us to find other female characters who shuttle between public and private spaces and between immaterial and particularized narration, not only literal *portières* but also such ubiquitous and omniscient characters as Madame Defarge in *A Tale of Two Cities*.<sup>24</sup> Urban ghost stories provide a new framework for understanding why in many British novels, such as *Great Expectations* and *Bleak House*, spectral eruptions accompany domestic disruption. The apparitions who disrupt male proprietorship when they appear in the rented rooms of ghost stories also haunt sensation novels, which frequently align transgressive women, ghosts, and lodging houses; this distinctive motif recurs in Wilkie Collins's *Basil*, *Armadale*, and *No-Name* and in Mary Braddon's *Charlotte's Inheritance* and *The Story of Barbara*. Zola's use of the apartment house to mirror the process of storytelling prefigures recent postmodern experiments such as Georges

Perec's *La Vie mode d'emploi*, which analogizes the chapters of a book to the rooms of an apartment and implicates reader, author, and characters in the construction of novelistic space.

Studies of urban culture continue to draw on Walter Benjamin's seminal essays on nineteenth-century Paris, adopting some of his key terms (shock, the *flâneur*, the prostitute) in ways that secure the separation of the urban and the domestic.<sup>25</sup> But when Walter Benjamin returned from his first visit to Paris in 1913, he described a city "whose houses seem made, not to be lived in, but rather to be stone wings or scenery [*stein-erne Coulissen*] between which one walks. I have become almost more at home . . . on the Grand Boulevard than I am . . . on the streets of Berlin."<sup>26</sup> Benjamin's metaphor seems clear, simple, familiar: the city is a theater, down to its very houses.<sup>27</sup> Yet the sentence generates contradictory spatial images. *Coulissen* can mean the wings of a theater, which in the sentence's ambiguous syntax would make either the houses themselves or the spaces between them into hallways leading to a stage. If the houses are the wings, they become passages to and from the stage that is the street; if the spaces between them are the wings, then the streets become enclosed spaces leading to a domestic theater. In both instances, Benjamin's metaphor reverses expected associations: homes are not sealed, interior spaces but theatrical ones, streets are not open, exterior paths but domestic, enclosed corridors where one feels so "at home."<sup>28</sup> The complications only increase when we note that the word *Coulissen* also refers to stage sets or scenery and to an outward show or front. The houses thus become both backdrops and projections in the urban landscape. Nestled in Benjamin's deceptively offhand remark is a dizzying series of substitutions that blur the usual distinctions between the city and the home.

A slight imbalance, however, offsets Benjamin's evocation of the city as interchangeable with its houses. His qualification that the "houses seem made . . . *not* to be lived in, *but* rather to be stone wings or scenery between which one walks" implies that when they coincide with the city's streets, Parisian houses cease to be habitats. Living in a place seems incompatible with performance and promenade. Benjamin suggests that while the street can be "homelike" and "cozy" and still be a street, homes can only retain their domestic character if they are enclosed, hidden, static. Within the confines of his brief impression, contradictory

views collide: on the one hand, the city and the home resemble one another to the point of being interchangeable; on the other, the home can only be a home in opposition to the city, as its antithesis. This book gives those contradictory views a history—one that begins in the 1820s, in Paris, with the culture of the transparent apartment house that is the subject of the next chapter.