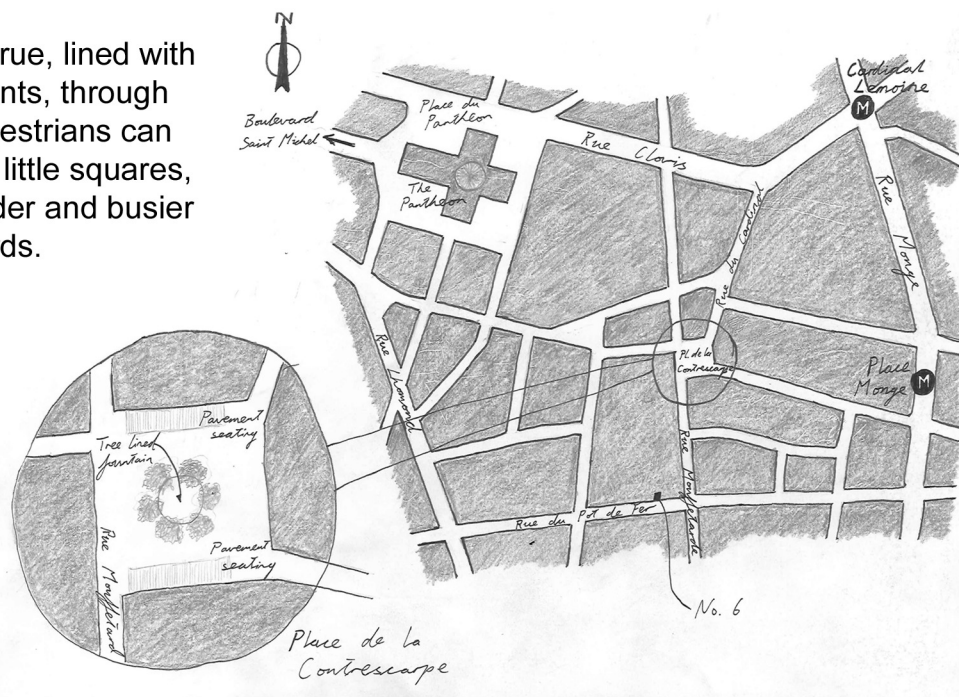


Transition from pedestrianised rue, lined with bistros with seating on pavements, through quiet narrow streets where pedestrians can still walk in roads, and intimate little squares, and then onto roads getting wider and busier as they near the main boulevards.



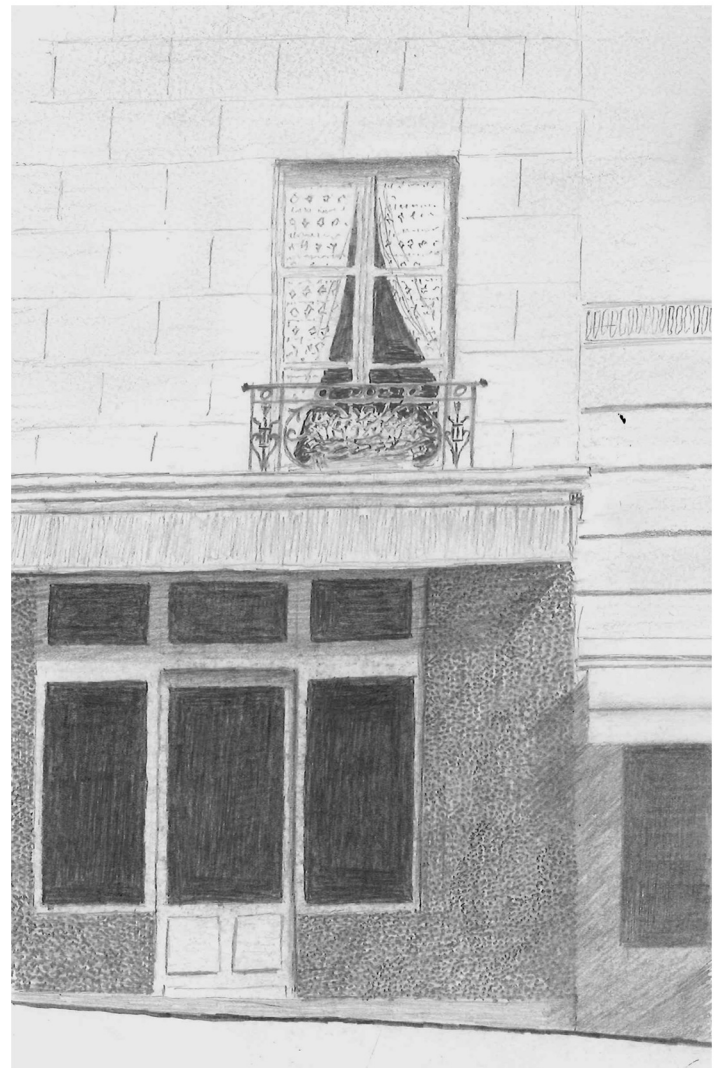
## Invisible Cities

The place in Paris that I have chosen, which I feel evokes the fictional city of Maurilia described in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, is the house where George Orwell stayed whilst he lived in Paris – No 6 Rue du Pot de Fer.

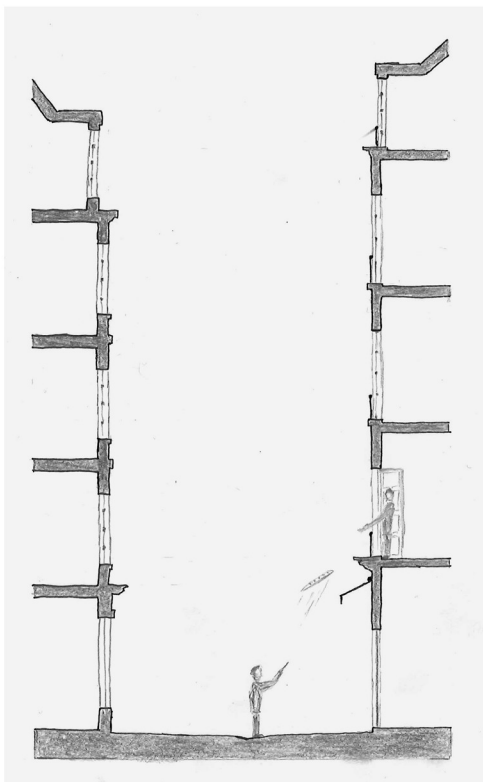
Rue du Pot de Fer is located in the Latin Quarter in Paris, and runs perpendicular to Rue Mouffettarde. It is surrounded by an irregular network of narrow streets, some of which are cobbled. The neighbourhood is popular with tourists as well as students from the nearby University. It is some way away from the main boulevards, and as a result, the area is relatively traffic free. Tourists, locals and students wander in the middle of the streets without fear of being run over by cars, or stop for coffee in peaceful squares like the nearby Place de la Contrescarpe. The Place de la Contrescarpe is an intimate square with a fountain in the centre surrounded by a ring of trees. The square has a bar and a restaurant on the North and South sides respectively, each of which spill out onto the square with pavement seating under awnings. The shops in Rue Mouffettarde cater for tourists, locals and students – for example grocers, bookshops, gift shops and student clothing shops. Rue du Pot de Fer itself is a pedestrianised street which is dominated by restaurants. As one moves away from the area and nearer to the busy boulevards, the streets gradually become wider, with more vehicular traffic pushing pedestrians back onto the pavements.

In *Invisible Cities*, the character of Marco Polo describes his visit to the city of Maurilia, and compares his experience of the city to depictions of the city as it used to be in old postcards. He finds that the postcards show “a certain lost grace”, but at the same time he recognises that if he was actually experiencing the city of old he would not have perceived it as graceful, and that the perception of lost grace is only possible when one looks back with nostalgia at what the city has lost.

The reason that I have chosen the building where George Orwell stayed as the place that I feel evokes Maurilia in Paris, is because Orwell's description of the building and the surrounding neighbourhood in *Down and Out in Paris in London* is like a depiction of the area in an old postcard. Furthermore, although the physical fabric of the area may not have changed much since Orwell's day, the feel of the neighbourhood certainly has.



When George Orwell stayed at No. 6 Rue du Pot de Fer it was a cheap and dirty boarding house. The surrounding area at the time was probably rather squalid, and in Orwell's book it is portrayed as an area inhabited by some of the poorest sections of Parisian society. Ernest Hemmingway also lived in the area, and described the nearby Place de la Contrescarpe as a cesspool. The area today has a very different feel from that described by Orwell. It is full of appealing shops, bars and restaurants catering for a wide range of people. Now that the area has become gentrified, the narrow cobbled streets have an intimate feel that creates a pleasant contrast to the wider and more formal boulevards.



The picture that Orwell paints of the area is certainly not one of “a certain lost grace”. Nevertheless, it is still possible to look back at the area in Orwell's time with nostalgia and romanticism, and to yearn for a less sanitised era, when the area would perhaps be inhabited by Bohemian characters drinking Absinthe and smoking opium.

It is certainly true that anyone looking back with nostalgia to a lost Bohemia can probably only do so from the comfort of what the area has become. If the area remained the squalid cesspool, which would only have been affordable to the penniless writer, it would have no draw for today's tourists. The Rue du Pot de Fer is certainly a different area to that of Orwell's time. To paraphrase Calvino – “[the writers] who live above places have gone off without a word and outsiders have settled in their place”.

The building where Orwell stayed also illustrates how one's perception of a building can change in different circumstances, for example with the knowledge or psychology of the person perceiving. I approached the building with a certain reverence because it is a place where a hero of mine had stayed. However, the reality of the building is that it is in fact rather bland. I have tried to draw the elevation of the building in great detail in order to emphasise this blandness, but nevertheless, the drawing and the building itself have a special meaning to me, because I know that Orwell once stayed there.

“At night, at about ten o'clock, I heard an eager shout from the street. I got up and went to the window. Boris was there, waving his stick and beaming. Before speaking he dragged a bent loaf from his pocket and threw it up to me.” from *Down and Out in Paris and London*