

A STRANGER IN PARIS

A HEAD START

BY DANIEL SCHEFFLER

What Paris does so well, so formidably and provocatively well, is lift the chalice of culture above the skies. Too high for piffling earthlings to climb to, but just far enough for everyone to want to stretch out and tingle in its molest.

Paris concedes with no allowance for disagreement to be the possessor of culture. So if culture is the full spectrum of learnt human behavioural patterns then Paris has given us some of the blueprints.

Paris is a city that likes to go sleep a little late and wake up very late, indicative of the ever controversial 35-hour workweek and long lunches enjoyed not only by the blue collars, but white and gold ones too. Mornings are spent with pastries in the blur of cigarette smoke as one of the only city's in the world where smoking is still the avocation of all. The city inspires smokers to take double time and non-smokers to now also be screaming fumes from their mouths: a perfect way to bestow upon them a lifelong addiction.

The same way that animals have learnt behaviour, Parisians possess something similar. They have it passed along from generations of over finessed Paris mothers and over fed Paris grandfathers (and the rest of the flavoured relatives as perfectly depicted in Julie Delpy's new film "Two Days In New York"). Eating small amounts, being inappropriately sexual, drinking wine in large amounts, swearing as often as possible and always keeping a watchful eye on fashion disasters whilst drinking extra scolded coffee are just some of the markings of a good Parisian; and it keeps them sane.

But nights in the city are no longer shared with Voltaire, Hemingway or Rousseau. They have finally retired their postulations and decided to rest peacefully somewhere away from the dirty streets and extra small café tables. When David Lynch opened "Silencio" last year everything changed, it gave Parisians a new notion of who inspires them. Hollywood sneaked through the high fences and Paris accepted the rupture of a new culture by expressing the ultimate encomium. Hail to a new Paris someone said.

In the same bawl is "Paris Seen By Hollywood" launching this month at the city's Hotel De Ville where photos, clips, sets, décor and costumes will be displayed to show just how ingrained Hollywood has always been in the French capital. From Woody Allen's "Midnight in Paris" to the ever-glamorous "Moulin Rouge", unforgettable "Funny Face" and of course "An American in Paris" the Air France flights from the US have always been chockablock. The free exhibition will be on until mid December.

Paris has always stood in the messiness of monarchies, empires, republics and revolutions. Both equally inspiring the city hosts the snobbiest suburbs on the planet and the trashiest ones too. The bohemians have tried to own their city with underground squats and circuses but the conservatives never let go of their grip on the official Paris representation; thus giving way to a city of dichotomy. Beautiful and ugly in an "Umberto Eco" sense where both are needed for the other to exist.

So where has this muddle of disorder left the city of love? The right bank is no longer in opposition with the left bank; the suburbs and the inner city are now the holders of gloves as they belabour and pulverize the visions of a new greater city. As the throb of Paris romance continues to give the city the highest number of tourists, of any destination, a different perspective of love is imminent. The bolted locks on the bridges, so often seen in magazines this year, represent an almost desperate attempt to hold onto love's embrace. Paris feels differently about love. The same way that Paris residents want the locks to be removed, the city wants to feel free again - free from love. Free to find a new love. •

