“TERROR, THE ORDER OF THE DAY”:

THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY TERROR

AND ITS RESTAGINGS

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"TERROR, THE ORDER OF THE DAY": THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY TERROR AND ITS RESTAGINGS

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This dissertation examines the relationship between terror and democracy in modern French and Francophone history, political theory, culture and literature. It focuses on the Terror and three moments when the Terror resurfaces with explosive force: French Romanticism, the advent of avantgarde theater and anarcho-terrorism in the wake of the Paris Commune and, finally, the Algerian War. Rather than look to the Terror as a founding moment in order to lay bare a monolithic, transhistorical, ontological "truth," my dissertation, following Foucault, ventures to rethink the Terror genealogically, as a singular event whose various restagings do not coalesce but rather open up diverse modalities of thinking democracy and terror. Recasting Marx's observation that we make our own history but under conditions handed down from the past, my research strives to apprehend the multiplicity of the Terror has played in shaping what we say, think and do. On one hand, the Terror poses an obstacle to democracy, an intractable weight it relentlessly struggles to jettison, often at its own peril. On the other hand, the Terror has the potential to explode present conditions, offering modes of resisting the present and means to radically reconfigure it.

The introduction sets out the stakes by challenging the dominant mode of investigating the Terror postwar: the Terror as precursor to totalitarianism. I demonstrate that by conflating the Terror and totalitarianism, this mode of interpretation inscribes the Terror into the very essence of democracy, making it into a pathological potential that must be contained. I further trace how this mode informs Agamben's biopolitical reading of democracy via the camp and address current research on aesthetics and affect that challenge the dominant mode of reading the Terror.

The first chapter analyzes French Romanticism via the epithet "*93 littéraire*," an insult that Victor Hugo would come to embrace and develop, transposing the French Revolution, including the Terror, into poetry and prose such that literature would inherently serve democracy. I argue that Hugo did indeed develop a theory and practice of literature and democracy, one that anticipates the work of Sartre, Macherey, and Rancière. However, in inscribing "literary terror" into literary democracy, I further contend that Hugo serves to challenge and broaden these theories by pointing to the persistence of the politico-theological, not in political theory, but in literature and aesthetics.

The second chapter looks to a restaging of this accusation, "*La Terreur littéraire*," as it was hurled at the stage in performances of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*. I argue that avant-garde theater developed as both a continuation and transformation of anarcho-terrorism and its reinterpretation of the Terror following the Paris Commune. Through original archival work, I demonstrate that the anarchists, especially in the Marx-Bakunin debate, came to understand Jacobinism not as an ideological worldview but as a form of *sensibilité*. To counter this legacy, anarcho-terrorism, I claim, sought to open up new modes of perception by violently transforming material reality. It is through this frame that I then read Jarry's allusions to anarcho-terrorist attacks in his theory and practice of theater. I argue that Jarry and the anarchists suggest a properly anarchic aesthetic education that would not lead to an Aesthetic State as in Schiller's response to the Terror.

The third chapter analyzes terrorism and its representations in the theory and practice of emancipatory violence during the Algerian War. I examine Zohra Drif's apology for terrorism, in which she rejects André Malraux and Albert Camus' literary constructions of the terrorist as a twentieth-century Saint-Just, in order to reframe how we read Hegel and the Terror in the context of colonial struggle. I argue that Drif and Fanon challenge the binary that pits ideas against lived experience; rather violence is an "absolute praxis" that may open up to new experiences and ideas.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

After completing a Bachelor of Arts at the University of California, San Diego with highest honors and a Master's in French Literature at the Universities of Paris 7 and 8 with a "*mention très bien*," Cory Browning began his Ph.D. at Cornell University in 2006. In Fall 2014, he took on a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of French at the University of Oregon.

During his time at Cornell and in Paris doing research, he has presented his research at several national and international conferences. He won the Naomi Schor Award for Best Graduate Student Paper at the Nineteenth-Century French Studies Colloquium in 2013. In addition to presenting at this colloquium several times, he has also given papers at the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries French Studies Conference, the UK-based Society of *Dix-neuviémistes*, American Comparative Literature Association, and in various venues at Cornell University.

As a teacher with twelve years experience, he has conducted courses in a variety of disciplines and at diverse institutions (Cornell, Sciences-Po – Paris, Université de Paris 8, a *lycée* in Paris, and as an English language instructor for businesses in Paris while completing his Master's). At Cornell, he won first prize for Outstanding Performance as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in 2009.

In addition to research and teaching, he has also served on the board of *diacritics*, translated articles for *diacritics* and for a forthcoming collected volume, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism*, edited by Claudia Verhoeven and Carola Dietze. His English translation of Laurent Dubreuil's *Le refus de la politique* will be published by University of Edinburgh Press in early 2016. He was elected as Graduate Student Representative in the Romance Studies Department at Cornell for the academic year 2011-2012. He also served as President for the Cornell Romance Studies Graduate Conference in 2007-2008 on "The Literary Animal."

His dissertation was directed by Laurent Dubreuil (serving as chair), Jonathan Culler, and Mitchell Greenberg.

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In addition to my committee members, many others have contributed to this dissertation and to my *formation* as a researcher, teacher, community member, and individual. In the early phases of the dissertation, Richard Klein and Dominick LaCapra played instrumental and formative roles; I wish them the best in retirement. Bruno Bosteels' Mellon Seminar on "Theories of the Subject" brought greater theoretical dexterity to the project and focused its stakes in relation to current theoretical debates. Diane Brown, Managing Editor of *diacritics*, served as a sort of fourth member to my committee; I took advantage of her door always being open on many occasions. Informal discussions with Laurent Ferri in and around Olin Library offered a breath of fresh air and always managed to open up new perspectives with invigorating curiosity. Jason Frank's course on democratic theory helped bring the project into fruition my first year at Cornell.

I have also benefitted greatly from generous institutional support from Cornell University and its commitment to interdisciplinary studies and independent, critical thought. As Director of Graduate Studies, Tracy McNulty helped teach me the intricacies of departmental decision-making and the challenges of building community. Rebecca Davidson, our Graduate Field Assistant, brought a human face to the institution and helped foster community among graduate students.

On a more personal note, I also want to thank Selin Yilmaz for her support, tenacity, liveliness, and sense of adventure. Joshua Jordan has been a close friend and an intellectual ally over the years. Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not also thank Cecily Swanson, from whom I learned much, and my parents, who gave me support and unrelenting freedom.

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Introduction

> "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past"
>
> Karl Marx,
> "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte"[1]

> "History is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time [*Jetztzeit*]. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with now-time, a past which he blasted out of the continuum of history."
>
> Walter Benjamin,
> "On the Concept of History"[2]

On September 5, 1793 the Convention, the legislative assembly governing revolutionary France, declared terror the order of the day. Controversy still persists today in defining and even dating the Terror; many of the same pressing questions and concerns that at the time vexed the revolutionaries and those involved in it, spectators included, still resonate and animate, directly or indirectly, contemporary debate. Recent studies by Jean-Clément Martin and Dan Edelstein both question whether the term "The Terror" accurately captures the complexity of events, laws, projects, speeches, committees, motivations, demands, philosophy and psychology that make up

[1] Marx, Karl. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." The Marx-Engels Reader. 2nd edition. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1978. 594-617. 595.
[2] Benjamin, Walter. "On the Concept of History." *Selected Writings*. Ed. Michael W. Jennings et al. Trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap of Harvard U P, 2003. v.1. 389- 400. 395.

what we commonly refer to as "the Terror." Even before the declaration of Terror as order of the day, indeed before the most violent events of the Revolution, Edmund Burke was already in 1791 decrying its violent excess while simultaneously relishing in the gothic gore of the *noir* spectacle it offered up. The revolutionaries, simultaneously "men of theory" and a "band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with blood," had, in Burke's grandiose claims, put a "barbarous philosophy" into action, which striped humanity to bare abstractions leaving only "the defects of our naked, shivering nature."[3] Likewise, although with less schadenfreude, Immanuel Kant condemned the Revolution, but more for its hefty "price" than for its goals. In further contrast to Burke, he lauds it nonetheless because, he reasons, it "finds in the heart of all spectators (who are not in this game themselves) a wishful *participation* that borders closely on enthusiasm," which in turn bears testament to "a moral disposition in the human race."[4] Despite their physical and intellectual distance from the Terror, both Burke and Kant position themselves as spectators who, in one way or another, participate in the very action they condemn, action that spurs and shapes both their thought and action.

This question of participation has lost little of its controversial force in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. To take one example from popular culture, the video game *Assassin's Creed: Unity,* developed by the French company Ubisoft and released in late 2014, earned the ire of historians, intellectuals, and politicians on the left for its portrayal of the Revolution, particularly the Terror and the figure of Robespierre. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, 2012 presidential candidate for the *Front de gauche*, accused the game of "dénigrément de la grand Révolution."[5]

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[3] Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien. New York: Penguin, 2004. 128, 168, 171.
[4] Kant, Immanuel. *The Conflict of the Faculties.* Trans. Mary J. Gregor and Robert Anchor. *Religion and Rational Theology*. Ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2001. 302, author's emphasis.
[5] Audureau, William. "Jean-Luc Mélenchon et 'Assassin's Creed Unity': 'deux formes différentes de la mémoire' de

Jean-Clément Martin, who served as consultant in developing the game, defended it, claiming that it created a "fantasy" meant as a source of "play" distinct from historical reality.[6] Although Friedrich Schiller, who developed his notion of "aesthetic education" and "play drive" in direct response to the Terror, may well have objected to this flippant use of "play," such theoretical niceties have left the popularity of this multi-billion dollar, global franchise untrammeled. In a more academic setting, historian Sophie Wahnich frames her interpretation of the Terror and its relation to the current War on Terror in terms of participation. She recounts how her dissertation director, Michel Vovelle, would invite students to commemorate the beheading of Louis XVI on 21 January in a tradition established by the Convention: *manger la tête de veau.*[7] Students reeled at such lack of decorum and respect for the dead even if they generally supported the Revolution. For Wahnich, this anecdote illustrates a pervasive and unexamined "*dégoût*" for the Terror, one, we might add, that might mark these students less as children of the Revolution and more as children of Victor Hugo's Romantic, literary presentation of the Revolution. In opposition, Wahnich's historico-cultural projects, including co-authoring an opera, strive to overturn this distaste, not to have us *manger la tête de veau avec délices* as it were, but, rather, to critically question our emotional, affective, aesthetic responses to it. Slavoj Žižek also frames his return to Robespierre in the twenty-first century in terms of "taste." Although from a much more post-Marxist perspective, he too goads us to challenge the truism that "the Jacobin dictatorship is fundamentally 'not to our taste' (the term 'taste' should be given all its historical weight, as the name for a basic ideological disposition)."[8] All three of these examples illustrate both the

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la Révolutoin." *Le Monde*. 11 Nov. 2014.
[6] Bilefsky, Dan. "Assassin's Creed Meets the French Revolution, and the Left Rebels Again." *New York Times*. 20 Nov. 2014.
[7] Wahnich, Sophie. *La Liberté ou la mort: Essai sur la Terreur et le terrorisme*. Paris: La fabrique, 2003.
[8] Žižek, Slavoj. "Robespierre, or, the Divine Violence of Terror." *Robespierre: Virtue and Terror*. New York:

persistence of the aesthetic, ideological "play" of the Terror in the twenty-first century and its influence in multiple domains: presidential debate, entertainment, education, culinary tradition, and cultural-political memory.

This dissertation poses questions of the relationship between aesthetics – particularly literature – and politics – notably democracy – in the declaration of Terror as order of the day, but where the order of the day does not just refer to September 5, 1793. It examines three moments when the Terror resurfaces with explosive force: French Romanticism, the advent of avant-garde theater and anarcho-terrorism in the wake of the Paris Commune and, finally, the Algerian War. Rather than look to the Terror as a founding moment in order to lay bare a monolithic, transhistorical, ontological "truth," this dissertation, following Foucault, ventures to rethink the Terror genealogically, as a singular event whose various restagings do not coalesce but rather open up diverse modalities of thinking democracy and terror. Recasting Marx's observation that we make our own history but under conditions handed down from the past, it strives to apprehend the multiplicity of the highly conflicted roles the Terror has played in shaping what we say, think, and do. On one hand, the Terror poses an obstacle to democracy, an intractable weight it relentlessly struggles to jettison, often at its own peril. On the other hand, the Terror has the potential to explode present conditions, offering modes of resisting the present and means to radically reconfigure, even explode it.

My objects of study and methodology develop out of a dissatisfaction with the current mode of reading the Terror and how it has shaped the way we think and enact democracy. If François Furet's assertion that "Aujourd'hui, le Goulag conduit à repenser la Terreur, en vertu d'une identité dans le project" cast the still dominant frame of analysis, I argue that this mode

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Verso, 2007. viii.

inscribes the Terror into the very nature of democracy, making it into a pathological potential inherent in it. Consequently, it stipulates that we must curb democracy if we are to avoid the double perils of the biopolitical camp. My dissertation challenges these conclusions in excavating three moments that restage the Terror, it opens up alternative modalities of thinking democracy and terror. Rather than look to the Terror as founding moment in the monolithic narrative of democracy, my contribution is to present a genealogy that mobilizes the Terror's disparate restagings across disciplines and literary genres in order to apprehend the diverse ways that it both weighs on the present and offers up alternatives to reconfigure it.

Ontologizing the Terror

When Robespierre justified the Terror in a speech "Sur les principes de morale politique" on February 5, 1794, he brought democracy and terror together in a lasting union. One time proponents and supporters of the Terror, most notably Danton and Camilles Desmoulins in *Le Vieux Cordelier*, had begun to very publicly question its efficacy and its philosophical underpinnings. Desmoulins feared that the Terror, although initially an integral part of the triumph of revolutionary democracy, had run its course and that it was now being used in a Machiavellian power grab. The Terror, Desmoulins deftly suggests, now stood at odds with democracy, taking on the very abuses of power it had initially sought to eradicate. He insinuates that dismantling the various apparatuses of the Terror would in fact serve democracy and allow it to triumph whereas the Terror, such as it was at the moment, had come to serve as an obstacle to liberty and equality. Robespierre's response is both tactical and theoretical. He bases his

justification of the Terror on the principle that terror "est moins un principe particulier qu'une conséquence du principe générale de la démocratie appliqué aux plus pressants besoins de la patrie."[9] Playing with the distinction between particular or individual and general in a way reminiscent of Rousseau's *Du contrat social*, Robespierre insists that Terror partakes of democracy. In fact, according to Robespierre, in the very principle of democracy – government of the people, by the people, for the people – there is terror.

Robespierre here crystallizes an argument that has taken on many forms both during and after the Revolution, finally seeming to form a doxa by which we have understood and continue to understand the very nature of democracy. It is this very question that has animated debates about the relationship between the Enlightenment and the Revolution. Was the Terror the culmination of the Enlightenment, lying dormant at the very center of the Enlightenment project? Or, rather, did the Terror result from a perversion of Enlightenment ideals, the famous *dérapage* or skidding off course of the Revolution ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*? These questions haunted the bicentenary of the Revolution in 1989, which took up with great fanfare the beginnings of the Revolution and left 1793 in utter silence. The French government to this day has had a difficult time coming to terms with the Terror and the historical figures who carried it out. A metro station outside of Paris now bears Robespierre's name; the dilapidated, lackluster intersection tellingly demonstrates his place among the Revolutionary *lieux de mémoire*.

Nowhere has this tendency to ontologize the Terror into the very essence of democracy been more influential and more thoroughly, repeatedly articulated than in the work of François Furet. To any historian, intellectual, novelist, film director, video game developer, etc. who might still believe that the Revolutionary tradition lives on in the shaping of conditions of the

[9] Robespierre, Maximilien. "Sur les principes de morale politique." *Pour le bonheur et pour la liberté*. Ed. Yannick Bosc et al. Paris: La fabrique, 2000. 296-297

present, Furet famously offered his pithy retort, "La Révolution française est terminée."[10] No longer part of the living present, the Revolution now lay in ruins or artifacts to be dispassionately and scientifically dissected by the professional historian. Furet no doubt was caught in a performative contradiction as the polemical nature of his declaration sought not so much to declare that the entire Revolutionary tradition had passed, but rather that the Marxist reading of it no longer had any hold on the present.[11] Thus, Furet still insisted that we had to read the completed or terminated Revolution in light of contemporary history and historical events: "Aujourd'hui, le Goulag conduit à repenser la Terreur, en vertu d'une identité dans le project"(Furet, 29). Furet's project to rethink the Terror self-consciously positions itself within a particular historical context. Despite Furet's staunch opposition, it is history with a finely tuned political and ideological edge. The overall effect is to inscribe the Terror in *la longue durée* that marked it as the origin of twentieth-century totalitarianism.

Furet was certainly not alone in rethinking the Terror and the French Revolution as major events that shaped twentieth century atrocities, not only the Gulag but the camp generally – whether Soviet, Nazi, US internment camps, or other. Hannah Arendt, for her part, linked the Terror to totalitarianism, to the problem of stateless persons and, ultimately, to the birth of biopolitics and "naked life."[12] Drawing from the same passage in Burke cited above, she thus comes to the broad conclusion, "The survivors of the extermination camps, the inmates of concentration and internment camps, and even the comparatively happy stateless people could see without Burke's arguments that the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human was their

[10] Furet, François. *Penser la révolution*. Pars: Gallimard, folio, 1985. 29
[11] Perhaps nowhere more extensively than in: Kaplan, Steven Laurence. *Farewell, Revolution: The Historian's Feud, France 1789/1989*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell U P, 1995.
[12] Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Inc. 1973. She develops a similar argument, at greater length, in *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

greatest danger"(*ibid.,* 300). She links terror to ideology and makes "[t]otal terror, the essence of totalitarian government"(*ibid*., 466). In one of the more philosophically and theoretically sophisticated arguments to make this connection, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy draw on the Terror in articulating what they term "The Nazi Myth."[13] Building off of Arendt's argument on ideology and terror, they sketch out what they term the "Total State," an attempt by which the state, taking the form of subjectivity, strives to present itself to itself. With more subtlety and with more numerous examples, they point out that "the logic of the idea or of the subject, fulfilling itself in this way, is, as Hegel's analysis of the French Revolution permits us to see, first of all the Terror (which in itself, however, is neither properly fascist, nor totalitarian), and then, in its most recent development, fascism"(294). The Terror, following Hegel's reading of it, thus becomes the historical event that plays out a dialectical truth concerning the nature of subjectivity. In all three of these examples, the Terror demonstrates an ontological problem inherent to democracy.

As recent scholars have shown, Furet's reading of the Terror draws from a theoretically influential definition of democracy articulated, most notably, by Claude Lefort. Michael Scott Christofferson thus argues that to fully understand Furet's tactical position on rethinking the Revolution, we have to situate him within a generation of French thinkers who sought to dismantle the perceived ideological domination of Marxism at the same time that they crafted new intellectual weapons to fight totalitarianism. This may seem trivial today, but as many commentators have more recently pointed out the Anglo-American reception of Furet often failed to take this context into account, missing the subtle allusions and references to other thinkers such as Lefort. According to Christofferson, this generation of thinkers thus "concluded

[13] Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe and Jean-Luc Nancy. "The Nazi Myth." Trans. Brian Holmes. *Critical Inquiry* 16.2 (Winter, 1990): 291-312.

that the urgent task of creating a new political culture entailed breaking with the French Jacobin and revolutionary heritage, which they believed was fatally affiliated with totalitarianism."[14] Any irony in their attempt to create a new culture by breaking radically with a tainted past seems to have been lost on them. Building off Christofferson's research, Samuel Moyn brings to the fore what remained latent in his work: how Claude Lefort helped shape Furet's understanding of democracy in rethinking the Terror. Moyn, more attuned to the theoretical underpinnings of Furet's rethinking of the Revolution, does not mince words: "it was Claude Lefort's philosophy that provided Furet with the critical intellectual tools to round out his classic book."[15]

In "La question de la démocratie," Lefort, in the very gesture that Furet reiterates, calls for a revival of political philosophy that would strive to rethink democracy in light of totalitarianism. Taking on this task, he influentially defines democracy not as a set of institutions or particular mechanisms for distributing and regulating power in a society. Rather, democracy, he claims, is a "une forme de société,"[16] specifically it is a certain symbolic order that gives shape to society, its institutions, mechanisms, individuals, etc. The defining trait of this symbolic order is that in democracy "[l]e lieu de pouvoir devient *un lieu vide*"(*ibid.,* 28). Democracy recognizes that power resides in and emanates from the people. However, the perennial challenge for democracy is the representation of the people. For Lefort, the people can neither be represented nor take on corporeal form, rather they come together and form a society around the very empty place of their own representation. This implies, Lefort continues, "une institutionnalisation du conflit"(*ibid.*). Democracy then is the form of society in which the

[14] Christofferson, Michael Scott. "An Antitotalitarian History of the French Revolution: François Furet's *Penser la Révolution française* in the Intellectual Politics of the Late 1970s." *French Historical Studies* 22 (1999): 557–611. 569.
[15] Moyn, Samuel. "On the Intellectual Origins of François Furet's Masterpiece." *The Tocqueville Review*. v 29.2 (2008): 59-78. 60.
[16] Lefort, Claude. "La question de la démocratie." *Essais sur le politique: XIXe et XXe siècles*. Paris: Seuil, Points, 1986. 17-32. 23.

symbolic place of power must necessarily remain empty, it creates institutions to ensure that that place remains empty and to give shape to the various conflicts that try to represent the irrepresentable. This abstract definition can only be fully understood, "devient pleinement sensible," Lefort states if we look to the founding moment of modern democracy: the French Revolution. And, thus, the Revolution comes to serve, for Lefort, Furet, and many others as the historical stage on which the theoretical intricacies of democracy play themselves out.

The major event in this staging, according to this reading, is the beheading of the king, which brings about the "mutation d'ordre symbolique" by which Lefort defines democracy. In the absolute monarchy of the Ancien Régime, "le pouvoir était incorporé dans la personne du prince"(*ibid.,* 27). It is in guillotining what Ernst Kantorowicz has called *The Kings Two Bodies* that the place of power in democracy "devient *un lieu vide*." Though secular, democracy necessarily maintains "une permanence du théologico-politique"[17] even if only in the negative imprint that remains from the symbolic and literal decapitation of absolute monarchy. Although Lefort does not touch here on the Terror, we can already begin to see the sketches of an interpretation of the Terror, one that would link it to totalitarianism and the camp. Robespierre comes to incarnate the people just as in totalitarian societies the people take on bodily form, they become literal representations that strive – murderously if need be – to fill the empty place of power. Terror, like totalitarianism, results then from the unchecked tendencies of the defining dynamic of democracy. Terror, in short, is part of the very ontology of democracy. This is precisely how Furet reads the Terror and its relation to the totalitarian camp. He thus characterizes the sovereignty of the people as "ce lieu qui n'est nulle part"(*op. cit.* 74). With strong echoes of Lefort, he claims, "Le 'peuple' n'est pas une donnée, ou un concept, qui ne

[17] Lefort, Claude. "Permanence du théologio-politique?" *Essais sur le politique: XIXe et XXe siècles*. Paris: Seuil, Points, 1986. 275-329.

renvoie à la société empirique. C'est la légitimité de la Révolution, et comme sa définition même: tout pouvoir, toute politique tourne désormais autour de ce principe constituant et pourtant impossible à incarner"(*ibid.,* 76).

Furet's students have carried forth the Furet-Lefort reading of the Revolution with some major shifts. Patrice Gueniffey in *La Politique de la Terreur: Essai sur la violence révolutionnaire 1789-1794* denies that ideology played any role at all in the Terror. Rather, according to this student of Furet, it "est le produit de la dynamique révolutionnaire et peut-être, de toute dynamique révolutionnaire."[18] Rather than a historically situated set of circumstances, he thus analyzes the Terror as a transhistorical, theoretical event that may be explained according to the dynamic inherent in democracy itself. In analyzing Robespierre as incarnation of the power of the people, he can thus declare, "C'est même la règle fondamentale de la démocratie que la souveraineté ne peut s'y incarner"(*ibid.,* 330). The Terror, in the figure of Robespierre, violates this fundamental rule thereby leading it inexorable toward its bloody excesses. And perhaps most explicitly, in his entry on Robespierre for *La Dictionnaire Critique de la Révolution Française*, which draws directly on Lefort, Gueniffey concludes with a telling theatrical metaphor: "Tandis que ces adversaires regardent vers le haut, mais vers *un lieu vide*, lui [Robespierre] se tourne vers le bas, vers le peuple qui occupe toute la scène."[19]

Another of Furet's students, Pierre Rosanvallon, both continues and alters Furet's interpretation and its Lefortian underpinnings. If Furet progressively embraced Anglo-American liberalism as the alternative to the totalitarian legacy of the French Revolution, Rosanvallon, in contrast, recognizes inherent dangers in Anglo-American liberalism that may tend toward

[18] Gueniffey, Patrice. *La politique de la Terreur: Essai sur la violence révolutionnaire*. Paris: Gallimard, tel, 2000. 14.
[19] Gueniffey, Patrice. "Robespierre." *Dictionnaire Critique de la Révolution Française*. Ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf. Paris: Flammarion, 1988. 318-333. 321, emphasis added.

violence not dissimilar from the Terror. In Rosanvallon, the Terror is once again interpreted as an ontological problem inherent to "the people." He can pithily push this line of thought thus: "On pourrait presque parler à ce propos des *deux corps du peuple*: comme peuple-nation, il est, malgré son abstraction, un corps plein et dense vivant du principe d'unité qu'il exprime; comme peuple-société, il est au contraire sans formes, corps fuyant et improbable."[20] Rosanvallon identifies this as the constitutive aporia of the people, an aporia at work in the Terror, totalitarianism, as well as liberal democratic societies like the United States and England.

Although in a much different vein, we find a similar tendency to ontologize the Terror among certain constructions of biopolitics. Thus, despite the substantial separation between Rosanvallon and Giorgio Agamben, both build arguments on the people's two bodies. Whereas Rosanvallon hesitates to fully develop this notion (we could "presque parler à ce propos des deux corps du peuple"), Agamben makes it the cornerstone of his philosophical project: the distinction between *bios* and zōē; bare, naked life on the one hand and political, collective life on the other; *populace* and *peuple*. In "What is a People?" he draws specifically on Hannah Arendt's reading of the French Revolution and her own use of "naked" life taken from Burke (quoted above) to establish this fundamental distinction, "*The concept of people always already contains within itself the fundamental biopolitical fracture. It is what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a part as well as what cannot belong to the whole in which it is always already included.*"[21] It is the French Revolution that introduces the biopolitical fracture that animates not only totalitarianism but also twenty-first century global, democratic capitalism. Agamben will expand and develop this thesis more fully in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* where it will

[20] Rosanvallon, Pierre. *Le peuple introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France*. Paris: Gallimard, nrf, 1998. 31, emphasis added.
[21] Agamben, Giorgio. "What is a People?" *Means without End: Notes on Politics*. Trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino. Minneapolis: Minnesota U P, 2000. 29-36. 31, author's italics.

fall to the French Revolution, particularly Robespierre and the Jacobins, to articulate and put into action both the "paradox of sovereignty" and the difference between "sovereign body and sacred body."[22]

As alternatives to these tendencies to ontologize the Terror, Dan Edelstein[23] and Sophie Wahnich have both recently begun to rethink the Terror in fundamentally novel ways. Both respond to Agamben directly and argue against his reading of the Terror. Edelstein's overarching thesis can be read as the overturning of Agamben's use of the Terror. Edelstein argues that the Terror does not emerge as a state of exception. More dangerous, it, like the current War on Terror, establishes a parallel legal system that threatens to erode civil liberty through a fastidious legality.[24] By drawing on the role of fiction and myth in the construction of a political imaginary, Edelstein brings in the aesthetic dimensions of the Terror more than have most canonical readings. This is what links his project to that of Sophie Wahnich. Wahnich focuses on affect or emotion, the current "*dégoût*" for the Terror, in order to attack any attempt to inscribe totalitarianism, and thus the Terror, into democracy. Against Agamben and Arendt, she defends the Terror and, drawing on both Kant's "moral disposition" cited above and Jacques Rancière's notion of a *partage du sensible*, attempts to develop an alternative aesthetic affective reception of the Terror, one that could then serve to denounce the current War on Terror. The Terror in this sense would not constitute a historical event that inaugurates a fracture that we in the twentieth-first century then need to overcome. On the contrary, the Terror offers up a participatory spectacle that may be leveraged to change the present. It is in line with Edelstein and Wahnich's

[22] Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, Stanford U P, 1998.
[23] Edelstein, Dan. *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution*. Chicago: Chicago U P, 2009.
[24] See my review: Browning, Cory. "Review." *L'Esprit Créateur.* vol. 50. no. 3 (2010): 144-145.

reading of the Terror as well as their attention to the aesthetic and the affective that I am proposing a rethinking, via restagings, of the Terror.

Rethinking, Restaging the Terror

All these attempts to inscribe the Terror into the very ontology of democracy are strongly marked by their historical context, a context in which the pressing theoretical and practical questions rise out of the threat of totalitarianism. Although certain pundits and policy experts have gone to great lengths to map out contemporary problems of terrorism and its relation to democracy in the shapes and even terms of this largely Cold War relic, times have changed. Paul Berman, drawing extensively on Albert Camus' *L'homme révolté* and touching on Victor Hugo's verse practice, will analyze the relation between *Terror and Liberalism* to come to the conclusion that what threatens liberal democracies in the twenty-first century is "Muslim totalitarianism."[25] This work will earn him a MacArthur "Genius" Grant as well as the dubious honor of being named by Tony Judt one of "Bush's Useful Idiots."[26] In the chapters that follow, I argue against this tendency to ontologize the Terror. Rather than one monolithic narrative of the Terror, the chapters demonstrate multiple restagings of it. By inscribing the Terror into democracy, these historians, political philosophers, theorists, and thinkers give tacit support to

[25] Berman, Paul. Terrorism and Liberalism. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003.
[26] Judt, Tony. "Bush's Useful Idiots." London Review of Books, vol. 28, no. 18, Sept. 21, 2006. 3-5.

the idea of democracy as a fragile construction that, in order to preserve it, we must curb certain of its tendencies. Security apparatuses thus necessarily serve to preserve democracy against itself. As Foucault trenchantly puts it: *Il faut défendre la société*. Furthermore, these restaging also serve to contribute to Foucault's call to cut off the king's head in political theory, that is, to move away from the centralizing question of sovereignty in the practice and theorization of politics.[27] The notion of restaging itself challenges any privileging of origin, original event, or founding moment.

By calling them restagings, I want to draw attention to how each moment recasts the *problématique* of the Terror, reanimating it according to the questions, events and debates of the time. Rather than arrive a single truth on the nature of democracy and its relations to literature, aesthetics, and the Terror, each restaging rearticulates and reanimates common problems and questions. One of these common questions concerns the relation between politics and aesthetics, particularly literature. It takes inspiration from Jacques Rancière's work to rethink aesthetics and politics. I thus borrow from him the notion of stage, where the construction of the locus of thought partakes of the very act of thinking. Thought itself might best be captured as a staging of competing ideas, words, affects, senses. "Restagings" thus further capture the dynamism and mobility of what remains always in movement.

The methodology further takes heed of one of the persistent critiques of Rancière's work. This is articulated by Laurent Dubreuil and Bruno Bosteels among others. For Dubreuil, Rancière's "politique insurrectionnelle" remains utterly dependant on the police order against which revolts. This politics of insurrection, ahistorical and structurally determined by the police

[27] Foucault, Michel. "Truth and Power." *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordin et al. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. 109-133.

order, Dubreuil concludes, "ne saurait liquider la police pour de bon, sous peine de se perdre."[28] Similarly, Bosteels points to an asymmetrical treatment of art and politics in Rancière's articulation of aesthetics and politics. He argues that although both art and politics are "improper" in Rancière's terminology, having no essence proper to them, not all impropers are equal. Art seems to be more improper than politics; in other words, politics although "improper" does, according to Bosteel's reading of Rancière, seem to have an ahistorical essence whereas art does not. Thus, Bosteels claims, "it seems perfectly possible to define what is specific to politics – a specificity that certainly marks a 'proper' that, even if it is constitutively 'improper' (whence the commonly assumed homology with art, most notably under the aesthetic regime)."[29] Rancière responds to the critique, acknowledging the asymmetry, but he strongly denies that it results from "ontological determinations" latent in his work.[30] I however agree with Dubreuil and Bosteels' readings of Rancière and do find tendencies toward insufficient attention to different historical forms of politics that would not be determined by the police order. My aim is that in casting each of the historical events analyzed in this dissertation as restagings, we may gain greater leverage into how each event constructs its own historical forms of doing both politics and art.

The first chapter analyzes French Romanticism via the epithet "93 littéraire," an insult that Victor Hugo would come to embrace and develop, transposing the French Revolution, including the Terror, into poetry and prose such that literature would inherently serve democracy. I argue that Hugo did indeed develop a theory and practice of literature and

[28] Laurent, Dubreuil. "L'insurrection." *Labyrinthe*. "Jacques Rancière, indiscipliné." 17 (Winter 2004): 25. This same argument is rearticulated and expanded in his *Le Refus de la politique*. Paris: Hermann, 2012. Especially, 24-25.
[29] Bosteels, Bruno. *The Actuality of Communism*. New York: Verso, 2011. 136.
[30] Rancière, Jacques. "Afterward." *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics.* Ed. Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts. Durham: Duke U P, 2009. 287.

democracy, one that anticipates the work of Sartre, Macherey, and Rancière. However, in inscribing "literary terror" into literary democracy, I further contend that Hugo serves to challenge and broaden these theories by pointing to the persistence of the politico-theological, not in political theory, but in literature and aesthetics.

The second chapter looks to a restaging of this accusation, "La Terreur littéraire," as it was hurled at the stage in performances of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*. I argue that avant-garde theater developed as both a continuation and transformation of anarcho-terrorism and its reinterpretation of the Terror following the Paris Commune. Through original archival work, I demonstrate that the anarchists, especially in the Marx-Bakunin debate, came to understand the Jacobin legacy of the Terror not as an ideological worldview but as a form of aesthetic *sensibilité*. To counter this legacy, anarcho-terrorism, I claim, sought to open up new modes of perception by violently transforming material reality. It is through this frame that I then read Jarry's allusions to anarcho-terrorist attacks in his theory and practice of theater. I argue that Jarry and the anarchists suggest a properly anarchic aesthetic education that would not lead to an Aesthetic State as in Schiller's response to the Terror.

The third and final chapter analyzes the image of the terrorist in the theory and practice of emancipatory violence during the Algerian War. I examine Zohra Drif's apology for terrorism, in which she rejects André Malraux and Albert Camus' literary constructions of the terrorist as a twentieth-century Saint-Just, in order to reframe how we read the Algerian Revolution and Hegelian Terror. I conclude that the image of the Algerian terrorist challenges dominant trends in literature and dialectical history passed down from Kojève's anthropological reading of Hegel on the Terror.

Chapter 1

Hugo's "*93 littéraire*":

Literature, Democracy, the Terror

In his brief one sentence preface to *Les Misérables* (1862)*,* Victor Hugo claims of his novel and others like it a type of situated socio-political intervention. In this terse, measured statement that took the place of the more sprawling "Préface philosophique" that Hugo originally wrote, he insists on the utility of the novel.[1] Or rather, as long as the problems of modern, capitalist, democratic societies persist, he contends, "des livres de la nature de celui-ci pourront ne pas être inutiles."[2] In this somewhat cumbersome and disingenuously flippant construction, Hugo asserts his struggle to balance *l'art pour l'art* and what Sartre would later term *la littérature engagée*. He does not enlist literature as a foot soldier into the rank and file of politics or *l'art pour la cause,* as it were, nor does he claim that the free play of the imaginative faculties is entirely untethered from politics, carving out an autonomous sphere for itself. Between useful

[1] The longer introduction, written in 1860 in between drafts of *Les Misérables*, was not published until 1908 under the title "Préface philosophique." In Massin's edition to the collected works, it goes by the title "Philosophie, commencement d'un livre." The 1985 Bouquin edition directed by Jacques Seebacher and Guy Rosa simply titles it "Philosophie" and groups along with other fragments under the rubric of "Proses philosophiques de 1860-1865."
[2] *Oeuvres complètes.* Paris: Robert Laffont, Bouquins, 1985. *Romans,* 2.2. Hereafter cited as *Romans*.

and useless, literature is at the cross-section of politics and aesthetics; or, as Hugo rather cryptically puts it, "La démocratie est dans cette littérature."[3]

It has become something of a commonplace to canonize Hugo as a literary giant against whom *la modernité* consciously built itself. Baudelaire, for example, nurtured a notoriously conflicted relationship with Hugo, publicly praising him as "un génie special" and a "grand homme" while privately denouncing him as "un sot," full of "bêtises," whose epic novel, *Les Misérables*, was "immonde et inepte."[4] Flaubert, also full of indignation after reading *Les Misérables*, railed against the novel for its platitudes, its absence of truth or grandeur, but above all its lack of thought: "La postérité ne lui pardonnera pas, à celui-ci, d'avoir voulu être penseur, malgré sa nature."[5] Flaubert thus develops a line of thought that still reverberates today, Hugo does not think, rather he simply rehashes "l'ensemble des idées banales de son époque"(*ibid*.). Mallarmé further ensconced modernity's rupture with Hugo as he famously dated the "Crise de vers" to coincide with Hugo's death, which if it did not cause the crisis at least helped precipitate it. Lastly and with perhaps the greatest influence on studies of modernity today, Walter Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire solidified the image of Hugo as mere precursor to the modernity inaugurated by Baudelaire. Singing with avuncular gusto the heroic march of the downtrodden, Hugo remains forever the Romantic poet of France prior to the 1848 Revolution; his dogged faith in progress anathema to the so-called "école du désenchantement;"[6] and recognition of his greatness always tempered as in André Gide's famous anointing of France's greatest poet: "Victor Hugo, hélas!"

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[3] *William Shakespeare*. *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Robert Laffont, Bouquins, 2002. *Critique*, 433. Hereafter cited in text as *Critique*.

[4] For Baudelaire's review of *Les Misérables* see "*Les Misérables* de Victor Hugo." *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1976. 2.217-224. For the private insults see his letter to his mother, Mme Aupick, dated August 10, 1862. *Correspandance.* Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1973. 2.254.

[5] Letter to Mme Roger des Genettes; July 1862. *Correspondance*. Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1991. 3.235-237.

[6] Paul Bénichou took the expression from Balzac. See *L'école du désenchantement*. Paris: Gallimard, 1992.

This narrative of modernity has itself however become rather hackneyed, to the point that debates about modernity have flagged or themselves seem to rehash familiar material and reinforce the general narrative of modernity. Jacques Rancière has even argued that the notion of modernity is not only an "incoherent label"[7] but that it has actually hindered our understanding of the arts since the Enlightenment, particularly the relationship between aesthetics and politics. He offers an alternative to the well-worn narrative of modernity, an alternative that brings the relationship between literature and democracy onto center stage. It is not surprising then that Hugo features significantly in this new narrative and the theory of literature articulated with and through it. Rancière's work has the dual advantage of challenging us to re-evaluate the notion of modernity (specifically the relationship between aesthetics and politics) and of asking us to rethink the place of such established authors as Hugo in French studies today.

Rancière is not however the only one to have analyzed Hugo's works with an eye to gleaning a greater insight into the relationship between democracy and literature. Quite to the contrary, as we will see, articulating this relationship has vexed readers and scholars of Hugo from his own time to ours. Rancière is perhaps only the most recent and most fully developed in a line of enquiry that includes theorists who touch on Hugo such as Sartre and Pierre Macherey as well as dedicated Hugo scholars that include Pierre Albouy, Guy Rosa, Jacques Neefs, Victor Brombert, Paul Bénichou and Suzanne Guerlac to name a few of the most prominent.

Many of these authors do indeed corroborate and expand on Hugo's assertion that democracy articulates itself within or *dans* literature but the vast majority of them do not take into account the third term in Hugo's own articulation: the Terror. "La démocratie est dans cette littérature," Hugo claims, but that literature is itself what he terms a "93 littéraire"(*Critique*, 432). More than just an articulation and practice of literature in the service of democracy and

[7] Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics.* Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004. 24.

democracy in the service of literature, Hugo brings in a third term, the Terror, that challenges the very practice and theory that he establishes. Bringing together this triad – literature, democracy, the Terror – Hugo makes an intervention into contemporary theory and the role of political theology in understanding democracy. He does indeed articulate and put into practice a conjunction of democracy and literature that necessarily passes by way of the Terror, and thus enriches Claude Lefort's influential understanding of democracy by demonstrating how literature partakes of democracy. On the other hand, by interjecting the Terror into the conjunction of literature and democracy, he provides leverage into Rancière's understanding of literary democracy and his debate with Lefort. But, Hugo also points to the shortcomings of such an articulation and posses the problem of materiality in the literary legacy of revolutionary transformation.

Despite or perhaps because of Hugo's efforts, the convergence of literature, democracy and the Terror has proven highly polemical, throughout the nineteenth-century and into our own. Preceding Hugo and in a radically different mode, Madame de Staël cautioned that we must gaze on the Terror through the lens of philosophy in order to better shield ourselves against "d'ineffaçables traces de sang" that could forever stain the imagination.[8] Sainte-Beuve, marshaling military metaphors, bemoaned "l'invasion de la démocratie littéraire" into the tradition of *belles lettres,* equating it with the industrialization of literature and its subjugation to market values.[9] Théophile Gautier, reminiscing about his legendary "gilet rouge," insisted that among its marvelous tones of red – "les plus chauds, les plus riches, les plus ardents, les plus

[8] Mme de Staël. *Considérations sur la Révolution française. Oeuvres posthumes de Madame de Staël.* Genève: Slatkine, 1967. 178.
[9] Christopher Prendergast. *The Classic: Sainte-Beuve and the Nineteenth-Century Culture Wars*. New York: Oxford U P, 2007. Especially, chapter 8: "Literature and Democracy," 200-239.

délicats" – there was nonetheless a hint of purple put there in order to "éviter l'infâme rouge de 93."[10]

But undoubtedly the most uncanny of these literary afterlives is Paul Berman's invocation of Hugo's verse in his 2003 book *Terror and Liberalism,* which the publisher touts as "[a] manifesto for an aggressive liberal response to terrorist attacks."[11] The book was a New York Times best-seller, has been translated into fifteen languages and earned Berman both a MacArthur "Genius Grant" as well as the dubious honor of being named by Tony Judt one of "Bush's useful idiots."[12] In a chapter largely indebted to Camus's *L'homme révolté*, Berman traces the roots of totalitarianism, including what he calls "Muslim totalitarianism," to the Terror. However, for Berman, it is Hugo – more than anyone else – who sets the "liberatory impulse to rebel" onto its enduring suicidal trajectory. This is because Hugo *romanticizes* this trajectory, making it aesthetically appealing by inscribing the act of rebellion into the very form of literature as evidenced in *Hernani*'s infamous opening enjambment. Riding roughshod over the long nineteenth-century, Berman builds from Hugo's *escalier/Dérobé* to Baudelaire's rebellion against God, Dostoevsky's "everything is permitted" and on to the spate of anarcho-terrorist attacks that would eventually spark World War I. Bringing this grand sweep to its crescendo, Berman concludes, "Those people, every one of them, were Hernanis from Hugo's play"(Berman, 33).

Berman's book generally cooperates fully with academic attempts to pick it apart, and this has been amply done. Nonetheless, as Judt inadvertently makes clear, Berman does tend to conjure up profoundly inept figures from the past. If for Judt, he recalls Lenin's "useful idiots," I

[10] "La légende du gilet rouge." *Souvenirs romantiques. Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Club français du Livre. 3.1432.
[11] Berman, Paul. *Terrorism and Liberalism.* New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Hereafter cited as Berman.
[12] Tony Judt. "Bush's Useful Idiots." *London Review of Books,* vol. 28, no. 18, Sept. 21, 2006. 3-5.

read him as a sort of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. It is precisely because he can rely so heavily on received ideas to arrive at such bungled conclusions that he demonstrates the necessity of rethinking the relationship between literature, democracy and the Terror today. It is with this task in mind that I return to Hugo, particularly *Réponse à un acte d'accusation*, in order to argue that his poetry does indeed stage a theory and practice of literature and democracy, one that anticipates much of Rancière. However, in inscribing "literary terror" into this project, Hugo, I further contend, serves to challenge and broaden contemporary theory by pointing to the persistence of the politico-theological in literature and aesthetic theory.

Romanticism as Democratic Revolution: "Réponse à un acte d'accusation"

Although Hugo never fully developed a theory or philosophy to explicate how democracy may be said to be *in* the Romantic literature of 1830, he did articulate enough of it that we can piece together a coherent version. This is what I propose to do in this section. This involves glossing over some of the more intricate details and culling together disparate pieces in order to patch them together into a coherent whole. If there is a bit of the artificial in this task, I hope to make up for in the following sections that delve into the fissures and problems that will be addressed in the final section. As we will see, Hugo inscribes literature and democracy into a mutually symbiotic and dialectically intricate movement. This section describes what we might

call the first phase of that movement, and thus does not address the tensions that the Terror posed for Hugo. Hugo kept coming back to the Terror precisely because it posed nearly insurmountable problems for the poetic vision that he put into practice and tried to think through theoretically. As Henri Meschonnic has claimed, "Hugo est actuel parce qu'il expose des questions plus fortes que les réponses que lui-même a pu donner."[13] Before moving to a more nuanced posing of the question of literature and democracy via the challenges posed by the Terror, let us then first examine the response that Hugo sketched out.

In what has become the standard canonical reading, it is Hugo who most clearly, forcefully, and influentially laid out the overturning of Classicism and the system of *belles lettres* that Hugo came to attack aggressively, militantly, but perhaps with more sheer bravado than actual substance.[14] If the *Préface* to *Cromwell* now serves as a convenient "manifesto" of French Romanticism and is certainly the closest thing that comes to such a declaration, Hugo, the staunch and indefatigable self-promoter, played an industrious role in advancing and solidifying that reading. Indeed, he led the way in his own revisionist reading, looking back on the conjunction of Romanticism and Revolution in 1830 from the hindsight of post 1848 France and from the distance afforded by self-imposed exile. It was in advancing this revisionist reading that Hugo made his greatest claims linking democracy, literature, and the Terror. If *William Shakespeare* furnishes Hugo the occasion to further his revisionist reading in critical, essayistic prose, its poetic equivalent is to be found in poem seven of *Les Contemplations*: "Réponse à un acte d'accusation." This poem not only articulates and performs Hugo's literary democracy, but it also sets the stage for the challenges that the Terror poses to such a project.

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[13] *Hugo, la poésie contre le maintien de l'ordre*. Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2002. 19.
[14] See, for example, Jean Gaudon's entry for *A New History of French Literature*. Ed. Denis Hollier *et al*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U P, 1989. 644-649.

Written in 1854, but backdated to 1834, this is Hugo's most intricate and explicit conjunction of his poetic project with that of the French Revolution. As early as 1834 in the Preface to *Littérature et philosophie mêlées* (itself part of his revisionist reading), Hugo was already insisting on the convergence of aesthetic and political revolutions: "Nous l'avons déjà dit ailleurs, et plus d'une fois, le corollaire rigoureux d'une révolution politique, c'est une révolution littéraire"(*Critique*, 51). "Réponse à un acte d'accusation*"* is however Hugo at his most violent and, simultaneously, perhaps at his greatest moment of self-parody. In response to what was most likely an entirely fictitious accusation, he famously thunders back, "Oui, je suis ce Danton! je suis ce Robespierre!"[15] Cultivating the image of himself as poet-terrorist, Hugo narrates how he zealously accomplished in poetry what the Terror had done for politics. He puts an end to privilege, overthrows the monarchy, wages war, commands battalions, slits throats, declares a republic, massacres, delivers thought to freedom; in short, he maps out into aesthetics many of the major political events of the Revolution. Although, we should note in passing, the beheading of Louis XVI is conspicuously absent, for reasons to which we will return. Much of this mapping out comes to a crescendo in one of Hugo's most well known couplets: "Je fis souffler un vent révolutionnaire./ Je mis un bonnet rouge au vieux dictionnaire."

By backdating the poem, Hugo makes it contemporary with the final entries in *Littérature et philosophie mêlées* and the preface quoted above. However, Hugo's revisionist account had already begun in 1834, thus he dates the final pages of *Littérature et philosophie mêlées* to the *Trois Glorieuses* (July 27-29) although the manuscripts reveal that these were in fact written four years after the 1830 Revolution.[16] Hugo, never as avant-garde as he makes himself out to be a

[15] *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Robert Laffont, "Bouquins," 2002. *Poésie*, 2.263-268. All quotes refer to this edition.
[16] For a more thorough reading of Hugo's manipulation of dates, see Pierre Laforgue. "Rhétorique et poésie (1822-1855)." *Hugo: Romantisme & Révolution*. Besançon: Presses Universitaires Franc-Comtoises, 2001. 59-70.

few years after the fact, was an adroit publicist, and he crafted his image with great care and a meticulous eye to public opinion. The standard interpretation of this double backdating argues that it was in the interest of managing his self-image that Hugo manipulated dates, attempting to provide stalwart credentials to his would be republican skeptics. Although this reading has been nuanced and indeed challenged by the likes of Paul Benichou and Laurent Jenny,[17] for my purposes, I am less interested in identifying the motivations of Hugo's revisionist project or in teasing out the differences between the poetic project as articulated and performed in 1830 and its revisionist account post 1848. Rather, I read the poem in conjunction with the 1830 texts, notably the Preface to *Cromwell* through Hugo's revisionist lens in order to explicate Hugo's project of bringing together democracy and literature.

The poem equates Romanticism's overturning of Classicism with the French Revolution, where the Revolution is understood as razing the Ancien Régime and regenerating humanity by restoring power to the people and making liberty and equality the foundations of social bonds. Military images abound, beginning with the very first characterization of the accusation: "J'ai foulé le bon goût et l'ancien vers françois/ Sous mes pieds, et, hideux, j'ai dit à l'ombre : Sois !/ Et l'ombre fut. – Voilà votre réquisitoire"(lines 3-5). "Fouler aux pieds" has both the figurative meaning of treating with contempt and the literal meaning of trampling or treading on someone as soldiers on enemies. The narrator poet is here then a militant-soldier poet, marching along and trampling on "le bon goût" and "l'ancien vers françois." The use of the dated French spelling is both mocking and pragmatic; it allows for the simple rhyme with "Sois," which echoes Genesis: "Dieu dit: Que la lumière soit! Et la lumière fut."

[17] Laurent Jenny. *Je suis la révolution: Histoire d'une métaphore, 1830-1975*. Paris: Belin, "L'Extrême contemporain," 2008. Paul Bénichou. *Les mages romantiques*. Paris: Gallimard, "Bibliothèques des idées," 1988. Esp. 354.

There are thus multiple overturnings in these few lines; one, what convention has defined as "le bon goût" now lies on the ground, toppled from its majestic heights and anticipating a renegotiation of *bon* and *mauvais*; similarly, "l'ancien vers françois" – defeated, derided, and *dépassé* – will have to make way for the new; this new verse will bring with it a *révolution dans les lettres*, in this case, literally, as the modern spelling replaces the "o" with an "a";[18] third, the act of poetic creation mirrors the divine act, imitating not what is created but the very act of creation. However, this mirroring inverts the image; God calls light into being, the mortal poet strives to bring forth light from the black ink that he lays down on the page.

But, in addition to describing Hugo's poetic revolution, these lines perform the very overturning that they announce. The expression "fouler sous mes pieds," separated out by an enjambment, creates the very tension between meter and syntax that characterizes much of the novelty in Hugo's verse. The enjambment beaks up the metrical unit or *pied* at that precise moment that Hugo announces that he has "foulé…/ Sous [s]es *pieds*" classical verse. The military march of the poet-soldier thus keeps impeccable cadence with the metrical feet as figurative and literal meanings unite to triumphantly trample classical verse underfoot. Even the layout on the page collaborates. The enjambment breaks the syntactical unit "fouler sous mes pieds" such that part of the unit is situated on the page literally just under or *sous* the other, thereby concreticizing one of Hugo's characterization of poetry as "forme optique de la pensée"(*Critique,* 28).

These few lines can thus serve to illustrate what Jacques Roubaud has canonically termed the "révolution hugolienne," that is, the various strategies by which his verse "desserre les contraintes de concordance et de métaposition" that thereby create the conditions for "un *nouvel*

[18] Jenny makes a similar argument, although he draws much different conclusions.

alexandrin qui réaliserait les possibilités combinatoires de *tous* les entiers rythmiques à douze événements."[19] Hugo may not exactly be the Robespierre of the alexandrine, creating metrical cuts equivalent to those of the guillotine, but, with enjambments such as these as well as with displacements in the position of the hemistich, he does loosen (*desserrer*) the rigidity of classical French verse. By introducing these small fissures and tensions, he opens the way, in Roubaud's canonical reading, to Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, who will pry it completely loose and may even explode it from within.

This performance of Hugo's poetic project is further inscribed in an exchange between reader and poet, particularly that of accusation and response. Rather than the engaged intellectual solemnly and staunchly putting forth his "J'accuse," acting as moral conscious to public order, here the poet-come-soldier gives an account of his actions. We could even say that he is called to account by the public as long as we understand that in the end Hugo plays both accuser and accused, proleptically giving shape to the very public, the people, who are now fictitiously calling him to order. As Hugo famously chides his readers in the preface to this collection of poetry, "Ah! insensé, qui crois que je ne suis pas toi!"

Let us return to the multiple overturnings in these lines, beginning with the "le bon goût" and "l'ancien vers françois," the transformations of the latter leading us to a new understanding of the former. This change is developed in the second stanza. Inviting the reader with a casual and affable imperative, "Causons," Hugo launches into a description of the state of poetry in his youth, but one where state must be understood both as the specific conditions or attributes and as a political entity, the State. He takes a jab at the Latin based schooling of his youth, describing the young poet who emerges from it as atrophied, uncivilized, and – following the etymology of

[19] Roubaud, Jacques. *La Vieillesse d'Alexandrie: Essair sur quelques états du vers français récent*. Paris: Ivrea, 2000. [Maspero, 1978]. 104.

enfant – without language: "farouche, espèce d'enfant blême." But, in an act of empirical inquiry that is also the deliverance of consciousness from sleep, Hugo opens his eyes to see that "La poésie était la monarchie," the rhyme *idiome/royaume* sonorously reinforcing the identification. However, rather than making language the bond that unities a people and forges their very identity (which was one of the defining projects of the French Revolution),[20] this equation of language and monarchy shows how language was used to divide, order, and rank society according to the feudal system of the Ancien Régime. Words are equated with individuals, whose identity depends on their place within the hierarchical, hereditary social order: "un mot/ Etait un duc et pair, ou n'était qu'un grimaud." In addition to conjuring up a generic view of the Ancien Régime, we might also see in this juxtaposition reverberations of the 1830 Revolution, which made the duc d'Orléans into King Louis-Philippe and made the *pairs* of the *Chambre des pairs* (a relic of the medieval system of peerage instituted under the Restoration) no longer a hereditary position. These two feudal titles, *duc* and *pair*, contrast starkly with the "grimaud," defined as a *écolier des petites classes* or *élève ignorant*, the very same situation in which Hugo had just described himself as a young poet; thus making Hugo into the scrappy upstart (precursor to Gavroche) pitted against hereditary titles.

"La langue était l'état avant quatrevingt-neuf," declares Hugo, an equation between language and state that we could extend into the *troisième état* or Third-Estate's revolt against the first and second Estates. In the pre-revolutionary, feudal state of language, words were still alive; but, "bien ou mal nés," they "vivaient parqués en castes." Pejoratively confined to the limits of their social place – limits defined entirely by birth right rather than merit – these words contrast with the free, social mingling of words, which takes as its image the streets of the

[20] Laurent Jenny develops this line of thought. *Op. cit.*

metropolis. Deploring what this system lacks, Hugo anticipates the Revolution: "Les syllabes pas plus que Paris et que Londre/ Ne se mêlaient; ainsi marchent sans se confondre/ Piétons et cavaliers traversant le pont Neuf." The intermixing of syllables, expressed here significantly with the self-reflective verb, *se mêler*, is compared to passers-by on the streets of Paris, where no cast system separates out the pedestrian from the mounted horseman. It is also significant that for Hugo the passers-by in the streets, like the syllables that are their poetic counterpart, are meant to mix (*se mêler*) and even to merge (*se confondre*). Furthermore, this is not just any street in Paris, rather it is a bridge connecting, making communicate, bringing together two land masses, unifying the city of Paris and, not insignificantly facilitating access to and from the Notre-Dame Cathedral. It is itself a point of exchange, a man made one, historically the first in Paris, and one suspended above a water way that, in turn, is itself a means of transport and communication. Lastly, the enjambments here once again do the work of breaking up the state of language before the Revolution. By running the syntactical unit into the next line, they further perform the mixing and merging that was so deplorably lacking in the Ancien Régime.

Against this rigid and stifling cast system of language, Hugo portrays himself as liberator and his poetic project as one of democratic liberation. Given the equivalency he builds between words and people, the poetic revolution mirrors the political one; both empower words/the people and thereby invest the *kratos* (power) in the *demos* (people). In these twenty-seven lines describing the monarchical state of language and announcing the grand themes of *Les Misérables,* Hugo gradually recedes from his role as active poet only to re-emerge triumphantly halfway through the stanza. He emerges only armed with the seemingly simple question loaded with revolutionary potential: "Alors, brigand, je vins; je m'écriai: Pourquoi/ Ceux-ci toujours devant, ceux-là toujours derrière?" It is this question that makes of Hugo a "brigand," an outlaw,

one who dares flout the legal system, the conventional system of codes and hierarchies. It questions the social hierarchy, but also the syntactical position of words in relation to meter, a question that the staccato break up of the line reinforces with its two commas, semi colon, and colon. It is a question that goes unanswered but has the effect of bringing down the hierarchical system by rhetorically inciting its interlocutors to come to the conclusion that there is in fact no legitimate reason for this hierarchy. The very foundations of such a system are arbitrary and unjust, and their power to endure stems entirely from its power to stifle just this sort of question. Finally, it is a question put to the past and what has always (*toujours)* been, undoing the tradition and habits of social hierarchy just as it loosens up the poetic conventions of Classicism and resigns them to the past.

The poem quickly moves from this question to a depiction of the Académie Française and the system of Classicism that it upheld in the seventh-century. The Académie – depicted as a sort of juggernaut in the finery of a *grande dame*, "aïeule et douairière" – dons a courtly dress under which, Hugo, ever the mischievous miscreant, has dared look; and there he spies "sous ses japons les tropes effarés." It is into these tropes, cowed into submission and – like the *forçats* on whose work the system depends – carefully kept from public view, that Hugo breathes new life: "Je fis souffler un vent révolutionnaire." With the wind in his sails and at least a bit of hot air, Hugo quickens the poetic pace as he gleefully enumerates his heroic and revolutionary deeds, coming to the triumphant crescendo: "je montai sur la borne Aristote,/ Et déclarai les mots égaux, libres, majeurs." Still the soldier *en marche*, Hugo, after having trampled on his enemies, now rises triumphant over them and declares a new regime, one based on equality rather than caste. He further recuperates a parallel launched at the time of the *bataille d'Hernani* in 1827, when the première of the play at the bastion of Classicism, the Comédie Française, was likened

to the storming of the Bastille. "J'ai pris et démoli la bastille des rimes," he claims, rhyming *rimes* with *crimes* and thus projecting sonorously the parallel between his poetic transgressions of convention and the revolutionaries' legal transgressions. Down with Aristotelian classicism, long live the equality and liberty of words, words that in contrast to the "espèce d'enfant blême" that emerged from the Latin school are now "majeur," that is, have reached the legal age at which they can speak for themselves and make their own decisions. If we adhere to Hugo's own equivalency between people and language, we can conclude that power now emanates from and is founded in words, which are also the people, and thus, the *kratos* is now completely invested in the *demos*. "La démocratie est dans cette littérature."[21]

For the Hugo of *Réponse* it is an aesthetic inherited from the French Revolution, part of its unfulfilled legacy that continues to animate contemporary French society in all its aspects. The accusation and the accuser slowly fade from the poem as the response eclipses the accused, relegating him once and for all to the past to which he still timorously clings. Hugo pleads guilty one last time: "Vous tenez le *reum confitentem*. Tonnez!" But it is he who thunders back anaphorically, drowning out the accusation and the exchange between the accuser and the accused in the exchange between Hugo – the militant, revolutionary, terrorist poet – and words. This latter exchange, however, begs the complicity of the reader, creating sympathy through appeal to freedom, equality, and a simplicity of style meant to contrast with fustian and arcane Classicists as well as the fictional accuser who resorts to Latin and who – dimwitted, obstinate, or dispassionate – refuses to consider these acts from different points of views or to see the larger dialectical movement in which they participate.

[21] Jenny also develops this argument in his reading of the poem.

In the final stanza, which begins “Le mouvement complète ainsi son action,” the Revolution becomes the force that unites the poet, the poem, and the reader: “Grâce à toi, progrès saint, la Révolution/ Vibre aujourd'hui dans l'air, dans la voix, dans le livre;/ Dans le mot palpitant le lecteur la sent vivre.” The form of the response – with the attendant *vous* – has now given way to the poet directly and informally addressing progress: “Grâce à toi, progrès saint.” The work of progress unites the poet, poem, and reader as each breathes and speaks the Revolution; *vibre/livre/vivre* resonate with each other, the intermediary work of the book effecting the transition from the Revolution as subject of the verb *vibrer* to the object of what the reader *sent vivre* in both form and content.

It is in the rhythm of verse and in a certain *prose poétique* that words become alive, vibrating, resonating, or clashing with each other and, by extension with the reader, just as much of French society collided bitterly with each other in the streets of Paris during the Revolution, 1789 and 1793. Thus, with Hugo’s unflagging and dogmatic faith in progress, even the work of the revolutionary terrorists – Danton, Robespierre, Marat – and, by extension, of the poet-terrorist – Hugo – serve this purpose:

> Et, grâce à ces bandits, grâce à ces terroristes,
> Le vrai, chassant l'essaim des pédagogues tristes,
> L'imagination, tapageuse aux cent voix,
> Qui casse des carreaux dans l'esprit des bourgeois;

Not only may truth emerge through and thanks to the work of bandits and terrorists, but, more importantly for the work of democracy and literature, the imagination benefits from their criminal transgressions. The multitude of voices in this tumultuous, boisterous, and extravagant imagination wields power destructively; and, like the revolutionary mob so abhorred and feared by Edmund Burke, it may use this power to break down the decorative or aesthetic foundations

and walls of the bourgeois mind. Poetry, by giving voice to this "imagination tapageuse," has a transformative capacity whereby the violent, destructive mob may take on the "la sagesse de Job."[22] Although the rhyme *mob/Job* may rely more on visual than auditory correspondence, there is nonetheless an audacity in connecting those responsible for the September Massacres to the biblical trials of a great figure of righteous innocence.

Furthermore, in praising the "terroristes," Hugo advances his violent rhetoric against Classicism to include the bourgeoisie, particularly bourgeois prejudice. But the attack is less the throat slitting variety evoked earlier that attempts to break brutally with the past by assassinating those who seem to incarnate it. Gradually attenuating the violence, Hugo further shifts away from the metaphor of a rowdy imagination thronging with the voices of the mob and breaking what William Blake dubbed "the mind-forg'd manacles" and what Hugo calls the *carreaux* of the bourgeois mind. The final metaphor is that of poetry as dissolvent – frenetic perhaps, but certainly neither the guillotine nor the September Massacres. And more than individuals incarnating past wrongs or city like structures of the mind what it attacks are prejudices, which in the extended metaphor of these last lines take on the form of abuses coalesced over time into rigid and impeding structures of stony coral (*madrépores*):

> Les préjugés, formés, comme les madrépores,
> Du sombre entassement des abus sous les temps,
> Se dissolvent au choc de tous les mots flottants,
> Pleins de sa [i.e. the Revolution's] volonté, de son but, de son âme.

Words, liberated and free floating in this oceanic metaphor so dear to Hugo, collide with each other creating shocks, unexpected encounters not dictated by any caste system or preordained order, that have the effect of loosening up long standing prejudices. The oceanic metaphor

[22] My reading here converges in many ways with Alain Vaillant, who reads the two lines on the "imagination tapageuse" as an example of the "incongruité métaphorique" by which he defines modernity. See, *L'histoire littéraire*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2010.

merges with that of the stormy, revolutionary streets of Paris; and, as so often happens in Hugo, one becomes the mirror image of the other.

What animates the living word, what gives it direction, what wills it (*volonté, but, âme*) is the Revolution; and, as Hugo tersely claims, "Sa langue est déliée ainsi que son esprit." *Délié* may mean untethered, unmoored, unbound; and thus *délier les mains d'un prisonnier* is to liberate him or her; the Revolutionary *langue déliée* thus contrasts sharply with the monarchical language of the Ancien Régime depicted earlier, where Vaugelas – founding member of the Académie française – had marked certain words with the prisoner's stigmata of *F* for *forçat* or galley slave. Furthermore, *Délier la langue de quelqu'un* means to make or get that person to speak; and *avoir la langue déliée* to have a certain rhetorical ease, to speak loquaciously, or simply *être bavard*. However, taking full advantage of the lexical dexterity of this particular liberated word, *délié*, Hugo ensures that this untethered, free, and agile potential ex-convict of a word modifies not only *langue* but also *esprit*, where *un esprit délié* refers to a penetrating mind, one that may nimbly and incisively plumb great depths. Lastly, *délié* may itself become unhinged from its role as adjective modifying and agreeing with a noun. Standing alone as itself a noun, *un délié* may refer to the upstroke in handwriting; or, in music, *avoir un bon délié* means to have a flowing or even touch. All of these possibilities come together in this final image to affirm Hugo's Romantic Revolution as a staunchly democratic revolution.

Romanticism as Literary Terror: Hugo, Robespierre, Rancière

If we consider the opening lines of the following poem, "Suite," "Car le mot, qu'on le sache, est un être vivant./ La main du songeur vibre et tremble en l'écrivant," we gain a greater appreciation of the dexterity of the liberated word. The Revolution, which as we have seen, breathes new life into language, a life that the reader feels (*sent*) on the page, here joins the movement of the writing hand, itself vibrating with the life of words. Animated by the same spirit – that of the Revolution – the liberated word, which carries with it the penetrating force of intelligence, transfers its movement from hand to page and on to the reader, who – as we will see further in the next section – may register its movement as bitter aftertaste, goose bumps, raised hairs, perturbed sleep, a certain *tapage* or disturbance in the imagination, or it may give rise to what the *Les Misérables* famously terms *Une tempête sous un crâne*. In the vast extended metaphor that is the greatest characteristic of Hugo's poetry, this vibratory movement continues in the mind where it acts as a dissolvent against convention, prejudice, and everything that over time has solidified into an unreflective worldview.

In conclusion to our reading of "Réponse à un acte d'accusation," we can thus join the multiple layers of Hugo's conjunction of democracy and literature to what Rancière terms "literary democracy." Building a genealogy of the notion of literature from roughly Mme de Staël to Artaud, in *La parole muette* Rancière argues that literature grew out of an "aesthetic revolution" that overthrew classicism and its system of belles-lettres. What founded this system was a certain practice of mimesis that privileged "le primat de la parole comme acte, de la performance de parole."[23] We could say that belles-lettres teaches one how to do things with

[23] Rancière, Jacques. *La parole muette: essai sur les contradictions de la littéraire*. Paris: Hachette, 1998. 24.

words, things such as give advice to a king, rally troops, defend the innocent in a court of law, or excel in the art of court banter and wit (*ibid*., 27). There is a strict hierarchy that regulates what is represented as well as how, when, where, and to whom it is represented. In short, belles-lettres establishes a particular order that governs how we perceive the world, how we construct a common lot in that world, and how we do things in it. This, in Rancière's parlance, is a certain *partage du sensible*.

Hugo plays a pivotal role in Rancière's narration of what he terms the aesthetic revolution, a revolution that deposes this system of legitimization in which live speech emanated from an established authority and was addressed to a particular individual or group. Literature is the reign of what Rancière calls the "orphan letter," that is, the written word that circulates freely, emanating from "n'importe qui" and addressed to "n'importe qui." In literature and with literature anyone can *prendre la parole* with the potential to disrupt and play havoc with the established order. Detethered from the spoken word of authority, the written word of literature – through homonyms, puns, syllepsis, tension between form and content, and a wealth of other devices – always says more and less than the mere words on the page. Rancière calls this the proper-improper or the "part du sans-part." Both literature and democracy function according to the same movement of dissensus or conflict where what is at stake is neither personal interests nor even the common will, but the very construction of what is common and who has a stake or part in it. Rancière sums up his argument thus, "democracy is the struggle about democracy"; for him, it is more the forms of this struggle – rather than institutions or forms of government – that define democracy. If democracy builds consensus it does so through dissensus, conflict, and adversity. It is this indeterminacy, this self-questioning along with the forms of conflict that link democracy and literature in Rancière's "literary democracy."

As stated earlier, this reading of Hugo's poetry as performing the very revolution it announces serves to illustrate what Jacques Roubaud termed the "révolution hugolienne," that is, the various strategies by which his verse, in creating tension between syntax and meter, "desserre les contraintes de concordance et de métaposition." This "loosening" thereby creates the conditions for "un *nouvel alexandrin* qui réaliserait les possibilités combinatoires de *tous* les entiers rythmiques à douze événements."[24] This reading has since been corroborated and expanded with ever greater sophistication by David Evans and Guillaume Peureux.[25] However, what Roubaud and other canonical readings of Hugo's revolution in verse do not address is the political task that in this poem is explicitly inherent to the poetic revolution. This is the great merit both of Rancière's reading of Hugo and of his theory of democracy and literature.

As much overlap as there is between Hugo and Rancière, there is nonetheless, one aspect by which Hugo may call into question and expand Rancière: *93 littéraire*. Roubaud, Evans, Peureux, and Rancière all tend to agree: Hugo is no Robespierre, he anticipates Rimbaud's "déversification" and Mallarmé's *Crise de vers* and opens the way to regeneration, but he himseld still works largely within the Classical alexandrine. However, I want to suggest that Hugo is indeed a terrorist, but not as Berman would have it, that is, by *romanticizing* revolt, inscribing it within aesthetic form. Rather, like Robespierre, Hugo unleashes Terror, declares it the order of the day, but then proceeds to hem in its excesses by an appeal to an *Etre Suprême*. The Terror is often read as a radical attempt to follow through on Rousseau's *Du contrat social*, where the founding of a democratic order requires the ability to "changer pour ainsi dire la nature

[24] *La Vieillesse d'Alexandrie: Essaie sur quelques états du vers français récent*. Paris: Ivrea, 2000 [1978]. 104.
[25] David Evans. *Rhythm, Illusion and the Poetic Idea: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004. Guillaume Peureux. *La fabrique du vers*. Paris: Seuil, 2009.

humaine."[26] The guillotine is one apparatus by which to change human nature, however, the *Fête de l'Etre Supreme* is another. It is part of an attempt to bring the Terror to a close by completing the work of the formation of a democratic people. This is precisely how I believe we are to understand Hugo's claim, "je suis ce Robespierre," it is not the Robespierre of the guillotine but of the *Fête de l'Etre Suprême.* Hugo calls on this new poetry to "Soyez république!," which, he immediately follows up with the pious imperative: "Croyez." The liberated word, "grâce à ces terroristes," has released the "[l]'imagination, tapageuse aux cents voix," and thus opens up to the polyphonic, potentially cacophonous, democratic tumult of a revolutionary mob. But for Hugo, as for Robespierre, this mob ultimately rhymes (at least visually) with "la sagesse de Job." It rises up to form one unifying voice, that of the people into whom a transcendent power – by way of the united poetic and political Revolution – has breathed new life. The true power of the *demos*, its *kratos*, thus ultimately resides in this Supreme Being. It is in this way that we can thus conclude, modifying Hugo, "La démocratie du droit divin est dans cette littérature."

The Democratic Utility of the Grotesque: *Préface* to *Cromwell*

With the insights into Hugo's poetic project as articulated and performed in *Réponse à un acte d'accusation,* we can turn to that manifesto of French Romanticism, the *Préface* to *Cromwell,* to demonstrate how it contributes to Hugo's democratic revolution in literature. If the

[26] *Du contrat social*. Paris: Garnier, 1975. Book 2, Chapiter 7. 262.

grotesque is the fulcrum on which the revolution of Romanticism brings down Classicism, I want to demonstrate that the *Préface* develops a democratic utility to the grotesque. In the *Préface,* Hugo famously celebrates the ugly and the grotesque over and above beauty: "Le beau n'a qu'un type; le laid en a mille"(*Critique,* 12). And although this celebration of the multiplicity of the ugly has often galvanized debate about how to define French Romanticism, I believe that the emphasis is misplaced, especially in consideration of Hugo's revisionist account after the 1848 Revolution.

We can schematize Hugo's critique of Classicism thus: it is hierarchical, conventional, monolithic, merciless, and severely constrained. Classical art, Hugo glosses, "n'avait étudié la nature que sous une seule face, rejetant sans pitié de l'art presque tout ce qui, dans le monde soumis à son imitation, ne se rapportait pas à un certain type du beau"(*Critique,* 9). Classical art submits reality to what it chooses to imitate in it; and since it is only concerned with its own conception of the beautiful, it necessarily ends up with only a truncated reality, or, what the *Préface* more brutally terms "une nature mutilée"(*ibid.*).

In contrast, modern art, Hugo continues, "sentira que tout dans la création n'est pas humainement beau, que le laid y existe à côté du beau, le difforme près du gracieux, le grotesque au revers du sublime, le mal avec le bien, l'ombre avec la lumière"(*ibid*.). Hugo scholarship had long situated his use and valorization of the grotesque in this context, that is, the broader attempt to achieve "une harmonie des contraires." However, Hugo scholars of the last half-century have adeptly focused less on the harmony or lack thereof in the end result and more on the dialectical movement that drives the attempt, even if the attempt is not entirely felicitous. Thus, Bradley Stephens giving an account of the "Etat présent" of Hugo scholarship comes to the pithy summary that what has emerged in recent scholarship is a Hugo read in light of Bakhtin, where

the anticipation of a polyphonic multiplicity trumps any attempt at a harmony of contraries.[27] It is in continuation of this shift in focus that we can re-read the passages of the ugly and grotesque from the *Préface* to demonstrate the democratic utility of the grotesque.

Rather than debate the relationship between the ugly and the beautiful or between the movement and the end result, I want to focus our attention on the peculiar adverb that modifies beautiful: "tout dans la création n'est pas *humainement* beau"(emphasis added). What is at stake then is not a formal aesthetic project whose chief goal is the creation of harmony out of contrary elements, a sort of structural balance between mutually opposing forces that we may or may not judge beautiful. It is not a question of how we understand or judge beauty, but of how we understand and represent humanity; or, more accurately, how humanity understands itself through its self-presentation or self-representation. Classicism, as Hugo portrays it here, by concentrating on the beautiful – or only one conception of the beautiful – is stagnant, "monotone," and lacks the dynamic movement that Hugo so closely associates with what it means to be alive. He further explains his critique of Classicism, once again having recourse to the same adverb, "C'est que le beau, à parler *humainement*, n'est que la forme considérée dans son rapport le plus simple, dans sa symétrie la plus absolue, dans son harmonie la plus intime avec notre organisation"(*Critique*, 12, emphasis added). Although this depiction of Classicism is grossly lacking in nuance, it does serve to offer a new reading of the transformation wrought by Romanticism. Classicism's beauty, "à parler *humainement*," presents a monolithic form whereas Romanticism strives for a greater vision, one that begins with the premise that "tout dans la création n'est pas *humainement* beau." Romanticism not only challenges Classicism's

[27] "Etat Présent: Victor Hugo." *French Studies: A Quarterly Review*. Vol. 63, no. 1 (Jan. 2009). 66-74.

conventions of beauty; more important, this challenge entails a shift in perspective, a new worldview that ultimately means a shift in how we view and understand humanity.

Hugo's call for the ugly, the deformed, the grotesque, the evil (*le mal*), and the shadowy entails not a turn away from the beautiful *tout court* but rather a turn away from what is *humanly* beautiful. It challenges its readers or spectators to shift perspectives, to take on a multiplicity of views, and prods them to see the beautiful in what is not conventionally considered beautiful and what, if one clings to conventional notions of beauty and of humanity, may very well strike one as nothing but grotesque, ugly, and deformed. In contrast to the beautiful, "le laid," continues Hugo, "est un détail d'un grand ensemble qui nous échappe, et qui s'harmonise non pas avec l'homme, mais avec la création tout entière"(*ibid*., 13). Classicism, in Hugo's contrast, strives for forms that harmonize with "notre organization," it does not challenge the conventional understanding of humanity that it has established over time. In contrast, modern art has recognized that such an understanding of beauty mutilates nature, including human nature. It has the intimations of a harmony that does not depend solely on "notre organization," and that there is an "ensemble qui nous échappe."

The grotesque, the ugly thus serve as glimpses into this *ensemble* and challenge any sense of harmony that is not dynamic, constantly introducing new elements as it strives to bring into harmony disparate points of views and a greater, more encompassing vision of humanity. The attempt at a harmony of contraries challenges us to perceive or conceive of a harmony that does not limit itself to one point of view, that of Classicism's conception of beauty. In a movement akin to Kant's "free play of the faculties," the human mind in contemplating the grotesque may glimpse a greater harmony or might participate in a harmonizing force that would challenge any conception of beauty narrowly defined. This, we can sum up briefly, is the characteristic trait of

Hugo's Romanticism: a shift away from the beautiful à *parler humainement* toward a dialectical movement in which the negation of the human is quickly sublated into a movement that aspires to the infinite, but where the emphasis is less on the result than on the movement, one that constantly challenges humanity's sense of self and the ways it represents itself. This challenge is one put to both democracy and literature, to empower all of humanity equally.

The Empty Place: *Les Misérables* and the Theoretical Staging of Democracy

In one of the draft prefaces to *Les Misérables* mentioned above, Hugo furthers his theory of the democratic utility of the grotesque, explicitly giving an account of how he envisages the novel engaging its readers. He forewarns them that the novel will provoke "un arrière-goût amère."[28] But, he reassures them, "[i]l y a des amertumes utiles," thus pivoting away from any abstract speculation about the utility of the novel as he invites his readers to drink to the lees the bitter glass of modern French society offered up by the novel: "Peut-être ce livre sera-t-il bon à quelque chose. C'est une coupe où l'auteur a mis un peu de ce qui est au fond de la société humaine au dix-neuvième siècle. Goûtez-y. Ensuite songez"(*ibid*.). From a provocative, though vague sense of bitterness – the proverbial bad taste left in one's mouth – the reader is implored to reflect on this aesthetic experience, shaping it into thought and putting it into words. The

[28] *Oeuvres complètes*. Ed. Jean Massin. Paris: le Club français du livre. 1967. 11.1002. Hereafter cited as Massin.

lingering sense of acrimony is meant to goad readers toward contemplation, which, in turn might inflect in unconventional ways how they see and interact with themselves, others, and the world in which they live. The novel first intervenes at the level of the senses, but rather than edulcorating or pleasing them, novels such as *Les Misérables* grate, agitate, prick and may even accost them in an attempt to alter readers' perceptions, to stir them from received ideas, or indeed to shock them.

Much of the comedy of "Une comédie à propos d'une tragédie" that precedes the 1832 edition of *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné* derives from Le Gros Monsieur's ineptitude at recognizing any utility or purpose in a novel that flaunts what he sees as "le bon goût." "Mais, ce roman," he bemoans, "il vous fait dresser les cheveux sur la tête, il vous fait venir la chair de poule, il vous donne de mauvais rêves. J'ai été deux jours au lit pour l'avoir lu"(*Romans*, 1.425). The satirical mode here only exaggerates to the point of comic ridicule what Hugo develops solemnly in the draft preface to *Les Misérables*. If there is a utility to the novel, for Hugo it begins by raising the hairs on your head, giving you goose bumps and bad dreams. The comically faint at heart or the punctilious stalwarts of convention for whom good taste is the sole purpose of aesthetics might even find themselves bedridden, convalescing after a jarring aesthetic experience. The novel may very well be a communicative act with a political, social or moral message to convey; but, more than that, what it offers first and foremost is a "taste" or feeling, a certain aesthetic experience that may challenge how its readers understand and experience good versus bad taste, beauty, humanity, harmony, self, and society.

Here Hugo parallels some of Jean-Paul Sartre's argument in his eponymous response to the question *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*(1948) Sartre makes the case that perception is action and that in reading we engage in both the creation and the disclosing or unveiling (*dévoilement*)

of the world with the potential to open up new perspectives for concrete change. Literature has the potential to upset a reader's conscience, creating what Sartre, following Hegel, terms a *conscience malheureuse*; and this feeling of uneasiness in turn serves as the self-reflexive basis for action, action meant to change the world and bring the real in greater alignment with one's ideals. However, even before this more overt action, Sartre argues that perception is action and that since literature has the potential to alter our perceptions of the world, literature is itself action.

This more or less standard account of Sartre's argument in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* leaves out, however, a rather important piece of that argument, one that speaks directly to the question of literature and democracy. Literature, Sartre reminds us, is always situated in a particular historical time and place. Although there may be certain functions and aspects of literature that transcend its immediate historical and geographical situation, the response to the question, what is literature, must necessarily take into account the situation in which that literature is produced. For Sartre, literature partakes of a larger historical dialectical movement, such that questions as to whether literature is subversive, conservative, revolutionary, counter-revolutionary or terrorist depend on the historical context.

Although Sartre may tend to align it more with revolution, claiming that it may even be "naturellement révolutionnaire," this seemingly inherent tendency is itself bound to a particular context: "la littérature est naturellement révolutionnaire, quand la révolution qui se prépare est bourgeoise, parce que la première découverte qu'elle fait de soi lui révèle ses liens avec la démocratie politique."[29] Such is the delicate balance that Sartre's essay aims to strike: literature by its very nature is aligned with the bourgeoisie; but perhaps, more deeply and intrinsically,

[29] *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* Paris: Gallimard, folio, 1948. 127.

literature unites with democracy. Furthermore, it is in exploring its own nature that literature discovers its common cause with democracy. That is indeed its first discovery, a discovery that it makes "of itself." When literature becomes self-reflective, when it poses itself the question of what it is, it unavoidably arrives at the conclusion: "L'art de la prose est solidaire du seul régime où la prose garde un sens: la démocratie"(*ibid.,* 71).

If, for Sartre writing in 1947, literature is once again to be revolutionary, it is in pitting its inherently democratic tendencies against its bourgeois inclinations. It is a question of once again making literature revolutionary, but where the revolution is not bourgeois, but Marxist humanist. For Sartre, as for Hugo, literature serves democracy because the two are mutually supportive, mutually beneficial, sharing a common project, "solidaire" as Sartre says. This is precisely the term that Hugo uses in one version of the preface to *Les Misérables* known either as the *Préface philosophique* or *Philosophie, commencement d'un livre*: "La grande chose de la démocratie, c'est la solidarité"(*Critique*, 508). In one of the most extensive studies of the link between democracy and literature in Hugo to date, Jacques Neefs argues convincingly that it is less a question of solidarity than the common movement by which one apprehends the real.

Although Neefs makes no mention of the quote from *William Shakespeare* on democracy being in literature, he does offer the most in depth arguments on the connections between democracy and literature in Hugo. Focusing almost exclusively on *Les Misérables*, his overarching thesis is that the novel, in its very enunciation, creates an "espace démocratique du roman."[30] Tracing the philosophical moments or digressions in the novel, he demonstrates how they build to grand, declarative, philosophical statements only to immediately undermine them, reinscribe them into the interrogative probing of the novel. The text thus dramatizes the reflexive

[30] Neefs, Jacques. "L'espace démocratique du roman." *Lire* Les Misérables. Ed. Anne Ubersfeld and Guy Rosa. Paris: José Corti, 1985. 21-38.

or interrogative process; social space is grasped visually as a tense interaction of forces where multiple points of view come into contact, clash, and give depth to the reality represented. The net result, concludes, Neefs is a certain "épaisseur du réel,"(*ibid*., 35) where the real is grasped in the depths of its interconnected forces.

This process is not, however, unique to Hugo. Balzac, for example, employs a similar narrative process, but its results are drastically different. For Balzac, it culminates in a near scientific gaze on society, one distant enough to observe and establish the laws governing the interaction of these forces. Hugo's novel, on the other hand, reinscribes each point of view such that there is no such scientific gaze, no position that is not itself both subject and object of the very forces it is observing. Rather than presenting social reality in all its vast visible tensions, Hugo's novel functions more by dramatizing visibility, that is, a certain mode of perceiving reality. Neefs finds an admirably lucid instance of this in the description of Jean Valjean's entry into the subterranean sewer system of Paris: "La pupille se dilate dans la nuit et finit par y trouver du jour, de même que l'âme se dilate dans le malheur et finit par y trouver Dieu"(Massin, 11.1009). For Neefs, this entry into darkness exemplifies how Hugo explores the limits of both society and thought. It is not a question of mapping out its contours but of adjusting to the situation and being able to see at those very moments that plunge one into society's greatest depths. It is, Neefs concludes, less a question of naming *les misérables* than of acclimating both the eye and the soul to see them for what they are: both grotesque and an unconventionally beautiful part of humanity.[31]

The novel, in Neefs characterization of it, unfolds a space of visibility at the same time that it attempts to enfold it, to envelop it within a movement that "*donn[e] à voir*" more than it

[31] For an alternative reading, see Gabrielle Chamarat-Malandain's *Les Misérables: Nommer l'innomable*. Orléans: Paradigme, 1994.

displays or shows. As Neefs puts it, “Le roman, en se faisant mimesis de l'accès à la visibilité, devient lui-même espace de tâtonnement dans le confus du réel”(Neefs, 32). The novel itself gropes around in the darkness at the limits of both thought and language; but as soon as it has felt its way around, adjusted to this new way of seeing at the limits of visibility, it is thrown back into the obscurity and the opacity from which it emerged. Each point of view is constantly folded back into the novel, into the object of its study, making it emerge and recede back into the horizons of obscurity and lightness that play on the margins of what is visible, sayable, and thinkable. It is through this movement, one that is constantly folding in on itself, reinscribing whatever philosophical declarations it articulates back into the interrogative movement of the text, that reality takes on, in Neefs terms, a certain “épaisseur.”

These are moments of chiasmus that are also moments of becoming, moments entirely dependent on the writing’s ability to make visible, to displace the limits of the visible. This constant shifting of the threshold of visibility struggles to give shape to an infinitely enveloping space. And it is this infinitely enveloping space that Neefs terms the “espace démocratique du roman.” The novel presents social space as “un sans-fond à explorer” but also opens this space to the risk of being *insaisissable* because there are no stable positions that are not subject to the novel’s own interrogative process. We might say that there is no transcendental position from which to judge the aesthetic movement, no scientific gaze that could observe and establish the laws of this movement. Neefs, however, holds out for transcendence, but a horizontal rather than a vertical transcendence: “L’espace esthétique se fait interrogation sur l'horizon du social et du monde, il est la sollicitation d'une sorte de transcendance horizontale pour penser ce qui (nous) enveloppe”(Neefs, 37).

Neefs is certainly not alone in reading these moments of philosophical digression within the narrative as moments of *mise en abyme* when the novel "peut être pensé." In many ways, Neefs' article anticipates Pierre Macherey's much more well known analysis of *Les Misérables* in *A quoi pense la littérature?*[32] Situating the novel as part of "[l]a naissance d'une littérature des profondeurs" that includes Eugène Sue, Heinrich Heine, Georges Sand, Marx, and Tocqueville, Macherey finds in Hugo a certain *philosophie littéraire* succinctly captured in the following description of Jean Valjean: "Il ressemblait aux êtres de nuit tâtonnant dans l'invisible et souterrainement perdus dans les veines de l'ombre."[33] Just as Neefs (and often drawing from the same quotes in *Les Misérables*), he reads these images of Jean Valjean's entry into the subterranean sewer system as a *mise en abyme.* The movement of the writing, in its very enunciation, is meant to capture this groping about in the darkness at once utterly lost but still unknowingly connected to a larger organic whole whose interconnected system of circulation may only be glimpsed through a plunge into what vacillates on the borders of visibility. The writing, Macherey and Neefs use the same verb, *tâtonne*. Macherey takes exception with Benjamin's reading of Hugo in which Hugo serves predominantly to highlight the novelty of Baudelaire's full-fledged modernity by way of an overly rigid contrast. In Benjamin's reading of Hugo, as glossed by Macherey, the people are made to identify with their destiny as sovereign in the democratic march of progress, and this identification is immediate, direct, and complete.

Analyzing figures of the "homme souterrain" or "homme en bas," Macherey demonstrates how the novel stages a dynamic perception, *une perception dynamisée*, of the people as both subject and object of the very act of perceiving. Rather than an immediate, direct,

[32] Macherey, Pierre. "Autour de Victor Hugo: figures de l'homme d'en bas." A quoi pense la littérature: Exercices de philosophie littéraire. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990. 77-95.
[33] *Les Misérables*. *Romans* 2.1009 (V, III, 1).

and complete identification, the people resemble more Jean Valjean's groping about in the dark as well as the novel's own dynamic attempt to shed light, articulate, or make visible what remains below (rather than beyond) its threshold of perception. The people themselves, the *demos* of democracy, thus never grasp themselves as a unified and self-possessed whole that can then wield its sovereign power in one harmonized and harmonizing voice, the voice of the people.

More than just an analysis of certain figures and themes in Hugo's novel, Macherey's reading finds a correspondence between Hugo's work of fiction and both the theoretical work of Marx and the historical work of Tocqueville. He argues that the figures of the "homme en bas" in Hugo reveal "une logique des images"(Macherey, 88), "une véritable structure de pensée"(*ibid*., 93) that is not just a "*mentalité*" but what strongly resembles what Foucault termed an "*épistèmè*." With the figure of subterranean man, Hugo contributes to the creation and articulation of "un nouvel ordre du savoir"(*ibid*., 94) that Macherey sums up as follow: "pour la société démocratique dont le modèle s'est peu à peu organisé après la fin du XVIIIe siècle, l'idée selon laquelle 'la vérité se situe en bas,' a tenu le rôle d'une telle notion commune, servant de règle et assignant leurs objets à tous ses discours"(*ibid*., 95). What unites Hugo, Marx, and Tocqueville is the creation of a certain structure of thought that goes along with the development of democratic societies, a necessary structure that fundamentally changes the conditions of thought. Although the question of the relationship between this new order of knowledge and the democratic society that articulates it is not Macherey's primary concern, the structure of thought that he articulates applies first and foremost to representations of the people. It is thus a question of how literature may help us think democracy, or rather how democracy attempts to think itself in and through literature. "La démocratie est dans cette littérature"; Macherey does seem to corroborate Hugo's assertion. The figure of the people, the *demos*, is for Macherey "[e]n soi-

même irreprésentable"(*ibid.,* 85). Nonetheless, through figures such as the subterranean man where the truth of humanity is situated in the depths, at the limits of representability, literature does manage to "montrer, ou plutôt […] suggérer, ce qui, par sa nature, appartenait à l'ombre: la masse sombre de l'homme en bas" and thus lend a certain "signification évocatoire"(*ibid*.) to the figure of the people.

Both Macherey and Neefs point to a certain structural understanding of democracy most thoroughly and influentially developed by Claude Lefort. Neefs quite explicitly invokes Lefort, adding a footnote to the conclusion quoted above that connects Hugo's elaboration of an "espace démocratique du roman" with Lefort's theoretical understanding of democracy as structured around "un lieu vide" such that in democratic societies according to Lefort, "le pouvoir, la loi, la connaissance se trouvent mis à l'épreuve d'une indétermination radicale."[34] Drawing on Ernst Kantorowicz's *The Kings Two Bodies*, Lefort builds his theory of democracy out of a certain narrative of the French Revolution, understood as both a continuation of the Ancien Régime and as a radical break from it.

Under the monarchy of the Ancien Régime, the king's mortal body doubled as the immortal, political body of society; in these two bodies, he embodied the order of society, guaranteed its continuity, and represented an organic unity by which each member of society knew his or her place within it. It is in contrast to this model that, according to Lefort, "se désigne le trait révolutionnaire et sans précédent de la démocratie. Le lieu du pouvoir devient un *lieu vide*"(Lefort, *Essais*, 27). Unlike both monarchies and totalitarian regimes, in a democracy power cannot take on bodily form (*s'incorporer*), rather democracy institutionalizes conflict around the empty place of power left by the beheading of the king. With this disincorporation of

[34] *L'invention démocratique: Les Limites de la domination totalitaire*. Paris: Fayard, 1981. 174. Quoted by Neefs, 37. Lefort's argument is more fully and famously developed in "La question de la démocratie." *Essais sur le politique:XIXe-XXe siècles.* Paris: Seuills, points, 1986. 17-32. Hereafter quoted as Lefort, *Essais*.

power in democratic societies comes a number of other monumental transformations that, collectively, institute "un nouveau rapport au réel" or "une nouvelle constitution symbolique du social"(*ibid*., 28) that may be concisely captured as "la *dissolution des repères de la certitude*"(*ibid*, 29). It is this dissolution that subjects democratic societies to radical indeterminacy such that there is no absolute guarantee of law, power, or knowledge nor any organic unity by which to identify one's place in society and one's relation to others. Democracy comes to be defined as an institutionalized symbolic struggle for power and is associated with certain forms that this conflict takes, most prominently elections.

For Neefs, Hugo's novels stage this radical indeterminacy in their very enunciation; they unfold a space, the space of democratic contest, at the same time that they strive to enfold that very space within the movement of its own unfurling. As Neefs puts it, "la démocratie est constituante de l'unité qui la constitue." But, whereas Neefs' article and most scholarly work on democracy and literature in Hugo makes no mention of the Terror, Lefort's theory of democracy brings to the fore what was there in Hugo all along: the "93 littéraire" that necessarily accompanies the union of democracy and literature. On the one hand, Hugo's literary democracy depends on an understanding of democracy in relation to the empty place of power left by the decapitated king, and thus Neefs is able to convincingly bring together Hugo's exploration of what lies at the limits of the visible with Lefort's theory of democracy as an adventure of radical indeterminacy. Similarly, although Macherey's primary concern is the articulation of a certain structure of thought and literature's contribution to it, he repeatedly alludes to the development of this structure in tandem with the rise of modern democracy. The unrepresentability of the people in Macherey finds its counterpart in the unfigurability of the empty place of power in Lefort.

It is furthermore in this way that Hugo poses a problem for Rancière's reading of Hugo, and by way of that, with the reading of Hugo developed earlier in this chapter. It is also in this way that the role of the Terror in understanding democracy gets to the heart of contemporary theoretical debates about democracy and thus how Hugo may be said to respond to Rancière. Rancière repeatedly takes aim at Lefort and his reliance on a structure of sacrifice animating the Terror. More explicitly, in number five of his "Dix thèses sur la politique,"(1990) he develops his own understanding of the people, which he defines as "la partie supplémentaire par rapport à tout compte des parties de la population, qui permet d'identifier au tout de la communauté le compte des incomptés."[35] Further on, he identifies the people as "parts sans part," which is the term that he will use more frequently in his subsequent work. This definition also has the added advantage of explicitly linking Rancière's thought to the Derridean logic of the supplement, which Rancière has also developed more explicitly in recent work.[36]

The people for Ranicière are always divided, a division that is at once internal and external, but what is essential for Rancière, in his debate with Lefort, is that this division is not the result of any sacrifice, specifically not the sacrifice of Louis XVI during the French Revolution. The problem with Lefort's theory, according to Rancière, is its reliance on an originary unity of society in the body of the king, a unity that must be sacrificed but leaves a longing for that very unity. Against this influential theory, he contends, "Il faut délier l'interruption et la désidentification démocratiques de cette dramaturgie sacrificielle qui noue originairemt l'émergence démocratique aux grands spectres de la réincorporatn terroriste et

[35] *Aux bords du politique*. Paris: La Fabrique, 1998. 171-172.
[36] Rancière, Jacques. "Does Democracy Mean Something?" *Adieu, Derrida*. Ed. Costas Douzinas. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

totalitaire d'un corps déchiré."[37] Even more explicitly, in an interview for *SubStance,* Rancière extends his critique of Lefort to an indictment of all political theology:

> all "theological-political" thought centers on this Freudian theme of patricide, on Lacanian exclusion, on the Kantian sublime, on the Ten Commandments' interdiction of representation, etc. in order to definitively impose a pathological vision of the political, wherein two centuries of history are read as a single catastrophe linked to this original murder. I wanted to show that democratic people were totally independent from this drama.[38]

If in Rancière's theory political theology is doomed to a pathological repetition, Hugo's novels seem to fit squarely within this vision as sacrifice, one that for Hugo becomes the ultimate guarantor of democracy.

The question of the relation between literature and democracy thus entails the question of the Terror, not just for Hugo, but for contemporary theorists and philosophers such as Claude Lefort and Jacques Rancière. The Terror is indeed at the center of the debate between Lefort and Rancière on the nature of democracy. Lefort inscribes it in a certain history that makes of the French Revolution, particularly the beheading of Louis XVI, the founding moment of democracy. Defined as a way of institutionalizing conflict and giving particular forms to struggles for power, democracy maintains a structural affinity with the monarchy of the Ancien Régime in that the conflict is centered on a place of power, once occupied by the king's two bodies, that after the beheading remains empty. On the other hand, democracy breaks significantly with the Ancien Régime in that post revolutionary democratic societies cannot take on bodily form; the people who wield the power in democracies, unlike the body of the king, cannot be localized in time and space, cannot take on a particular, fixed and stable representation. They are constantly undermined by radical indeterminacy.

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[37] *La Mésentente: Politique et philosophie*. Paris: Galilée, 1995. 140.
[38] "Jacques Rancière: Literature, Politics, Aesthetics: Approaches to Democratic Disagreement." *SubStance*. Issue 92, vol. 29, no. 2 (2000): 3-24. 19.

Hugo's novels parallel this indeterminacy creating what Neefs terms the "espace démocratique du roman." However, Rancière takes Lefort to task for making democratic politics into a pathology, one that seems doomed to forever repeat the sacrifices of the French Revolution, and thus the Terror. Against the political theological model he finds in Lefort, he develops a theory of democracy in which the people are always double: those that have a full stake in society and are recognized as such and the *parts sans part*, who have a stake in society but are not fully recognized as such. Rancière defends this understanding in part by arguing that it does not fall victim to a logic of sacrifice, the very logic that Hugo's poetry and novels are constantly restaging.

"93 littéraire": Reinscribing the Terror in literature and democracy

It is in the context of this debate that in I want to reinscribe the Terror into the reading of Hugo on democracy and literature. Hugo, much more than either Lefort or Rancière, attempts to think the triad: literature, democracy, terror. Lefort explores one way that the Terror and democracy are linked; Rancière makes the case for a "literary democracy," but has very little to say about the Terror. This is evident in his treatment of Hugo. Hugo may play a pivotal role in his genealogy of literature as *une parole muette et bavarde*, but Rancière does not address what Hugo states explicitly; "La démocratie est dans cette littérature," but where that literature is also a "93 littéraire." In this section, I read Hugo's staging of literature, democracy, Terror in the

meeting of bishop Myriel and the Conventionnel G in *Les Misérables*. I argue that Hugo's conjunction of literature and democracy requires the complete transposition of the material violence of the Terror into symbolic violence, what he terms the *drame dans les faits* into the *drame dans les idées*. Hugo strives to aestheticize the Terror and to mobilize its legacy in the name of the symbolic "work" on humanity, work begun by the Revolution but whose completion now falls to literature and aesthetics more broadly.

The Terror continued to pose problems for Hugo because, in his grand Romantic, democratic revolution, it cannot be so easily sublimated into the ethereal realm of ideas and into a notion of history driven almost exclusively by ideas. Democracy may be in that literature as Hugo claims; but if Hugo insists that that literature is also a literary terror, we should add that that democracy is liberal, deliberative democracy. It is a democracy that projects a radical faith in the symbolic, a symbolic disconnected from the materiality of the real and undergirded by a faith in the voice of the people. *Vox populi, vox dei.* The "imagination tapageuse à cent voix" may indeed give voice to a muddled mass verging on the cacophonous; and those hundred voices may indeed act as a dissolvent on prejudices and the abuses that have over time solidified into seemingly natural structures in the bourgeois mind. Through the clash of these hundred voices truth may precipitate out; and violent competition may give rise to harmony. But, all of this, on the condition that that violence separates out rigidly the symbolic from the material. Alternatively, and this is one of the threats that Hugo must continuously keep at bay, the muddled mass of cacophonous voices may only result in a discordant multitude that too easily lends itself to domination by the most powerful voice that manages to assert itself as *the* voice of the people. Rather than the voice of truth or reason, what emerges may only be the voice of the most powerful, the voice that manages to unite a majority of the people under its banner, symbol,

slogan, anthem, image, or person. Against this threat, what Lefort defines as the fascist threat, Hugo pits a certain providentialism, one that inscribes his subjective vision of the future into the present, thus making it into a task for the present to complete.

True to his poetic project in which "Tout parle," Hugo gives voice to the Terror, first in the figure of the Conventionnel G in *Les Misérables* and then again in *Quatrevingt-Treize*. The Catholic press cried heresy at the scene in *Les Misérables* in which a bishop bows down before a Conventionnel and asks for his benediction; and, with perhaps as much hermeneutic savvy as outright disdain, it accused Hugo himself of being a "terroriste." As controversial as this inverted benediction certainly was, a more surprising feature is, as Victor Brombert has noted, that the voice of the Terror in Hugo speaks the language of religious mysticism.[39] As Pierre Albouy has demonstrated, meticulously reconstructing the polemic, the apotheosis of the Conventionnel was not meant to provoke the ire of Catholics; rather Hugo's interlocutors were atheist socialists such as Proudhon, Feuerbach, and Pierre Leroux, who argued that religion and democracy were incompatible. According to this argument, if democracy means that power is vested in the people and emanates from them, then, by postulating the existence of a transcendent being (or beings) who would subject human power to its own, religion contradicts democracy and is thus incompatible with it. The meeting of the Conventionnel and the bishop Myriel is most often read as Hugo's response; he advocates a divine right democracy, where democracy derives its legitimacy not from the people themselves but rather from the people as instruments of a transcendent power.

This reading, however, does not address the Terror, the representation of the Terror, or why it would fall to the Terror to profess divine right democracy. Much has been made of

[39] Brombert, Victor. *Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U P, 1984.

Hugo's conflicted attempt to situate the Terror within a providential view of history; but not enough of how this attempt proceeds by way of the theme of the king's two bodies. However, before addressing the king's two bodies and by way of leading up to it, let us begin by reading this chapter of *Les Misérables* as an instance of the democratic utility of the grotesque.

In *Philosophie, commencement d'un livre*, Hugo claims "La grande chose de la démocratie, c'est la solidarité. […] Rien n'est solitaire, tout est solidaire."(Massin, 49-50) thus paralleling Sartre and echoing the *Préface* to *Cromwell*: "Tout se tient"(*Critique,* 9). Part of what is at stake in this scene is to demonstrate that this "homme solitaire," outside of the community and outside of the law, is indeed *solidaire,* that is, that he partakes of the movement of history no matter how isolated, forgotten, condemned, monstrous, or grotesque he may appear to be. In this way, the Terror is an *épreuve,* both trial and proof, of Hugo's democratic vision. If the grotesque is understood as that which challenges a certain aesthetic understanding of humanity, one caught between the dual imperatives of striving for harmony and not mutilating the reality represented, then the Terror may very well be the greatest challenge to Hugo's democratic vision. It cannot be relegated to a minor detail. Quite to the contrary, it is perhaps the most glaring challenge to the celebration of the French Revolution as advent of democracy because it seems to weigh it down with contradictions that risk bringing it to a grinding halt, which in Hugo's cosmological vision is tantamount to death. If, on the other hand, the Terror – in all its violence, presumed Machiavellian self interest, and putative disregard for humanity – may be shown to have been, like the grotesque, a detail in a more imposing attempt at harmony; then, the Terror may indeed be a necessary component of literature and democracy. If we follow the scientific imagery, it is a moment of error, equivalent to groping about in the darkness, before the pupil/soul has adjusted and seen light in the midst of darkness.

If what is at stake in the chapter is the Conventionnel's inscription in a larger, Providential perspective, making the radical democracy of the Year II part of literature and democracy's struggle for greater harmony, then this is accomplished through a series of conversions and a play of recognition and misrecognition. The dialogue between bishop Myriel and the Conventionnel G constantly shifts perspectives, reinscribing what is affirmed into a different perspective, what Neefs convincingly characterizes as an attempt to explore the limits of thought and language but also to envelop what lies at those limits within their own interrogatory exploration.

However, even before the dialogue, the text sets up the encounter as one of great tension at the extreme limits of society and humanity. Myriel, "perplexe," stammers between a sense of duty, "je lui dois ma visite," and "ce sentiment qui est comme la frontière de la haine et qu'exprime si bien le mot éloignement"[40] The text dramatizes this mix of aversion, near hatred, horror, curiosity, and duty as Myriel seems physically to test the limits in his own sort of *tâtonnement*: "Quelquefois il allait de ce côté-là, puis il revenait"(*ibid*.). When he finally does strike off to see the Conventionnel G, it is reiterated that he is journeying "au fond," to the fringes of society, and his arrival coincides with another limit point: "Le soleil déclinait et touchait presque à l'horizon." His heart races as he approaches the "*tanière*"(liar); the place itself is described as "excommunié," literally outside of the community where even the law, in the form of the sentinel who escorted G there "avait disparu sous l'herbe"(*ibid*., 62). But, the first image of G, a white haired man of eighty sitting in a wheelchair smiling at the setting sun – a premonition of his own imminent death – hardly matches the image formed by the doxa in the nearby town of Digne: a savage and monstrous vulture praying on a once moribund social order.

[40] Hugo, Victor. *Les Misérables*. Ed. René Journet. Paris:Flammarion, GF, 1967. 3 vols. 61. Hereafter cited as *Misérables*.

When he utters his first words, he further upends the expectations nourished by the "commerages" of Digne. For them, a Conventionnel is a relic from another time, an epoch when "on se tutoyait et qu'on disait: citoyen." G, however, not only uses the formal *vous* but addresses Myriel with the bourgeois title of *Monsieur*, both signs of bourgeois civility and, moreover, of G's tacit acceptance that times have changed and that the revolutionary bravado in speech is no more. G greets Myriel with simple and gracious hospitality, "Entrez, monsieur"(*ibid*., 63). Although Myriel rebuffs the offer, he will himself echo this command when Jean Valjean knocks uninvited at his door.

At the limits, where expectations fray and extremes meet, the dialogue proceeds toward the first and major conversion, that of bishop Myriel to revolutionary mysticism. Throughout their conversion, there is no negation. The word "no" is not uttered. Both the Conventionnel G and bishop Myriel launch volleys that the reader knows are erroneous, but neither rejects the accusations. Rather, they tacitly accept them at the same time that they shift the perspective, giving new meaning to what has been said and creating much of the tension in this exchange. Myriel launches his sardonic opening gambit: "Je vous félicite […] Vous n'avez toujours pas voté la mort du roi"(*ibid*., 64) as if the trial were still going on and the Conventionnel, on his death bed or during his prolonged seclusion, could still vote the death of the king and thereby reignite the Terror. Myriel does not recognize that G's language has already resigned that aspect of the Revolution to the past. G confronts Myriel's "accent sévère" with his own "accent austère," which is severity turned inward toward oneself. G does not, however, defend the Convention's decision to put the king to death; he is not baited by the accusation in the form of congratulations. Rather, he, the supposed incarnation of extremism, solicits moderation: "Ne me félicitez pas trop, monsieur"(*ibid*.). He does defend his actions, but he casts them in a different

light, nuancing Myriel's depiction of his actions, and giving them new meaning. Rather than protesting that he did not vote the death and rather than defending the sovereign decision of the Convention, he recasts the accusation: "j'ai voté la fin du tyran."

The tyrant that G identifies, however, is not Louis XVI, monarchy, the Ancien Régime and its feudal system of castes. He thus introduces even greater difference between Myriel's description and his own. The tyrant that G fought against – and by extension what the Terror fought against – is ignorance: "Ce tyran-là a engendré la royauté qui est l'autorité prise dans le faux"(*ibid.*, 65). G thus offers up a different point of view, one that does not stop at royalty as the source of tyranny; as he understands it tyranny has itself a source in a greater form of tyranny, ignorance and error. Whereas during the king's trial many in the Convention argued that monarchy was itself unnatural, that is, was itself outside the laws of nature and worthy of the most pitiless condemnation, Hugo presents the image of the Conventionnel who attributes all the tyranny of monarchical rule to error, humanity misguided, a prolonged erroneous misstep in the long and grueling process of trial and error on the way to science. Man should be governed only by science, states G; Myriel in quick rejoinder adds "Et la conscience." But G claims they are one and the same: "La consciences, c'est la quantité de science innée que nous avons en nous"(*ibid*., 66). It is upon hearing these words that Myriel gives a start as he listens to "ce langage très nouveau." What matters less in this exchange is G's redefinition of conscience than the shifting of perspective, the "langage très nouveau" created by probing the limits of thought and language and enfolding those limits into a dialectic exchange.

G describes the work of the Revolution as an "oeuvre," thus highlighting its moral, religious, or aesthetic aspects comparable to an *oeuvre d'art*. The *oeuvre,* he concedes, "a été incomplète […] nous avons démoli l'ancien régime dans les faits, nous n'avons pu entièrement

le supprimer dans les idées. Détruire les abus, cela ne suffit pas; il faut modifier les moeurs. Le moulin n'y est plus, le vent y est encore"(*ibid.,* 67). It is here that G's description of the work of the Revolution most closely parallels Hugo's poetic project as articulated in "Réponse à un acte d'accusation," as well as Hugo's own claim for the utility of the novel as a situated socio-political intervention in the preface to *Les Misérables*. Moreover, the three "problèmes du siècle" that the novel is meant to combat: "la dégradation de l'homme par le prolétariat, la déchéance de la femme par la faim, l'atrophie de l'enfant par la nuit" are reiterated by G as justification for the Terror: "J'ai voté la fin du tyran. C'est-à-dire la fin de la prostitution pour la femme, la fin de l'esclavage pour l'homme, la fin de la nuit pour l'enfant." This *mise en abyme* by which the work of the Terror mirrors the utility of the novel furthers the poetic project of "Réponse à un acte d'accusation," extending the revolutionary-poetic terror to the novel. However, we can push this parallel even further, tying in Hugo's revisionist rereading of Romanticism in 1830, his comments on democracy and literature in *William Shakespeare,* the role of the grotesque, as well as the *Préface philosophique* to *Les Misérables*.

The work of the Revolution, including the work of the Terror, plays on different conversions. The first is that of Myriel to the new language of the Terror. He comes to appreciate that there is no hierarchy in suffering, the suffering of the people merits pity just as much as, if not more than, the suffering of the young dauphin, Louis XVII, who died in the Temple prison at the age of ten. Furthermore, he is brought to comprehend the dialectical movement of which even the Terror partakes. And, by bowing down and asking for benediction, he participates in this movement. Here he contrasts starkly with Javert, who takes his own life when his worldview has been radically challenged by Jean Valjean's acts of kindness. Rather than administer the last rights to the dying man, Myriel asks to receive the benediction and thereby extends his role from

the "témoin" that G assigns him at the outset to that of active participant. Göran Blix has recently touched on the role of the witness in his analysis of the figure of the *passant* in *Les Misérables.* He argues that if there is a heroism to the *passant* it is in the incarnation of the point of view of justice at a critical moment. As witnesses, the *passants* attest to a form of justice at those moments when history appears to be at odds with it. Furthermore, by projecting himself into the role of *passant,* Hugo makes of the poet-novelist a witness who is able to see the greater march of history, the *longue durée*, that evades historical actors. This vision is also of course Hugo's writing of that history, giving form to those moments when history itself seems to be groping about for meaning. The dialectical movement could be interpreted thus as providential, this is certainly Hugo's unrelenting assertion. However, it is, as Blix notes, a purely subjective providence, one projected onto the future in the very gesture of witnessing.[41] It is left to the future, it is the task of the future, to render justice to this event, the very justice to which the poet-passant bears witness. Although Blix does not touch on this particular chapter of *Les Misérables*, his analysis sheds light on Myriel's role as "*témoin*" to the Conventionnel's death. Myriel incarnates justice at a moment when society has condemned and excommunicated a man who deserves praise and admiration for his suffering and for his service to humanity. He bears witness to the justice of the incomplete work of the Revolution, he inscribes it in a dialectical movement in which he in turn takes part.

The narrator consistently intervenes in the text, passing judgment, but also adding a third voice to the dialogue and inscribing it within the novel as a whole and – in keeping with the preface – within a larger socio-political context. It is in this way that the bitter glass of modern French society offered up by the novel is equivalent to the terrorist's discourse. Just as the

[41] Blix, Göran. "Le Livre des passants: l'héroïsme obscur dans Les Misérables." *Ego Hugo*. Ed. Stéphanie Boulard. *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 302: 2 (2011). 63-75.

dialogue between the Conventionnel and Myriel brings about a conversion in bishop Myriel, the novel goads the reader toward a similar transformation. This is perhaps most evident in the narrator's interaction with the "commerages" about the Conventionnel. The people of Digne call him a vulture, to which the narrator poses the question, "Etait-ce du reste un vautour que G.?" The affirmative response however does not connect the Conventionnel to the scavenging habits of the bird, but rather for Myriel he is a vulture in that there is "de farouche dans sa solitude"(*ibid.,* 60). The narrator continues the metaphor mobilized by the rumors but plays with expectations, setting them up only to overturn them or distort them such that they no longer hold. The scene both begins and ends with these rumors, and part of what is at stake in Myriel's conversion is his position in relation to them. Initially sharing in the general "horreur" at the mere mention of G, Myriel at the end returns to Digne where everyone is startled at Myriel's newfound respect for the Conventionnel, just as Myriel had been unsettled by G. The chapter ends with a dowager, *une douairière* (the same word Hugo uses for the Académie in "Réponse"), asking Myriel "on demand quand Votre Grandeur aura le bonnet rouge"(*ibid*., 71). The text thus continues the play of playful irreverence, the play between the grand and the petit, a play of recognition and misrecognition, of light and dark. Myriel has the last words "voilà une grosse couleur…" echoing the "gros mot" the narrator uses to introduce the "conventionnel" at the beginning of the chapter. Myriel continues, "Heureusement que ceux qui la mérpisent dans un bonnet la vénèrent dans un chapeau"(*ibid*.). Even this dowager, disparagingly referred to as "de la variété impertinente qui se croit spirituelle," is made to partake in the shift in the perspectives brought about by G in Myriel. The dowager is impertinent, irreverent toward Myriel just as he himself had been toward Napoléon and G toward him. This grand play of reverence/irreverence and recognition/misrecognition extends to the level of doxa the exchange between G and Myriel.

Lastly, there is the implied transformation of the reader, who now occupies a position analogous to that of bishop Myriel. Whereas Myriel faced a terrorist, the reader faces a novel, whose preface and subsequent *mise en abyme* make it a "93 littéraire." The voice of the Terror here is made to function as the grotesque in the *Préface* to *Cromwell*, a moment of intense discord that challenges our sense and understanding of history, society, and humanity. By recuperating the Terror, by making the Terror serve the dialectical movement of history that is either providential or utopian, Hugo does however cut short the Terror. The Conventionnel G may indeed have the last, ironic word as his accusation toward Myriel, "vous n'aimez pas les crudités du vrai" applies equally to Hugo and his representation of the Terror. Or, perhaps it is the *crudités de l'histoire* that are too quickly transformed into the *crudités du vrai*; any sort of crudeness or harshness is admissible in Hugo as long as it may be made to fit within a dialectic movement toward greater harmony.

What Hugo consistently evades in his representations of the Terror is the material body of the king. From *Réponse à un acte d'accusation*, where Hugo the poet-terrorist reenacts the major events of the Revolution, to the Conventionnel G in *Les Misérables* and on to *Quatrevingt-Treize,* the Terror is aestheticized as the work that puts to death the Ancien Régime and even Louis XVI. But, it is always only the symbolic body of the king. What is even more shocking than Myriel's genuflection or the Conventionnel's G use of the language of religious mysticism is that the voice that speaks the Terror is a "quasi-régicide." The narrator-Hugo gently chides and pokes fun at the citizens of Digne for their hyperbolic identification of G as a "monstre" and "un vautour," whose acts were "terrible" and whose death can only be welcomed with a "Dieu merci!" But Hugo goes to the other extreme; his bravado masks a coy protection of the body of the king: "Il n'avait pas voté la mort du roi, mais presque." For those who did indeed vote the

death of the king – both body politic and material, natural body – Hugo has very little to say. He alludes to them only indirectly by way of contrast to G, who "[n]'ayant pas voté la mort du roi, il n'avait pas été compris dans les décrets d'exil, et avait pu rester en France"(*ibid*., 60). Hugo goes to great lengths to set the scene for the encounter with this *quasi-régicide* as one on the frayed and savage margins of society, outside of the law, a "caverne" that one approaches with great trepidation and only after multiply attempts. But, for those who did indeed vote the death of the king, the true regicides, Hugo passes over them in silence. For Hugo, they remain outside of France and outside of literature's dialectical movement toward a greater, more encompassing vision of democratic society. They constitute an empty place that rather than structuring democratic conflict simply remains outside, not constitutive of democratic society and its literature.

One could argue that this is only a minor detail, but Hugo himself made this the detail that would continue to pose a challenge to his literary and philosophic practice. I would argue then it is this detail that brings to focus the grand shortcoming in Hugo's poetic project. As he explains in *Philosophie, commencement d'un livre,* "il faut, la misère étant matérialiste, que le livre de la misère soit spiritualiste"(Massin, 12.71); and, similarly in the *Reliquat* to *Les Misérables*: "De même que pour étudier le cadavre, il faut le désinfecter, pour étudier la misère, il faut la sublimer"(Massin, 12.1255). The disinfection, the spiritualization, the sublimation that defines much of Hugo's work stops short of materiality. The liberation of the word is meant to bring with it a liberation of thought, and thus political liberation, but it is a freedom from materiality and particularly from the materiality of history. We could extend this reading to include *Quatrevingt-Treize* where instead of the Terror's trial and execution of the king, Hugo offers the quartering and massacring of a book.

The material body of the king, unable to be sublimated (*sublimer*) in the disinfecting and spiritualizing work of Hugo's literature persists as a presence marked through its absence, a figure that haunts much of Hugo's poetry and novels. Hugo's conjunction of democracy and literature necessarily passes through the Terror as it is the Terror that creates the structural possibility of democracy as theorized by Lefort. The Terror challenges most radically Hugo's poetic project because it creates a material debt which democracy must repay, and perhaps continuously repay. The Terror made the democracy complicitous with the Ancien Régime, and thus the Terror failed according to Hugo not because it was too radical, but because it was not radical enough. Its radical violence was misdirected, it failed to understand that the truly radical gesture requires sacrifice to the other, to one's enemy. It is only through this symbolic triumph that the Revolution can truly triumph over the Ancien Régime. It is for this reason that figures of sacrifice abound whenever Hugo struggles to come to terms with the Terror. His literary democracy perpetuates sacrifice, and transfigures all struggle into symbolic struggle; it is ultimately the triumph of the symbolic over the material. The problem is that Hugo's clashes are always between ideas, not people, interests, and even less groups. "Tout se tient," but all is sublimated into the *drame dans les idées* leaving behind so much of the *drame dans les faits*. It is the triumph of the written word over concrete reality, of fiction over fact or deed. This is precisely the problem that the anarchists will address in the latter half of the nineteenth-century.

Chapter 2

Aesthetic Education of the Bomb:

Anarchist "propaganda of the deed"

and Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*

"Neuf-Thermidor littéraire"?

On 11 December 1896 theater critic Henri Fouquier of *Le Figaro* launched an attack against the experimental theaters of Paris, the fringe theaters or *théâtres d'à côtés,* forerunners of the avant-garde, for having overstepped what he considered the legitimate bounds of experimentation. Taking as "*symptomatique*" the spectators' raucous upheaval at the première of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* at the *Théâtre de l'Oeuvre* the previous night, Fouquier, with great rhetorical fanfare, informed his readers, "*nous avons assisté à une véritable soirée de Neuf-Thermidor littéraire,*" which, he hoped, would finally put an end to "*une sorte de Terreur qui régnait sur les Lettres.*"[1] Ratcheting up the provocation, he followed this article with another

[1] Fouquier, Henri. "Critique: *Ubu roi*." *Le Figaro* 11 Dec. 1896.

article two days later, this one *à la une* and vehemently titled*: "La Terreur littéraire."*[2] He indicted theaters, the press, audience members as well as intellectuals for imposing on the public at large "une véritable terreur"; he then went on to elaborate parallels between literary terror, the Terror of 1793, and the recent spate of anarcho-terrorism that shook Paris in 1892-1894. He called on "le vrai public," "le bon public" to pursue its triumph over the aesthetic vanguard, those extremists who had pushed the legitimate goal of regenerating art and society to "terrorist" excesses.

The first to respond in the ardent debate that ensued, Henry Baüer, a former militant Communard, writing for *L'Echo de Paris,* led the charge in support of Jarry's play and the broader artistic movement that it was taken to represent. Rather than deny the terrorist accusation, Baüer assumed it zealously, at the same time overturning its value judgment and offering a rather different understanding of the Terror: "Certes, il a pu se faire une terreur littéraire […] je m'honore d'y participer, d'avoir collaboré à la liberté de l'art dramatique."[3] Contrary to Fouquier, for Baüer and others, Jarry's literary terror contributed to the overriding struggle to liberate art from the stifling conventions that had relegated theater to a second rate art forced to slavishly serve bourgeois entertainment. Literary terror was justified, indeed necessary according to Baüer, because it served artistic freedom and innovation. A series of articles by the "terrorists" hammered out this argument repeatedly in major and minor newspapers and journals. Retaliating, the "Thermidorians" hit back with an equal number of articles rehashing the well-worn arguments against the Terror.[4] But despite the vast differences separating the two sides,

[2] Henri Fouquier. "La Terreur Littéraire." *Le Figaro* 13 Dec. 1896.
[3] Baüer, Henry. "Chronique." *Echo de Paris* 19 Dec. 1896.
[4] Jarry himself collected these articles. *La Société des Amis d'Alfred Jarry* has reprinted his "dossier" of press articles and made it available on their web site: http://www.alfredjarry.fr/amisjarry/documents/reactionsubu.html

both agreed on the terms of the battle and took as given the affinity between art and terrorism, both that of 1793-1794 and 1892-1894.

Jarry himself participated in and contributed to this debate, articulating and developing his own conception and practice of the theater in terms of political and aesthetic terror. Showing a preference for the more recent anarcho-terrorism over the French Revolutionary Terror, he characterized Ubu Roi as a "parfait anarchiste de l'art," and compared the play both to Vaillant's bombing of the Chamber of Deputies (1893) as well as Emile Henry's bombings of the Rue des Bons Enfants Police Station (1892) and the Café Terminus (1894) in Paris.[5] But most explicitly and famously, in "Questions de théâtre," he flippantly professed "la foule est une masse inerte et incompréhensive et passive qu'il la faut frapper de temps en temps."[6] Art, for Jarry and his avant-garde supporters, had become a form of *attentat*. This notion of art as attack seems to have been corroborated by the legacy of the riotous opening night of *Ubu Roi,* pitting aesthetic terror against a crowd of spectators goaded into taking on the role of belligerent participants. Although literary historians have done much to dispel the myth of the riot, it persists rather doggedly because, in G.E. Wellwarth's terms, it sowed "the seed of the avant-garde"[7] that would flourish, most notably, with Artaud, dada, surrealism, Ionesco and on to Beckett, and Genet.

Jarry was certainly not the only artist to draw parallels between art and the anarcho-terrorist bombings. Quite to the contrary, such parallels pervade the Paris art scene of the 1890s including music, dance, poetry, theater, painting, and graphic arts. Emile Zola, simultaneously

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[5] The classic account of the history of anarchism is: Maitron, Jean. *Le mouvement anarchiste en France.* Paris: Gallimard, tel, 1992. For a recent account of Emile Henry, see: Merriman, John. *The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-de-siècle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terrorism*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. For an account of the international aspects of anarcho-terrorism, see: Bouhey, Vivien. "Terrorism on the Move: International Anarchist Networks in *Fin-de-Siècle* France." Trans. Cory Browning. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism*. Ed. Carola Dietze and Claudia Verhoeven. (Forthcoming).

[6] Jarry, Alfred. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade. Ed. Michel Arrivé and Henri Bordillon. 1972. Hereafter cited as *OC*. 417.

[7] Wellwarth, G. E. "Alfred Jarry: The Seed of the Avant-Garde Drama." *Criticism* 4:2 (1962: Spring). 108-119.

fascinated and appalled, waxed lyrical about "l'éternelle poésie noire" of these acts of terrorism. Poet Paul Adam and engraver Charles Maurin collaborated to build up the image of the most infamous of the bomb throwers, Ravachol, as Christ-like martyr who had come to announce a new era of humanity and to preach the gospel of the bomb. Denizens of Belleville showed their support of the anarchist cause by dancing and singing "La Ravachole." The poet Laurent Tailhade, asked to comment on Vaillant's *attentat* on the Chamber of Deputies, notoriously captured the decadent aesthete's quintessential rejoinder: "Qu'importent les victimes si le geste est beau?"[8] And lastly, in one of a series of comparisons between poetry and bombs, Stéphane Mallarmé, also asked to comment on Vaillant's attack, retorted, "Je ne sais pas d'autre bombe, qu'un livre."[9] Indeed, as Richard Sonn has demonstrated, terrorism in the 1890s was the "dramatic focus" of literary and artistic currents.[10]

This dramatic focus extends both back in time, linking anarcho-terrorism to the Revolutionary Terror, and forward, informing theory of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Echoing Jarry, Peter Bürger in 1974 thus famously defined the avant-garde as "an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society," a "negation of the autonomy of art," and an attempt to do away with the distance between art and life, in what he termed the sublation of art into life.[11] Similarly, Matei Calinescu in 1977 drew out the connection between the aesthetic avant-garde and nineteenth-century anarchism: "Bakunin's anarchist maxim, 'To destroy is to create,' is actually applicable to most of the activities of the twentieth-century avant-garde."[12] More

[8] Brulat, Paul. "La Dynamite au Palais-Bourbon." *Le Journal* (supplément). 10 Dec. 1893. For a thorough and theoretically savvy reading of Tailhade and the Foyot bombing, see: Lay, Howard. "'Beau geste!' (On the Readability of Terrorism)." *Yale French Studies*. No. 101 "Fragments of Revolutoin." 2001. 79-100.
[9] Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Ed. Bertrand Marchal. Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 2003. 660.
[10] Sonn, Richard D. *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-Siècle France*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1989. 184.
[11] Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984. 51.
[12] Calinescu, Matei. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke U P, 1987. 117.

recently, Jacques Rancière has given new vigor to such questions and situated them in broader debates about the relationship between aesthetics and politics and how art may effect political and social change. Focusing particularly on theater and performance art in an attempt to overturn the critical legacy of Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, in *Le Spectateur émancipé* he opens up new possibilities for reinvesting theater, and the spectacle more broadly, with revolutionary, emancipatory potential.

It is in light of these new possibilities that this chapter traces a certain genealogy that links the Revolutionary Terror of 1793-1794 to the advent of avant-garde theater in Jarry's *Ubu roi* via the anarchist theory and practice of "propagande par le fait"(propaganda of the deed). Charting the development of propaganda of the deed through Mikhail Bakunin's writings on the Terror and the Commune, his dispute with Karl Marx, the debates of the Communards themselves, and on to anarchist journals such as *L'Avant-garde*, *Le Bulletin de la Fédération jurassienne*, and *Le Révolté* (renamed *La Révolte* when it moved to Paris in 1887), I demonstrate that propaganda of the deed developed out of anarchist interpretations and critiques of the Terror, particularly the idea of a "revolutionary government." Whereas revisionist historians, following François Furet, insist on a certain Hegelian dialectic of ideas as the driving force of the Revolutionary dynamic, I demonstrate that the anarchists articulate a *sensibilité jacobine,* that is, a legacy of the Terror that is not passed down through revolutionary ideology or the adoption of a certain "pensée," but rather through aesthetic or affective means. I argue that propaganda of the deed developed from this critique in an attempt to elaborate a new model of revolutionary action and a new form of aesthetic education, one that eventually tried to use the spectacle of the bomb to "teach," to "raise consciousness," and to incarnate ideas "en chair et en os." Whereas Schiller

proposed aesthetic education as a solution to state-sponsored terrorism, one that would lead to the "aesthetic State," turn-of-the-century anarchists used terrorism against the state in order to destroy it and to bring about radical social transformation. Their critique of revolutionary action modeled on the Terror led them to reintroduce violence and terror both as a legitimate form of revolutionary action and as a form of aesthetic education, one that would emphasis deeds over theory or metaphysics and that would expunge the involuntary appropriations of the legacy of the Terror, the very *sensibilité jacobine* that, according to the anarchists, plagued revolutionary action throughout the nineteenth-century.

Reading Jarry within this cultural and intellectual context, I then examine his conception and practice of theater as explosive "attack" akin to the anarchist aesthetic education of the bomb. Drawing out the affinities, I argue however that Jarry's theater of action, or more accurately theater as action, with its "acte imminent" strives to articulate a participatory spectacle that offers an alternative form of spectacle, one that does not fit entirely either within the tradition of theater as civil celebration (Rousseau's "fête civique" and its manifestations during the Revolution) nor within the tradition of theater as pedagogical lesson as in Schiller's aesthetic education and anarchist propaganda of the deed.

The Crisis of Revolutionary Action: The Weight of the Terror

In Geneva in September 1870, two months after the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin published a pamphlet in French under a pseudonym, *Lettres à un Français sur la crise actuelle*. Addressed to no Frenchman in particular and written between September 1-7, 1870, that is, when Napoleon III was captured and a "Government of National Defense" was formed in Paris, the letters astutely assessed the crisis that imminent defeat posed for the French. Much more than that, however, they strove to intervene in it by opening up opportunities for revolutionary action and prodding its readers toward a certain type of action. Bakunin foresaw two possible outcomes: one, the provisional government would surrender to Bismarck in order to preserve the state with its "*machine administrative*" and "*vieille routine gouvernementale,*"[13] which, in Bakunin's analysis, would make the Third Republic little different than the Second Republic, the Second Empire, or even the monarchy of *l'Ancien Régime*. If this was to be avoided, Bakunin urged, the people had to take up arms to break the machinery of the state, thereby allowing free voluntary associations to rise from its ruins in what he envisioned as a free federation of communes.

Although such a Manichean presentation of the situation left little doubt about the direction in which Bakunin was trying to steer events, it did set the stage for his presentation of what constituted the more acute and urgent crisis: the form of action the revolution was to take. This question would continue to occupy him until his death in 1876, and although his response remained incomplete – leaving it to his successors to develop it fully and put it into practice – he was abundantly clear about what not to do: "*Les révolutionnaires socialistes de nos jours n'ont*

[13] Bakounine, Mikhaïl. *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Champ Libre, 1879. 100. Hereafter cited as Bakounine, *OC*.

rien ou presque rien à imiter de tous les procédés révolutionnaires des jacobins de 1793"(*ibid.,* 114).

This problematic legacy of the Terror is vividly and succinctly illustrated by the Lyon Commune of 1871. Bakunin participated in the Lyon Commune directly, clashing fiercely with the leader of the Lyon section of the International, Albert Richard, in ways that inadvertently but heavy-handedly helped the Lyon Commune to a hasty demise.[14] However, prior to this face-to-face confrontation in the heat of the moment at the Hôtel de Ville, Bakunin and Richard quarreled in letters earlier that year. Bakunin sternly admonished Richard against those who "se promettent de devenir les Danton, les Robespierre, les Sant-Just du socialisme révolutionnaire."[15] At issue was Richard's proposed "People's Committee of Public Safety," which he had offered up as the solution to the present crisis. Bakunin rejected it outright and argued that reincarnating the Terror in the form of its central executive committee would only lead to disaster, warning Richard, "vous serez dévorés par la réaction que vous aurez créée vous-mêmes."(*ibid.*). Bakunin's bitter vindication would come as the Lyon Commune did indeed declare a Committee of Public Safety before being vanquished by the National Guard twenty-four days later.[16]

Reflecting on this exchange in an 1896 article, shortly after the last explosion in Paris's "*ère des attentats*," Richard notes that the anarchist bombings were the result of the Communes' failures and bloody repression "*les hommes de l'anarchie… finirent par s'aigrir*"(Richard, 135). Nurturing bitterness, the Communards eventually gave free reign to "*leurs rages déçues*," which would eventually culminate, according to Richard, as follows:

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[14] Greenberg, Louis M. *Sisters of Liberty: Marseille, Lyon, Paris, and the Reaction to a Centralized State, 1868-1871*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U P, 1971.
[15] The letter is reprinted along with Richard's diatribe against the anarchists in: Richard, Albert. "Bakounin et L'internationale à Lyon 1868-1870" *Revue de Paris,* Sept-Oct 1896. 119-160. 133. Hereafter cited as Richard.
[16] Richard served briefly as a member of the Committee of Public Safety before being stricken from the list for being a radical. *Sisters of Liberty*, 224-225.

> *comme pour trouver une compensation à leur impuissance et prendre une sorte de revanche, ils [les anarchistes] se persuadèrent qu'il ne leur restait d'autre moyen d'action que la propagande par le fait. Voilà la vrai cause des attentats anarchistes*. *ibid*., author's italics.

Richard is thus one of the first to voice this widespread and not entirely erroneous genealogy of propaganda of the deed. Rancor, frustration, and desperation certainly did play large roles in motivating such terrorist bombers as Vaillant, Ravachol, and Emile Henry. But this is only part of the story, one that off-handedly denies that such acts of terrorism could be anything other than blind rage. In tracing the intellectual origins of propaganda of the deed, we can demonstrate that rancor, frustration, and desperation do not necessarily exclude reasoned arguments and that these arguments are worth our critical attention. This is not to justify the bombings or condone them, but rather to try to understand what has played and continues to play a formidable role in the formation of the modern world.

The Lyon Commune is but one illustration of the problematic legacy of the Terror, and Bakunin was certainly not alone in trying to distance himself and the revolutionary movement from the model of revolutionary action handed down from the Terror. Rather, it was at the heart of the Marx/Bakunin debate; it animated the Paris Commune, both in its debates and its actions; and it was the driving force behind the intellectual development of a new model of revolutionary action that would crystallize into propaganda of the deed. Perhaps the most comprehensive articulation of the crisis of the model for revolutionary action comes from Marx, whose intellectual influence was recognized and praised even by his most virulent anarchist opponents, Bakunin included. Bakunin thus accredited Marx with having demonstrated the primacy of material conditions in shaping thought, feelings, tastes, or what Bakunin simply terms "life." Although Bakunin would rail against Marx for ultimately relying on metaphysics to guide

revolutionary action, he shared in Marx's maxim, famously articulated in *The Theses of Feuerbach* (1845) that: "philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."[17] But the question that would divide them so decisively was how.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the answers to this question turned on how one interprets the Terror and its relation to the present. In the opening of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx captured much of the barbed problem that would continuously hound revolutionary movements: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past"(Marx, 595). Wielding formidable agency and power, human subjects make their own history; in this vein, Marx's thought here shows itself to be the progeny of the Enlightenment. However, he immediately tempers this agency, power, and Enlightenment influence, giving the caveat that they do not shape and transform history "as they please." There is no slate wiped clean, no *tabula rasa*; rather the circumstances in which they make history are set by and handed down from the past. Marx continues:

> The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language. *ibid*.

To elucidate this predicament, Marx, echoing Benjamin Constant, gives the example of the French Revolution, which, he points out, "draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire"(*ibid*.). If the dead generations whose tradition weighed so

[17] Marx, Karl. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd edition. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1978. 145.

heavily on the brains of the French revolutionaries were Roman, then it was, *mutatis mutandis,* the now defunct tradition of the French Revolution, particularly the Terror, that would burden the most ardent revolutionaries of the second half of the nineteenth-century. The anarchists thus continued to cast the Terror as an obstacle, one that weighed on the present and needed to be overcome, a dead weight to be jettisoned if the revolution were to have a chance. It was precisely in this way that Bakunin would interpret the Paris Commune thereby setting off his debate with Marx.

Bankruptcy of "la méthode terroristique": Bakunin, Marx, and the Commune

Bakunin's critique of the Terror, or what he termed, "*la méthode terroristique* [*sic*]"(Bakounine, *OC*, 116) would become one of the great hallmarks of anarchism and would also serve as the negative example against which anarchism defined itself. Echoing his private critique of Richard, in the *Lettres* Bakunin publicly argues that if the revolutionaries of the 1870-1871 crisis imitate their predecessors of 1793, such emulation would be their ruin ("*les perdrait*"). Alternatively referring to the Terror as "*méthode,*" "*routine,*" "*tradition,*" "*théorie*," "*système politique,*" and even "*pensée*"; Bakunin follows the wide spread phenomenon of taking the Terror as a paradigm, not completely untethered from its particular historical circumstances nor thoroughly determined by them. The defining gesture of this paradigm is, for Bakunin, to "*faire la Révolution par décrets*"(*ibid*.). Although he would nuance this critique in the aftermath

of the Paris Commune, the Terror is here synonymous with revolution decreed by special committee or revolutionary government, a minority that dictates from on high what is best for the people and what direction the revolution should take, going so far as to institutionalize terror as an instrument in the creation of "*l'homme nouveau.*"

Bakunin does not disagree with this objective; quite to the contrary, he praises and upholds the ideals of the French Revolution – *liberté, égalité, fraternité* – precisely for their power to effect change in the human nature. For him, part of the enduring, positive legacy of the Revolution is that these ideals have become for the French "part of the their nature, so to speak, […] determining, even unconsciously and involuntarily, the direction of their thoughts, aspirations, and actions."[18] The Revolution for Bakunin then did in fact achieve what Rousseau had identified as the challenge put to those great legislators who would found a nation: "*changer, pour ainsi dire, la nature humaine.*"[19] The Revolution then was a fundamental reordering of how we view the world, how we understand our place in it, as well as how we interact both with it and with each other. As momentous as this was and as much as Bakunin celebrates the Revolution, it was, according to him, a task that remained largely incomplete. It was a work in progress that had not progressed beyond a skeletal framework as was all too obvious in the economic misery and gaping disparities that persisted from the First Republic through two Empires and on to the fledgling days of the Third Republic. To complete the work of the French Revolution, that was the task Bakunin and the anarchists set for themselves.

[18] Bakunin, Mikhail. *Statism and Anarchy*. Trans. Marshall S. Shatz. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge U P, 1990. 18. Hereafter cited as *Statism*.
[19] Rousseau, Jeans-Jacques. *Du contrat social. Oeuvres complètes*. v.3. Ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1964. 381.

Anarchists were thus for Bakunin the "children of the Revolution"[20](Bakunin, 135), but this lineage in no way meant that the children were going to do as the parents had done. Nothing could be further from the nature of the relationship Bakunin sought between the French Revolution and anarchism. Indeed, Bakunin castigates the French Revolution for what he terms its "statism," that is, the reliance on the state – its structures and apparatuses – as the principal agent of revolution. Despite its admirable ideals, the Revolution cut them short by trying to achieve them "exclusively on the political plane"(*Statism*, 48). It thereby neglected the material reality in which they were to be realized. In the defining anarchist argument, Bakunin declares the need to revolutionize the revolution, that is, to strive for a revolution that would not seize the state apparatuses in the name of revolution but would destroy the very structures and institutions of the state. In order to complete the work of the Revolution, anarchists argued, it was imperative to disavow its methods. They thus sought to create alternative forms of communal association, and aimed at forms of direct action and direct democracy that would circumvent what they saw as the devastating problems inherent in hierarchical and representative forms of government and organization. If the Terror was understood primarily as revolution by political decrees backed by terror and the guillotine, then anarchism declared "*Maintenant, cette théorie de la révolution a fait banqueroute*"(Bakunin, *OC*, 116-117) and sought to articulate an alternative form of revolution.

This fraught question of the legacy of the Terror also animated Bakunin's critique of Marx, particularly how Marx theorized and practiced revolutionary action. Without reducing the complexities of this intricate debate, we can elaborate Bakunin's critique of Marx from the pithy and charged accusation in *Statism and Anarchy*: "By education and by nature he is a Jacobin, and

[20] Bakunin, Mikhail. *On Anarchism*. Ed. Sam Dolgoff. New York: Black Rose Books, 2002. 135. Hereafter cited as Bakunin.

his favorite dream is of a political dictatorship"(*Statism*, 182). In *The Communist Manifesto* of 1847, Marx equated revolutionary action with "the conquest of political power," whose goal was "to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class" and thus "to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State."[21] The central tenet of Bakunin's critique is that Marx fails to see how the power relations of the State contribute to the very problems that the Revolution is meant to resolve. Revolution by seizure of state power – its apparatuses and structures – is not and cannot be a revolution. Rather, it is a reform that leaves the armature of oppression not only intact but all the more powerful because it is now wielded in the name of the very people it dominates. Quoting these passages from *The Communist Manifesto*, Bakunin ponders, "if the proletariat is to be the ruling class, over whom is it to rule?"

Directly denying the universalism of the proletariat,[22] Bakunin reasons that the proletariat, raised to the position of the ruling class, would result in two forms of dictatorship: a social dictatorship and a dictatorship of developed countries over developing countries. The primacy of the proletariat put forward in the *Communist Manifesto* necessarily implies, Bakunin argues, the subordination of peasants as well as the much-maligned *Lumpenproletariat.* Countering the various insults lobbed at this figure – "riffraff," "rabble," "dregs of society," and "*canaille*" – Bakunin argues that they should have an equal voice and an equal share if the community genuinely holds equality as a goal. Applying the same logic to an international perspective, Bakunin further conjectures that if a developed country such as Germany rose up in revolt, then the less developed Slavic nations – notably Russia – would "be placed in the same subordinate relationship to the victorious German proletariat in which the latter now stands to the

[21] Marx, Karl. *Collected Works*. New York: International Publishers. 6.498.
[22] Bakunin states, "the state cannot be the embodiment of any universal, the diversity of humanity is just much too grand"(Bakunin, 131-2).

German bourgeoisie"(Bakunin, 331).[23] Bakunin, always more attuned to power structures than to economics or class conflict, concludes that the proletariat raised to the level of the ruling class means the proletariat as the new bourgeoisie and with it the creation of "another proletariat which will be subdued to this new rule, to this new state"(*ibid*.). Marxist revolution, for Bakunin, then merely follows the hoary cliché of revolution as a mere shuffling of positions; out with old, in with the new but all remains as it was. It recreates the same power relations that it sought to eradicate, and thus is a revolution without a revolution.

Underlying this double critique of Marxism is what Bakunin identifies as its scientific or bureaucratic tendencies. He argues that the Hegelian foundations of Marx's thought tend toward the abstruse and thus encourage the creation of a scientific, learned, or educated elite. The central issue is once again equality, and Bakunin's major critique of Marxist politics is that it creates a bureaucratic or scientific elite that would rule over and speak in the name of the people. Marxists are simply the latest and most sophisticated incarnation of the Jacobin model of revolution by decree. Scientific knowledge becomes the basis from which this new elite dictates what is best for the people and what form and direction the revolution should take. Marxist revolution, according to Bakunin, "will be the reign of scientific intelligence, the most aristocratic, despotic, arrogant, and elitist of all regimes"(Bakunin, 331). Just as the proletariat raised to the ruling class means the subordination of anyone and everyone who is not a proletariat of the most developed nation, in scientific socialism "[t]he 'uneducated' people will be totally relieved of the cares of administration, and will be treated as a regimented herd"(*ibid.*). Education, that potentially great

[23] This is the problem of uneven development or non-capitalist development, a problem that Marx will be at pains to address in response drafts to Vera Zasulich. In the Preface to the first edition of Capital, Marx had famously stated that countries that were "more developed industrially" would show "the less developed the image of their own future." As summarized by Etienne Balibar, Marx's response to Zasulich develops most prominently that "the law of the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation presented in Capital does not apply irrespective of historical circumstances." Balibar, Etienne. *The Philosophy of Marx*. London, New York: Verso, 1995. 107.

instrument of equality and democratization, can actually serve the exact opposite, creating an elite that rules in the name of the knowledge that it wields. Marxist revolution would then repeat the Jacobin model with only a minor difference: revolution by *scientific or learned* decree.

If the legacy of the Terror was the animating principle of the Marx/Bakunin debate, its charged questions were by no means confined to the abstract, the purview of theorists of revolutionary action alone. Quite to the contrary, without the intervention of either Marx or Bakunin, the Paris Communards themselves engaged in a strikingly similar debate, directly and urgently posing the question of the legacy of the Terror for the Commune and its course of action. On April 28, 1871 at the Communal Assembly Jules Miot motioned for the creation of a *Comité de salut public*. Two major questions animated the strident and eventually crippling debate that followed: would the Committee of Public Safety be a dictatorship?; and, two, would the name Committee of Public Safety with its direct invocation of the committee that organized, instituted, and carried out the Terror lend strength to the Commune or rather detract from it, perhaps even smothering it under the weight of its legacy?

Raoul Rigault pithily captured one extreme, casting his vote thus: "Esperant que le Comité de Salut public sera en 1871 ce que l'on croit généralement, mais à tort, qu'il a été en 1793, je vote pour."[24] The opposition protested, "ce comité de salut public cache la dictature"(*ibid*., 1.584) and denounced it as backwards, "un retour aux errements monarchiques"(*ibid*., 1.585). One member repeatedly lampooned it as "de pastiche révolutionnaire"(*ibid*., 1.586). In the end the measure passed (45-23), after which Gustave Courbet, who voted against the measure, closed the session with these sage words: "Je désire que tous titres ou mots appartenant à la Révolution de 89 ou 93 ne soient appliqués qu'à cette

[24] *Procès-Verbaux de la Commune de 1871.* Ed. Georges Bourgin and Gabriel Henriot. v.1 Paris: Leroux, 1924; v.2 Paris: Lahure; 1945. 2.34.

époque"(*ibid*., 2.36). In creating a Committee of Public Safety, Courbet intoned, "nous ressemblons à des plagiaires, et nous rétablissons à notre détriment une terreur qui n'est pas de notre temps"(*ibid*., 2.37). Although Courbet's comments and suggestion would go largely unheeded, they may very well have been vindicated by Charles Delescluze, one of the more prominent and militant members of the Commune.[25] Sitting on the Commune's second Committee of Public Safety, Delescluze eventually denounced it, provocatively declaring to the Assembly, "Votre Comité de salut public est annihilé sous le poids des souvenirs," and bellowing, "Je ne suis pas partisan du Comité de salut public; ce ne sont que des mots! (Interruptions. Approbations.)"(*ibid*., 2.302-303). This denunciation of the Terror as mere rhetoric, along with the many interruptions and approbations that it continued to provoke, would resonate throughout the last quarter of nineteenth-century France.

Despite the vast differences that separate Bakunin and Courbet, both denounce the revolutionary model handed down from the Terror as inadequate to meet the demands of the present. For Courbet, the revolution undertaken by the Commune is meant to be an original work, one that draws its material and inspiration from its own times. Rather than view the adoption of the term, Committee of Public Safety, as a continuation of a revolutionary legacy still in need of completion – thereby lending historical weight and precedence to the movement – Courbet sees this borrowing from the past as an instance of plagiarism, an attempt to pass off a copy from the past as an original work of the present. If we extend Marx's metaphor, we can see that for Courbet the Commune is borrowing more than just the cloak of the Terror; 1793 weighs ominously on 1871 and the results would indeed prove nightmarish. Similarly, for Bakunin, the legacy of the Terror is bankrupt. No longer solvent, having depleted its sources, it holds out no

[25] Merriman, John. *Massacre: The Life and Death of the Paris Commune*. New York: Basic Books, 2014. See also: Rougerie, Jacques. *Paris libre, 1871*. Paris: Seuil, 1971.

promise for revolutionary action. It is untimely, but in the pejorative sense of the term rather than in Nietzsche's use of it. There is nothing left to draw on, it is time to move on.

Lessons from the Commune: The Lurking Jacobin

Articulating exactly what to move on to came by way of the Commune and the reassessments it afforded. It was in building a case against the Jacobin paradigm as it was reflected in and refracted by the Paris Commune that Bakunin most fully articulated a new form of revolutionary action, one meant to overcome the terrorist method of 1793, still powerfully present in 1871. If the defining trait of the Jacobin paradigm was revolution by decree, enforced by terror and the guillotine, then, Bakunin argued, what was needed was an opposing form of revolution, one that would not fall victim to the hierarchical structures inherent in a revolutionary government dictating revolution to the people and wielding terror as an instrument of regeneration.

His solution was revolutionary deeds: "Au système des décrets révolutionnaires, *j'oppose celui des faits révolutionnaires*, le seul efficace, conséquent et vrai"(Bakunin, *OC*, 51-52, emphasis in original). Whereas the French Revolution for Bakunin only succeeded in establishing liberty, equality, and fraternity "on the political plane," the anarchist model of revolutionary action sought to establish them as *faits*, that is, as both fact and deed or, more precisely, what exists incontroversially in its very act. The term, "*faits révolutionnaires*," also

connotes a latent opposition between *de jure*, that is according to law, and *de facto,* what is in practice or in action. There is an undeniable performativity to propaganda of the deed, one that developed an ambiguous and tense relationship with what Bakunin himself terms "*la métaphysique*" or simply "*théorie*." Bakunin thus appealed to his fellow anarchists, "Laissons maintenant à d'autres le soin de développer théoriquement les principes de la révolution sociale, et contentons-nous de les appliquer largement, de les incarner dans les faits"(*ibid.,* 51). This attempt to incarnate revolution in deeds would constitue Bakunin's legacy as subsequent anarchists, notably Paul Brousse and Peter Kropotkin, would develop fully a theory and practice of *propogande par le fait*.

Although Bakunin did not coin the term "*propagande par le fait*," he did nonetheless call on "*fait révolutionnaires*" as a form of propaganda:

> Maintenant nous devons nous embarquer tous ensemble sur l'océan révolutionnaire, et désormais nous devons propager nos principes non plus par des paroles, mais par *des faits*, – car c'est *la plus populaire, la plus puissante et la plus irrésistible des propagandes*." *ibid*, emphasis in original.

Setting revolutionary action on a stormy course, this valorization of the revolutionary deed as a powerful force of propaganda would continue to shape much of propaganda of the deed for the next twenty-five years, almost invariably pitting the flaccid, passive word against the potent, active deed.

But at the same time that Bakunin championed revolutionary deeds, he also began to reassess the Terror, putting a sharp emphasis on how its legacy continued to shape the events and historical actors of the Paris and Lyon Communes. In his 1871 pamphlet, *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State*, Bakunin praised the Commune as "a bold, clearly formulated negation of the State,"(Bakunin, 264) but then went on to analyze its shortcomings and their causes. In

order to take full account of the fraught interworking of the Communes, Bakunin distinguished between two types of Jacobins. The first, exemplified by Gambetta, consisted of fervent supporters of the Republic who had "repudiated the old revolutionary faith, leaving nothing of Jacobinism but its cult of unity and authority"(*ibid*., 265). More intricate and unsettling were those "Jacobins who are frankly revolutionaries," strident upholders of the ideals of the French Revolution for whom the Commune served as a means to complete what 9 Thermidor year II had cut short. Exemplifying this second type was none other than Delescluze, the very man quoted above who served on then denounced the Commune's Committee of Public Safety as empty rhetoric crumbling under the weight of the past. This second type of Jacobin Bakunin criticizes less for its ideals, ideology, or theory than for what he terms its "prejudices" or "instincts," which he declares, with much bravado but scant evidence, are "more or less developed by history"(*ibid*., 328). What I am here suggesting is that Bakunin recognizes that the legacy of the Terror is less ideological or theoretical and more affective and aesthetic.

If Bakunin's first foray against Jacobinism attacked its ideology, theory, or "pensée" and declared it bankrupt, the more nuanced second offensive acknowledged that it lived on, that the legacy of the Terror had engrained certain prejudices and shaped instincts to such an extent that even the Commune, the most radical revolutionary movement in modern history, as it attempted to break from the past and give birth to a radically new form of society, fell back on experiences and concepts that neither fit the time nor the intentions of the revolutionaries. The Terror had so imbued the habits, customs, mores that, according to Bakunin, even among very young children, in the earliest stages of social development, "If you rummage around a bit in their minds, you will find the Jacobin, the advocate of government, cowering in a dark corner, humble but not quite dead"(*ibid*., 266).

With this striking image, Bakunin recognizes the affective or aesthetic dimension of the legacy of the Terror, a legacy that continues to shape how people feel, perceive and engage in the world, what I am calling a *sensibilité jacobine.* It is a part of the legacy that is not passed down through revolutionary ideology, the adoption of a certain "*pensée*," or what revisionist historians have dubbed "political culture."[26] Rather, in the France of the nineteenth-century at least, the Terror participates in the earliest forms of socialization and subjectification. It takes hold of a child's tender sense of self and the world and contributes in forming him or her into a citizen of the state and in instilling a certain sense of humanity. As prejudice, this Jacobin sensibility precedes any judgment based on reason or actual experience. Similarly, given the etymology of instinct, it is a near innate prick or prod that impels, incites, and instigates us toward action, giving that action direction and urgency that tend to short-circuit conscious control. Much more than ideology, the Terror bequeathed a legacy that has suffused and engrained itself at the most rudimentary levels of what it means to be both a citizen and part of humanity. As Bakunin concludes, "All these ideas are imprinted upon the mind of the individual, and conditioned by the education and training he receives even before he becomes fully aware of himself as an entity"(Bakunin, 242).

To further sharpen this Jacobin sensibility, we can situate it in the current field of competing interpretations of the Terror. Although Bakunin generally reads the Terror as the result of social conflict and is thus aligned with Marxist interpretations of it, his reading is more nuanced and less one-dimensional than this cursory reading generally admits. By focusing on the role of ideology, Bakunin's interpretation in certain respects overlaps with that of François Furet and other revisionists who insist, much more than Bakunin, on revolutionary ideology as the

[26] *The French Revolution and the Creation of Political Culture.* Ed. Keith Baker et al. Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1987-1994. 4 volumes. Volume 4 is dedicated to the Terror.

driving force of the Revolution.[27] Bakunin is, however, more interested in the force that that ideology continues to exert in the present, a force that he now emphatically declares "bankrupt." Further distancing himself from his revisionist successors, Bakunin sees the Terror as the result of a vortex of forces, ideology being only one factor. Surveying various revolutionary movements from the French Revolution onward, but particularly the Commune and its relation to the French Revolution, he observes that dedicated revolutionaries and even fervent ideologues have often taken on positions that compromise themselves, their ideals, and their movement. It is an all too common mistake, he continues, to explain this curious phenomenon as "a kind of treason"(Bakunin, 221). Rather he argues that we must look to something other than ideology to explain this phenomenon, mainly to the "logic of the revolutionary movement"(*ibid*., 265) and, second, to the aesthetic or affective legacy of the Terror.

In the first line, he collaborates in the wide spread attempt to analyze past revolutions, but particularly the French Revolution, in order to distill from them a "logic" or "mechanism" that would apply to most if not all revolutionary movements. In this reading, the Terror then is more a structural phenomenon that may ensnare even the most well intentioned revolutionaries, propelling them to act in ways that counter the revolutionary movement they are genuinely trying to advance. As Bakunin contends, "the demands of certain positions are more compelling than noble sentiments and even the best intentions"(*ibid*., 344). More than ideology, it is these structural positions that explain motivations and movements in the course of a revolution, including the so called acts of "treason" by revolutionaries but also acts of tyranny by the counter-revolutionaries for "they, too," Bakunin insists, "are involuntary products of the present social order"(*ibid*., 150). In this reading, neither revolutionaries nor counter-revolutionaries make

[27] Furet, François. "La Terreur." *Dictionnaire Critique de la Révolution Française*. Ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf. Paris: Flammarion, 1988. 156-170. And *Penser la Révolution Française*. Paris: Gallimard, 1978.

history as they please, rather they all struggle vehemently to assert their agency in the tangled conflict of ideas and practices that asserts its own logic. Bakunin thus anticipates the late twentieth century shift away from revisionist readings, a shift perhaps best illustrated by Furet's former student Patrice Gueniffey, whose influential essay, *La politique de la Terreur*, adamantly denies ideology any determinant role in explaining the Terror. Rather than a political project ruthlessly striving to implement its ideals, the Terror, he argues, "est le produit de la dynamique révolutionnaire et peut-être, de toute dynamique révolutionnaire."[28]

However, it is the aesthetic dimension of the Terror that I want to focus on for several reasons: one, this seems to be the most novel, offering more fruitful connections with the literary and aesthetic movements of the time; two, the affective and aesthetic legacy of the Terror is also the most pertinent in what connects the Terror to the "birth of modern terrorism" in the anarchist movement of the turn of the century; third, it is this aesthetic dimension that resonates with the current trend of exploring the role of affect, emotion, and aesthetics in the Revolution, particularly the Terror. Most prominently in this movement, Sophie Wahnich has focused on what she perceives as the wide spread "*dégoût*" for the Terror in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, attempting to understand the reasons and implications of the near visceral reaction against the Terror. A large part of her historical project, the articulation of an "histoire sensible," is set not only on interrogating this distaste but on overturning it in a concerted effort to re-evaluate how we understand – intellectually, emotional, and aesthetically – the pertinence of the Terror in the twenty-first century.[29] It is in this line of inquiry that we must situate

[28] Gueniffey, Patrice. *La politique de la Terreur: Essai sur la violence révolutionnaire*. Paris: Gallimard, tel, 2000. 14.
[29] Wahnich, Sophie. *La Liberté ou la mort: essai sur la Terreur et le terrorisme*. Paris: La fabrique, 2003. For an elaboration of her methodology and conception of what it means to do history, see *Les émotions, la Révolution française et le présent: exercices pratiques de conscience historique*. Paris: CNRS, 2009.

Bakunin's insistence on a legacy that is neither ideological nor structural but rather affective and aesthetic.

Furthermore, we can extend this interpretation to further understand Marx's well-known reassessment of his own positions in the wake of the Commune. If Bakunin is correct in identifying Jacobin tendencies in Marx, these are proclivities of his second type of Jacobin, a fervent revolutionary but one whose mind may still harbor a Jacobin "cowering in a dark corner, humble but not quite dead."

Beginning his analysis of the Paris Commune with the seemingly straight-forward question, "What is the Commune?," Marx argues that the Communards themselves answered this question in the manifesto of the Central Committee of the Commune, printed in *Le Journal Officiel de la République Française* on March 21, 1871:[30]

> The proletarians of Paris amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs. …They have understood that it is their imperious duty, and their absolute right, to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power.[31]

The Commune, in its own words, would thus appear to have enacted precisely what Marx had called for in *The Communist Manifesto*: the seizure of state power. However, rather than champion the Commune for this revolutionary form of action, Marx immediately appends the following caveat to the Communards' declaration, "But the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes"(*ibid.*). With this addition, Marx is in fact rectifying his own position of fourteen years earlier. Already in *The Eighteenth-*

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[30] "Le prolétariat, en face de la menace permanente de ses droits, de la négation absolue de toutes ses légitimes aspirations, de la ruine de la patrie et de toutes ses espérances, a compris qu'il était de son devoir impérieux et de son droit absolu de prendre en main ses destinées et d'en assurer le triomphe en s'emparant du pouvoir." Quoted in Rougerie, 122.

[31] Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. *Collected Works*. Trans. Richard Dixon et al. New York: International Publishers, 1975-2004. 50 volumes. 22.328. Hereafter cited as *Collected Works*.

Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852) Marx had traced a brief genealogy of the "state machinery" of centralization, concluding: "All revolutions perfected this machine instead of breaking it." The great novelty of the Commune is, according to Marx, that it overturned this phenomenon: "This new Commune […] breaks the modern State power"(*ibid*., 22.333) rather than simply laying hold of it.

Marx's position has thus moved substantially closer to that of Bakunin, even going so far as to use strikingly similar vocabulary: the Commune, praises Marx, had "no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*"(*ibid*., 22.335). In almost direct parallel to Bakunin, Marx here denounces the model of revolutionary action based on revolution by decree, even if those decrees emanate from the people themselves. Rather than "ready-made utopias" to be implemented by revolution, Marx praises the Communards for having understood and accepted that the work of emancipation would be a long, arduous process, "a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men"(*ibid*., 22.335). Whatever form the new society would take at the end of the process, one thing now seems certain to Marx: it would not resemble the modern day state. Whether destroyed or simply allowed to "wither away," the revolution would eradicate the state one way or another. Although Marx began his critique of state power before 1871, the Commune seems to have acted as a deed that he did not anticipate and that profoundly affected his philosophical trajectory. Stated thus, we can say that the Commune affected Marx precisely as a form of propaganda of the deed. The very fact of its existence was what gave it such stature, or as Marx states, "The great social measure of the Commune was its own working existence"(*ibid*., 22.339).

The Revolution, as both Marx and Bakunin understood it, if it was to achieve the goals they both sought, would have to revolutionize both circumstances and the individuals acting in

those circumstances; "transforming circumstances *and men,*" writes Marx in 1871 echoing *The Eighteenth-Brumaire* cited above: "Men make their own history," but the full weight of the past bears down upon them as they go about "revolutionizing *themselves* and things." Revolutions not only act on the conditions in which human beings make history, much more than that revolutions act just as much on human beings themselves. Part of the task then of revolutionary action is thus self-reflexive, the task of revolutionizing oneself and other members of society, what the French Revolution termed "*régénération*" or the creation of "*l'homme nouveau*." For Bakunin's struggle against the Jacobin sensibility, this means excising the Jacobin that lurks in the inchoate corners of even the child's mind. It means not only a fundamental reshaping of how people feel, perceive, and engage in the world; but also a recasting of how one views oneself and the community. It means a new aesthetic education.

Propaganda of the Deed as Aesthetic Education

In April 1877, a small band of anarchists led by Carlo Cafiero and Errico Malatesta staged a revolt in the rural town of Benevento, Italy where they burned archives, pronounced revolutionary speeches, and forced the parish priest to vow to preach evangelical fraternity. This anarchist insurrection then continued on into another nearby village where in addition to burning archives and giving revolutionary speeches, the small band seized the public coffers and redistributed the collected taxes among the masses. The practical impact was rather insignificant,

even within the two small towns directly effected, a fact that even the leaders readily admitted. Far from sparking any great conflagration of successive revolts that might lead to the sought after mass revolution, the band barely managed to sustain themselves. They were arrested within a few days, suffering from exposure to inclement weather and malnutrition. However inauspicious, the Benevento events, through publicity and the debates they sparked, marked the advent of propaganda of the deed as a deliberate attempt to spread anarchism through direct action. The anarchist press – notably *Le Bulletin de la Fédération Jurasienne* and later *L'Avant-Garde* and *Le Révolté/La Révolte* – hailed the events as a pointed success and held them up as illustrative of this new form of propaganda, *propagande par le fait*.

If, in terms of revolutionary action, the events achieved very little, what made them such landmarks and the reason why they quickly became the topic of intense debate was precisely their value as propaganda. In *the* defining article on propaganda of the deed, French anarchist and former Communard, Paul Brousse, analyzed the events of Benevento along with others like it at Notre-Dame de Kasan and demonstrations at Berne on March 18, 1876 and 1877 commemorating the anniversary of the Commune. Inscribing them in a long lineage of revolutionary propaganda that dates back to 1789, Brousse lauds these deeds as "un puissant moyen de réveiller la conscience populaire."[32] Practicing an aesthetics of shock, propaganda of the deed was first and foremost an attempt to jar the masses out of an intellectual, moral, and aesthetic torpor. Beginning with the precept that life precedes theory, Brousse comes to a general understanding of propaganda of the deed by analyzing various examples, beginning with the model of all other instances: the Paris Commune. Guided by experience rather than any revolutionary theory, the Commune was, according to Brousse, an act in which the idea of

[32] Brousse, Paul. "La Propagande par le fait." *Le Bulletin de la Fédération Jurasienne*. 5 August, 1877.

organizing society through communal association rather than through the State "eut pris corps et vie"(*ibid*.). It became a living reality, inscribing itself into the very material existence of the city and the community. It was a fact and a deed that could not be ignored and that no speech or "theory" could deny. Already in this brief articulation of propaganda of the deed, Brousse aligns it with a certain tradition of aesthetics that defines art as means of giving sensible form to ideas.

Even after the destruction of the Commune and its bloody suppression, its work as propaganda persists, exciting strong emotions in the populace, inciting them to similar acts, all of which would serve as an impetus to theory. Brousse thus attributes the propaganda effect of a demonstration at Notre-Dame de Kasan to the "émotion populaire" that it roused. Admirable though it was, Brousse nonetheless demurs, "Il ne suffit pas d'une propagande qui se borne à exciter l'émotion populaire." Such an affective reaction must be nourished, "il faut lui fournir un aliment," Brousse reasons, concluding "Le fait doit donc contenir au moins un enseignement"(*ibid.*) As a first illustration of just what such an education entails, Brousse turns to the Berne protests where on March 18, 1876, the anniversary of the declaration of the Commune, a peaceful demonstration bearing the red flag was attacked and violently repressed. Although local Swiss law upheld the right to free speech, including communication "*par des emblèmes,*" the protesters were brutally denied this right as soon as they tried to exercise it. In this case then the deed of propaganda of the deed attempted to enact certain rights, to exercise them in the full force guaranteed by law. However, this attempt to perform or enact their rights precipitated a reaction on the part of the State whereby the State, through its repressive action, contradicted itself or performed the contradiction that the anarchists held to be an essentially and unavoidable characteristic of the State. If the State justifies its existence by guaranteeing equality of certain basic "human" rights, then, by suppressing acts that put those rights into practice, it

has acted counter to the very foundations of its existence. Or, as the anarchists argue, it has demonstrated the hypocrisy that is an integral part of the State. Part of the lesson of propaganda of the deed is thus negative, disabusing individuals of what the State has lead them to believe or "taught" them, specifically, in this case: "ce préjugé qu'il jouit de toutes les libertés." As *enseignement* propaganda of the deed challenges prejudice, which *Le Littré* defines as "Opinion, croyance qu'on s'est faite sans examen" and *Le Grand Robert* as "Croyance, opinion préconcue, souvent imposée par le milieu, l'époque, l'éducation."[33] By attacking the material foundations of what is imposed by environment, epoch, and education, propaganda of the deed offers a counter education, one that, through repetition, is meant to erode the foundations of dominant modes that may even precede or evade conscious thought.

If the Berne demonstrations serve as an example of the negative work of propaganda of the deed, then, Brousse continues, the Benevento events illustrate its positive work: that of empowering the people. Just as Berne improved upon Notre-Dame de Kasan, "Nos amis de Bénévent," Brousse claims, "ont fait mieux." In burning the archives, "ils ont montré au peuple le respect qu'il faut avoir de la propriété"(*ibid*.) We could expand on Brousse's analysis: not just any property and not just any archives, in burning the debt ledgers, the anarchists at Berne burned records of the past used to financially enslave generations of workers, thereby liberating them "en fait." By attacking the archives, this particular form of propaganda of the deed also struck at the deep-seated respect for authority as handed down from the past in the form of the written word. Furthermore, in giving tax money back to the people and re-arming them, Brousse continues, "ils ont montré au peuple le mépris qu'il faut faire du gouvernement." Not only by instilling contempt for a hypocritical government, propaganda of the deed empowers the people,

[33] "Préjudice." Def. 1a. *Le Littré*; *Le Grand Robert*.

putting the financial and material arms of the state back into their hands. It is a means to break the state's supposed monopoly on legitimate violence, whether in the form of arms or archives.

Continuing his progression from Notre-Dame to Kasan to Benevento, Brousse concludes, "On peut faire plus." To fully understand his conclusion, it is imperative that we situate it within the genealogy of propaganda that he undergoes at the beginning of the article. Permitting himself "une petite digression," Brousse begins his brief genealogy "Chaque période historique marche, se développe, s'éteint, avec tout un cortège d'idées, d'institutions, de moyens d'action, avec un milieu et un mot qui lui est propre"(*ibid*.). From this general observation he argues for the historical specificity of the present and for the particular task of the late nineteenth century, but this task has its origins, according to Brousse, in the French Revolution. One of the great transformations of the French Revolution was according to Brousse a shift in where politics took place, its location or site. Before 1789, "La politique se faisait au salon, à la cour surtout, en talon rouge"(*ibid*., 2); but the Revolution brought politics into "la place publique" and on into the streets, which not only meant the "journées," speeches, and "fêtes" but also the newspaper read aloud at public gatherings and circulating in the cafés and clubs. From its prolific advent, the newspaper grew in stature, physical size, circulation, and breadth of subject matter; notably, "par le roman il s'attache les âmes sentimentales" and "enfin, Emile de Girardin lance dans le monde d'idées des annonces commerciales"(*ibid*., 2). The newspaper became a formidable and formative place where politics mixed with imagination, affect and commerce; indeed as Benedict Anderson has argued the newspaper served a fundamental role in the imagined community that morphed into the nation.

As formidable instrument as its was, the newspaper, Brousse points out, has also served to exclude certain groups from the imagined community. Those without access to the means of

journalistic production found themselves with limited access and even less influence in the mix of politics, affect, commerce, and imagination. Even those who did control the means of production found their power contingent upon market forces beyond their control. The revolutionary force that the newspaper wielded in 1789 thus found itself sharply curtailed, but not altogether defunct as *Le Bulletin de la Fédération, L'Avant-Garde,* and *Le Révolté* demonstrated. If the means of journalistic production had changed substantially since the Revolution, so had the means of consumption, and it was in addressing this change that propaganda of the deed found its most vociferous justification, according to Brousse. The economic situation of exploited workers left them little time and energy to dedicate to revolutionary theory. The present then was ripe, reasons Brousse, for a new form of propaganda:

> Eh bien, s'il y avait un moyen d'attirer l'attention de ces hommes, de leur montrer ce qu'ils ne peuvent pas lire, de leur apprendre le socialisme par les faits, en le lui faisant voir, sentir, toucher? Il arrive souvent que tel qui ne comprend pas un tableau, comprend une statue; si la peinture se voit, la sculpture se touche. Quand ce raisonnement a été fait, n'importe qui l'a fait! on a été sur le chemin de faire, à côte de la propagande théorique, la propagande par le fait. *ibid*., 2.

Brousse is careful to situate propaganda of the deed between a pure sensationalism, which "se borne à exciter l'émotion populaire" and a purely rational, scholastic, pedagogical lesson, which might fail to engage one on anything but abstract principles far removed from empirical facts and the daily lives of exploited workers. There is indeed a lesson to be learned, but one situated between thought and the senses. Propaganda of the deed acts on the senses but aims to "réveiller la conscience populaire." Its connection with works of art is explicit as Brousse compares it to painting, sculpture and the different senses that they engage. It draws in different perspectives and attempts to multiply the points of entry into the education. But, although it may draw parallels to literature, painting, and sculpture; in Brousse's argument it surpasses them all

because, as he explains, in propaganda of the deed, "L'idée sera jetée, non sur le papier, non sur un journal, non sur un tableau, elle ne sera pas sculptée en marbre, ni taillée en pierre, ni coulée en bronze; elle marchera, en chair et en os, vivante, devant le peuple." Whereas the rights guaranteed by the State have been shown to be, as *L'Avant-Garde* (founded by Brousse and Kropotkin) puts it "lettres mortes et noires sur du papier,"[34] as Brousse would have it, the deed is alive, it effects the senses, incarnates the idea in flesh and blood giving it life and animation, the form and the force to walk among the people.

As formative as Brousse's articles in the *Bulletin* were, it is *Le Révolté* that further advances propaganda of the deed as a form of aesthetic education. In a series of articles contrasting bourgeois education to revolutionary education, it aligns propaganda of the deed with Bakunin's critique of the *sensibilité jacobine* inherited from the Terror. Taking it as given that education works first on sentiments, that is, on the affective and aesthetic level, the anonymous author, perhaps Kropotkin, argues that "les premiers sentiments qu'on devreait inculquer à l'enfant sont le courage et le sentiment de la dignité humaine."[35] From this basis, he goes on to criticize the free and obligatory education established by Jules Ferry under the Third Republic, which, in the author's view, strives to "*étouffer*" both courage and human dignity. Echoing Bakunin on the relation between religion and the State, the author argues that State education takes on parallel functions to religious education. Instead of fostering free individuals who understand that their freedom depends on the liberty and equality of others, both religious education and state education form citizens whose subjectivity depends on a higher authority, God or the State respectively. Rather than courage, the student is instilled with fear; "il s'habitue insensiblement à l'idée de sujétion à un pouvoir supérieur"(*ibid*.). Just as prejudices, this form of

[34] *L'Avant-Garde*. 24 March 1878.
[35] "L'éducation bourgeoise." *Le Révolté*. 17-30 Aug. 1884.

education comes by way of habit or of *habitus*, the "manière d'être" within a particular environment; furthermore, it forms the individual "insensiblement," in ways that elude most conscious perception. And even if the individual later rejects this education through self-reflective, critical examination, "il n'en garde pas moins l'empreinte de sa première éducation"(*ibid*.). Even a dedicated anarchist, who has rejected government intellectually may find that "il croit à l'autorité et est tout préparé à écouter les sophismes intéressés des apologistes du pouvoir." State education is first and foremost an aesthetic education, one that instills an "imprint" on the individual that resists, but is by no means impervious to, critical analysis and rational inquiry. Like the Jacobin lurking in the corners of the child's mind in Bakunin's analysis, this imprint may remain hidden, exerting its nefarious influence furtively without one realizing it. Daily acts of subjugation have inured the masses to their own plight, lack of liberty, equality, and fraternity; propaganda of the deed is a means to stir them out of this state of torpor, to unsettle their sense of received ideas, values, ideas, and worldview. Bourgeois education holds up certain ideals as sacrosanct and inviolable at the same time that, through its actions or deeds, it violates them materially, viscerally, *de facto*.

Two years later, *Le Révolté* explicitly links these articles on education with propaganda of the deed in its major statement and article on it. Countering the growing equation of propaganda of the deed with violent forms of terrorism, the article argues for a subtler form of resistance and with it a more nuanced pedagogical function. It begins with the argument that the domination of the state is achieved through daily acts of subtle submission that mask affective and psychological brutality. Just as submission to the State need not come in the form of a *baton* (billy club), propaganda of the deed need not mean throwing a bomb into a crowded café; rather it can consist of daily acts of resistance whereby an individual asserts self-dignity and self-

respect against the State's "education" in daily acts of submission. Such acts of resistance require first and foremost that individuals manage to disentangle themselves from "l'influence qu'exerce sur eux, à leur insu, le respect bête de l'uniforme et du pouvoir."[36] Recognizing the aesthetic accoutrements of power, this formulation poses the problem of the Jacobin sensibility, a form of power that lurks in the unconscious, that is transmitted subtly enough that its influence acts "insensiblement" and "à l'insu" of those effected. This formulation however does not offer a solution but only begs the question of how an individual and indeed an entire people is to rid itself of such a nefarious influence. This is the problem to which propaganda of the deed as spectacle is to help overcome. Perhaps through an excess of misery that fuels a "spirit of revolt," or alternatively aided by a sutble and strong intellect, or perhaps through a sheer assertion of will, some individuals do manage to carve out a degree of freedom from the state. These individuals in their acts of resistance serve as spectacles to emulate for others who have yet to achieve a similar degree of freedom. More than a pedagogical lesson, however, these acts of resistance – by their very factuality, by their visceral existence – offer a lesson in what Brousse termed "en chair et en os." It is physical resistance that may, in its extreme form, take the form of physical violence; but, in its subtler forms, may take much more aesthetic or affective forms.

It is in this regard that the authors of *Le Révolté* qualify propaganda of the deed as a form of "démolition intellectuelle." An article dedicated to "L'éducation révolutionnaire," on September 29, 1883 explicitly equates revolutionary education with "actes révolutionnaires" and with propaganda of the deed as "le meilleur enseignement pour leur montrer le sillon dans lequel passera le soc de la Révolution."[37] In this agricultural metaphor the Revolution is a plowshare,

[36] "La propagande par le fait." *Le Révolté*. 4-10 Sept 1886.
[37] "L'éducation révolutionnaire." *Le Révolté.* 29 Sept. 1883.

the blade that cuts the earth in preparation for the sowing of new seeds. Propaganda of the deed then is a sort of *avant-coureur* or forerunner of what is to come, tracing the movement of the Revolution to come. It is significant here that propaganda of the deed does not sow the seeds of the future society itself, it is rather the blade that furrows the soil so that the subsequent work of replanting, that is rebuilding society, may take place. This it does by reinforcing a collective sense of human dignity and liberty.

If the Revolution itself is the destructive work that brings down government and society in their current forms, propaganda of the deed, as forerunner to this action, acts as a sort of "démolition intellectuelle" that attempts to alter the conditions of thought through action, physical acts that aim to break the "échafaudage"(scaffolding) of thought:

> c'est précisément parce que le préjugé de la propriété est encore aujourd'hui profondément enraciné dans le cerveau des individus que les communistes-anarchistes doivent par tous les moyens, actes, paroles, écrits, travailler à débarrasser les prolétaires des idées fausses qui leur ont été inculquées pour avoir facilement raison de leurs vélléités d'indépendenace, et à les amener à reconnaître comme parfaitement justes les actes qu'ils considèrent aujourd'hui comme autant de sacrilèges.[38]

Propaganda of the deed here serves first to rid the masses of certain deep-rooted prejudices and false ideas such as private property and second to change the way that they perceive certain acts, not as attacks on such inviolable and sacred principles as private property or the authority of the state but rather as legitimate acts justified by the brutality that they are trying to bring down and the radically different society that they are trying to bring into existence. This involves a radical shift in worldview, in the changing of perspectives. In the irreverent words of Laurent Tailhade, it may involve overlooking innocent victimes to see the "beau geste" in acts of terrorism.

The article concludes with the assertion that this intellectual demolition is entirely necessary to ensure that the masses are not led into "les bras de quelques grotesques imitateurs

[38] "La propagande et la révolution II." *Le Révolté*. 24 Nov. 1883.

des prétendus 'grands hommes de 93'"(*ibid*.). Implicit in this conclusion is the notion that without the destruction of certain prejudices then the revolutionary masses would revert to the same Jacobin sensibility that Bakunin had denounced. As aesthetic education engaged in the work of intellectual demolition, propaganda of the deed then serves to rid the masses of the legacy of the Terror that has coalesced into a sensibility.

The journal makes this connection even more explicit in a series of articles commemorating the centenary of the Revolution. Heaping praise on the Revolution, the articles nonetheless conclude that "cet héritage est toujours incomplet," noting the "tentatives pour la plupart avortées comme 1848 ou 1871" to bring this work to completion.[39] The authors find in the Revolution the "germes" of anarcho-communism but cut short, literally, by the guillotine. They deplore the persistent existence of "les révolutionnaires jacobins" and argue for a different revolutionary model. In order to complete the work of the Revolution, the article argues, "Reste à démolir cet échafaudage qui étouffait la pensée, qui empêche encore l'homme de marcher à la liberté." What needs to be destroyed in order to bring the French Revolution of 1789 to completion is the "échafaudage"(scaffolding) of thought, and it is this scaffolding that bars the way to liberty. Let us recall that liberty, for the anarchists, requires the destruction of the state and all the hierarchical apparatuses of power that continuously subject masses and individuals alike and call on them to recognize and legitimate the "higher" authority of the State. However, the anarchists further recognize that a major obstacle to the destruction of the State and thus to full liberty is the way that the State has conditioned the people mentally and affectively such that even in their earnest, passionate struggles for liberty they fall back on the very structures of the State.

[39] "1789-1889." *Le Révolté*. 13-19 Jan. 1889.

The Jacobin, as Bakunin had said, "cowers in a dark corner" of young children, "humble but not quite dead." The intellectual destruction that propaganda of the deed seeks is precisely the final coup de grâce to the feeble but remarkably tenacious Jacobin that lurks in the corners of the child's mind or that leaves an "imprint" on each subject formed by the State. Revolutionary education, education through action acting upon the senses, strives to break certain models, habits of thought, prejudices. By goading the State into a sort of performative contradiction, it poses a spectacular challenge to the Jacobin lurking within. It brings the latent contradiction, assumptions, and scaffolding of thought to the fore, exposing them to inherent weaknesses and contradictions at the same time that it points the way toward a different form of revolutionary action and a different society resulting from that revolution. Bourgeois education instills respect for the "higher" power of the State, debilitating everyone's sense of individual human dignity to the point that the mind of the bourgeoisie "est si bien façonné à la tradition de l'État, que jamais ils ne s'en départissent, même dans leurs rêves d'avenir. Leurs utopies mêmes en portent le cachet."[40] In contrast, propaganda of the deed as aesthetic education strives to instill through action and the spectacle of action a sense of human dignity that does not depend on the higher authority of the State; it empowers individuals and masses with the courage and dignity to declare that human society can function without the State. It offers new dreams, but it is not meant as a utopian vision but a practical one that acknowledges that if any sort of social harmony is to be had it is only a dynamic harmony in which strife, struggle, and excess will play their part. It is through this intellectual demolition that the revolutionary movement is to avoid repeating or simply imitating the Jacobin Terror of 1793. As intellectual demolition, propaganda of the deed

[40] "Étude sur la révolution IV." *La Révolte*. 26 Sept. - 2 Oct. 1890.

aims to destroy the mental scaffolding that drives revolutionary movements to imitate the Jacobin Terror.

Propaganda of the Deed Against Schiller's Aesthetic State

To appreciate the full implications of propaganda of the deed as a form of aesthetic education, let us compare it to Schiller's foundational text, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Written between September 1794 and June 1795, that is, just a few months after 9 Thermidor Year II, the *Letters* present aesthetic education as a response to the French Revolution and particularly the Terror. Interpreting the Revolution in parallel with Edmund Burke, Schiller essentially reads its bloody extravagance as the result of a political voluntarism that fails to take into account the duality of human nature, that is, as both rational and sentient being, noumenal and phenomenal in the terms Schiller adapts from Kant. Although he never explicitly mentions the Revolution, referring instead to "the present age" and to "contemporary events," Schiller does see humanity "awakening" in these events with the opportunity of "honouring man as an end in himself" and of "making freedom the basis of political associations."[41] In this regard, then, his interpretation agrees with the anarchists, who praised the ideals of the Revolution, particularly liberty, but criticized it for establishing them uniquely in politics. The Revolution is an opportunity to establish the State on the foundations of reason; however, this transition from a

[41] Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters.* Trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982. 25. Hereafter cited as Schiller.

state of nature in which brute force determines human relationships to a state of reason marked by the rule of law, according to Schiller, runs the risk of sacrificing the "actual existence"(*ibid*., 13) of human beings and society in the name of an ideal. The "contemporary events" present the challenge of making actual, existing humanity coincide with an ideal, fictious vision of what humanity could be. Taking the State as the projection of the ideal that every man carries within him, Schiller thus reformulates the question of the relation between empirical man and ideal man as the relation between State and those that constitute it. He envisions two scenarios: "either by the ideal man suppressing empirical man, and the State annulling individuals; or else by the individual himself becoming the State, and man in time being ennobled to the stature of man as Idea"(*ibid*.,19). In the first scenario: the state sets itself against civil society and may be compelled to "ruthlessly trample underfoot such powerfully seditious individualism in order not to fall a victim to it"; thus, in this situation, "the concrete life of the Individual is destroyed in order that the abstract idea of the Whole may drag out its sorry existence"(*ibid.,* 21). In the conflict between reason and nature, in this latter situation reason may set to decimating nature in the name of its lofty but all too abstract ideal. If the objective is to strike a balance between unity (reason) and variety/multiplicity (nature) without sacrificing either of them – a thinly veiled reading of the Terror – this first scenarios clearly fails.

The "present events" demonstrate two tendencies, two extremes that unite: savagery and depravity; on the one hand, the "lower and more numerous classes" who revert to anarchy akin to a state of nature ruled by individual animal instincts and appetites; and on the other hand, "the cultivated classes," who fair no better and revert to the same sort of depravity with the only difference being that theirs has its "sources" in civilization itself (*ibid*., 25). They make use of "the Enlightenment of the mind" to bolster their violent acts with rational arguments and

"precepts." Schiller's critique of the Enlightenment follows his critique of the Terror such that it seems that Schiller reads the Terror as caused by or culminating the Enlightenment. He criticizes the Enlightenment for having "so little of an ennobling influence on feeling and character"(*ibid*., 27) that is, it has done much for the mind but little for sensibility. In Schiller's characterization of the Enlightenment, it takes feelings and sensibility to be obstacles to enlightenment such that it is only "by completely abjuring sensibility" that humanity may safeguard itself against its "aberrations"(*ibid.,* 29). Following Rousseau in the Second Discourse, Schiller sees civilization as creating at least as many new problems as it solves such that advanced civilizations such as France can quite easily slip into barbarity and depravity not despite of but because of their advanced civilization.

In a curious parallel to the anarchist development of propaganda of the deed, Schiller notes that the mass of humanity is in fact "far too wearied and exhausted by the struggle for existence"(*ibid*., 51) to take up intellectual arms in a fight against ignorance, prejudice, and error. The anarchists address the same issue, arguing that material conditions of time and energy leave the masses neither the time nor the energy to devote themselves to revolutionary theory or even to understanding their own plight in the larger context of modernization and capitalist development. Further paralleling the anarchists, Schiller observes that given these constraints, rather than articulating their own thoughts, questions, and concerns; the masses of humanity are "[h]appy to escape the hard labour of thinking for themselves" and thus "embrace with avid faith the formulas which State and Priesthood hold in readiness"(*ibid*.). The State thus establishes a tutelage of thought, becoming a regulatory body to supervise and provide ready-made formulas so that the masses do not think for themselves. It is precisely as a remedy to this scenario that

Schiller proposes aesthetic education, the second way in which the individual and the state or the masses and the state may be reconciled.

Whereas the Terror is an example of the state establishing unity by suppressing particularity, individuality, and multiplicity, the second scenario is of course that of aesthetic education. If the scenario of the Terror is to be avoided, then, Schiller explains, the political state "can only become a reality inasmuch as its parts have been tuned up to the idea of the whole"(*ibid.,* 21). This question of "tuning up" and the difference between the first and second scenario pivots on the question of violence, on comparisons between art, artisanal work, and the formation of a state. The artisan does not hesitate to inflict violence on the object or material that he is shaping, constructing, or building. The artist, whose task is the creation of beauty out of a "formless mass," is much like the artisan in his violence; as Schiller states, "he has just as little scruple in doing it violence"(*ibid*., 19). But in order to maintain the illusion involved in his creation of the beautiful, "he avoids showing" the violence he inflicts. However, things are much different with the "the pedagogic or the political artist [pädagogischen und politischen Künstler]," for whom "[m]an is at once the material on which he works and the goal towards which he strives." He explains:

> The statesman-artist [Staatskünstler] must approach his material with a quite different kind of respect from that which the maker of Beauty feigns towards his. The consideration he must accord to its uniqueness and individuality is not merely subjective, and aimed at creating an illusion for the senses, but objective and directed to its innermost being [*das innre Wesen*]. *ibid.,* 21.

Whereas the Terror, in Schiller's reading, imposes its abstract ideals violently and without consideration for any of the uniqueness or individuality of its "material," the people; Schiller claims that the formation of the State is indeed an art, one perhaps even more delicate than that performed by sculptors and painters who deal with physical objects and need not be concerned

with any "inner" being or the effects that violence may have on such a being. The political artist, in contrast, must not impose violence as he strives to effect change on the "innermost being" of his subjects; he must strive to reconcile the subjective and objective such that the harmony created results from a dialectic overcoming of conflicting faculties in what Schiller famously terms the "play drive." As Paul de Man has convincingly demonstrated, for Schiller this often takes the rhetorical form of reciprocity, two opposing and conflicting forces concede power to each other in a bilateral negation that allows for their sublation into a greater force harmoniously balancing agitation and tranquility.[42] The dialectical relationship between multiplicity and unity doubles as that between the people and the state. In the same way that unity must not sacrifice multiplicity, the State must not do away with the diversity of the populace in its attempt to form the people into a unified nation. This is precisely the work of "tuning up" the part to the whole that aesthetic education is meant achieve. In such tuning up, the role of the state changes; for each citizen, it "will be merely the interpreter of his own finest instinct, a clearer formulation of his own sense of what is right"(Schiller, 21). This conception of the State, what in the final letter he terms the "aesthetic State"[*aësthetische Staat*], is the only form of collectivity that "can make it [society] real, because it consummates the will of the whole through the nature of the individual."

Having described the aesthetic state, Schiller asks the question if such a state does indeed exist, to which he responds that it does exist as a "realized fact" amoung "some few chosen circles," but that it exists as a "need" in every "fine-tuned soul [*feingestimmten Seele*]"(*ibid*., 219). Schiller uses the same verb, *stimmen* (to tune or attune), to describe both the work of the political artist [*Staatskünstler*] and the soul of every individual who has recognized in his soul

[42] de Man, Paul. "Kant and Schiller." *Aesthetic Ideology*. Ed. Andrzej Warminski. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996. 129-162.

the need of the aesthetic State. Both the political artist and the work of fine art penetrate the individual with the potential to bring about change in the "inner being" of individuals and entire groups of people, indeed in the people that constitute or are to constitute a nation. This is precisely what various critics – from Jerome McGann, Paul de Man, Terry Eagleton, Marc Redfield, and Pierre Bourdieu – have termed aesthetic ideology, that is, as Marc Redfield argues "Aesthetics enables and exemplifies the production of the universal subject of bourgeois ideology"[43]; or Terry Eagleton, who argues for aesthetics as "radically double-edged": on the one hand, raising the particular material interests of the bourgeoisie to the universal form common to all humanity, and, on the other, holding out the promise of radical emancipatory practices that challenge and threaten that very order.[44]

Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi:* Theater of Action as Intellectual Demolition

Although propaganda of the deed ceased to play an active role in anarchist revolt after 1894, it did continue to exert a powerful influence in intellectual and artistic circles, with most artists invoking in one way or another the relation between the terrorist attacks and art. If we place Jarry's comments on the theater in their cultural and intellectual context, particularly the anarchist bombings and the debates that accompanied them, I believe we can gain a greater,

[43] Redfield, Marc. *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell U P, 1996. viii.
[44] Eagleton, Terry. "Schiller and Hegemony." *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Cambridge, Mass: Basil Blackwell, 1990. 102-119.

more nuanced appreciation of Jarry's theater and its emphasis on action, theater as action. I want to argue that propaganda of the deed, with its emphasis on action and deeds over words in order to change modes of perceptions, offered Jarry a model for his own practice and conception of theater.

In the canonical reading of *Ubu Roi,* the reading that has served as one of the founding myths of French avant-garde theater, it was that odd opening word, "merdre," that incited the crowd to revolt, in what Fouquier called a "9 Thermidor littéraire." This "merdre" has been described as the bodily filth that bourgeois society took such great pains to remove from public view, now being shouted at them from the stage. In this reading, it was the shocking revelation of the repressed. Another critic recently described it as a form of "linguistic sabotage"[45] that pointed to the dysfunction inherent in all language. It has been read along largely deconstructive lines, the deformation of language that points to the outside of language while remaining within it. However, rather than all language or all discourse, I believe that the historical context allows us to see that it is in fact not all language or all discours that is attacked in *Ubu Roi*, but rather a specific form of revolutionary discourse handed down from the Jacobins and continued on in French Romanticism and on to the Commune.

We can thus contrast Jarry's "*merdre*" with the equally well-known "*merde*" in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables.* In a famous scene that not so surprisingly did not make it into the latest cinematic musical version of the novel, Cambronne, a general in Napoléon's army, faces death on the battlefield. Whereas Napoléon, in Hugo's account, goes into battle with the haughty laugh of hubris, Cambronne faces death with a triumphant laugh of defiance and utters but one word: "merde." The explicative became known euphemistically as Hugo's "mot de Cambronne" and

[45] Williams Hyman, Erin. "Theatrical Terror: Attentats and Symbolist Practice." *The Comparatist*. vol. 29 (May 2005): 101-122. 111.

caused a great stir, not only as a breach of decorum but as a celebration of the word, as a triumph over death, a confrontation with fate. It exemplified the transformative power of the word championed in Hugo's poetry. Through Cambronne, the Battle of Waterloo is depicted not as a national tragedy and the source of devastating defeat, but rather a show of resilience in the face of overwhelming odds. In the critical reception, it has often been compared to Rabelais' carnivalesque. Thus Victor Brombert concludes his reading of it: "Such transformational laughter not only exorcises fear and challenges authority; it contains huge regenerative power"(Brombert, 110). In this regard, it is part of Hugo's larger poetic project, which champions the transformative power of the word. Hugo eventually celebrates both the Revolution and the Terror, transposing them into a literary terror in which both violence and bodily excrement serve as negative moments in the dialectical march of history achieving ever-greater progress. Zola may have had this usage of "merde" in mind when in the early 1890s he advised aspiring writers to: "dire merde au siècle."[46] It is a defiance and an act of rebellion against niceties, social decorum, and aesthetic convention. It is indeed an act of liberation.

Jarry himself in his private correspondence, often referred to "*merdre*" as his "*mot de Cambronne*" thus making the parallel between him and Hugo explicit. However, in contrast to Hugo (or to Zola), Jarry's "*merdre*" has no regenerative force, there is no redeeming quality, it is not the negative moment that will be quickly sublated within the dialectic. It is not the tearing asunder of stifling social conventions to get at a greater sense of the real or to achieve a greater sense of liberty. The question of just how to interpret "*merdre*" has vexed readers and fueled debate since the dress rehearsal of the play in 1896. I believe that the audience members

[46] Quoted in: Blackadder, Neil. "Merdre! Performing Filth in the Bourgeois Public Sphere." *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*. Ed. William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2005. 184.

themselves may furnish us with some of the greatest cues. As one audience member wrote anonymously the following day, Jarry "voulait donner de l' 'r' à la merde," thus playing on the homonym "air" and the letter "r" where *donner l'air* (to aerate or air out) becomes tantamount to adding the letter "r" to *merde.* What this captures more than other interpretation is the interaction between the theater and the audience, between the character on the stage in all its corporeal presence, vulgar language and the spectators who are exposed to its "air". This question of *donner l'air/r* thus contrasts Jarry's theater with a theater focused on telling a story, for example, or one attempting to purge sorrow and pity. Jarry himself emphasized the physicality of the theater as one of its inherent strengths, "Je pense qu'il n'y a aucune espèce de raison d'écrire une oeuvre sous forme dramatique, à moins que l'on ait eu la vision d'un personnage qu'il soit plus commode de lâcher sur une scène que d'analyser dans un livre"(*OC,* 415; See also figure 1). He insists on the material, physical presence of the character on the stage, the material support of the theater as giving form to thought and, I want to suggest, also as a means to attack what the anarchists termed a certain "échafaudages de la pensée." Jarry thus engages in the very same debate between word and deed as the anarchists. However, whereas propaganda of the deed sought to incarnate the idea in "flesh and blood"(*en chair et en os*) as they state, thus making the act the culmination of the idea, Jarry rather uses the stage to disturb conventional ways of thinking, to break down a certain aesthetic, and to open up new possibilities of thought through the physicality of the stage.

Jarry's text "Être et vivre" published in the Spring of 1894 at the height of the attacks, begins with the question: "Au commencement était la Pensée? ou au commencement était l'Action?"(*OC*, 341). This short, highly theoretical and abstract piece on the relation between being (être), living (vivre), thought, action, language, perception, and the identity of contraires

has been at the center of Jarry criticism for at least the last forty years. I want to focus on the one concrete reference in the text: Vaillant's bombing of the Chamber of Deputies in 1893. The reference crops up, not insignificantly, while Jarry is reflecting on the relation between being and non-being (*être et le non-Être*). The speculative dialectic comes to the blunt affirmation:

Figure 1: Jarry's woodcut, titled "Véritable Portrait de Monsieur Ubu." Scanned from *OC,* 347.

> L'Anarchie Est; mais l'idée déchoit qui se résout en acte; il faudrait l'Acte imminent, asymptote presque. Vaillant de par son nom prédestiné voulut vivre sa théorie. Au lieu du Monstre inconcevable, fut palpable et audible la chute non fendue d'un des grelots de son joyeux bonnet. Et pourtant il fut grand. – Quoiqu'il fût contraire à l'Etre. Car l'Etre est meilleur que le Vivre. Mais – causuitique licite – pour en paix avec ma conscience glorifier le Vivre je veux que l'Etre disparaisse, se résolvant en son contraire.

Jarry's theater with its use of marionette-like gestures, masks, and character specific voices including accent, intonation and rhythm does not seek to incarnate the idea. Quite to the contrary, all of these devices serve in a certain sense to dehumanize the actor playing the character, to ensure that the actor does not incarnate the character in "chair et en os." Jarry's theater seeks to have Being (l'Etre) disappear, to destroy it so as to glorify the Living (le Vivre). In Jarry's reading, Vaillant's bombing does not incarnate the idea, making it walk among the people in Brousse's definition. Rather, for Jarry, the idea that resolves itself into action demeans itself. Against this understanding of action as culmination of the idea, Jarry calls for "l'Acte imminent," the act that hovers on the horizon of the possible.

Although this imminent act remains ambiguous, Jarry does give some insight in "Réponses à un questionnaire sur l'art dramatique." Here Jarry poses the question the question: "Qu'est-ce qu'une pièce de théâtre? Une fête civique? Une leçon? Un délassement?" Against the conventional responses of civil festival, pedagogical lesson, and relaxing diversion, Jarry argues for theater as action, a theater that if it were to offer any lessons it would only to demonstrate "une leçon de sentimentalité fausse et d'esthétique fausse." This second type of theater offers up as spectacle the lie of the first by demonstrating the falsity of its aesthetic and sentimental education, the very sentimental education that the theory of propaganda of the deed develops. Jarry explains: "Cet autre théâtre n'est ni fête pour son public, ni leçon, ni délassement, mais

action"(*OC,* 412). Jarry thus calls for a participatory theater, one in which the audience neither passively watches from a distance, not actively participates in as in Rousseau's civil festival.

Rousseau famously concludes his thorough-going attack on the theater in *Lettre à d'Alembert* (1758) with the question if in conclusion there are thus to be no spectacles in the republic. "Quoi! ne faut-il donc aucun Spectacle dans une République?"[47] The *fête* is his response to this question, the fête as the type of spectacle fit for Republican society. In a simple reading of this text notoriously lacking in simplicity, we can characterize the opposition between the theater and the fête around the notion of alienation. The theater has an alienating effect on its spectators, separating them from the spectacle that they are watching and thereby assigning them the more passive role of spectators. In contrast, Rousseau calls for a spectacle: "donnez les Spectateurs en Spectacle; rendez-les acteurs eux-mêmes; faites que chacun se voye et s'aime dans les autres, afin que tous en soient mieux unis"(*ibid*., 115). As Jean Starobinski points out,

> L'exaltation de la fête collective a la même structure que la volonté générale du *Contrat social*. La description de la *joie publique* nous offre l'aspect lyrique de la volonté générale: c'est l'aspect qu'elle prend en habits du dimanche. La fête exprime sur le plan 'existentiel' de l'affectivité tout ce que le *Contrat* formule sur le plan de la théorie du droit.[48]

Participants in the festival are both actors and spectators in the same way that in the social contract citizens are members of the sovereign, both subject and object of the law, those that make it and want it but also those who obey it. Starobinski further comments on the passage quoted above, "Regarder tous ses frères, et être regardé par tous: il n'est pas difficile de retrouver ici le postulat d'une aliénation simultanée de toutes les volontés, où chacun finit par recevoir en retour tout ce qu'il a cédé à la collectivité"(*ibid*.). This complex dialectic of ceding in order to

[47] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Lettre à d'Alembert*. *Oeuvres complètes*. Ed.Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade. vol. 5. 114.
[48] Starobinski, Jean. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

gain, of restricting in order to expand liberties has been a key feature of readings of Rousseau including Starobinski, Derrida, de Man, Judith Shklar, Chantal Mouffe, and others. Jarry's theater does not call for or provoke the same sort of interaction, the same level of participation, nor indeed the same presence of State in the form of the Magistrate who supervises or surveys the fête. Whereas the merit of the fête for Rousseau is precisely its harmony, its ordered spontaneity, Jarry's theater is participatory first and foremost as attack. Not, like anarchist bomb throwing, the direct confrontational attack, but the cumulative grating irritation of established public taste. It is participatory in so much as it provokes a riot, and thus the opposite of the orchestrated harmony of policed gaiety advocated by Rousseau.

In calling for a theater of action, Jarry points to the inadequacies of those forms of theater and their potential links to forms of revolutionary action. He reinjects the material, the theater of action as a hybrid form that has not entirely given up on language (as in Artaud's theater of cruelty) but that declares the word as insufficient. Jarry's theater of action is action in defiance of making sense, action that is not in the service of communicating a sense or meaning that would exist independent of the theatrical form. To achieve the effect he is looking for, he needs the theater, he needs the physical presence of the stage, a physical, material presence of characters on the stage interacting with those in the audience. However much Jarry rails against the materiality of the theater, he puts forward this antitheatrical stance to reinvent the theater, an abstract theater utterly dependent upon its materiality in order to achieve a greater degree of abstraction. In this way, it does indeed relate to the intellectual demolition of propaganda of the deed, the material to help dismantle the scaffolding that has hemmed in abstract thought. It is a form of aesthetic terrorism against the state insofar as the state has become Schiller's aesthetic state, a state whose presence is asserted by each individual in the greatest depths of their being.

In contrast Jarry's theater of action strives to get at that inner most being and to disrupt it, to undo the scaffolding that has crystallized in the form of the status quo either that comes in the form of theatrical and aesthetics conventions or the state, aesthetic or not. It is action to jar loose the scaffolding, to reassert life over the being that has rigidified around the state and made it the arbiter of the living, indeed the very support of the living.

Jarry's theater as attack certainly does not strive for harmony as Rousseau's *fête civique*, or if it does it is only by aggravating the friction that may expedite the dialectical overcoming of what lies at the root of that friction, whether it be lack of equality, freedom, or solidarity. However, Jarry hardly presents himself as the subtle dialectician hurling his calculated insults at a public he is trying to reform or educate (the other vision of theater that Jarry rejects) in the name of Marxist or anarchist revolution. What we do have though is a valorization of life, of life over being. And it is here that Jarry contrasts most strikingly his theater with the anarchist propaganda of the deed. Jarry's theater takes from anarchist propaganda of the deed its confrontational theatrics, its strategy of shock and intellectual demolition. But, he also criticizes anarchist propaganda of the deed, particularly Vaillant, for wanting to live its theory. What is at stake in this construction is the valorization of theory over life, of the conceptual understanding of life and the forces that animate it. Whatever life may mean for Jarry, we know for certain that it is opposed to being. It is rather becoming, the inchoate that functions more as vector of force that does not expend itself in order to be. Jarry's theater creates a certain type, brings it to life, but rather than culminating in an idea, one that the people would salute in passing as Brousse says of propaganda of the deed but as theatrical type that relies on the very materiality of the theater. A type that thus stops short of becoming a pure abstraction. It is not an idea rendered

sensible, but rather the spectacle that spurs on the imaginative faculties with the material support of the theater of action.

Jarry agrees with propaganda of the deed in that thought and action, art and life, are indeed integrated; but whereas in propaganda of the deed action is the culmination of thought, its incarnation; for Jarry action and especially theater as action engages thought; theater is both its impetus and mirror but does not incarnate it.

In conclusion, Jarry's theater continues propaganda of the deed in that it makes use of deeds, action as a means toward challenging or indirectly attacking a certain aesthetic tradition, a tradition of aesthetic education handed down from the Terror and from Schiller's notion of an aesthetic state. However, on the other hand, Jarry's theater does not attempt to incarnate ideas in flesh and blood, but rather to use the theater as a means to open up new possibilities of thought rather than to confirm and to put into action preconceived ideas.

Chapter 3

Making and Unmaking the Literary Terrorist: the Algerian Revolution and Hegelian Terror

When Zohra Drif, a young Algerian activist and law school student, placed a bomb in the Milk Bar in the European section of Algiers on September 30, 1956, she and two other *poseuses de bombes* initiated the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*) strategy of indiscriminate violence against civilians in what would become known as the "Battle of Algiers." As historians and militants alike have often noted, this strategy was in fact a response to the concerted efforts of French military and paramilitary forces in the Rue de Thèbes bombing in the Algerian section of the city, the Casbah, on August 10. The history of these "events"(as the French government euphemistically and obstinately referred to the War[1]) is perhaps the most well known of the Algerian Revolution, famously reenacted in Gillo Pontecorvo's *Le Bataille d'Alger* (1966). It is, furthermore, a history that continues to shape debates, policy and how we think about terrorism,

[1] It was not until 1999 that the French government under Jacques Chirac officially recognized that the "events" did in fact constitute a "war." Throughout the chapter, I have drawn from many historical accounts of the Algerian War, most notably: Horne, Alistair. *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*. New York: New York Review of Books, 2006. Shepard, Todd. *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell U P, 2008. Thenault, Sylvie. *Histoire de la guerre d'indépendance algérienne*. Paris: Flammarioin, Champs-Histoire, 2012.

torture, decolonization, and the French Republican model in the twenty-first century.

Nowhere is this continued legacy more striking than in the current War on Terror. In 2003 the Pentagon held a screening of Pontecorvro's film in order to better understand and manage events in Iraq. In a flyer, the Pentagon enticed its operatives and policy experts by drawing direct and borderline racist parallels between the War on Terror and the Algerian Revolution:

> How to win the battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas. Children shoot soldiers at point-blank range. Women plant bombs in cafés. Soon the entire Arab population builds to a mad fervor. Sound familiar? The French have a plan. It succeeds tactically, but fails strategically. To understand why, come to a rare showing of this film.[2]

The Pentagon here reiterates a canonical reading of the Algerian War in which the French win the battle but lose the war. Such an interpretation has coalesced into a truism of counter-insurgency policy in which the so-called battle for hearts and minds matters just as much, if not more, than military strength and strategy.

In the context of the 2012 fiftieth anniversary of the Evian Accords that put an official end to the war, to take another notable instance of the continued pertinence of the Algerian War, several prominent French and Francophone intellectuals, including Etienne Balibar, renewed the demand that the French Republic address more frankly and openly the history of the Algerian War. Within the context of what Benjamin Stora has termed a "guerre de mémoires,"[3] they petitioned the government to declare that the colonial system in general, not just in Algeria and not just during the War, "étaient en contradiction avec les principes dont elle [la République] se

[2] Kaufman, Michael T. "The World: Film Studies; What does the Pentagon See in 'Battle of Algiers.'" *New York Times* 7 Sept 2003. http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/07/weekinreview/the-world-film-studies-what-does-the-pentagon-see-in-battle-of-algiers.html

[3] Stora, Benjamin. *La Guerre des mémoires: La France face à son passé colonial. Entretiens avec Thierry Leclère*. Paris: L'aube, 2007.

réclamait."[4] Such a recognition, they argued, would mean that France, as a nation and as a people, "doit remettre en cause la grille de lecture du monde du XIXe siècle qui lui a permis de soutenir un système inique, trop longtemps tenu pour une entreprise normale"(*ibid.*). These authors thus drew sharply into focus the role that the nineteenth century continues to play in shaping thought and attitudes in the twenty-first century. Further, they pose one of the fundamental questions of this chapter: how does the Algerian Revolution and its legacy pose a challenge to the interpretive lens, the *grille de lecture*, inherited from the nineteenth-century? Along with this fundamental question, the chapter poses two related and equally central questions: how may the Algerian Revolution be read as a restaging of the Terror; and, second, how does this particular restaging relate to a Hegelian tradition of reading of the Terror? Lastly, it further sets up further research into the Algerian Revolution as aesthetic event, one that affects both how we read nineteenth-century French literature and how we understand the relationship between democracy and terror in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This chapter demonstrates not only that the Terror did indeed play a central role in shaping the Algerian Revolution but also that such a reading allows us to engage the Algerian War as a restaging of Hegel's reading of the Terror and its wide influence in the French literary and philosophical tradition. Drawing on Zohra Drif's short apology of what she does not hesitate to call her "terrorist" activities, I situate Algerian terrorism within a tradition of literary incarnations of the figure of the terrorist, most notably in André Malraux's *La Condition humaine* and Albert Camus' *Les Justes*. I argue that what ultimately Zohra Drif engages in her critique of Malraux and Camus is a tradition of French Hegelianism. Drif thus enters into

[4] Etienne Balibar et al. "Le contentieux colonial entre la France et l'Algérie doit être enfin dépassé." *Le Monde* 18 Dec. 2012. The article was also published by *L'Humanité* in France and *Al Khabar* and *El Watan* in Algeria. http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2012/12/18/le-contentieux-colonial-entre-la-france-et-l-algerie-doit-etre-enfin-depasse_1807916_3232.html?xtmc=etienne_balibar&xtcr=17

dialogue with Frantz Fanon and his rereading of Hegel in the colonial context. Like Fanon, she argues for the use of violence as an "absolute praxis" in the collective struggle for liberty. My work here contributes to a larger effort to rethink what Michael Rothberg has called, in his 2009 book of the same name, *Multidirectional Memory,* and what Debarati Sanyal has termed *noeuds de mémoires*.[5] This chapter contributes to the exploration of different multidirectional memories at work both during and after the Algerian War. It demonstrates how the Terror threads through the intricate *noeuds de mémoire* that shape different experiences and modes of interpretation of the Algerian Revolution.

Unmaking the Literary Terrorist

Following the bombing of the Milk Bar, Zohra Drif along with Samia Lakhdari, Djamila Bouhired, and their leader, Saadi Yacef went into hiding in the Casbah as the French military led an intense hunt that institutionalized torture and other forms of brutality.[6] Finally captured in early October 1957 and sentenced by a military tribunal to twenty years of hard labor in August 1958, she was imprisoned first in the infamous Barberousse prison in Algiers, where the French routinely tortured and guillotined Algerian prisoners, then transferred to a prison in Pau in

[5] Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford U P, 2009. Sanyal, Debarati. *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015. See also special of *Yale French Studies* dedicated to "*Les noeuds de mémoires*" edited by Rothberg, Sanyal, and Maxime Silverman. Nov. 2010.
[6] Branche, Raphaëlle. *La Torture et l'Armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie, 1954-1962*. Paris: Gallimard, 2001.

metropolitan France. It was during this time that she penned a short text, *La mort de mes frères,* first published by Maspero in Paris in November 1960 four months before the signing of the Evian Accords brought the war to an official close. In it, Drif set out to explain frankly and clearly, in her own words, "comment et pourquoi, de la Faculté d'Alger, j'ai accepté de faire partie d'un réseau essentiellement terroriste."[7] Drif was of bourgeois background and, after having volunteered for militant action, had been chosen by Yacef's organization in the Casbah for her "European" looks, presumably able to pass more easily through the checkpoints separating the Casbah from the European sections of the city. She was furthermore a successful student, intelligent and politically engaged in the *Université d'Alger*'s law school. Recounting her militarization in her own words, she narrates that is was on her own initiative that she made contact with FLN leaders and offered her support as a militant.

In contrast to Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Fidel Castro, Yasser Arafat and many other militant revolutionaries of the time and since,[8] Drif, like many Algerian revolutionaries, did not hesitate to use the word "terrorist" to describe her actions and those of the FLN. Quite to the contrary, she candidly embraces the word without quibble and seeks both to justify its use and to shift our understanding of it. In this embrace, she tries to lever the history and ambiguity of the term in order to gain support for the cause of Algerian independence. She thus gestures obliquely toward solidarity between the Algerian cause and the French Resistance. In this way, Drif engages in a semantic, socio-connotative transformation more often found in poetry than in apologies for terrorism. Her description of life for Algerians during the colonial struggle draws implicitly parallels with life in Nazi occupied France: "Nous connaissions les perquisitions, le

[7] Drif, Zohra. *La Mort de mes frères*. Paris: Maspero, 1961. 8.
[8] See selections in Laqueur, Walter ed. *Voices of Terror: Manifestos, Writings and Manuals of Al Qaeda, Hamas, and other Terrorists from around the World and throughout the Ages*. Naperville, Illinois: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2004.

couvre-feu, le cerclage des quartiers, la population menée au stade de Saint-Eugène"(Drif, 8). Such a portrait could not help but recall France under German occupation, with the Saint-Eugène stadium sitting in for the Vel d'hiv and the roundup of French Jews in 1942. She makes this same point more explicitly in a later interview documenting the role of women during the revolution. There, she reproaches Germaine Tillion, the former resistance fighter who had been tortured by the Gestapo and who sought, at great personal risk, to bring the FLN and the French government to the negotiating table: "Nous vivions traqués avec la responsabilité de répondre aux exécutions alors que nous n'en avions pas les moyens. Et elle [Tillion], qui représentait la résistance, venait nous faire la morale: les bombes c'est mal."[9] The critique is that Tillion as an engaged militant of the *Résistance*, which resorted to using bombes and other commonly recognized "terrorist" tactics, deployed a hypocritical double standard. For Drif, Tillion fails to recognize the parallels between the situation in which the *Résistance* fighters found themselves under Nazi occupation and the situation of the Algerian revolutionaries under French colonial rule. Part of Drif's rhetorical, poetic strategy here is to prod her readers into seeing this parallel, gently reminding them that the official French government, the Vichy regime, labeled the Résistance fighters terrorists. A striking, yet subtle example of this may be seen in Marcel Ophüls' 1969 documentary film, *Le Chagrin et la pitié*. A movie theater owner in occupied Clermont-Ferrand narrates how the *Résistance* bombed the theater killing eight and wounding forty Germans. During the course of his account, he casually refers to the resistance fighters as "*terroristes.*"[10] Ophüls, often eager to prod his interviewees to bring greater depth and nuance to particular word choices, does not pause over the use of the term.

[9] Amrane, Djamila. *Des femmes dans la guerre d'Algérie: Entretiens*. Paris: Karthala, 1994. 141.
[10] *Le Chagrin et la pitié*. Dir. Marcel Ophüls. 1969. I thank Laurent Dubreuil for bringing this scene to my attention. My argument here parallels and is inspired from his analysis of *L'Empire du langage: Colonies et Francophonies*. Paris: Hermann, 2008.

In order to further highlight the significance of this strategy, we can contrast it with Marc Redfield's theoretically sophisticated analysis of *The Rhetoric of Terror* in the post 9/11 War on Terror. Drawing on different historical moments, he provocatively ventures the following definition of sovereignty in the context of the War on Terror: "sovereign is he who decides on terror – who can call the other a terrorist and make it stick."[11] In contrast to the growing tendency for opposing sides of a conflict to declare their enemies "terrorists," Drif's use of the term engages an entirely different rhetorical strategy. She sovereignly declares herself and her organization terrorist thereby pre-empting those who would tactically deploy the term within a particular power knowledge structure. Rather than attempt to disarm the term, however, she shifts the socio-historical background in which we understand it.

It is however not only in relation to the French Résistance that Drif invokes and strives to justify the term and what it designates. She effectively engages in a dual rhetorical strategy. On the one hand, she reminds the French of their own recent "terrorist" activities in response to occupation. On the other, she extends the parallel further, alluding to a larger historical context of terrorism. She inscribes terrorism in *la longue durée*, making it part of a general strategy used by militants and revolutionaries throughout modern history. She thus introduces Algerian terrorism as only the most recent iteration of what she claims to be "la forme classique de la guerre insurrectionnelle, le terrorisme"(*op. cit.* 9). However, just as she embraces the term terrorism only in order to shift our understanding of it, she reads historically the image of the terrorist to contest it and alter how we understand terrorism. Terrorism is, for Drif, a classical form of insurrectionary struggle but, at the same time, she takes exception with a tradition of representing the terrorist. Significantly, for Drif, it is not a question of how the media, politicians

[11] Redfield, Marc. *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror*. New York: Fordham U P, 2009. 56.

and lawyers portray the terrorist.

Rather, her apology for terrorism and attempt to shift our understanding of it takes the form of a literary critique, specifically against André Malraux's 1933 Goncourt winning novel, *La Condition humaine*, and Albert Camus' 1949 play, *Les Justes*. She justifies terrorism as a "response" to French colonial oppression, torture, executions and as the only means available to the revolutionaries. But, her major challenge, what she develops the most is not a critique of colonial policy per se or of how the French government and media have depicted Algerian militants and their struggle for independence. Rather, she attacks literature and canonical literary presentations of the terrorist. She thus argues against how literature has come to shape how we view and understand the figure of the terrorist. She bases her critique in her own lived experience as a terrorist engaged in militant activities. She refutes Malraux's novel thus: "jamais, au cours du combat, je n'ai pu faire le rapprochement entre ce que je vivais et la conception du terroriste de Malraux, parlant de Tchen"(*ibid.*, 10). Apparently still able to access to the novel while in prison, she then cites Malraux on Tchen: "Celui-là jeté dans le monde du meurtre et il n'en sortirait plus, avec son acharnement il entrait dans la vie terroriste comme dans une prison. Avant dix ans il serait pris, torturé ou tué, jusque là il vivrait comme un obsédé dans le monde de la dérision et de la mort"(*ibid*.) Despite the importance of this passage in her overall argument, Drif does not dwell on the text. However, I believe that we can extend her analysis into a close reading that teases out the greater implications of the text and its intertexts. This is what I propose in the following sections.

Drif contends that the literary conception such as Malraux constructs it does not match her personal lived experience nor the communal experience of the struggle, indeed that there is a fundamental disjunction between the two. Malraux's Tchen serves as the contrast against which

Drif articulates her own experience. But in narrating that experience, I believe, she also puts forth a new conception of the terrorist. For Drif, terrorism is not a form of prison, a solitary cell where one is left to brood over one's conscious and past actions. Nor is it a form of obsession, an unbridled death drive soldiering on to a suicidal transcendence of the individual self and its actions. Quite to the contrary, for Drif, the terrorist draws her strength from the community. Terrorist action takes form and meaning only within a communal struggle in which everyone has the agency to affect both the form and meaning. The FLN terrorist activities can only have meaning in so far as they are able to mobilize the community and to rally it to the cause for which the revolutionary movement fights, in this case national freedom and independence under the banner of the FLN. Drif's negation of the prison metaphor has a double implication. On the one hand, it rejects the solitary nature of terrorist action and affirms the absolute necessity of communal involvement. On the other, more implicitly, it challenges the psychological or metaphysical implications of the terrorist as one obsessed with and driven by death. Terrorism, in the paradoxical implication of her argument, is a means to invigorate the life of the community. It binds it together in a sense of shared experience and core beliefs, such as autonomy, freedom, and self-governance. Implicitly in Drif's reading, what motivates the terrorist is not contempt for life, Tchen's "*dérision*." Quite to the contrary, her actions ardently strive to re-invigorate life and values within an independent collectivity. Malraux insists that the terrorist lives in a "monde du meurtre." Drif objects on the grounds that *murder* "implique une volonté particulière." Bringing in the full political weight of the nuance between words for killing, she adamantly claims that the correct term is "*guerre,*" not murder. We will come back to this point, but at this point I believe we can already pose the question: if Malraux's world of murder implies a "volonté particulière," does Drif's insistence on war and collective action allude to a Rousseauian "volonté générale?"

Taking our cue from Drif's *longue durée*, we can see how Malraux's conception of the terrorist draws from the nineteenth-century tradition or *grille de lecture* of the lone, anarcho-nihilist, male bomb thrower. In fact, it is precisely the nihilistic connotations of the terrorist that Drif most virulently wants to overturn, a tradition that is perhaps best captured by Sergei Nachaev's 1869 pamphlet, "Catechism of the Revolutionist"(a text long believed to have been written by or in collaboration with Bakunin). The "Catechism" famously puts forth its somber first principle, "The revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no interests of his own, no affairs, no feelings, no attachments, no belongings, not even name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single exclusive interest, a single thought, a single passion – revolution"(*Voices of Terror*, 71). Malraux's Tchen descends directly from Nachaev. Many of Tchen's fellow revolutionaries consistently comment on, on the one hand, just how self-absorbed he is, and, on the other, just how self-abnegating he is. Wholly absorbed yet without emotional attachment to anyone including himself, such is the portrait of Tchen, a portrait that also finds echoes in the anarchist bomber, Souvarine, in Zola's *Germinal* (1885).

Drif's harshest and, for our purposes, most productive critique of Malraux and the tradition of nihilist terrorism poses the question of terrorism's relation to absolutes, any absolute. She quotes the most relevant exchange, in which Souen, a fellow revolutionary "demandait à Tchen: tu veux faire du terrorisme une sorte de religion?' – 'Pas une religion, le sens de la vie, la possession complète de soi-même"(*op. cit.* 10). Drif proceeds with her close reading, "Le terroriste, tel que le voit Malraux, cherche dans l'action terroriste sa réalisation personnelle absolue, qu'il pousse jusqu'à l'héroïsme, entendu ici comme l'exaltation individuelle"(*ibid.*). What is at stake in this passage and in this exchange between Malraux and Drif is a question of means and ends. For Malraux's Tchen, the terrorist act gives meaning to life, it is the all

consuming self-actualization by which an individual completes himself, raising himself above the limits of this all too material world. The terrorist act, in Malraux's presentation of Tchen, culminates in "la possession complète de soi-même" or what Drif terms a "réalisation personnelle absolue." In the parlance of Malraux's novel, we could say that terrorism serves as the means by which an individual elevates himself above *la condition humaine* and communes with the absolute.

Drif's comments on these two passages of *La condition humaine* go no further than a few sentences and may initially seem of only passing significance. Her challenge to Camus' *Les Justes* is even sparser. She neither cites it nor engages it more than in passing. It is noteworthy however that she makes no mention of *L'étranger* and the death of a nameless Arab in the novel. This is all the more remarkable if we recall that the nameless Arabs in Camus would lead Conor Cruise O'Brien and Edward Said to accuse Camus of orientalism.[12] Nor does Drif mention Camus' comments on his mother, his *Chroniques Algériens,* or his unheeded call for a "*trêve civile*" just a few months before Drif's bombing of the Milk Bar. Her apology of terrorism is first and foremost a negative thesis, rejecting a certain tradition as inaccurate within the lived experience of the colonial context. In continuing her analysis, we can build up an alternative figure of the terrorist. Her text however does not do this, it only points in that direction and calls out for further analysis.

[12] O'Brien, Conor Cruise. "Camus, Algeria, and 'The Fall.'" *New York Review of Books*, 9 Oct. 1969. Also *Albert Camus of Europe and Africa.* New York: Viking, 1970. Said, Edward. "Camus and the French Imperial Existence." *Culture and Imperialism,* New York: Vintage Books, 1994. 169-185. For a more recent revisionist interpretation of Camus' work, see Carroll, David. *Albert Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice*. New York: Columbia U P, 2008.

Posing the Problem of the Terror in the Twentieth-Century: Malraux

In many respects, Malraux and Camus pose the problem of the Terror for much of the twentieth century. It is in their writing perhaps more than other twentieth-century authors that we find an explicit literary interpretation of the Terror in light of twentieth century events and philosophy. They provide the background that allows us to see how the Algerian War does indeed restage the Terror. Drif's text makes no mention of the Terror nor of the French Revolution or any of its actors. However, both her interlocutors, Malraux and Camus, make great use of the Terror, particularly the figure of Saint-Just. In contesting Malraux and Camus, Drif, the apologist for Algerian terrorism, indirectly engages with both the Terror and with Saint-Just. It is in this way that we may read the Algerian Revolution and Algerian terrorism as a restaging of the Terror. If we take this analysis one step further, we quickly see that both Malraux and Camus are in turn in dialogue with a tradition of French Hegelianism and with Hegel's reading of the Terror in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). In parsing out the various strands of this *noeud de mémoire*, we expand Drif's close reading of Malraux to include Camus and eventually Hegel. In the sections that follow, I read Malraux as he poses the problem of the Terror for the twentieth-century. Camus then picks up this problem and works toward what he believes is a literary solution to the problem of the Terror. Finally in the fourth and final section, I return to Drif, putting her in dialogue with Hegel and a tradition of French Hegelianism. I will argue that Drif's dialogue with Hegel in certain respects parallels that of Fanon's critique of Hegel in the colonial context, but also deepens Fanon's critique of Hegelian dialectics.

Although *La condition humaine* makes no reference to the French Revolutionary Terror nor to Saint-Just, by following the intertextual connections between the novel and some of Malraux's other writings, we can see that Tchen is a twentieth-century recasting of Saint-Just. Furthermore, we also discover Malraux's engagement with Hegel. Readers familiar with Hegel's reading of the Terror and with the explicit influence Hegel had on Malraux's novel may already begin to see how Malraux modeled his terrorist on a form of revolutionary action that comes by way of the Terror. We do not, however, need to rely on such familiarity and implicit parallels. Malraux himself provides the connections in an essay on Saint-Just that served as a preface to a 1954 collection of Saint-Just's works. Despite significant political and cultural shifts during and after World War II, Malraux's presentation of the terrorist remains strikingly consistent throughout his intellectual works.

Malraux's Saint-Just is a man of action, a man whose literary and rhetorical output would merit little more than a footnote in history if not for his deeds. "Saint-Just," Malraux lauds, "orateur digne de Tacite, est un écrivain qui n'exprime rien de ce qu'exprimera, de ce qu'exprime, son action. Comme les autres grands révolutionnaires."[13] Malraux makes of Saint-Just the historical figure of the Revolutionary Terror into a type, indeed a transhistorical type, the great revolutionary whether of the eighteenth or the twentieth century. For Malraux, Saint-Just's greatest action, a performative speech act, was his speech calling for the death of Louis XVI during the king's trial. Malraux contributes to the solidification of a canonized reading of Saint-Just. According to this reading, Saint-Just sought to kill the two bodies of the king, that is, the

[13] Malraux, André. "Saint-Just et la force des choses." Preface to *Saint-Just et la force des choses*. Ed. Albert Olivier. Paris: Gallimard, 1954. Reprinted in André Malraux. *Le Triangle Noir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1970. 97-135. All quotes are from the 1970 reprint. 109.

physical body of Louis XVI as well as the spiritual body of the monarchy.[14] Malraux, following many others, calls this second body "l'âme de la royauté"(*ibid*., 114). Thus in spilling the royal blood of these two bodies, Saint-Just sought to found what Malraux calls "la République de droit divin"(*ibid.*). Such a divine right republic implies a theologico-political worldview in which government for and by the people partakes of a "natural" order, indeed a divine order. Louis' crime, according to Saint-Just, was not treason, for which the revolutionary court officially charged him. Rather, according to Saint-Just, he had usurped the rightful place of the people in the theologico-political order the Revolution sought to establish. In this reading of the Revolution, it is not the people who seize their liberty on the sole foundations of their own actions. Rather, it is a theologico-political order that has ordained that the people reclaim what has always already been their rightful place as sovereign. In Malraux's reading, it is Saint-Just's dubious honor to inaugurate this theologico-political world, which would give rise, Malraux insists, to the greatest atrocities of the first half of the twentieth-century.

Taking on the interpretive lens propagated by Michelet of Saint-Just as "archange de la terreur"(*ibid*., 101), Malraux praises Saint-Just at the same time that he positions him squarely at the root of totalitarianism. Saint-Just's conviction may be worthy of high praise in its radical attempts to "former des hommes" by endowing them with an entirely new "conscience morale"(*ibid*., 119). Indeed, Malraux does not hesitate to equate the conscious of this new man with "une foi," one more akin more to totalitarianism than to Catholicism. It is in this regard that, for Malraux, Saint-Just is "[p]assionnément totalitaire"(*ibid*., 121). The theologico-political order that he strives to establish is totalitarian in its attempt to expand to embrace the totality of life

[14] Kantorowicz, Ernst H. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1957. Michael Walzer will relies heavily on this theory in his influential reading of the trial of Louis XVI in his extended introduction to *Regicide and Revolution: Speeches at the Trial of Louis XVI*. New York: Cambridge U P, 1974.

within the state. In Saint-Just's darkly prophetic vision as depicted by Malraux, the state "embrasse tous les rapports, tous les intérêts, tous les droits, tous les devoirs, et donne une allure commune à toutes les parties de l'Etat"(*ibid*., 121). We may push Malraux's interpretation further to prefigure what Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt have termed the biopolitical. Saint-Just's states strives through every means possible, including the biological, to "changer l'homme"(*ibid*., 132). Not surprisingly, for Malraux this change takes on literary connotations as he equates it with "contraignant [l'homme] à une épopée transfiguratrice"(*ibid.*).

It is precisely this transfigurative epic that Malraux attempts to stage in *La condition humaine*, thereby linking his literary project with the theologico-political project of the Terror as incarnated by Saint-Just. For Malraux both the French Revolution and the Shanghai rebellion narrated in the novel fail, but these failures matter little to Malraux. What counts is that these revolutionary endeavors testify to a larger truth concerning the human condition. That truth may remain unattainable within the human condition such as it is. However, we do manage to catch a glimpse of it precisely at those moments of radical transformation such as the French Revolution and the Shanghai Revolt.

What Malraux praises most in Saint-Just, what allows him to read the revolutionary as a transhistorical figure, a "myth" in his own words, is that Saint-Just's action resist instrumentalization. They do not lend themselves as simple means to an end whereby the ends justify the means, however unsavory or atrocious. They are actions in and of themselves, and they are heroic to the extent that they strive against all odds to adhere to the Kantian kingdom of ends. In Malraux's recasting of Saint-Just, "[i]l semblait tenter d'accomplir des actes exemplaires pour eux-mêmes; plus exactement, pour témoigner de la vérité qui le possédait"(*ibid*., 127). It is not that these acts are completely devoid of utility. Rather, if there is a utility, it is to testify to a

truth that is in itself without utility, a truth that requires action, one that must be performed. Furthermore, they are exemplary, that is, serving as historical models for action in the present.

That truth, enacted in Saint-Just's deeds, simply put is that humanity may attain to the ideal, may raise itself up to what Tchen terms "la possession complète to soi-même" but only through death. Many of Tchen's fellow revolutionaries, those like the reader who bear witness to Tchen's truth, comment on this aspect of his character. Thus Kyo Gisors, the leader of the insurrection, observes, "Tchen n'appartenait plus à la Chine, même par la façon dont il l'avait quittée: une liberté totale, quasi inhumaine, le livrait totalement aux idées."[15] The human condition in all its embodied materiality does not lend itself to this total freedom, a freedom from the self and from the material world that would deliver the self entirely to the realm of ideas. Fatally, however, this deliverance of the self is also ineluctably its annihilation, its death. The omniscient narrator similarly describes Tchen's move toward individual terrorism: "Déraciné, désencadré, marqué à la fois par une exigence spirituelle d'une rigueur extrême et par le rejet de la foi qui le fonderait et lui donnerait substance, Tchen ne peut que glisser vers le terrorisme. Il exprime dans la destruction son besoin d'Absolu"(*ibid*., 67). Tchen drifts further away from the community as he embraces terrorism. He becomes unmoored and without roots, drifting away from the social and material world as he approaches an impossible exit from it. Tchen's suicidal, terrorist actions are tragic in that they follow an inexorable logic of a certain metaphysical dialectic. They attain to the absolute but only negatively, through the annihilation of a self already cut off from both the community and the sensorial world. For those who bear witness to Tchen's tragedy, however, his actions afford a certain glimpse into the ideal, a paradoxical testament to humanity's communion with the absolute.

[15] Malraux, André. *La Condition humaine*. Paris: Gallimard, folio, 1972. 62.

It is here that Malraux's vision of revolution and the role of terror and terrorism engages that of Hegel's. In a sub-section of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* dedicated to "Absolute Freedom and Terror," Hegel poses the problem of the French Revolution. He reads it as a struggle between, on the one hand, self-consciousness, which at this point in the dialectic strives for absolute freedom, and, on the other hand, the existing material reality, which resists self-consciousness' attempts to subsume it for its own uses. The French Revolution, in this influential reading, sought to form society into a self-conscious work that would be present to itself without mediation, humanity's self-fashioning of itself as immediate object.

The problem, according to Hegel, is that the Revolution claimed to realize this principle solely as an abstraction rather than through the mediated transformation of objective reality. Following Rousseau, the Revolution abstracted individual will into a collective "volonté générale" that claimed universal assent. This general will cannot be alienated from itself and thus will brook no differentiation or, in other words, individuation. As Hegel states it, "the supreme reality and the reality which stands in the greatest antithesis to universal freedom […] is the freedom and individuality of actual self-consciousness itself."[16] The struggle for universal freedom takes the form then of a stand off between the universal, abstract, general will and the particular, actual, individual will. Hegel reasons that because the French Revolution advanced by way of abstraction the "undivided Substance of absolute freedom ascends the throne of the world without any power being able to resist it"(*ibid*., 357). Absolute freedom, akin to the *Être Suprême*, reigns supreme as each individual conscious either bows down before it or attempts to bring itself within its folds, making individual will indistinguishable from the general will. This struggle takes on material form in the Terror, which Hegel memorably depicts thus:

[16] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller. New York: Oxford U P, 1977. 359.

> The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water. *ibid*., 360

Self-consciousness's attempt to attain absolute freedom results, indeed can only result, according to the Hegelian dialectic, in the death of the of the individual self. This death is furthermore meaningless, a negation of life not recuperated in any dialectic sublation. If the collective life of a society binds itself to the general will, the death of an individual has no meaning. It is a death not inscribed within a collective that would lend it meaning. When heads fall like cabbages in such a context, self-consciousness may indeed attain to the absolute. But that absolute is not only as vacuous as Robespierre's irrepresentable *Être Suprême* but may only be attained through a cold and meaningless death.

The literal dead end of the Terror does however serve in Hegel's *Phenomenology* the dialectic as it pursues its march toward absolute knowledge. Hegel is quite explicit on this point and even manages to overturn the Terror's meaningless death into a source of "rejuvenation": "Out of this tumult, Spirit would be thrown back to its starting-point, to the ethical and real would of culture, which would have been merely refreshed and rejuvenated by the fear of the lord and master which has again entered men's hearts"(*ibid*., 361). This overlapping of the Terror and master slave dialectic suggests the importance of the place of the Terror in the *Phenomenology*. The Terror marks a return to the struggle for life and death and thus as a certain restaging of the master slave dialectic, one rejuvenated by the fear of the Terror. As Jean Hyppolite points out of the passages of rejuvenation, "Hegel's thought is quite obscure here."[17] The dialectic move from the Terror to the "*moral* Spirit"(*ibid*., 363) that follows in the wake of a

[17] Hyppolite, Jean. *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's* Phenomenology of Spirit. Trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern U P, 1974. 455.

rejuvenated dialectic does indeed remain obscure and up for debate. It is however clear that Hegel's choice of words, "rejuvenate" and, later, "refresh"(*ibid*.) echo the very words of those who sought to justify and propagate the Terror: "régénération." This point will prove crucial in Camus' reading of Hegel and the place of the Terror within the dialectic.

Alexandre Kojève will pick up on this parallel and make much of it, pushing an ambiguity in Hegel's text arguably to its extreme limit and perhaps transgressing it. He will make the introduction of the fear of death during the Terror a moment of emancipatory triumph rather than tantamount to cutting off a head of cabbage. In Kojève's Marxist reading of Hegel, the bourgeois becomes a slave to capital, that is, a slave unto himself as capitalist. Driven by a desire for freedom, it is the bourgeois turned revolutionary who "creates the situation that introduces into him the element of death. And it is only thanks to the Terror that the idea of the final Synthesis, which definitively 'satisfies' Man, is realized."[18] One must earn emancipation in Kojève's reading of the master slave dialectic. For it is only an individual who, like the slave, has "trembled in every fiber of its being"(Hegel, 117) in Hegel's words that may truly be free through the dialectical overcoming of this extreme dread. The Terror then marks a necessary moment akin to the master/slave dialectic in that it reintroduces absolute dread or terror into a collective body and thereby rejuvenates it.

In conclusion, Malraux's posing of the problem of the Terror in the twentieth-century thus lies somewhere between Hegelian meaningless death in terror and the Kojèvian triumph of self-emancipation through terror as rejuvenating or regenerating force. The meaningless deaths of *La condition humaine* do nothing for the people of Shanghai. The revolt fails. However, these deaths bear witness to what is most noble and human of humanity: an act of complete self-

[18] Kojève, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the* Phenomenology of Spirit. Ed. Allan Bloom. Trans. James H Nichols, Jr. Ithaca, NY: Cornell U P, 1980. 69.

emancipation and self-possession. But, tragically, given the human condition such as Malraux presents it, such an act may only culminate in death, an exit from humanity and human existence. Malraux glorifies death at the same time that he condemns it. It is a heroic death whereby individual human beings strive to ascend to the ideal, to raise themselves above the human condition and grasp at an ideal way of living that necessarily eludes actual existing human beings. It bears testament to humanity's willingness to sacrifice itself, negate itself, in order to transfigure itself into something that it has only glimpsed as an idea. But, on the other hand, it is indeed futile. But for those who witness the contradictory futility and heroism of the act, we may renounce such a pursuit at the same time that we hold it dear as evidence of humanity's greater communion with the ideals it strives to attain. It results neither in the pure Kojèvian triumph nor the ambiguous Hegelian rejuvenation. Although Malraux clearly articulates the problem of the Terror in the twentieth century, he does not seem to put forth a clear solution. That task will fall to Albert Camus.

Toward a Literary Solution to the Terror: Camus

That Camus perceived and addressed the problem of the Terror in the twentieth-century in a strongly analogous way to Malraux is not pure speculation or interpretation. Camus himself recognized and cultivated the connections. In 1948 he wrote to Malraux asking him if he would accept to write a preface to a French translation of a novel by a Russian terrorist, Boris Savinkov,

whose autobiography, *Souvenirs d'un terroriste,* gives a first hand account of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party's assassination of the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich in 1905. Camus would later use this story and its characters as the basis of his 1949 play, *Les Justes*. In his letter Camus praises Malraux for his insight into the problem of terror, "Vous êtes le seul à pouvoir parler comme il convient du nihilisme, de la terreur et de l'impasse où il mène."[19] It is noteworthy that Camus lauds him for clearly articulating the problem without mention of any solution. It is precisely this "impasse" in terrorism that Camus will address in his play, his essay *L'homme révolté*, and in his political and literary engagement with the Algerian Revolution. Later in the letter, drawing parallels between Savinkov's memoires and Malraux's literary work, Camus claims that the two shared a similar "esprit." Although in the end Malraux did not go on to write the preface, the similarities of "esprit" between Camus' work and Malraux go far deeper than Camus' flattering letter or the brief and unanalyzed amalgam that Zohra Drif makes of the two. In this section, I argue that Camus, implicitly in *Les Justes* and more explicitly in *L'homme révolté*, proposed a literary solution to the problem of the Terror in the twentieth century, one that relies on a particular interpretation of Saint-Just.[20]

In many ways, Camus' *Les Justes* reiterates and reinforces the presentation of the terrorist in Malraux's novel although with a heavier-handed pedagogical lesson on its perils or impasse. An underground cell of Russian revolutionary socialists plot to assassinate the Grand Duke Serge. Their first attempt quickly unravels however as Kaliayev, the "poet" revolutionary, hesitates to throw the bomb when confronted with the faces of the small children accompanying

[19] Camus, Albert. *Oeuvres complètes*. Ed. Raymond Gay-Crosier et al. Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 2008. 3.1182-1183. Hereafter cited in text as *OC*.

[20] Both Debarati Sanyal and David Carroll (*op. cit*.) also analyze Camus' interpretation of the Terror and Saint-Just although with different approaches than my own. My work is indebted to theirs and also builds off of it. Sanyal, Debarati. *The Violence of Modernity: Baudelaire, Irony, and the Politics of Form*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 2006.

the Grand Duke. This hesitation in turn tears at the unity of the cell, as Stepan, the most ardent and the least scrupulous of the group, berates Kaliayev for lacking conviction. These debates provide much of the dramatic tension of the play and, furthermore, sketch out in broad terms Camus' solution to the impasse of terrorism. Kaliayev's second attempt succeeds, and the Grand Duke dies in the explosion. Kaliayev, however, will go to the gallows for his success; and, through deft manipulation by the Russian authorities, the remaining revolutionaries will question and doubt Kaliayev's legacy within the movement as some begin to splinter and others harden their resolve. Kaliayev's lover, Dora, ends the play with a somber lament of the fate of those who seek justice at all costs, the eponymous "*justes*."

For our purposes, the driving tension of the plot pits revolutionary action against the ideas that both motivate these actions and serve as goals toward which the revolution strives. The revolutionary cell – especially the central, amorous couple, Kaliayev and Dora – undergo a profound transformation as they struggle with the question of the limits to revolutionary action if there are any. At the opening of the play, a jovial Kaliayev explains blithely why he thinks it should be him to throw the bomb: "Mourir pour l'idée, c'est la seule façon d'être à la hauteur de l'idée. C'est la justification"(*OC,* 14). Kaliayev thus reiterates Malraux's reading of the Terror and terrorism as an attempt to attain to the ideal, which may only be achieved through death. Just as Tchen's act of terrorism would furnish "le sens de la vie," Kaliayev's actions seek to raise his life up to the idea of justice. The audience may even hear echoes of Saint-Just's argument at the king's trial as Kaliayev continues his justification, "Ce n'est pas lui [le grand-duc] que je tue. Je tue le despotisme"(*ibid*., 15). Kaliayev further explains his motivation, "J'aime la vie. Je ne m'ennuie pas. Je suis entré dans la révolution parce que j'aime la vie"(*ibid*., 11). Rather than weariness or, by implication, rancor, disappointment, frustration, it is love of life that motivates

Kaliayev. Stepan immediately retorts, "Je n'aime pas la vie, mais la justice qui est au-dessus de la vie"(*ibid*.), thus setting up in clear opposition the strife that will continue to animate all interactions between these two types of revolutionary terrorists, Kaliayev and Stepan. Life, on the one hand; justice, an ideal beyond or above (*au-dessus*) life on the other. After the heated exchange with Stepan, the two lovers speak more openly and intimately. Kaliayev ventures to further explain his position to Dora, "la révolution pour la vie, pour donner une chance à la vie, tu comprends?"(*ibid*.) In case anyone has not picked up on the irony of this statement among a group plotting an assassination, Dora responds "*avec élan*: Oui… (*Plus bas, après un silence:*) Et pourtant, nous allons donner la mort"(*ibid*., 13).

As the revolutionary cell copes with its set-backs and then rejoices its Pyrrhic victory, Kaliayev and Dora undergo a transformation or transfiguration as Malraux might have it. This transformation largely revolves around the question of the relation between love and the revolution. The positions are clear: Stepan loves justice above all else, including life; both Kaliayev Dora love justice and life equally, and it is this love that paradoxically motivates their revolutionary, terrorist action; however, they also love each other. From the onset, their love of each other comes into both direct and indirect conflict with their love of justice, life, and revolution. Stepan relentlessly berates them for this. For him, such individual love can only weaken their dedication to the revolutionary cause. Kaliayev and Dora struggle between love of life in a general, abstract sense and love of life in the form of an individual, living being.

Kaliayev's belief system – love of life in the abstract sense and his justification of death as giving life a chance (*donner une chance à la vie*) – comes under intense pressure when he faces the potential murder of "innocent" children. As long as an individuals embodies an idea, such as the Duke incarnates despotism, Kaliayev has no problem with assassination. However,

the tangible, physical presence of children resists more forcefully such a subsumption of individual being to idea. The play stresses that it is the physical gaze of the children rather than a reasoned or ideologically motivated argument that challenges Kaliayev's beliefs. It is this struggle between abstract belief system and bodily presence that puts into motion a different understanding of the revolution. Stepan's intransigent and callous love of justice represents one form of revolution, one willing to sacrifice children and do whatever it takes to attain to the ideal of justice. Kaliayev's love of life is another form of revolution. But, within Kaliayev's form of revolution, there is a further conflict: love of life in the general, abstract sense and love of life in actual living beings, who, implicitly resist being subsumed under the abstract sense.

The play stages Kaliayev's transformation from a revolutionary who believes that dying for the idea drives the revolution to a revolutionary who comes to believe that ideas may not be enough to justify terrorism. After his failed first attempt and encounter with the children, he explicitly voices his transformation to Dora "*se levant, dans une grande agitation*: Aujourd'hui, je sais ce que je ne savais pas. Tu avais raison, ce n'est pas si simple. Je croyais que c'était facile de tuer, que l'idée suffisait, et le courage. Mais je ne suis pas si grand"(*ibid*., 29). Kaliayev's pithy lesson here overturns his earlier declaration that dying for the idea was the only way to raise oneself up to its heights. The idea is not enough. That is the insight he gains, an insight that comes not by way of argumentation but through the visceral experience of facing the possible execution of children. This experience throws Kaliayev's belief system and way of engaging in revolutionary action into crisis. Dora begins to unpack Kaliayev's contradictions: "Ceux qui aiment vraiment la justice n'ont pas droit à l'amour […] L'amour courbe doucement les têtes, Yanek [Kaliayev's first name]. Nous, nous avons la nuque raide"(*ibid*.). Love, according to Dora, softens ideological convictions and gently turns one's attention away from the realm of

ideas toward the material world and the individuals who inhabit it. For those who would absolutely serve ideals such as justice, love of particular individuals can only hinder one's commitment to revolutionary ideals, which in this Platonic vision are not of this world.

The problem that Dora struggles to impress upon Kaliayev is precisely one of communication between lovers, specifically lovers who struggle to distinguish ideals form people. She thus points to a further paradox. Their grand, abstract love of the people motivates their revolutionary action, which they execute in the name of the people. It is after all a social-democratic revolution meant to better all of humanity that they seek. But, they never speak to the people, that is, they do not engage with those around them in whose name they kill indiscriminately. This is a central paradox of the revolutionary cell that must cut itself off from the rest of society in order to execute the revolutionary actions that are meant to serve society. They must continuously face the silence of the people. Kaliayev contends, however, "Mais c'est cela l'amour, tout donner, tout sacrifier sans espoir de retour"(*ibid*.). It is here that Dora then voices an alternative vision of love, "Peut-être. C'est l'amour absolu, la joie pure et solitaire, c'est celui qui me brûle en effet. À certaines heures, pourtant, je me demande si l'amour n'est pas autre chose, s'il peut cesser d'être un monologue, et s'il n'y a pas une réponse, quelquefois"(*ibid*.). This dialogic love, I am arguing, is also Camus' solution to the problem of terrorism as inherited from the Terror: a form of revolution motivated by love but a love that does not grow out of an abstract idea of justice or even of the people but out of a dialogue with the actual people, individual beings that inhabit that world and whose lives the revolution is fighting to improve.

The audience may glimpse this vision, and perhaps Dora as well, but whatever insight the characters gain is not enough to heed the impending tragedy. Kaliayev dies. Dora, no longer with

a living loved one as interlocutor, tragically fixes her gaze on abstract ideals as she foreshadows her own death. The ultimate union of these lovers will only come in death. The revolutionaries may deserve our pity and our admiration, but the audience sees all too well the impasse that has brought them to this end. But, that tragic impasse is not all they have witnessed. More importantly, it has glimpsed a solution to the impasse of terrorism in the form of a different kind of revolutionary action, one *performed* on the stage and in the dialogic exchange between Kaliayev and Dora.

What I am here calling the performative, literary solution takes on more argumentative form two years after the play in *L'homme révolté* (1951). The essay pits what Camus terms "la révolté métaphysique" against a form of revolt that would engage empirical reality at the same time that it would refuse any and all absolutes. Camus' solution lies in aesthetics.[21] Specifically, it is an aesthetics that "*corrige*" reality but does not bludgeon or mutilate it in its quest for absolute unity, harmony, or what, following the Wagnerian tradition, we may term total art. It consciously resists the totalizing drive to unity that, according to Camus, is inherent in all art. If this aesthetic correction can still be called revolt, and for Camus it certainly can, it is a relative or contingent revolt that does not take its impetus from metaphysics. Camus' aesthetics does not amount to full fledged education as in Schiller in that it posits no telos. Rather, it is an aesthetic correction, one in which the aesthetic realms of literature, the novel, and the arts in general enter into dialogue with the material, empirical reality that they tend to negate in the creation of other, fictional worlds. Extrapolating from Camus, we might say that fiction and the material, empirical world have to engage each other in a process akin to a dialogue among lovers in which the embodied reality counts much more than any abstract notion of the other. In fact, true dialogue

[21] Camus, Albert. *L'homme révolté*. Paris: Gallimard, folio, 1985.

for Camus negates any abstract notion of the other by putting one face to face with the bodily presence of a particular concrete other who necessarily resists subsumption under an abstract ideal.

What is most striking is that Camus comes to the above aesthetic solution by way of rereading the Terror in the twentieth century. For him, the Terror is the paradigm of all "metaphysical revolt." He defines such revolt as "le mouvement par lequel un homme se dresse contre sa condition et la création tout entière"(*ibid.,* 41). He further explains that it qualifies as metaphysical because "elle conteste les fins de l'homme et de la création"(*ibid*.). It thus presupposes a teleology to humanity and to creation such that there are "ends," that is, points toward which they tend. Camus does not necessarily deny that such ends might exist. However, if they do exist, we, who live and act in a particular moment in history, cannot know for certain what they are. If there is any trace of the absolute in Camus, it is in the assertion that any ends to humanity remain absolutely beyond our grasp.

Camus' metaphysical revolutionaries claim to know with certainty the metaphysical ends of humanity and the entire created world. They, in turn, disparage and denounce the phenomenal world around them because it does not live up to that metaphysical vision. Consequently, they can justify their turn to violence as an idealist attempt to create or recreate the world according to greater unity between abstract ideals and empirical reality. Metaphysical revolt is thus, in Camus' tersest definition, "la revendication motivée d'une unité heureuse"(*ibid.,*42).

Camus reads the Terror as a metaphysical revolt within the existential logic according to which being precedes essence. The Revolution deposed divine monarchy and the metaphysical belief system that went along with it. The divine creator that set humanity on its teleological course was no more. Rather, the people as sovereign took on the power to shape their collective

essence. However, explicitly following Hegel's reading of the Terror, Camus argues that the revolutionaries of the Terror conceived of that essence in purely abstract terms whether as liberty, equality, virtue, justice, general will, democracy, etc. Camus argues that concerning the democracy of *Du Contrat social,* Rousseau had "bien vu que la société du *Contrat* ne convenait qu'à des dieux"(*ibid.,* 168). His successors, notably Robespierre and Saint-Just, in contrast, "l'ont pris au mot et ont tâché de fonder la divinité de l'homme"(*ibid*.). For Camus, this is the defining aspect of the Terror. It is furthermore the reason why the Terror serves as the paradigm of all metaphysical revolt. He thus concludes his reading of the Terror: "A la révolution jacobine qui essayait d'instituter la religion de la vertu, afin d'y fonder l'unité, succéderont les révolutions cyniques, qu'elles soient de droite ou de gauche, qui vont tenter de conquérir l'unité du monde pour fonder enfin la religion de l'homme"(*ibid.,* 171). What unites the Terror to twentieth century totalitarianism – whether communist, fascist, or Nazi – is the attempt to make humanity the unchecked master of its own essence.

Although Camus relies on and generally agrees with Hegel's reading of the Terror, he ultimately accuses Hegel and Hegelians of repeating and expanding the Terror. Like Malraux, Hegel and those who Camus refers to simply as "les philosophes allemands" grasped the problem of the Terror but failed to find a way out of its impasse. Quite to the contrary and despite their intentions, Hegel and his followers inscribed the Terror into philosophy and thereby gave it a greater and more menacing scope: "Le dépassement de la Terreur, entrepris par Hegel, aboutit seulement à un élargissement de la Terreur"(*ibid.,* 177). Camus' reading is here very broad and lacks textual evidence; he never cites Hegel or Marx. It seems that because the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* ostensibly pursues its inexorable marches to absolute knowledge without regard for actual historical conditions, Hegelian dialectics perpetuates in philosophy self-

consciousness' unrelenting path to absolute freedom in the Terror. He references Alexandre Kojève, who influenced Camus' understanding of Hegel in a recognizable fashion. It may well have been these passages that provoked Francis Jenson's, and later Sartre's, philosophical disdain. Because Camus reads the Terror within an existentialist framework, a critique of the Terror would potentially also imply a critique of existentialism.

What unites all Hegelian philosophers for Camus is an ardent belief that "l'homme n'a pas de nature humaine donnée une fois pour toutes, qu'il n'est pas une créature achevée, mais une aventure dont il peut être en partie le créateur"(*ibid.,* 175). The crux of Camus' argument here may very well rest on the meager "en partie." Certainly, Camus does not deny that humanity does at least to some extent shape itself according to its own volition. On the other hand, he rejects outright any absolute attempt to mold humanity on its own free will. The limit that Camus wants to hold to is violence, especially bodily violence. If the "adventure" by which humanity gives shape to itself results in bodily violence, the implication is that we have a moral duty to oppose it. And this duty is not itself derived from metaphysics but from the love and commitment we bear to flesh and blood individuals. Because what Camus terms the human "adventure" is radically contingent and because we cannot possibly know what the "ends" of humanity are, if any, then any justification of bodily violence is specious at best. Nonetheless, revolutionaries throughout at least modern history sacrificed living members of a present community to a potential future that would achieve total unity. If logic or philosophy had not proven the futility of this wager, certainly twentieth century history had in Camus' mind amply demonstrated it.

But what then of art, literature, and the aesthetics of correction in this reading of the Terror in the twentieth century? Camus, like many others, recognized and elaborated a formal

connection between the political, metaphysical project of the Terror and its philosophical expansion. He analyzes violence as a formal principle, specifically it is the form that radical attempts at total unity take, whether in politics or in aesthetics. This allows him to demonstrate succinctly and deftly how metaphysical revolt and aesthetics can overlap in a common project: "Dans toute révolte se découvrent l'exigence métaphysique de l'unité, l'impossibilité de s'en saisir, et la fabrication d'un univers de remplacement. La révolte, de ce point de vue, est fabricatrice d'univers. Ceci définit l'art, aussi"(*ibid.,* 319-320). Metaphysical revolt partakes of the creative process, it fabricates an alternative world just as fiction does. Both negate to various degrees the empirical world at hand in favor of an imagined one. As a prominent and startling example, Camus cites Rimbaud's project of a "dérèglement de tous les sens" articulated in the so-called "Lettres du voyant"(1871). Because such a *dérèglement* attempts to undo or at least disturb sense and meaning in search of a new and more harmonious world, Camus reasons, it partakes in a project shared by Nazi and Soviet concentration camps. Although he never states it, it is evident that for Camus art inherently strives toward a totalizing unity. It is this will to total unity that unites art, the Terror, totalitarianism, Nazis, fascism, Soviet gulags, etc. It follows that because art shares the same driving force, it also partakes of the impasse of terrorism. Like the Terror, art's will to totalizing forms risks running roughshod over all that stands in its way, perpetuating an aesthetic terror akin to the political Terror of the Revolution.

Camus' solution to this impasse is a new conception and practice of art, particularly literature. He articulates this new practice by contrasting it to realism. All art, but perhaps realism more so, runs the totalitarian or terrorist risk of subjugating its subject to formal unity. Camus explains this in terms that directly echo if not mimic Hugo's critique of realism. Hugo railed against realism's tendency to deliver "une nature mutilée" since even realism, despite its

pretentions, cannot capture the totality of the real. Following the exact same logic and with only slight variations in word choice, Camus claims of realism, "[i]l naît d'une mutilation, et d'une mutilation volontaire, opérée sur le réel. L'unité ainsi obtenue est une unité dégradée, un nivellement des êtres et du monde"(*ibid.,* 331-332). Realism then is a hybrid form that tries to capture empirical reality at the same time that it submits that reality to an artistic need for formal unity. The result is a "mutilation volontaire," where the will to unity and totality does violence to the real for the sake of a higher unity. In this regard, we could conclude that for Camus realism is terrorist.

Against this voluntary mutilation of the real, Camus proposes aesthetics as a form of "correction," a gentler force that takes stock of and resists art's inherent terroristic tendencies. This aesthetics of correction comes to define for Camus the very essence of the novel: "l'essence du roman est dans cette correction perpétuelle, toujours dirigée dans le même sens, que l'artiste effectue sur son expérience"(*ibid.,* 330). It attempts to strike a balance between the purely formal and the near mechanical reproduction of reality. What it strives to correct is personal experience, which both shapes and is shaped by collective forms of experience. Camus then introduces a subtle difference, which may lack philosophical rigor, between revolt and rebellion. Rather than revolt against empirically existing reality, this aesthetics of correction rebels against it. The difference lies in the relation to the absolute, any absolute. Revolt, for Camus, necessarily adheres to an absolute. Rebellion renounces any claim to an absolute, it strives to correct current existing problems. The aesthetics of correction recognizes, "qu'au lieu de tuer et mourir pour produire l'être que ne sommes pas, nous avons à vivre et faire vivre pour créer ce que nous sommes"(*ibid.,* 314). It is an aesthetic rebellion that begins not by positing what we are not (*l'être que ne sommes pas*), which is the gesture that defines all metaphysical revolt, including

the Terror. Rather, it proceeds first by taking stock of an actual, shared, experiential, lived experience.[22] It does not strive to create a "new man," as had previous revolutions. Rather, it strives to create who we are by correcting those aspects both of material reality and ourselves that stand in the way of this collective, dynamic being. Metaphysical revolt strives to correct reality according to metaphysical ideals. Its hubris and disdain for phenomenal reality are such that it does not hesitate to mutilate or destroy that reality. In contrast, Camus's aesthetic solution attempts to correct reality by first taking stock of the lives and situations of those actually in the world today. Its roots are in the phenomenal world rather than in metaphysics.

In Camus' new aesthetics, we may even observe obliquely how it responds to the Terror. In this aesthetic endeavor, Camus concludes,

> nous préparons ce jour de renaissance où la civilisation mettra au centre de sa réflexion, loin des principes formels et des valeurs dégradées de l'histoire, cette *vertu vivante* qui fonde la commune dignité du monde et de l'homme, et que nous avons maintenant à définir en face d'un monde qui l'insulte. *L'homme révolté,* 345, emphasis added.

Against the abstract, absolute Republic of virtue of the Jacobin metaphysical revolt, Camus calls for a living virtue (*vertu vivante*), one that would respect a sense of life common to all humanity. It is a virtue grounded in the actual lived or, more accurately, living experience of people. Camus' argument is problematically binary: the metaphysical world of concepts and ideas, on the one hand, and the living embodied experience of human beings on the other. Taking stock of the tendency in the twentieth-century to insult this sense of shared, living virtue, Camus invokes an aesthetic correction that would help pave the way for a renaissance, a rebirth that would not require the old world be put to death. Such a rebirth differs then from both Hegel's

[22] It is here that my argument most prominently overlaps with that of Debarati Sanyal, who astutely argues of Camus, "If literature was to contest the plasticity or erasure of the individual by larger historical processes, it could only do so by communicating the living texture of human suffering, the body's fragility when confronted with the force of history"(*The Violence of Modernity*, 179).

"rejuvenation" through fear and the Jacobin "*régénération*" through terror.

To conclude, we can return to *Les Justes* to see how the play both contributes to the solution argued for in *L'homme révolté* and puts that solution into performative, literary practice. If the terrorist revolution imposes an abstract ideal on a silent people and thereby resembles a monologue, the dialogue between Dora and Kaliayev hints at the aesthetic revolutionary model of dialogic correction put forth in *L'homme révolté*. As we have seen, the love of another individual gently bends one's head away from the ideal and toward another individual, a particular individual who has a voice in how this mutual love takes shape. The love of life is a collective endeavor because it is the love of other living individuals, whose voice and actions in turn shape the voice and actions of the collective, living virtue. Rebellion, in the form of Camus' aesthetic correction through dialogue, is still animated by a love of life, but the sense of living has drastically changed from that abstract sense that paradoxically put to death in order to make live. It is an aesthetics that eschews metaphysical concepts. Rather, it strives to capture the fabric of living experience and put it into dialogue with an artistic practice that attempts to gently correct problems within the collective "adventure" by which humanity shapes its own essence through a limited collective action, either political or aesthetic, founded in love of particular individuals.

Revising Hegel in the Algerian Context: Drif, Fanon, Hegel

As the previous sections have demonstrated, Zohra Drif's polemic with Malraux and Camus brings the Terror into the context of the Algerian War and the use of terrorism within a colonial context. Despite the brevity of the polemic, if we approach it as outlining a close reading that we in turn complete, the questions resonate widely and touch on central questions of (post)colonial studies as well as political theory. Reading Hegel and post-Hegelian dialectics within colonial and (post)colonial contexts has animated debates at least since Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), written before the Algerian War broke out, and *Les damnés de la terre* (1961), written during the War and published before its end. Arguably, however, these debates date from much further back as Susan Buck-Morss' "Hegel and Haiti"(2000) has convincingly demonstrated.[23] Fanon himself frames the Algerian Revolution in relation to Marx's reading of the Paris Commune, alluding to Marx's well known pronouncement on the Commune: "La thèse qui veut que se modifient les hommes dans le même moment où ils modifient le monde, n'aura jamais été aussi manifeste qu'en Algérie."[24] Fanon thus inscribes his essays, including the prominent and controversial "L'Algérie se dévoile" and "'Ici la voix de l'Algérie,'" within the trajectory of restagings of the Terror that indirectly link the Algerian Revolution to the Terror via the Commune. Fanon, like Marx, insists on revolutionary action as a process that transforms both the world and those living in it. This section returns to Drif's text in order to revisit and revise Hegel in the colonial context of the Algerian Revolution. It puts Drif in dialogue not only with Hegel, via Malraux and Camus, but also with Fanon's own complicated

[23] Buck-Morss, Susan. "Hegel and Haiti." *Critical Inquiry*. 26.4 Summer 2000. 821-865.
[24] Fanon, Frantz. *Sociologie d'une révolution*. Paris: Maspero, 1968. This collection of Fanon's writing for *El Moudjahid,* an official organ of the FLN, was originally published as *L'An V de la Révolution algérienne* by Maspero in 1959. Citations are from the 1968 reprint. 12.

engagement with Hegel and Hegelian dialectics. If the Algerian Revolution was indeed changing conditions as well as men and women, it was through an intricate restaging of the past rather than through a one-dimensional all or nothing removal of the dross of history from the present. Terrorist violence does not, in this regard, strive for the *tabula rasa,* the historical slate wiped clean, but for a deft reconfiguration of historical possibilities, a performative reworking of the conditions handed down from history.

Having excavated the intertextual support to Drif's apology for terrorism, we are now better situated to analyze the full force of her critique and to put that critique into dialogue with more canonical texts of the Algerian War, notably Frantz Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre*. In order to expand our reading of Drif, let us first summarize the main points from the first section. Drif's apology for terrorism does not mince words or attempt to argue that her activities merit a name other than terrorism, such as guerrilla or freedom fighter. Rather, mobilizing the recent history of the French Resistance while alluding to a much larger tradition of terrorism as "forme classique de la guerre insurrectionnelle," she engages in a poetico-rhetorical strategy to shift or challenge our understanding of the term. This strategy in turn takes the form of direct literary critique as she objects to a certain literary tradition presenting the figure of the terrorist, notably in Malraux and Camus. She bases her criticism in her own situated, lived experience, that is, her militant participation in a war of colonial independence. Her most sustained critique targets the terrorist Tchen of *La condition humaine.* It is essentially a two-pronged objection: one, to his "*dérision*" toward the world he lives in as motivation for terrorism; and, two, to his belief that acts of terrorism may confer meaning to life, indeed, that they serve what Drif calls a "*réalisation personnelle absolue*." The second point in fact reinforces the first in that it is a "*volonté particulière*" that further drives the motivation of derision. Given, on the one hand,

Malraux's self-conscious modeling of Tchen on his interpretation of Saint-Just and, on the other, Camus' own interpretation of Saint-Just in the articulation of an alternative to "la révolte métaphysique," we can now return to further analyze Drif's apology for terrorism as entering into dialogue with Saint-Just, the Terror, and, finally, Hegel's interpretation of it.

At the center of this restaging of the Terror lies a conflict in the relation between revolution and the absolute. Drif's rejection of Malraux's presentation of the terrorist as a twentieth-century Saint-Just culminates as an negation of terrorist acts as a form of "réalisation personnelle absolue." As examined above, this critique takes exception with each of the three terms of this formulation. In contrast to Malraux's Tchen, terrorism, for Drif, is not a self-"*réalisation*" in that it does not afford the opportunity for giving meaning to life, rendering real or actualizing what had only been previously an elusive sense of self. That is because, for Drif, the terrorist act only takes on meaning within a living community. She rejects outright Tchen's "volonté particulière," and opens up to a possible "volonté générale" in collective, armed struggle. Lastly, and most strikingly, she rejects the idea that the terrorist act may enable some sort of communion with the absolute that would make it akin to a religion. We have established that Malraux's twentieth-century Saint-Just inherits much from Hegel's reading of the Terror as the tragic culmination of self-consciousness desire for "Absolute Freedom." Also relying on Saint-Just and directly engaging Hegel on the Terror, Camus similarly puts the problem of the absolute at the very center of what he sees as the impasse of terror and terrorism. According to Camus, any pursuit of an absolute – any absolute whether political, aesthetic, or other – necessarily engages in a totalitarian drive for unity that cannot but sacrifice individual lives to an abstract and unknowable end or telos to humanity. Although Drif does not directly offer an alternative to these forms of absolute that she so adamantly rejects, I want to argue that her

revolutionary, terrorist practice in fact performs what Fanon in *Les damnés de la terre* calls "*praxis absolue.*"[25]

Drif, through her staging of the Terror, thus contributes to recent scholarship not just on Fanon's relationship to Hegel but, more specifically, Fanon's relationship to the Terror and Hegel's interpretation of it. Ato Sekyi-Otu, Nigel Gibson, Peter Hallward, and Nick Nesbitt have all recently drawn direct or indirect parallels between Fanon's defense of violence and the Jacobin Terror. Sekyi-Otu, who does not read Hegel according to Kojève, has argued that Fanon's violence as "absolute praxis" or "lived experience" in the colonial context goes against any form of Hegelian dialectical determinism. Rather, Fanon articulates what Sekyi-Otu terms a "dialectic of experience" more open to the "hazardous reality of conflict"[26] and thus closer to Foucault than to Hegel. Similarly, Hallward does not hesitate to qualify what he sees as Fanon's valorization of political will above and beyond any dialectical determination as "neo-Jacobin," thus reading both the Terror and Fanon against Hegel.[27] Developing as both an extension and critique of Sekyi-Otu's work, Gibson argues that Fanon does not dismiss Hegelian dialectics outright but offers a corrective to it in the colonial context. He reads the "dialectic as *lived experience,*"[28] a revolutionary struggle that brings about a radical change in consciousness that, in turn, reconfigures the revolutionary struggle in a mutual, dialectical transformation. Drawing on Hegel's reading of the Terror and absolute freedom, Gibson further contends that Fanon in fact overturns or sublates his own initial embrace of violence in the Algerian Revolution. In the most direct and in depth text exploring these analogies, Nesbitt draws parallels between, on the

[25] Fanon, Frantz. *Les damnés de la terre*. Paris: La Découverte/Poche, 2002. 82. Hereafter cited as *Les damnés*.
[26] Sekyi-Otu, Ato. *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1996. 27.
[27] Hallward, Peter. "Fanon and Political Will." *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*. 7.1 2011. 104-127. 120.
[28] Gibson, Nigel C. *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003. 10, author's emphasis.

one hand, Fanon's Manichaeism and, on the other, Robespierre and Saint-Just's arguments at the trial of Louis XVI. The king, he claims, "for the democratic order, like the slave and colonized for the hierarchical orders of the ancient régime or colonialism, lies absolutely outside that order."[29] He thus casts revolutionary action as a form of Benjaminian "divine violence" against an *absolute* enemy. By adding Drif's texts and its intertexts, we may further advance and nuance the relationships between the Algerian Revolution's use of terrorism and the French Revolutionary Terror, particularly how conflicting understandings of the absolute animate these debates.

The starkest contrast and therefore the most productive point of departure between Drif's defense of terrorism and Hegel's critique of the Terror is the question of death, and, by way of that, the productivity or "work" of violence in the Algerian colonial context. Let us recall first Hegel's conclusion to his reading of the Terror:

> The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water. *op. cit.*

In direct contrast to this senseless death, Drif narrates that in her collective terrorist activities, death "n'est que conséquence du combat"(*op. cit*.). Even more strikingly, as if in direct dialogue with Hegelian logic, she insists that terrorists like herself witness death firsthand and accept the possibility of their own death "convaincus que leur mort n'est pas stérile"(Drif, 12). Whereas for Tchen death served as the only means by which to attain to the absolute, for Drif the collective combat takes precedence over individual death. Death does not bring fulfillment or culmination for the individual, rather it is inscribed within a community who will continue the struggle

[29] Nesbitt, Nick. "Revolutionary Inhumanism: Fanon's *De la violence*." *International Journal of Francophone Studies*. 15:3&4 2012. 395-413. 401.

despite mass deaths within the community. Drif thus reproduces in her apology a revolutionary song that commemorates the death of the "*Chouhadas* (combattants éxécutés)"(*ibid*., 14) in which a mother encourages her children not to mourn the death of their father bur rather to celebrate his continued presence after death in motivating and inspiring the collective struggle. Death for Drif does not culminate an individual quest striving after an abstract "absolute freedom." Rather, death prods those of the community to continue the struggle in part to ensure that these deaths are not in vain, that is, that the community ensures their meaning.

But, perhaps more importantly than what Drif rejects is her insistence on her lived experience as the basis not only for this rejection but for revolutionary action in general. The Hegelian absolute of the Terror is not negated in the name of some other absolute idea; rather it is experience than trumps the absolute, perhaps even any absolute other than what lived experience furnishes itself. Malraux's Tchen sought through terrorism, "une liberté totale, quasi inhumaine," which "le livrait totalement aux idées"(*La condition humaine*, 62). Similarly, Camus' Kaliayev justified the death of the Grand Duke by asserting, "Ce n'est pas lui [le grand-duc] que je tue. Je tue le despotisme"(*OC,* 15). Furthermore, his own potential death was not an undesirable consequence of this terrorism of the idea. Rather, it was the sole means, in Kaliayev's own words, "d'être à la hauteur de l'idée." In rejecting this reading of the Terror and terrorism as driven by a fanatic, almost "inhuman" attempt to attain to an abstract absolute idea, Drif upends the assumed binary valorization that pits the transcendental idea against actual, earthly, living experience. Drif justifies her use of violence not by appealing to an abstract idea, an attempt to raise herself to the majestic heights of an idea of freedom, justice, equality, virtue, absolute knowledge, etc. Quite to the contrary, her apology for terrorism takes root in the collective experience of the colonial context. It negates a particular context not in order to found

some quasi-religious kingdom of divine humanity. Rather, it is the absolute negation of the colonial order based in the experience of that order.

It is here that Drif enters into dialogue both with Saint-Just and Fanon, corroborating and expanding their analyses of the French and Algerian Revolutions respectively. Saint-Just, more than Robespierre or any other revolutionary, advanced what we may call the logic of the absolute enemy. Louis XVI's crime, in Saint-Just argument during the trial, did not amount to treason; indeed, it was not even a crime in deed or action. Louis' crime, we might say, was ontological, a crime inherent in the very being of a king, "celui d'avoir été roi."[30] The Revolution had toppled the divine order by which monarchies claimed their right to rule. Consequently, reasoned Saint-Just, "de peuple à roi, je ne connais plus de rapport naturel"(*ibid*., 478). In the Revolution's attempt to found a Republic based in natural law, this meant that the king, being outside the laws of nature, took on the form of an absolute enemy. "Louis est un étranger parmi nous"(*ibid.,* 481), Saint-Just unequivocally declares. Consequently, he characterizes the dilemma facing the people of the Revolution thus: "je ne vois point de milieu: cet homme doit régner ou mourir"(*ibid.,* 479).

As several commentators have noted, this logic of the absolute enemy similarly animates Fanon's Manichaeism in the chapter "De la violence." Within the first few pages, those in which he stridently asserts the Manichean world of the colonialism, the qualifier absolute appears with profound regularity. Most prominently, he famously and provocatively defines decolonization as "le remplacement d'une "espèce" d'hommes par une autre "espèce" d'hommes. Sans transition, il y a substituion totale, complète, absolue"(*Les damnés,* 39). This absolute and total substitution is what in turn justifies and drives the "violence absolue"(*ibid*., 41) in the decolonial struggle. Decolonial, absolute violence builds as a response to the Manichean colonial system. Fanon

[30] Saint-Just, Antoine-Louis de. *Oeuvres complètes*. Ed. Anne Kupiec and Miguel Abensour. Paris: Gallimard, folio, 2004. 480.

defines the colonial system in terms that directly recall Saint-Just's argument against the monarchy as absolute enemy to democratic order: "le colonialisme n'est pas une machine à penser, n'est pas un corps doué de raison. Il est la violence à l'état de nature et ne peut s'incliner que devant une plus grande violence"(*ibid*., 61). For both Saint-Just and for Fanon, it is by appeal to a state of nature and to the work of violence within such a state that they justify terror and terrorism. First and foremost, it is not a war of ideas or some ideological conflict. No, it is as situation posed as absolute through a collective experience of extreme circumstances.

Despite certain similarities concerning the logic of an absolute enemy between Drif and Fanon, on one hand, and Saint-Just, on the other, they differ substantially on the work of violence as a process and its relation to the goals of the revolution. Saint-Just laid out the logic of the absolute enemy, but he further justified this violence by appealing to an abstract ideal of virtue and, if we follow Hegel's reading, of absolute freedom. In contrast, Fanon claims that his notion of "violence absolue" is also and perhaps more importantly "*la praxis absolue*": "Pour le colonisé, cette violence représente la praxis absolue. Aussi le militant est-il celui qui travaille"(*ibid*., 82). Violence as praxis does work. It is here that Fanon's argument both joins and shifts Marx on the Commune. For Fanon, violence constitutes revolutionary work that within the Manichean colonial context changes circumstances and men, forming them as subjects and changing the conditions in which they are formed as subjects. In one of Fanon's more inflammatory affirmations, he states unequivocally and unapologetically, "L'homme colonisé se libère dans et par la violence. Cette praxis illumine l'agent parce qu'elle lui indique les moyens et la fin"(*ibid.,*85). Saint-Just also justified violence as both means and end. However, Saint-Just, like Robespierre and many French revolutionaries, nonetheless held out the vision of an ideal society, that is, literally one conceived through abstract ideas. Violence was both means and end,

but the end, the telos was firmly established. Fanon, in stark contrast, insists that violence in the colonial context constitutes itself as a practice that is itself "absolute." It is not violence in the pursuit of an absolute, any absolute, but a praxis whose direction or guidance can only come from itself. It is in this sense that it is absolute, as a means lighting the way to its own end. In other words, it is an experience posed as absolute. The experience of absolute violence opens up to unforeseen directions. Just as for Drif, for Fanon the sole absolute is one rooted in lived experience.

Fanon and Drif further separate themselves from Saint-Just and the logic of the absolute enemy in the French Revolutionary context in how they pose the relationship between revolutionary violence and ontology. As we have seen above, Saint-Just accuses Louis XVI of the ontological crime of being king, a crime against the natural, democratic order that he envisions and is striving to found. Fanon, in contrast, begins his analysis with the lived experience of the colonial context. It is from an analysis based in that experience that he can come to the conclusion that decolonization "modifie fondamentalement l'être"(*ibid*., 40). Here we can see one of the most profound divergences between Fanon and Camus. Camus distinguishes slave revolt from metaphysical revolt on the assumed grounds that "L'esclave dressé contre son maître ne se préoccupe pas, remarquons-le, de nier ce maître en tant qu'être. Il le nie en tant que maître"(*op. cit.*). For Fanon, decolonization requires absolutely that the colonized negate the master not simply as master but as being. It is not a question of correcting a particular historical situation that would leave the metaphysical and ontological underpinnings of that world unscathed. Quite to the contrary, the absolute quality of the decolonial experience calls for the destruction of the metaphysical and ontological supports of the colonial context. It is a question in Fanon's recasting of Marx of changing both circumstances and humanity. Camus'

slave revolt changes circumstances but leaves fundamentally intact both being and those beings who shape our understanding of it. Camus' "révolte métaphysique" assumes a hierarchical binary that separates out transcendental ideas from lived experience. Such a revolt sacrifices living individuals for a non-living transcendental idea that serves as the telos to the revolutionary process. Fanon implicitly rejects such as binary. To the extent that the absolute plays a role, it is itself rooted in experience. It does not follow some pre-determined telos that exists in the ethereal realm of ideas. Revolutionary action lights the way to further action, it is what guides the revolution and gives its shape.

We can further draw out this distinction by recalling Fanon's critique of Sartre's reading of *négritude* in *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Although profoundly indebted to Sartre, Fanon sharply criticizes his insistence on the teleological orientation of the dialectical experience of *négritude*. Fanon takes Sartre to task for proving remiss in his application of the Hegelian dialectic to negritude: "Pour une fois, cet hégélien-né avait oublié que la conscience a besoin de se perdre dans la nuit de l'absolu, seule condition pour parvenir à la conscience de soi."[31] This exchange might at first seem like a technical philosophical peccadillo among like-minded philosophers with little bearing on the colonial context of the Algerian Revolution. However, given the crucial role that lived experience plays in Fanon's articulation and theorization of the Algerian Revolution, Sartre's tendency to neglect the experience of negritude in the name of arriving at a predetermined synthesis takes on much greater weight. It is not simply a question of the place of negritude within the dialectic. Rather, it is a question of the role of experience in giving shape to the dialectic. Fanon concludes, "Contre le devenir historique, il y avait à opposer l'imprévisibilité. J'avais besoin de me perdre dans la négritude absolument"(*ibid*., 109). Once

[31] Fanon, Frantz. *Peau noire, masques blancs.* Paris: Seuil, Points, 1952. 108.

again Fanon insists on experience as the absolute that trumps any conceptually driven telos to the dialectic of experience. The experience of negritude alters the fabric of experience; it opens up to new possibilities of being, that, in turn, may serve as the impetus to action that would further alter the circumstances, the world, in which that experience takes place. Sartre denies that the experience may make a claim to being itself absolute; his reading of négritude makes the telos of the dialectical sublation into the absolute thereby denying experience a role in shaping or altering the dialectic.

It is here, in the affirmation of the experience of revolutionary action as profoundly ontological, that Fanon's theory of the absolute praxis of violence joins Drif's terrorist acts and subsequent justification for them in *La mort de mes frères*. Fanon concludes *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* by insisting on the "mutation intérieure"(*op. cit.,* 172) evident in Algerian decolonization. This inner change acts as the catalyst for a revolutionary process by which "l'homme algérien, la société algérienne se sont dépouillés de la sédimentation mentale et de l'arrêt affectif et intellectuel organisés par 130 ans d'oppression"(*ibid.,* 172-173). By taking our cue from Drif's reading of Malraux and Camus, expanding it to include Saint-Just and various interpretations of the Terror, we are now better situated to nuance Fanon's conclusion. As Drif demonstrates both in her reading of literature and history, the Algerian Revolution engages less in a process of de-sedimentation, a peeling away of the thick strata of a hundred and thirty years of history, and more in a what I have been calling throughout a restaging. Albert Memmi famously summarized a recurring problem in studies of Fanon: "one doesn't leave one's own self behind as easily as all that"(quoted in Gates, 266).[32] Drif's subtle restaging of the past offers an alternative to Fanon's tendency toward images of history as geological structures. If Memmi is

[32] Quoted in Gates, *op. cit.,* 266. From Albert Memmi. "Frozen by Death in the Image of the Third World Prophet." *New York Times Book Review*. March 14, 1971.

correct in the difficulties of leaving one's self behind, the notion of restaging, particularly as it is performed by Drif, demonstrates the possibility that one may recast oneself and try on different roles in an experiential dialectic that need not culminate in the all or nothing weight of a suffocating or rejuvenating past.

Conclusion

> "Pas de liberté sans *ipséité*, et *vice versa*, pas d'*ipséité* sans liberté."
> Derrida, *Voyous*.

What, then, are we to make of the various restagings of the Terror in the previous chapters? If we began by demonstrating tendencies to ontologize the Terror that made it or some version of terror or terrorism inherent in the very nature of democracy, how do we proceed from the negative thesis against this tendency toward a different understanding of the relations between literature, democracy, and the Terror? If Marx's observation that we make our own history but under conditions handed down from the past, how are we to grasp the role the Terror has played in shaping present conditions? Is the Terror an obstacle, a great burden that trammels our thought and action, i.e. our freedom to make history as we please? A memory to be jettisoned in the name of present possibility? Alternatively, is the Terror a sort of promise that the past holds out to the present, an event whose potential may still, following Benjamin, explode the present with its *Jetztzeit*? An event worthy of our fidelity to it, a way to move forward by looking back? Or, perhaps it is this binary framing of the Terror's presence today that needs reworking, the articulation of a more nuanced imaginary that moves away from images of weights, scales, slates wiped clean and the geological strata of neatly stacked histories? However, in order even

to broach these questions we must first take stock of the methodological consequences that follow from a critique of ontologizing the Terror since the very idea of the Terror as a historical event that gets restaged at various moments in French and Francophone history stems from the practical and theoretical dissatisfaction with this ontological reading. Only then can we gain a full appreciation of how these restagings may bear the present, a time when the US led War on Terror continues to affect so many lives in disparate ways across the globe, not least of which is the proliferation of various "camps" – refugee, detention, torture, military and paramilitary training, etc.

Robespierre notoriously sought to justify the Terror by arguing that it was by no means antithetical to the democratic ideals of the Revolution. Quite to the contrary, he insisted that the Terror resulted from the rigorous application of democratic principles in the conditions the fledgling Republic faced in 1792-1794. Similarly, Saint-Just, at Louis XVI's trial, made the case that the king's crimes resulted neither from his actions nor his words. Rather, Louis deserved death because of who he was and the system that defined him. Saint-Just declared the system of divine right monarchy the absolute enemy of the democratic Republic the Revolution was trying to establish and spread. For both Robespierre and Saint-Just, the Terror followed from democracy. Rather than attempt to curb the terroristic excess inherent in democracy, they accepted them, nourished them, and sought to channel them to serve the Revolution. "Soyons terrible pour empêcher le peuple de l'être," Danton reasoned after the unbridled and unproductive – in the eyes of the Convention – violence of the September Massacres. "Nous ne sommes pas assez vertueux pour être si terribles," Saint-Just put forth the curious logic that made terror into a rare, seemingly noble virtue. Terror in this regard is not vengeance or some hoary blood lust that hearkens back to a primitive, uncivilized nature. Terror accepts that violence is

necessary in some circumstances, it requires that we suspend any innate sense of pity or commiseration toward others and take on any potentially adverse effect that violence may have on us as perpetrators of violence because we believe the cause to be noble or worthwhile – not just for ourselves but for all humanity. Terror is not only democratic, it is humanitarian. Such is the logic of the Terror as articulated by Saint-Just and Robespierre.

This logic however is not what animates subsequent restagings of the Terror. Victor Hugo, for example, inscribed the violence of the Terror within the formal, literary innovations that for him marked the revolution of Romanticism. This "*93 littéraire*" harnessed the symbolic violence of the Terror in order to bring down French Classicism and attempt to align the literary innovations in verse with the political, democratic gains of the Revolution. Liberating verse was tantamount to freeing the people, the *misérables* of modernity, those whom the Ancien Régime as both political and aesthetic system had oppressed. Despite Hugo's innovations and bravado, he stopped short of affirming what Robespierre and Saint-Just took as self evident: in order for the democratic Republic to thrive, the king – as both body politic and body in the flesh – must die. Robespierre might well have objected to Hugo's identification with him, "Oui, je suis ce Robespierre!," but in Hugo's restaging of the Terror that is of little import. Restaging is remaking, rethinking. Hugo's "*93 littéraire*" pitted symbolic violence against material violence and instead of full regicidal terror performed a literary *quasi-régicide.*

The anarchists and Jarry's avant-garde that developed in the wake of the Commune re-asserted the physicality of revolutionary change – whether political or aesthetic. Examining the Commune's debates and actions in relation to the legacy of the Terror, Bakunin and the anarchists who followed him found that the more insidious heritage lay not in ideology, method or thought but in *sensibilité*, affect, and aesthetics. A Jacobin lurks in the corners of even small

children and becomes part of the very structures in which one becomes a subject and a citizen. To counter this tradition, the anarchists developed *propagande par le fait* with the idea that in order to free one's mind and open up new possibilities of action, the physical, material world must first be altered since it carries with it a certain scaffolding of thought (*échaffaudage de la pensée*). Similarly, Jarry would use the physicality of the theater, its corporeal face to face with an audience, in order to attack it, jolt it such that the theater carried an "acte imminent." Action was not the culmination of theory but rather its impetus, goading it on by the possibilities of a corpuscular ruler waiving a toilet brush for a scepter. This restaging of the Terror challenges aesthetic education and its reliance on the state as set forth by Schiller. The possibility of anarchic aesthetic education was certainly not part of Robespierre and Saint-Just's Terror, but this second restaging recasts one of the central *problématiques* and opens up possibilities for rethinking the relation between aesthetics and politics.

Finally, in the Algerian Revolution, outright terrorism asserts itself as both a continuation of the Terror and a challenge to how it has been represented in literature and interpreted by way of Hegel. Against Malraux and Camus' literary representation of the terrorist as a twentieth-century Saint-Just, one sacrificing living reality to abstract ideals, Zohra Drif and Frantz Fanon assert violence as an "absolute praxis" in a dialectic of (colonial) experience. Rather than serving a means to an end, violence itself is an end, one that opens up possibilities for further action and further exploration. This is not to say that violence is the only and final end but that in the colonial context of torture, oppression, and overwhelming military might, violence initially plays a positive, liberatory role. This libratory role in turn challenges literary traditions handed down from the nineteenth-century.

The three restagings of the Terror analyzed in the preceding chapters make clear that

there is not *a singular* history of the Terror, a tale retold and re-enacted that follows essentially the same plot. Sophie Wahnich, the historian who most challenges the dominant modes of reading the Terror today, refers several times in her work to the French Revolution as the "laboratory for democracy," and that, I believe, is the greatest conclusion to be drawn and reinforced in the previous chapters – with, however, one minor though significant change: rather than *the* laboratory for democracy, *a* laboratory for democracy since we can read French Romanticism, the Commune, avant-garde theater, the Algerian Revolution as so many laboratories of democracy. These different laboratories restage underlying *problématiques* of the relation between literature, democracy, and terror; but rather than coalesce into a pithy truth, they present different experiences and different possibilities that enrich our understanding and appreciation of all the variables and variations possible. Rather than a yield a transhistorical truth that we may at last grasp with the vantage afforded by *la longue durée*, restagings point to the multiplicity and multidirectionality of events and their afterlives. We participate in these events and we may choice to take on some roles, some characters, while neglecting others; but we are by no means entirely scripted by the past. We make our own history under conditions handed down from the past, but those conditions do not necessarily take the form of fetters or bombs; rather they are part of our present *repertoire* – a cultural, political, aesthetic depository that comes to life only through restaging.

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