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THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL SPACE

Kristin Ross



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Introduction

In this book I have pursued the structures common to everyday life—the social imagination of space and time—and the most condensed of fictions: poetry. To do so I have gathered the voices of an oppositional culture of the 1870s in France, and arranged them into a series of dialogues on common questions of values, methods, strategies, and postures—thus the particular problems that resulted in each of my chapters: urban space, laziness, geography, atomization and collectivity, and slogans. This has meant first of all establishing the semianarchist culture of the Commune and the decade that followed it: its discourses, its verbal and visual forms, its orchestrations of social relations, orientations, directions; its relations to the city; its associations and mass migrations; its fellow travelers, its displacements, entrances, and exits. If most of these terms bring into play the “horizontal” or geographic experience of human life, this is because that perspective was itself, as I came to realize, a product of the period in question.

That period, the 1870s in France, is but hastily dealt with, if not skipped over entirely, in most standard, traditional histories of France. Neither has it received the attention of more recent cultural historians intent on charting the demimonde culture of the Second Empire, the rise of the department store and modern bourgeois consumer habits, or the faded glimmer of fin-de-siècle decadence: the whole forward march of late nineteenth-century bourgeois culture that translates so well into narrative prose. The decade of the 1870s, according to one American historian, “lacks drama . . . it suffers by contrast with the somewhat more meretricious glitter of the empire just before it and with the generation of political turmoil, crisis, and scandal that immediately followed.”¹ But for whom does it

lack drama? Certainly not for those who would focus on the event (both its existence and its bloody repression) that inaugurated the decade: the Paris Commune. For what could be more dramatic than the seizing of the government by Parisian workers on March 18, 1871? And what could be more dramatic than the massacre, two months later, of some twenty-five thousand, mostly working-class, Parisians at the hands of the Versailles in a week-long battle in the streets of Paris? More people died in the final week of May 1871 than in any of the battles of the Franco-Prussian War, or than in any of the previous "massacres" (for example, the Terror) in French history.² If anything I have found the drama of that event to be a terrible lure, for it is difficult not to grant the Commune the status of exceptional event—an accident, as many have called it; it is difficult to perceive in its glow the workers' movement and culture that preceded it and survived it.³ An analogous problem confronted me as well in the field of literature: the legendary status of Arthur Rimbaud as magnificent exception.

But if drama, as we traditionally understand it, entails the verticality of peak moments, the crescendo of event, the rise and fall of stellar individuals, then the 1870s, taken as a whole, might indeed be found lacking. Or perhaps they propose a new understanding of drama. For in France the 1870s were a decade that comprised two very significant *spatial* movements or events. It was the decade that saw the formation of a consciousness conducive to producing a colonialist, expeditionary class. The speed and mathematical directness with which the railroad proceeds through space, joining together previously inaccessible places as coordinates in a systematized grid, had already begun, within Europe, to make space *geographic*. Throughout the 1870s France prepared to accelerate that movement into a geopolitical one, to expand and project onto a global scale Haussmann's intraurban "fantasy of the straight line." France strengthened what would become its major role in the European transformation of space into colonial space, and in the establishment of an international division of labor. And second, on another but no less important scale, there occurred the spatial event of the Paris Commune, what in the 1960s was proclaimed by many to be the first realization of urban space as revolutionary space.

Why view the Commune as a primarily spatial event? To mention just a few of the spatial problems posed by the Commune, consider, for example, the relationship of Paris to the provinces, the Commune as immense "rent strike," the post-Haussmann social division of the city and the question of who, among its citizens, has a "right to the city"—the phrase is Henri Lefebvre's—or the military and tactical use of city space during the street fighting. These are some of the specific spatial issues of the book; here I want to consider a more general "horizontal" effect of the Commune: the way hierarchy came to be contested in the realm of the social imagination of the Communards before it was attacked on the political and economic level. To do so we must review briefly the events of the Commune.

Commune
1871

When the dubious bourgeois republicans who had claimed power on September 4, 1870, capitulated to the Prussians, they announced a "peace" to end Napoléon III's disastrous war for which the working people in Paris would be made to pay. Class antagonism that had smoldered under the authoritarian social measures of the Second Empire intensified; on March 18, 1871, workers, many of them women who had borne the brunt of the hardships of the long Prussian siege of Paris, revolted. For seventy-three days a largely leaderless revolutionary government declared Paris an autonomous Commune and set about the free organization of its social life—free, that is, except for the constant threat of military reprisal from the "official" army at Versailles, which was to come, in the form of unprecedented carnage, in the final week of May.

But the Commune was not just an uprising against the political practices of the Second Empire; it was also, and perhaps above all, a revolt against deep forms of social regimentation. In the realm of cultural production, for instance, divisions solidly in place under the rigid censorship of the Empire and the constraints of the bourgeois market—between genres, between aesthetic and political discourses, between artistic and artisanal work, between high art and *reportage*—such hierarchical divisions under the Commune were fiercely debated and, in certain instances, simply withered away. It is these antihierarchical gestures and improvisations, what was entailed in extending principles of association and cooperation into the workings of everyday life, that make the Commune a predominantly "horizontal" moment.

We can take as an obvious and graphic example of the attack on verticality the Communards' demolition of the Vendôme Column, built to glorify the exploits of Napoléon's Grand Army. The strength of the gesture as antihierarchical act can be gauged by the hysteria registered in Parnassian poet and anti-Communist Catulle Mendès's account of the impending event. Mendès reads the destruction of the column as a leveling of history itself, an attack on genealogy and heredity designed to produce a timeless present. (Mendès includes in his journal the Commune decree he has just seen in the streets pronouncing the column's imminent demise):

The Commune of Paris:

Considering that the imperial column at the Place Vendôme is a monument to barbarism, a symbol of brute force and glory, an affirmation of militarism, a negation of international law, a permanent insult to the vanquished by the victors, a perpetual assault on one of the three great principles of the French Republic, Fraternity, it is thereby decreed:

Article One: The column at the Place Vendôme will be abolished.

It wasn't enough for you [writes Mendès], in a word, to have destroyed the present and compromised the future, you still want to annihilate the past! An ominous youthful prank. But the Vendôme Column is France,

horizontal



Figure 1. The Vendôme Column, five minutes before its fall. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale.

yes, the France of yesteryear, the France that we no longer are, alas! It's really about Napoléon, all this, it's about our victorious, superb fathers moving across the world, planting the tricolored flag whose staff is made of a branch of the tree of liberty! . . . Don't think that demolishing the Vendôme Column is just toppling over a bronze column with an emperor's statue on top; it's unearthing your fathers in order to slap the fleshless cheeks of their skeletons and to say to them: You were wrong to be brave, to be proud, to be grand! You were wrong to conquer cities, to win battles. You were wrong to make the world marvel at the vision of a dazzling France.⁴



Figure 2. The Vendôme Column, after its fall. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale.

For Mendès the destruction of the column abolishes history—makes for a timeless present, an annihilated past, and an uncertain future. Alone in his room where he spends most of the Commune, wondering why he didn't have the sense to flee to Versailles along with the other "friends of order," Mendès perceives time to be at a standstill. For the Communards, the *existence* of the column freezes time: "a permanent insult," "a perpetual assault." Whose time is it? In Communard Louis Barron's description of the toppling, the column is just as much a symbol of the State, but the State is a whitened sepulchre:

Tuesday, May 16. I saw the Vendôme Column fall, it collapsed all in one piece like a stage décor on a nice bed of trash when the machinist's whistle blew. Immediately a huge cloud of dust rose up, while a quantity of tiny fragments rolled and scattered about, white on one side, gray on the other, similar to little morsels of bronzed plaster. This colossal symbol of the Grand Army—how it was fragile, empty, miserable! It seemed to have been eaten out from the middle by a multitude of rats, like France itself, like its old tarnished glory, and we were surprised not to see any [rats] run out along the drainpipes. The

music played fanfares, some old greybeard declaimed a speech on the vanity of conquests, the villainy of conquerors, and the fraternity of the people, we danced in a circle around the debris, and then we went off, very content with the little party.⁵

Time, said Feuerbach, is the privileged category of the dialectician, because it excludes and subordinates where space tolerates and coordinates. Our tendency is to think of space as an abstract, metaphysical context, as the container for our lives rather than the structures we help create. The difficulty is also one of vocabulary, for while words like "historical" and "political" convey a dynamic of intentionality, vitality, and human motivation, "spatial," on the other hand, connotes stasis, neutrality, and passivity. But the analysis of social space, far from being reactionary or technocratic, is rather a symptom of a strategic thought and of what Tristan Tzara, speaking of Rimbaud, called an "ethics of combat," one that poses space as the terrain of political practice. An awareness of social space, as the example of the Vendôme Column makes clear, always entails an encounter with history—or better, a choice of histories.

"Social space," then, became my way of mediating between the discursive and the event. I came to an understanding of the concept through my work on a project about Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre and the social thought and movements surrounding that other supremely antihierarchical event: May 1968 in Paris. It is tempting, but of course historically inaccurate, to analogize the events of May 1968 with those of May 1871. Much has been made of the migration of Commune slogans and iconography across a century where they erupted again in many of the same streets. It is true, however, that the events of May 1968 bore a complex relation to the history of the interpretation of the 1871 insurrection. And in this sense my own encounter with Lefebvre was perhaps theoretically overdetermined. For while Lefebvre first raised the notion of everyday life (or its synonym, "social space") to the status of a concept in a book he wrote immediately after World War II, his most substantial rethinking of theories of everyday life and social space took place in the late sixties.⁶ At that time he was engaged simultaneously in completing a prolonged and controversial meditation on the Paris Commune, in associating with members of the anarcho-syndicalist group, the Situationists (who themselves produced a provocative interpretation of the Commune), and in participating in the movements that led to the events of May 1968. Perhaps my own experience—as well as that of Alice Kaplan, Adrian Rifkin, and others with whom I worked on the everyday life project—of being socialized during the late 1960s and its aftermath, played a role in producing my fascination with the experience of a generation of writers, political thinkers, geographers, and poets whose political imaginations were formed by the event of the Commune. And that experience also, I think, drew me to certain contemporary theoretical voices, to wayward or renegade Marxists such as Lefebvre, or

Jacques Rancière and the circle of writers around the journal *Révoltes logiques*, which took its name from a poem of Rimbaud's—writers whose intellectual and political development, like that of Lafargue, Rimbaud, Reclus, and other Communards a hundred years earlier, was profoundly altered by their contact with a version of historical agency.

The analysis of space, like the analysis of poetry, has been, until recently, neglected within traditional Marxism. The exceptions to this tendency are Lefebvre and the primarily French and American Marxist geographers writing in journals like *Hérodote* and *Antipode* who in the 1960s elaborated their theoretical position mostly through unearthing and reexamining the long-repressed figure of Communist geographer Elisée Reclus, inventor of social geography. Within traditional Marxism, however, a preoccupation with spatial categories was taken as the mark of "spatial fetishism," a wrong-thinking conceptualizing of space as an autonomous determinant, separate from the structure of social relations and class conflict—a theoretical confusion deemed somewhat akin to technological determinism. But space, as a social fact, as a social factor and as an instance of society, is always political and strategic. And because it is characterized, among other things, by the difference in age of the elements that form it—the sum of the action of successive modernizations—social space cannot be understood according to an old and facile "history versus structure or logic" opposition.

Social space, for Lefebvre, can be understood as a kind of recoding of his initial concept of everyday life. Another way of saying this is that everyday life—what remains when all specialized activities have been eliminated—is primarily (but not entirely) a spatial concept. Like the state for Marx, everyday life for Lefebvre is only *modern* everyday life: the product of the great nineteenth-century European migration to urban centers and the waning of unifying styles disseminated by church and monarch. Everyday life is born in nineteenth-century Europe in the same gap or rift that separates a private, domesticated world from a public, institutional one. Alice Kaplan and I have argued elsewhere that the importance of Lefebvre's concept of everyday life lies in its introduction of a third term into the most important philosophical opposition of the twentieth century: the opposition between the phenomenological and the structural.⁷ Everyday life is neither the realm of the intentional, monadic subject dear to phenomenology; nor does it dwell in the objective structures—the language, institutions, kinship structures—that are perceptible only by bracketing the experience of the individual subject. Neither the subjective (the biographical) nor the objective (the discursive), but both: literally and *dans tous les sens*.

In some sense my study of Commune culture could be said to begin with that well-known injunction from Rimbaud: that he be read or understood, as he put it, both literally and *dans tous les sens* (in all directions, according to all five senses, according to all possible meanings). The second part of his call, for an azimuthal, polysemic understanding as opposed to a literal one, was for me some-

what less problematic to think about than the first. For my own training in literary criticism was largely about being attentive to the lure of the polysemic; it was about producing the sophisticated reading, whose value far outweighed the merely and unanalyzed literal, or what we were taught to call, "naive" reading. In fact, the literal or naive reading was presented to me in my graduate studies as but the necessary step (a menial task, preferably performed by others) in the developmental move to a sophisticated, formalist, and polysemic reading. It was that which was to be surpassed, a vestigial, evolutionary relic. And according to some vast and unquestioned intellectual division of labor, the work of the literal or the naive—what dirties the hands of archivists—was always to be performed offstage, and not by theorists.

But if I were to read both literally and *dans tous les sens*, I would have to develop a new perspective on both the biographical (historical) material and the information to be gleaned from close textual interpretation. For that kind of reading would entail a balancing act: neither did I wish to mobilize formalist skills for the reading of historical data—a practice that has come to be called, in recent years, the "new historicism"—nor could I allow the weight of psychosexual, biographical fact to determine, in the sense of explain, textual intricacy. On the one hand I was faced with the historically acknowledged, and I think, unquestionable, particularity and force of Rimbaud's oppositional, iconoclastic, annihilatory voice. And, on the other, as I came to see more and more, with that voice as one that speaks within and by means of a vast cultural system, a system that should be conceived *not* within the limits of some purely literary history but rather as made up of elements and languages that are not distinctly literary. A centrifugal reading of Rimbaud, which he himself invites, in fact leads very far afield. For it opens out onto a whole synchronic history, onto the web of social and political discourses and representations that simultaneously *place a limitation on* and *enable* meaning to take place.

As I began to consider my subject under the rubric of synchronic history, my own theoretical distance from much of the current social or "contextual" analysis of art became clearer. My concern was to establish oppositional or "vernacular" culture, voices that are for the most part conspicuously absent from or repressed in much of the recent attempt to rethink the relation between history and art that comes under the heading of the "new historicism."⁸ In such critical narratives, the critic, adopting the point of view of some more advanced stage of capitalism's development, inevitably reinstalls or rereads into the event in question the values or "bitter wisdom" of his or her own critical vantage point. Oppositional voices or moments in this critical paradigm become the "always already co-opted" of the forward movement of capital. A striking example of this depoliticizing strain in cultural criticism can be found in the recent French rewriting of the events of May 1968.⁹ Certainly one reason for the use I make of a kind of phenomenological perception—my attempt to imagine social construc-

tions of space and time—is that it helps avoid the metaleptic "it couldn't have been otherwise" dead end of such analyses. By imagining the lived experience of actors in particular oppositional moments, in other words, one can avoid an analytic structure that insists on starting from the (predetermined) result.

When I turned to Marxist aesthetic theory, my problem became one of genre. For not only has Marxist theory neglected to develop a theory of space, but Marxist literary critics from Lukács through Sartre and on up to the current generation—Eagleton, Macherey, and even an occasional critic of poetry and provocative thinker of space like Fredric Jameson ("*narrative*, which I take to be . . . the central function or *instance* of the human mind")¹⁰—have continued to reassert the traditionally dominant concern with narrative and the novel genre. Walter Benjamin's massive study of Baudelaire and Paris under the Second Empire stands out in the marked neglect shown by Marxist critics for poetry. Bertolt Brecht—whose favorite poet was Rimbaud—was certainly aware of that neglect when he debated it in the 1930s with Lukács. Brecht's question—"What about the realism of lyric poetry?"¹¹—is no less pressing today. This hesitation on the part of Marxist critics to concern themselves with poetry can be traced back to all too traditional assumptions, themselves a development of the late nineteenth century, that regard prose as the privileged vehicle for objective or political themes, and verse for subjective or individual ones—or, put another way, to the assumption that there exists a social production of reality on the one hand, and a desiring production that is mere fantasy or wish fulfillment on the other. Despite extensive feminist critiques of such divisions between the "personal" and the "political," these assumptions remain largely intact and are reinscribed in Marxism as generic omission.

Many of the best readings of nineteenth-century bourgeois cultural production, analyses that resist treating art as a miracle of poetic creativity independent of economic or social developments, still seem to flounder in their theoretical attitude to the "masterpiece." A single masterpiece might, for example, be decoded by a literary critic in such a way that it is made to reveal or offer up all of the social relations of the Second Empire. A reading like this certifies not only the analytic acumen of the critic—the master decoder who takes on the subtle riches and multivalent significations of the masterpiece—but the masterpiece's enshrined position in museum or canon as well. The wealth of social history "revealed" by the masterpiece forms a kind of landscape or ornamental drapery that reinforces canonical status and thus, paradoxically perhaps, the masterpiece's inertia. For my own purposes, an unquestioned cult of the masterpiece seemed singularly at odds with both Rimbaud and the people who pulled down the Vendôme Column. Another problem with such "contextual" analyses of art—analyses that leave untroubled the distinction between "text" and "context"—is that the "social history" that emerges full blown from the interpretation of the masterwork tends itself to be left unanalyzed—as if the formal

analysis of a text or painting offered up a social context that did not in turn have to be analyzed! Again social history remains merely decorative. But another analysis, particularly an analysis by a historian, might easily err in the opposite direction: by refusing culture its role in the articulation of social conflict, by limiting its role to that of providing décor for the "real" social conflict taking place.

In the course of writing this book I have come to see the kind of division of labor that has defined literary studies for some time—between the historical and the theoretical, or the historical and the linguistic, the contextual and the textual, the literal and the *dans tous les sens*—as politically counterproductive. And I have begun to recognize versions of that division of labor, often in dimly recognizable shapes, as that which formed the primary subject of debate and conflict during the Commune. Much of the formalist sterility of our own critical tendencies, in other words, bears the trace of nineteenth-century doctrines that proclaim the superiority of intellectual work over manual work, and the natural destiny that ordains some to perform one task, and others another. During the Commune these issues were fiercely debated as poets, cartoonists, musicians, and writers took sides for or against the insurgent government. One form the debate took was a radical questioning of the respective identities of worker and artist.

Workers and Artists

I would like to expand at some length on this debate by returning to the exemplary figure of Mallarmé's friend and fellow Parnassian, Catulle Mendès. Mendès, as I mentioned, lived out the Commune for the most part alone in his room; this rather furtive existence was interrupted by occasional and equally furtive forays out into the streets, forays he performed and then recorded faithfully in his journal. Mendès's journal, *Les 73 journées de la Commune*, is itself exemplary of a genre that sprang up immediately after the demise of the Commune: the hurriedly written eyewitness account or diary documenting everyday life under the Commune. Active Communards like Elisée Reclus's brother, Elie, who during the Commune served as the director of the Bibliothèque Nationale (a fact that the official history of the Bibliothèque Nationale neglects to mention!),¹² published an account many years later; so did Louise Michel and Jean-Baptiste Clément, composer of one of the better known Commune songs, "Le Temps des cerises."¹³ Pro-Commune accounts like these tended to appear much later unless they were published in Switzerland or England; by contrast, the rapid publication and distribution of anti-Commune texts like Mendès's in the early summer of 1871 coincided with and helped justify the violence of the repression of the Commune, a violence with which Edmond de Goncourt, writing in his journal in May, heartily concurs: "The bloodletting is a bleeding white. Such a purge, by killing off the combative part of the population, defers the next revolution by a

whole generation."¹⁴ By the end of 1871 a rigid censorship again prevailed. The onslaught of anti-Commune memoirs during the summer and fall was followed by a complete prohibition as the year ended, of any mention, pro or con, of the Commune.

In his journal Mendès describes how he is given to hallucinating late-night imaginary conversations with Gustave Courbet, president of the Fédération des Artistes under the Commune. The Fédération des Artistes, responsible for the organization of various concerts and cultural affairs, was mainly concerned with education and organization and hardly at all with artistic questions.¹⁵ Mendès finds Courbet's position ridiculous. Doing a little bit of everything, even politics, is comprehensible, if not excusable, if you are good for nothing else. But what is unacceptable to Mendès is that kind of varied activity on the part of someone "who can make excellent boots like Napoléon Gaillard, or paintings as good as Gustave Courbet's" (166). Art for art's sake, of which Mendès is one of the most vocal, if not the most adept, spokespersons of his time, seems, as Franco Moretti has suggested, to be in dialectical relation to production's sake, i.e., to booming late capitalism.¹⁶ Mendès's concern is for the *bel ouvrage*—or rather, its loss—the loss of Napoléon Gaillard's excellent boots, the sacrifice of the masterpieces Courbet would have painted were he not so busy organizing artists or sitting on Commune committees. But can a lapse in production in itself produce such anxiety? Mendès's fantasy continues. Were Courbet or any other poet or artist actually to appear at his doorstep and try to get him to "federate," he announces, he would reply, "Leave me in peace, Monsieur de la Fédération, je suis un reveur, un travailleur." A dreamer, a worker. He concludes with his version of a call to action:

Let us return home, messieurs the artists, close the doors, let's say to our servant—if we have a servant—that we're not at home to anyone, and after having prepared our best pen or taken up our best paintbrush, let us work in solitude, without stopping, with no other worry than that of doing the best we can. (167)

"I am a worker." To describe his own position, Mendès appropriates the term *travailleur* and inflects it with the full logic of the *métier*: the specialization that alone defines one's being. For workers or artisans, of course, that specialization, dating back to the justification of the division of labor in Plato's *Republic*, is simply the prohibition against doing anything else: "the *métier* for which nature made him and at which he must work all his life, to the exclusion of any other . . . in order to make the *bel ouvrage*."¹⁷ In Plato's well-constituted state, a unique *métier* is attributed to each person; a shoemaker is first of all someone who cannot also be a warrior. What is at first a simple functional or structural division of labor—to each person one task—is rapidly transformed into a hierarchy of "natures": to each person the task that nature destined him or her to per-

form. In the late nineteenth century little has changed; in fact, in the world of generalized production, in the interest of progress, one can less than ever do two things at the same time. A shoemaker like Napoléon Gaillard is still he who cannot do anything other than make shoes (excellent ones, it appears). "Nature," according to an 1845 article in the journal *L'Artiste*, "has not allowed everyone to possess genius; she has said to one, 'make poems,' and to the other, 'make shoes.'" ¹⁸ Author Charles Nodier, writing in midcentury, has become unnerved by the quantity of shoemakers who have transgressed the rules fixing their status and have taken to writing tragedies in the style of Corneille. The democracy of writing, he warns, is transforming "useful workers and artisans" into "thieves, impostors, and forgers."¹⁹

Forging and falsifying: In Plato the prohibition against artisans doing something other than their proper task has its roots in barring their access to the realm open to (and "proper to") artists and poets, namely, the realm of imitation, of appearances and role-playing.²⁰ "Je est un autre." The artist, as imitator of an imitation, is inferior to the worthy artisan. The artisan is defined by his prohibition from games, falsehood, appearance, imitation, fiction, lying. Gaillard makes shoes; Courbet counterfeits reality. But during the Commune Courbet and Gaillard are not in their proper places. Art for art's sake may have its roots in production for production's sake, but a deeper anxiety fuels Mendès: the anxiety of displacement, of a shift or confusion in the hierarchy of tasks. Displacement, after all, hurts. I am a worker, Mendès writes. The rights of the inspired are retained by invoking the myth of the artisan and of labor as redemptive agency. The rights of the inspired are retained by Mendès's "borrowing" or imitating a role—by his asserting the right to precisely the activity (imitation) that is the privilege of the writer but forbidden the honest artisan, the good worker. "Je est un autre." The worker becomes the exemplum, the bearer of truth in order to be all the better excluded from the science reserved for scholars and the inspiration reserved for poets. The rights of the inspired conspire without violence in the reign of order.

What happens to a state if the shoemakers and the artists are not in their proper place? Production—*le bel ouvrage*—is not the real concern. A drop in production can be withstood. Mendès is not really mourning the unmade boots of Napoléon Gaillard or even the unpainted paintings of Gustave Courbet. His anxiety stems from the experience of displacement, from the attack on identity. "Je est un autre." Not being able to *identify* a shoemaker—and thus, perhaps, not being able to identify himself, an artist—makes Mendès nervous. In his "call to action" to artists everywhere, he advises them to grasp their "best pen" or their "best paintbrush": the tools of the trade. Tools as fetishized anticipation of the gestures and disciplines of the *métier*, but above all as identification devices: the brand, the badge, the heraldic emblem. During the Commune, however, shoe-

makers—and artists—have laid down their tools. And shoemakers and artists are not in their place. How can they be recognized?

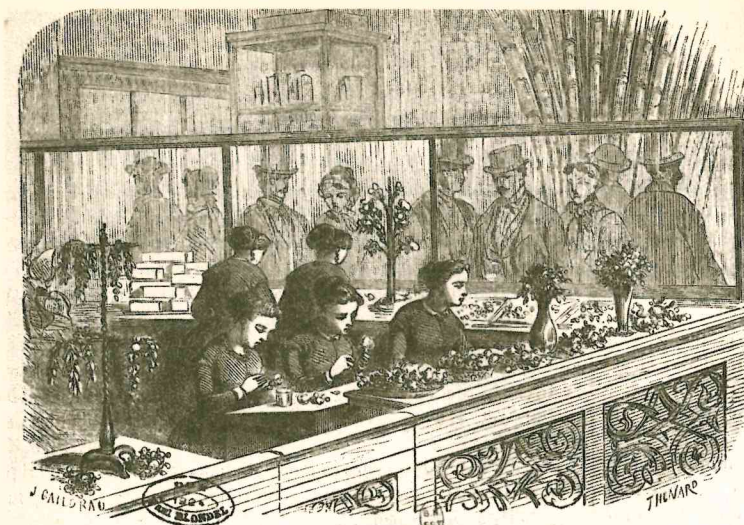
How to Identify a Worker

The problem of how to identify a worker absorbed the attention and energy of a considerable number of people and was addressed in a variety of ways toward the end of the Second Empire. Here are three examples. Frédéric Le Play, the conservative, Catholic sociologist who sought to reform society by shoring up the authority of property owners, managers, and fathers, was placed in charge of the 1867 International Exposition held in Paris, an exposition whose ostensible goal was to display "objects for the improvement of the physical and moral conditions of the masses."²¹ In fact, only one-third of the space allotted to this purpose was used. Much more space was taken up by a display of *objets d'art* to be used by the rich, and by a second display—not of objects created by workers but of workers themselves! In a section of the exposition entitled "Petits Métiers," model workers, male and female, could be seen plying their craft: lace makers, artificial flower makers, chocolate makers.

The visitors to the exhibition could see them at work and could come to the enjoyment of two illusions at least. One was the appearance of the relative independence and self-motivation of the workers. The appearance, that is, because in the case of the lacemakers, they belonged to home based industries controlled by a single large capitalist. Nevertheless, the small unit or family unit could be seen as operative. Another illusion was the absence of industrial disease. In this display, none of the flower-makers would have torn or bleeding fingers.²²

Such a display can in some sense be taken as a three-dimensional realization of the vast taxonomic project to which Le Play had devoted most of his life.²³ His aim was that of producing the image of the perfect worker for a newly industrializing, Catholic society, and he did so by grafting what he took to be the familial and moral values of rural workers onto the skills and energy of the industrious urban worker.²⁴ The conservative moralism of Le Play's construction of the "good worker" is perhaps most important in its implication of the consequences for workers—and in this, the exposition's zoolike display is all the more emblematic—of transgression, of escape to other worlds, or other conditions.

Denis Poulot's *Le Sublime, ou le travailleur comme il est en 1870, et ce qu'il peut être* (1870), written on the eve of the Commune, resonates with the fear of workers' transgression. As such, it reveals the same degree of bourgeois anxiety as Le Play's work, and the same will to construct, and thus wishfully "realize," the image type of the good worker. But Poulot's focus is the inverse of Le Play's. A bourgeois, Parisian industrialist with no pretense toward being a writer or an



1. PETITS MÉTIERS. — Les Fleurs artificielles. — Dessin de M. Gaillard.

Figure 3. Petits métiers. Artificial flower making. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale, from *L'Exposition illustrée*, 1867.

economist, Poulot sees himself more as a diagnostician. His concern is with identifying the *bad* worker, with being able to recognize one when you see one.²⁵ His position as *patron* allows him the opportunity to observe closely workers' habits; from such scientific observation he establishes a "pathological diagnostic" designed to ferret out *sublimisme*: the illness affecting those workers most insubordinate inside the *atelier* and those most oblivious to familial morals outside the *atelier*. *Sublime* (along with other slang expressions denoting superlatives: *chouette*, *rupin*, *d'attaque*)²⁶ was the word insubordinate workers used to refer to themselves; Poulot designates such workers rather as *ivrognes* or *paresseux*. The standards Poulot uses to establish a scale ranging from the good worker to the *sublime*—with many intermediate categories of moderate or incipient *sublimisme*—emphasize drunkenness and laziness: the degree of drunkenness or sobriety, the degree of laziness or ardor for work, the degree of conformity to the bourgeois family model, the degree of violence between companions. Something like a composite image of these four categories—the bloodthirsty, slothful, drunken prostitute—would be used after the Commune to construct the image of the Communist woman worker as *pétroleuse*.

It might seem peculiar to discuss my third example, that of Karl Marx, in the reactionary climate of Poulot, Le Play, and the anxiety of identity. I should make

clear that my concern here is with a particular Marx, the Marx of the 1850s and 1860s, the "mature" Marx, architect of scientific socialism. That Marx might be said to have provided the best-known and most sustained attempt to ascertain the identity of the worker. In Jacques Rancière's reading of Marx, the Platonic myth of the artisan as he who can do nothing other than his *métier* is displaced, but essentially operative, in the Marx of "mature" scientific socialism. "The impossibility of [the artisan doing] 'something else' becomes that general law of history that resounds like an obsession in *The German Ideology* or *The Communist Manifesto*: we know 'only one science,' the science of history."²⁷ The worker is still destined to do his unique "proper affair." For Marx, the unique task of the worker is to suppress property; workers must transform their own condition into the general condition of society, because of the identity provided them by the positive principle that makes the unity of the historic process: production. To find out what the worker is, is to find out what he will be obliged to perform historically, in conformity with his being. The proletarian, for mature, scientific Marx, the Marx of the 1850s and 1860s, is the worker who still has only one thing to do, the revolution, and who still has only one identity: that of the lone historical agent who will destroy capital.

Je Est un Autre

Gustave Courbet's activities and everyday life during the Commune are well known. A member of the Commune, delegate to the *mairie*, member of the Commission on Education, and president of the Fédération des Artistes, he is, in his own words, "up to my neck in political affairs." "I get up, I eat breakfast, I sit down and preside twelve hours a day. My head begins to feel like a cooked apple. But despite all this turmoil of the head and of my understanding which I'm not used to, I'm in a state of enchantment. Paris is a true Paradise."²⁸

Shoemaker Napoléon Gaillard's activities are less well known. In the months immediately following the Commune, a full half of the shoemakers in Paris were missing—massacred, arrested, in exile. "Shoemaking is the last of the *métiers*. If we find shoemakers in the first row everywhere where workers shouldn't be, it's because they are the most numerous, the least occupied, and the least mystified by the glory of the artisan."²⁹ Gaillard was a famous shoemaker, a member of the International, the author of a treatise on the foot, and an orator who had been imprisoned in 1869 for speaking at public meetings, a flamboyant figure and heavy drinker—a *sublime* according to Poulot's diagnostic categories. Fifty-six years old in 1871, he was the director of barricade construction during the Commune. But more significant, perhaps, than his shoemaking, and more significant, perhaps, than the fact that he stopped making shoes during the Commune in order to build barricades, is the fact that he insisted on being photo-

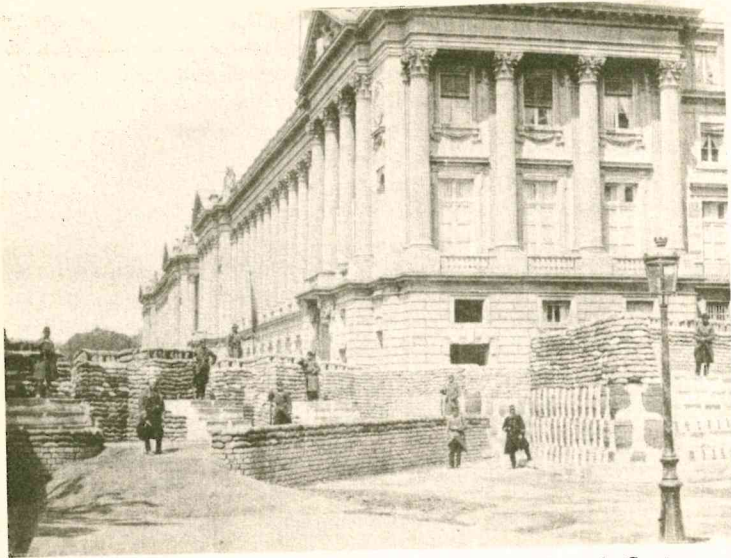


Figure 4. Napoléon Gaillard in front of his barricade at the place de la Concorde. Courtesy Adrian Rifkin from *Paris sous la Commune, par un témoin fidèle: La Photographie, 1871(?)*.

graphed posing in front of the barricade he made—thus, as Adrian Rifkin suggests, “authoring” it, demanding and appropriating for himself the status of author that was denied him.

Gaillard père, the head of barricade construction, appeared so proud of his creation that on the morning of May 20, we saw him in full commandant’s uniform, four gold braids on the sleeve and cap, red lapels on his tunic, great riding boots, long, flowing hair, a steady gaze, ordering the staging of a spectacle that was immediately carried out. While national guards prevented the public from walking about on one side of the square, the barricade maker posed proudly some twenty feet in front of his creation, and, with his hand on his hip, had himself photographed.³⁰

Gaillard does not choose to celebrate his status as worker. Instead he transgresses what is perhaps the most time honored and inflexible of barriers: the one separating those who carry out useful labor from those who ponder aesthetics.

In his claim to “author” his own work, Gaillard launches an attack on the good worker, on the very identity, as it was understood, of *l’être ouvrier*—an attack whose counterpart can be found in Rimbaud’s own resistance to the iden-

tity he playfully accused Verlaine of embracing: that of a “bon Parnassien.” These two flights from the idiotism of the *métier* form a single dialectical image. And it is this gesture—one that resonates with a nineteenth-century critique of specialization and of the division of labor—that I have attempted to trace in Reclus, Lafargue, and the other figures that move within and on the periphery of the Commune. My study began with Rimbaud and with what I took to be Rimbaud’s flight from *l’être poète*: a flight that took shape, as I came to realize not with his famous silence, his departure for Africa, but in 1870 when he wrote his first poem. Rimbaud left literature before he even got there.

“Bosses and workers,” Rimbaud writes in “Bad Blood,” “all of them peasants, and common.” And, “I have a horror of all *métiers*.” Communard and anarchist Elisée Reclus, whose “invention” of the field of social geography, as I argue in Chapter 3, had to be repressed for the field of academic geography to take institutional shape, unknowingly echoes “Bad Blood”:

He who commands becomes depraved, he who obeys becomes smaller. Either way, as a tyrant or a slave, as an officer or as an underling, man is diminished. The morality which is born out of the present conception of the state and the social hierarchy is necessarily corrupt. Religions have taught us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, whereas history tells us that it is the beginning of all servitude and all depravity.³¹

Reclus, like many of his generation, was a maker of slogans, and one of his slogans, “Travaillons à nous rendre inutile” (Work to Make Ourselves Useless), could be said to have been expanded into manifesto form by Paul Lafargue, the Communard to whom his father-in-law Karl Marx in an 1882 letter to Engels referred as “the last Bakuninist.” Lafargue wrote *Le Droit à la paresse* eight years after the Commune, at a moment when the left, responding to the scurrilous right-wing histories of the Commune that portrayed prostitutes, drunkards, and vagabonds setting Paris aflame, had reclaimed as its own the task of constructing the Communard as good or model worker. In leftist hagiographies of the period and after, the Communard was a good family man who never beat his wife, never touched *eau-de-vie*, and wanted nothing more than to devote himself fifteen hours a day to his *métier*. At a moment when labor was being deified by both left and right, Lafargue advocated laziness.

The threat of Lafargue, Reclus, and Rimbaud, all exiles or figures of displacement, lies in the “bastard” nature of their thought. Reclus’s geography, written for the most part in Switzerland where he was exiled after the Commune, is as he proclaims, nothing but “history in space.” Rimbaud’s poetry mixes the useful with the luxurious, the artistic with the artisanal, precious metals with trash. And Lafargue, in *Le Droit à la paresse*, suggests that revolutionary praxis, the attack on the existing order, comes not from some untainted and virtuous working class

in the full flower of its maturity, but from a challenge to the boundaries *between* work and leisure, producer and consumer, worker and bourgeois, worker and intellectual.

“(What a century for hands!),” writes Rimbaud. “I’ll never learn to use my hands.” Emancipation, in Roman and civil law, means to be freed from control; from the Latin *mancipare*, to seize with the hand (*manus*): emancipation, literally, to be unhandled. Emancipation, for Rancière, writing in the 1970s, takes as its point of departure not workers’ solidarity or community, but rather their atomization under capitalism: the alienated seriality of workers dependent on competing with each other for work. Rancière has shown how the usefulness that gains the worker a place in the city is what prevents him or her from doing anything other than his or her task—from being a citizen, for instance: “Work is not, in and of itself, a principle of liberty and equality; the defense of its interest may be the politics of a new slavery.”³² Emancipation—the transformation of a servile identity into a free identity—must be based on a principle other than work, since the exercise and defense of work are what constitute the servile identity. Emancipation follows from dispensing with the positivities of workers’ community, and from *radicalizing* that atomization instead:

It is about making oneself a citizen-atom: an atom whose movement, free from that point on, must produce a molecular energy able to decompose into free atoms the mass of “fanatics of the corporation.” The people, free and citizens, can only be the reunion of incandescent atoms. It is not masses but atoms that enter into fusion.³³

The greatest danger to the “friends of order,” in other words, is not in the masses; it is in their decomposition—what I call, in Chapter 4, the swarm.

“I’m not against the asocial,” Bertolt Brecht says in conversation with Walter Benjamin. “I’m against the nonsocial.”³⁴ Such a vision as Rancière’s, by downplaying the emancipatory value of workers’ culture or community, risks appearing nonsocial; in fact it is anything but. Mendès, the poet who is not at home to anyone, is nonsocial; Rimbaud, indifferent to conforming to conventional standards of behavior—be they moral, sexual, national, artistic, or lexical—is asocial. And nothing is more social than Rimbaud’s asociality. Consider his experience, as he himself was wont to do, geographically. To do so means focusing on his intersection with collectivities and movements that have been traditionally deemed irrelevant to his development *as a poet*. Rimbaud’s trajectory is part of the massive displacement of populations from the provinces to the city, that vagabondage whereby thousands of peasants, workers, and middle-class people learned of exile for the first time—a migration preparatory to that even greater geographic displacement, from the metropolises to the colonies. Rimbaud moves from the countryside—the “occidental forests”—through the capitals, to the desert. In his *Illuminations*, the fantastic city and the barren desert (or its equiv-

Rimbaud
geograph

alent, the polar regions), often in uneasy proximity, form the most prevalent landscapes. Worker-philosopher Louis Gauny suggests a reason for this:

It is in the desert that seditious thought ferments, but it is in the city that such thought erupts. Liberty likes extreme crowds or absolute solitude. . . . But the unhappy inhabitants of the countryside, brutalized by taxes, are rarely visited by rebellion.³⁵

If the peasant population in France forms an obstacle to rebellion, it is not because it is atomized (for this, in fact, is the reality of the social, what makes us human, the distance between us), but rather because of its character of being an indivisible mass—what Rimbaud calls *les assis* of Charleville, the seated ones, or *les accroupissements*, the squatting. Rimbaud’s later works stage the dialectic of the city and the desert (or the city and the sea in “The Drunken Boat”)—the crowd and an absolute, vertiginous, nonhuman or more-than-human solitude: the Drunken Boat as incandescent atom. These works reveal a thinker whose primary concern is that of emancipation.

Marx and the Commune

“The inventions of the unknown,” Rimbaud wrote in May 1871, “demand new forms.” Later that summer, Rimbaud composed a “communist constitution” (now lost) inspired by the form, the organization of the Commune. His friend Delahaye recalls it as follows:

In the little states that made up ancient Greece, it was the agora that directed everything; the agora, that is to say, the public place, the assembled citizens deliberating, voting, with equal rights, on what had to be done. He then began by abolishing the representative government and by replacing it by a system of permanent referendum.³⁶

For Marx too, the Commune’s abolition of representative (parliamentary) government was entirely unforeseen, a true “invention of the unknown.” Marx’s writings about the Commune could arguably mark the beginning of a “third phase” in his thinking—one that is distinct from what is thought to be his mature “scientific” phase, and one that is involved in rethinking some of the themes of his early “immature” writings of the 1840s. Confronted in 1871 with the unexpected event of the Commune, Marx is led to focus on what he saw to be the Communards’ unprecedented discovery of the “political form . . . under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor.”³⁷ The economic emancipation of labor, in other words, presupposes political forms that are *themselves* emancipatory;³⁸ this is the lesson Marx takes from the Commune:

The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state-

machinery and wield it for their own purpose. The political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation. (196)

Far more important than any of the measures or laws the Commune managed to pass was simply "its own working existence": the expansive, thoroughly democratic nature of its social organization. Its discovery of a "thoroughly expansive political form," a "completely new historical creation," was for Marx what made the Commune "the greatest revolution of the century."

Who were the agents of this decisive event? Who were the Communards? Although primarily manual workers, the Communards were by no means the new, industrialized proletariat that Marx, the architect of scientific socialism, had predicted. A significant percentage were the semiskilled day laborers (journaliers) who had migrated from the provinces to work on Haussmann's massive and fantastic urban-renewal projects; another significant group were traditional artisans.³⁹ A decisive role in the revolution was played by women, a population that had borne more than its share of the everyday hardships of the Siege: "Women started first, as they did during the revolution. Those of March 18, hardened by the war in which they had a double share of misery, did not wait for their men."⁴⁰ The Communards' self-definition, if not their origins, was decidedly Parisian, and their most immediate concerns had less to do with gaining control over the means of production than with avoiding eviction. (On March 13, a decree had been approved that required the forceful payment of all rents due and commercial debts unpaid during the siege.) The chosen targets of Communist violence, as Manuel Castells points out, were less the industrial capitalist than those emblematic figures charged with social classification and the policing of everyday life: the curé, the gendarme, and the concierge.

The event of the Commune caused Marx to return to some of the themes that had already emerged in what are called his early or "immature" writings of the 1840s. Manifest property relations recede into the background of his analysis of the Commune. Instead, a stronger focus on emancipatory political form and a new attention to the social and political forms that fetter that emancipation begin to emerge. Chief among these latter are the State and the division of labor.

The revolutions of 1830 and 1848, according to Marx, had succeeded only in transferring power from one faction of the ruling class to another. In each case, "the repressive character of the state power was more fully developed and more mercilessly used" (197). State power under the Second Empire reached unprecedented and grotesque dimensions; the Second Empire was "the last triumph of a State separate of and independent from society" (151). And the Commune, for Marx, was "the direct antithesis to the Empire" (151): "The Commune . . . was a revolution against the State itself . . . a resumption by the people for the people of its own social life" (150). The Commune's form, in other words, was eman-

cipatory because and to the extent that it did not form a state; because and to the extent that it proclaimed its historical capacity to organize all aspects of social life freely.

For Marx the "State" as such is only the modern state. It is only in modern times that the state becomes detached from society and forms a "parasitic excrescence," existing over and above society all the while dominating it. The abstraction of the state belongs to modernity, because the abstraction of private life—an apolitical, civil sphere organized around particular, individual interests—belongs only to modernity.

Already in his 1843 *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, Marx had argued that the political state disappears in a true democracy. In that essay he presents an important critique of parliamentarism and of the modern representative principle itself that is worth reviewing here. Representation for Hegel (in the *Philosophy of Right*) demands *either* the use of deputies (representatives) or the participation of "all individuals as single individuals" in the decision making of all public affairs.⁴¹ The terms of Hegel's choice—either the representative or each and every one—are interesting in that they recall the terms of Rimbaud's version of literary representation: "literally" and "*dans tous les sens*" (according to all possible meanings). *Either* a literal, straightforward notion of representation, where the representative—be it political deputy or poetic signifier—"stands in for" the represented (offstage, in the depths) or a kind of chaotic polysemia: in all possible ways, according to all possible significations, all individuals as individuals participating in all public affairs. (This, in fact, is how Rimbaud historically has been read: *either* literally [biographically] or as the exemplum of a Tel Quelian polysemic modernism.) Marx, however, proves Hegel's choice to be a false one, just as Rimbaud will insist that he be understood both literally *and* in all possible ways.

Marx, writing in 1843, undoes Hegel by emphasizing the modern state's detachment from civil society. It is that very detachment that makes "representatives" necessary:

Either the political state is separated from civil society; in that event it is not possible for all as individuals to take part in the legislature. The political state leads an existence *divorced* from civil society . . . the fact that civil society takes part in the political state through its deputies is the expression of the separation.⁴²

If the state is separated from civil society, then representatives are divided from those they represent. But what if such a separation, because historical, is not inevitable? What if politics were not a specialized set of activities, institutions, and occasions? What if the proper task of the poet were not, as Rimbaud's contemporary Mallarmé was to proclaim, to "render more pure the words of the

why
are the
Communards?

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masses [le tribu]”? What if there were no distinct political sphere, no distinctly poetic perception or language? Marx’s critique of Hegel continues:

Alternatively, civil society is the *real* political society. If so, it would be senseless to insist on a requirement which stems from the conception of the political state as something existing apart from civil society [for here] the *legislature* entirely ceases to be important as a *representative* body. The legislature is representative only in the sense that *every* function is representative. For example, a shoemaker is representative in so far as he satisfies a social need. . . . In this sense he is representative not by virtue of another thing which he represents but by virtue of what he *is* and *does*.⁴³

If the separation between state and civil society does not exist, then politics becomes just another branch of social production. Political emancipation means emancipation from politics as a specialized activity. Marx concludes his critique of Hegel with the suppression of politics and the extinction of the state. Thirty years later the Commune, which was both the thing and the rallying cry, put an end to the separation between event and sign, and an end to labor and politics as class attributes.

The Commune, then, reawakened in Marx a critique of the state he had already, to some extent, formulated in his “immaturity.” In 1872 he added a new preface to one of his “mature” texts, the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, writing now against the “revolutionary measures” that had, in the 1848 version, hinged on “centralization . . . in the hands of the state”:

The practical applications of the principles will depend everywhere and at all times upon extant historical conditions. We therefore do not lay any special stress upon the revolutionary measures suggested at the close of the second section. In many respects the passage would have to be differently worded today . . . in view of the practical knowledge acquired during the two months’ existence of the Paris Commune when the proletariat held political power for the first time . . . the program has, to a certain extent, become out of date. Above all the Commune of Paris has taught us that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.”⁴⁴

The stronger focus on the division of labor that emerges in Marx’s writing after the Commune is, on the other hand, new. The state is not merely an instrument of the bourgeoisie; its detachment from civil society, its status as a distinct organism, is attained only *through and by means of* the social division of labor. The organs of centralized state power—the standing army, the bureaucracy, the police, the clergy, the judiciary—are “organs wrought after the plan of a systematic and hierarchic division of labor” (197). The *means* through which the Commune was possible was simply its sustained attack on the divisions of labor

Marx
Commune
no adolescent

that render administrations and government “mysteries, transcendent functions only to be trusted to the hands of a trained caste.”⁴⁵

Marx’s return to the themes of his “immaturity,” and to the consideration of the actual natures of political and social organization, shows a departure from and critique of the evolutionist, progressivist view of what is taken to be his middle, scientific, and “mature” phase: one that proclaims the inexorable march of history toward capitalist centralization.⁴⁶ The principal tenet of scientific socialism is well known: only at an objectively defined stage of socioeconomic development (that of “mature” capitalist mode of production) and only as a result of the class struggle of the proletariat (workers performing their sole historical task) can the socialist transformation take place. By the standards of scientific socialism, the Commune, that “unplanned, unguided, formless revolution,”⁴⁷ can only be seen as an evolutionary accident. The Communards are “out of sync” with the timetable of the inexorable march of history. They are not the industrialized proletariat they are supposed to be. Like adolescents they are moving at once too fast in their unplanned seizure of power and too slowly. They are caught up in what was by all accounts an unusually mild and festive spring, unaware of or ignoring the massive Versaillais threat being mobilized against them, playing at symbolic games: demolishing the Vendôme Column while leaving the Bank of France untouched. When Marx takes the Commune seriously, he must confront the possibility of a multiplicity of roads replacing the unique Highway of History; he must give new significance to the decentralization of socio-political power. The country that is more developed industrially might still not be destined to show to the less developed, as he had written in *Capital*, “the image of its own future.”⁴⁸

The developmental model of Marx’s own theoretical evolution is troubled by this autocritique: one that puts into question the very notion of “maturity.” Late Marx bends back and touches young Marx in a recognition of the inadequacy of unilinear, “progressive” models of historical analysis. “Science, the new nobility! Progress. The world is on the march. Why shouldn’t it turn around?” (*Une Saison en enfer*). And Lautréamont: “Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it!” (*Poésies II*).

Poetry and Prose

That Rimbaud turned his back on the late nineteenth-century narrative of “formation” is apparent upon reading his “autobiography,” *Une Saison en enfer*. But then Rimbaud himself has always been coded as an immature or adolescent taste. As a poet he has been relegated to a realm of subjectivism entirely lacking in social reflexivity. Within the canon of French poetry he is prescribed, both in France and America, as adolescent reading — what one reads before acquiring the

ach to indiv or personal poetry

mature, sophisticated taste for Mallarmé or Valéry. His unwritten masterpieces of maturity, lost to the African desert, are mourned like the lost boots of Napoléon Gaillard.

The traditional, teleological narrative of nineteenth-century bourgeois French culture recounts an inevitable movement: the redirection of what were previously, in the early part of the century, *social* energies, toward a complacent, late-century textual irony. But where do Lautréamont and Rimbaud, not to mention less canonical figures, fit in this narrative? Rimbaud, as I read him, alters the balance away from the textual toward lived practices. Lautréamont, whom I will consider only briefly here, and Rimbaud are the authors of the great poetic epics of the nineteenth century, *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Une Saison en enfer*, the adolescents who with one voice call for an end to what they deem individual or "personal poetry":

Personal poetry has had its moment of juggling with the relative and contorting with the contingent. Let us take up again the indestructible thread of impersonal poetry. (Lautréamont, 1870)

Basically, you see in your principle only a kind of subjective poetry; your obstinacy in getting back to the University trough—sorry—proves it. But you'll always wind up satisfied without having done anything, since you don't want to do anything. Which is not to mention the fact that your subjective poetry will always be horribly wishy-washy. One day, I hope—many others hope the same thing—I will see objective poetry in your principle, and see it more sincerely than you. (Rimbaud to Izambard, May 1871)

Although Lautréamont died in 1870 at the age of twenty-four, a few months before the victorious insurrection of March 18, his *Poésies* (I and II, 1870) nevertheless anticipates Commune forms, the sloganeering and invective I discuss in Chapter 5. And his *Chants de Maldoror* (1869) has yet to receive the materialist and historical interpretation called for by Aimé Césaire that would show in that "mad epic an aspect ignored by many, that of an implacable denunciation of a very precise form of society, such as it could only appear to one of its sharpest observers around the year 1865."⁴⁹ Maldoror, according to Césaire, is a Vautrin surrounded by a swarm of Uruguayan vampires.

Rimbaud and Lautréamont are poets; the novel, for Lautréamont, is a "false genre": "How the turpitudes of the novel squat (*s'accroupissent*—a Rimbaldian word) on display!" (*Poésies II*). At the same time Rimbaud and Lautréamont perform the iconoclastic gesture that annihilates the French poetic tradition. They see the poetry of the last two hundred years as personal, "subjective" poetry: "Since Racine poetry has not progressed one millimeter" (Lautréamont); "Racine alone is pure, strong, and great. . . . After Racine, the game gets moldy. It's been going on for two hundred years" (Rimbaud).

The problem with the poetry of the preceding two hundred years is not just its prosody or its subject matter; personal poetry is symptomatic of a crisis in the poet's role as citizen. Both Rimbaud and Lautréamont frame their future programs in terms of the Platonic division of labor: "A poet must be more *useful* than any citizen in his tribe" (Lautréamont). In Rimbaud's words:

The future will be materialist, as you will see. . . . Essentially it will be Greek poetry again, in a way. This eternal art will be *functional*, since poets are citizens. Poetry will no longer give rhythm to action; *it will be in advance*.

Poetry then must exist as critique, as evaluation: the active expression of an active mode of existence. To produce poetry that would be an agent as well as an effect of cultural and political change, Lautréamont and the late Rimbaud choose a hybrid, poetic prose—the bastard mix of poetry and prose. Their choice is an oppositional one. Their adolescent, iconoclastic gesture stands out like an evolutionary accident, a different and startlingly abrupt rhythm in the critics' narrative of waning social energies. Could it be that the seamlessness of that narrative has something to do with its uncritical, unanalyzed, and finally unhistorical embrace of the phenomenon then transpiring during the very period under analysis: the universalization of prose, the cultural dominance of the novel genre?

Of course, one side of late nineteenth-century poetic production, that of Mallarmé, has had an extensive and subtle twentieth-century critical legacy. It can be traced in the stylistic allegiance owed him by a figure like Lacan, and in his status as master or Urtext for the branches of literary criticism that have developed in the last twenty years out of structural linguistics. How much of poststructural theory—Kristéva, de Man, and particularly Derrida—can be traced, directly or indirectly, to a meditation on Mallarmé?

In the light of the dominant narrative of nineteenth-century French culture, Rimbaud, Vermersch, Reclus and the others emerge as nineteenth-century instances of what might be called the "vernacular."⁵⁰ The vernacular is the equivalent of a language that is naive or inferior, somehow incomplete: a particular speech, a dialect. "I have always belonged to the inferior race," Rimbaud writes in "Bad Blood," and "not knowing how to express myself except in pagan words, I would rather keep silent." As against the streamlined, the mass-produced, and the mechanized, the vernacular stands out as something unique and handmade, "a product or situation which the mass-market, price-accounting and bureaucratic administration cannot handle to full effect."⁵¹ The vernacular is that which must be uplifted, swept up into the universal language and the forward momentum of progress. But it resists. Prose, for instance, the medium of explanation and exposition had, by the midcentury, become the tool of the great pedagogical movement of the century of progress—a century that would bring methodical, step-by-step enlightenment to the uneducated masses:

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These are the conquerors of the world,
 Seeking their personal chemical fortune;
 Sport and comfort accompany them;
 They bring education for races, for classes, for animals
 Within this vessel, rest and vertigo
 In diluvian light,
 In terrible evenings of study.

(“Mouvement”)

Rimbaud's and Lautréamont's production of a nonexpository, nondidactic prose puts them on the side of emancipation rather than pedagogy. We must understand their resistance to progress as distinct from the antiprogressivist clamor that could be heard throughout the nineteenth century: the clamor of bourgeois intellectuals who feared progress because they thought it meant equality. Rimbaud and Lautréamont resist the institutionalization and representation of progress because they know it has nothing to do with equality.

In various forms the vernacular can be seen serving as conceptual banner for the feminist or environmental or black movements: the alternative, particularized, new revolutionary subjectivities of our own time. By “vernacular” I do not mean a self-satisfied regionalism, a separate preserve of popular wisdom or class purity. Rimbaud's work is more anxious than that. And its anxiety is the anxiety of frequent displacement—frequent movement in the cultural space where contagion and meeting places are allowed to spring up *between* one class and another, or even between one species and another. Rimbaud, in other words, does not set out to create a savage, adolescent, or Communal culture. He participates instead in the articulation of a savage, adolescent, or Communal relation to culture.

Notes

1. Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times* (New York: Norton, 1981), 221.
2. See Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune: 1871* (Devon: Newton Abbot, 1972), 313-50, and Jacques Rougerie, *Procès des Communalards* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), for accounts of the repression of the Commune.
3. See Alain Dalotel, Alain Faure, and Jean-Claude Freiermuth, *Aux origines de la Commune: Le mouvement des réunions publiques à Paris 1868-1870* (Paris, 1980), for an analysis of the movement of *réunions publiques* in Paris between 1868 and 1870. Based on these documents the authors argue convincingly against one prevalent view of the Commune as having been born of the unusual circumstances brought on by the Franco-Prussian War; they trace its origins rather to the strikes and public meetings, the revolutionary movement that followed the law passed in June 1868 legalizing public meetings.
4. Catulle Mendès, *Les 73 journées de la Commune* (Paris: E. Lachaud, 1871), 149-50.
5. Louis Barron, *Sous le drapeau rouge* (Paris: Albert Savine, 1889), 167.
6. See especially Lefebvre's three-volume *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (Paris: L'Arche, 1958-81); see also his important works on urbanism and space: *Le Droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968),

La Révolution urbaine (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), and *La Production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1974).

7. See Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, introduction to *Everyday Life*, *Yale French Studies* 73 (Fall 1987): 1-4.

8. For a thorough examination of the ideological underpinnings of the “new historicism,” see Carolyn Porter, “Are We Being Historical Yet?” Proceedings of the “States of Theory” conference, University of California at Irvine, April 1987.

9. For an outline of this position, in which the events of May become the first sign of what has since developed into the rampant “individualism” of the 1980s, see *Pouvoirs* 39 (1986). This volume also contains an excellent refutation by Cornélius Castoriadis of this attempt to eclipse the events of the 1960s: “Les Mouvements des années soixantes,” 107-16. For a more extended version of the right's position, see Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'Ere du vide: Essai sur l'individualisme contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), and Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *La Pensée '68: Essai sur l'anti-humanisme contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

10. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 13.

11. See the Brecht/Lukács debates, reedited as Brecht, “Against Georg Lukács,” trans. Stuart Hood in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: New Left Books, 1977), 68-85.

12. Paul Reclus, *Les Frères Elie et Elisée Reclus* (Paris: Les Amis d'Elisée Reclus, 1964), 182. One interesting decree passed under the Commune concerning the Bibliothèque Nationale forbade the lending out of books—this privilege having been abused during the Second Empire by readers building up their private libraries out of the national collections (Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, 307).

13. See Elie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris: au jour le jour; 19 mars-28 mai, 1871* (Paris: Schleicher Frères, 1908); Jean-Baptiste Clément, *1871: La Revanche des Communeux* (Paris: Jean Marie, 1886-87); Louise Michel, *La Commune* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1898).

14. George J. Becker (ed.), *Paris under Siege, 1870-1871: From the Goncourt Journal* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), 312. Goncourt's sentiments were echoed by other bourgeois writers and artists, most notably, perhaps, by Leconte de Lisle, who in a letter dated May 29, 1871, to fellow Parnassian José Maria de Hérédia, writes: “I hope that the repression will be such that nothing will ever move again and for my part I hope that it will be total.”

15. For an account of the activities and significance of the Fédération des Artistes, see Adrian Rifkin, “Cultural Movement and the Commune,” in *Art History* 2 (June 1979): 201-20, esp. 214-15.

16. Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer (London: Verso, 1983), 143.

17. Plato, *Republic*, II, cited in Jacques Rancière, *Le Philosophe et ses pauvres* (Paris, 1983), 30. The following discussion about the status of the artisan and the Platonic division of labor is indebted to Rancière's very provocative discussion of these questions, 17-88.

18. *L'Artiste*, April 1845, cited in Rancière, *Le Philosophe et ses pauvres*, 94.

19. Charles Nodier, “De l'utilité morale de l'instruction pour le peuple,” *Rêveries* (Paris: Plasma, 1979), 182-83. Nodier recounts with satisfaction the example of a shoemaker who had the “admirable good sense” to “stay in his place”: “three of my friends, Benjamin Constant, Jouy and Montègre, introduced me to a shoemaker named M. François, whose tragedies in the style of Corneille had dismayed the police of the Empire. This excursion off the paths of his natural destiny by a man whom I had begun to like worried me. He was aware of this. ‘Don't worry,’ he said to me, laughing. ‘To have fun I make tragedies, to gain a living, I make boots.’”

20. See Rancière, *Le Philosophe et ses pauvres*, 26-36.

21. Jules Mesnard, *Les Merveilles de l'Exposition de 1867* (Paris: Imp. de l'Ahure, 1867), 6.

22. Adrian Rifkin, "Well-formed Phrases: Some Limits of Meaning in Political Print at the End of the Second Empire," *Oxford Art Journal* 8 (1985): 24.
23. See his *Les Ouvriers Européens* [orig. ed. 1864] (Tours: A. Maine, 1877-79), and *La Réforme sociale en France, déduite de l'observation comparée des peuples Européens* (Paris: Plon, 1864).
24. See Rifkin, "Well-formed Phrases," esp. 22-25.
25. Denis Poulot, *Le Sublime, ou le travailleur comme il est en 1870, et ce qu'il peut être* (Paris: Maspero, 1980). See especially the brilliant introduction to this edition by Alain Cottureau, "Vie quotidienne et résistance ouvrière à Paris en 1870," 7-102. Cottureau reinterprets Poulot's condemnation of the worker in *Le Sublime* as an encyclopedia of the ruses developed by workers to resist efforts to control their work and home life.
26. Alfred Delvau's *Dictionnaire de la langue verte* (Paris: Marpon & Flammarion, 1883), indispensable for reading Rimbaud, defines these workers' slang terms: *chouette*, a superlative of good; *rupin*, superlative of noble or elegant; *d'attaque*, to be solid or resolute. The first edition of Delvau's dictionary appeared in 1865.
27. Rancière, *Le Philosophe et ses pauvres*, 108.
28. Courbet, cited in Robert Boudry, "Courbet et la Fédération des artistes," *Europe*, April-May 1951, 125.
29. Rancière, *Le Philosophe et ses pauvres*, 92.
30. Le Comte d'Hérisson, *Nouveau journal d'un Officier d'ordonnance: La Commune* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1889), 295-96. Rifkin's discussion of Gaillard is part of his forthcoming book; see what are undoubtedly the most useful and provocative analyses of cultural movement (particularly visual and musical) at the end of the Second Empire and during the Commune in the articles cited in notes 15 and 22, and in "No Particular Thing to Mean," *Block* 8 (1983): 36-45.
31. Elisée Reclus, cited in Gary Dunbar, "Elisée Reclus, Geographer and Anarchist," *Antipode* 10 and 11 (1979): 16.
32. Jacques Rancière, "La Représentation de l'ouvrier ou la classe impossible," in Philippe Lacoue-Lebarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (eds.), *Le Retrait du politique*, (Paris: Galilée, 1983), 96.
33. Rancière, "La Représentation de l'ouvrier," 103.
34. Walter Benjamin, "Conversations with Brecht," in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anya Bostock (London: New Left Books, 1973), 116.
35. Louis Gabriel Gauny, *Le Philosophe plézien*, ed. Jacques Rancière (Paris: Le Découverte, 1983), 115-16.
36. Ernest Delahaye, *Rimbaud: L'Artiste et l'être moral* (Paris: Albert Messein, 1923), 38.
37. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, ed. H. Draper (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 76.
38. See Derek Sayer and Philip Corrigan, "Late Marx: Continuity, Contradiction and Learning," in Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the "Peripheries of Capitalism"* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 77-94; see also, in the same volume, Shanin's "Late Marx: Gods and Craftsmen," 3-39. These two articles argue, with interesting differences of opinion, for a reevaluation of the late Marx in the light of his own consideration of the Paris Commune and Russian revolutionary populism. I am indebted to these articles for the version of Marx that follows, and to Terry Cochran for making me aware of this book.
39. See Jacques Rougerie, *Procès des Communards*, 125-34, for a systematic breakdown of the backgrounds of the Communards. See also Manuel Castells, "Cities and Revolution: The Commune of Paris, 1871," in *City and the Grassroots* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), 15-26.
40. Prosper-Oliver Lissagaray, *Histoire de la commune de 1871* (1876; reprint, Paris: Maspero, 1967), 110.

41. See Lucio Colletti's discussion of Marx's critique of Hegel in his introduction to Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage, 1975), 7-56, esp. 41-45.
42. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State in Early Writings*, 189-90.
43. *Ibid.*, 190.
44. Marx, preface to the 1872 German edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. D. Ryazanoff (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 260.
45. Marx, *ibid.*, 153. See also Sayer and Corrigan, "Late Marx," 88.
46. Shanin, "Late Marx," 20-29.
47. Stewart Edwards (ed.), *The Communards of Paris, 1871* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), 9.
48. Karl Marx, *Capital* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), I, 91.
49. Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955), 45.
50. I borrow the use of this term from Teodor Shanin, "Marxism and the Vernacular Revolutionary Traditions," in *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 243-79.
51. *Ibid.*, 249.

Chapter 1

The Transformation of Social Space

I

Attempts to discuss Rimbaud in terms of the events of 1871 have for the most part been limited to frenzied interrogations by literary historians and biographers anxious to ascertain his precise physical whereabouts during the months of March to May 1871.¹ Was Rimbaud an active participant in the insurrection? Which informants are to be believed? Even to pose the question in this form reveals the anxiety of the empiricist working in the service of reductivism—a reductivism that most likely has political (recuperative) motivations. Would Rimbaud's absence, definitively proved, from the scene of the crime, in turn definitively silence the social and political repercussions of his work? Would an eyewitness account of his presence on the barricades give a political interpretation of his poetry more validity?

The actual, complex links binding Rimbaud to the events in Paris are not to be established by measuring geographic distance. Or, if they are, it is perhaps by considering Rimbaud's poetry, produced at least in part within the rarefied situation of his isolation in Charleville, as one creative response to the same objective situation to which the insurrection in Paris was another. In what way does Rimbaud figure or prefigure a social space adjacent—side by side rather than analogous—to the one activated by the insurgents in the heart of Paris?

To begin to answer this question I propose postponing for now a discussion of Rimbaud's most explicitly and thematically "political" poems—poems like "Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie," which praises the revolutionary actions of

women during the Commune, or "Chant de guerre parisien," announced by Rimbaud under the rubric of a "contemporary psalm" and featuring verbal caricatures of Favre and Thiers lifted straight from the stockpile of revolutionary imagery used in political cartoons and gravures produced during the early months of 1871. Such overtly political verse is important for an ideological reading of Rimbaud, but no more so, I hope to show, than the early Charleville erotic verse (or, for that matter, than the late "hermetic" prose poems)—in Rimbaud there is little distance between political economy and libidinal economy. And the significance of the Commune is most evident in what Marx called its "working existence": in its *displacement* of the political onto seemingly peripheral areas of everyday life—the organization of space and time, changes in lived rhythms and social ambiances. The insurgents' brief mastery of their own history is perceptible, in other words, not so much on the level of governmental politics as on the level of their daily life: in concrete problems of work, leisure, housing, sexuality, and family and neighborhood relations. Revolutionary struggle is diffuse as well as specifically directed, expressed throughout the various cultural spheres and institutional contexts, in specific conflicts and in the manifold transformations of individuals rather than in some rigid and polar opposition of capital and labor. Taking seriously such a "displacement of the political" can point us in the direction of certain of Rimbaud's poems thematically at a distance from the turbulence in Paris: the early ironic and erotic everyday Rimbaud of kisses, beer, and country walks.

Like much of Rimbaud's early lyric poetry, "Rêvé pour l'hiver" (1870) puts forth a particular imagination of the nineteenth-century commonplace of "the voyage." The poem opens with the dream of an enclosed, infantile universe:

L'hiver, nous irons dans un petit wagon rose

Avec des coussins bleus.

Nous serons bien. Un nid de baisers fous repose

Dans chaque coin moelleux.

[In winter we shall travel in a little pink railway carriage

With blue cushions.

We'll be comfortable. A nest of mad kisses lies in wait

In each soft corner.]

The interior of the carriage is created oppositionally to the winter outside; inside is warmth, well-being and comfort (the simplicity of "Nous serons bien"), repose and restfulness. The muted pastel colors suggest a nursery; the carriage is a nest where the violence and jolts of the voyage are cushioned and where all sensation or sound of moving through space is dulled. The passage will not be noticed.

But if the carriage is a nest, it is also the container of nests—a potential disturbance in the nursery is suggested by the adjective “mad,” whose threat is for the moment attenuated by the verb *repose*. Madness is there, a violence oddly separated and detached from the actors and seemingly part of the environment, but it is, at least at present, a sleeping *folie*.

Tu fermeras l'oeil, pour ne point voir, par la glace,
Grimacer les ombres des soirs,
Ces monstruosités hargneuses, populace
De démons noirs et de loups noirs.

[You will close your eyes, so as not to see through the window
The evening shadows grimacing,
Those snarling monsters, a swarm
Of black devils and black wolves.]

The second stanza opens out onto the landscape, continuing the childlike tone whereby shadows are frozen into grimaces not unlike the anthropomorphized nature illustrations in the popular children's books (*petits livres d'enfance*) Rimbaud mentions in “Alchimie du verbe.” Still, it is the gesture of cushioning, or refusing the experience of voyaging, that appears to hold sway. You will close your eyes to the outside, shutting off vision—that which continually makes and undoes relations between the voyager and the outer world. You will believe yourself intact because surrounded by the walls of the carriage. But the refusal of vision is double-edged: it is also a relinquishing of the mastery involved in any viewer/viewed relation, the domination of the look. To stop seeing the horrifying exterior through the window is, by the same token, to shut off the possibility of defining the interior by its contrary. Gone then is the protection of being distanced from the outside world that would remain there, detached, frozen into an illustration. The closing of the eyes makes the illustration come alive and awakens the sleeping madness:

Puis tu te sentiras la joue égratignée . . .
Un petit baiser, comme une folle araignée,
Te courra par le cou . . .

Et tu me diras: “Cherche!” en inclinant la tête,
—Et nous prendrons du temps à trouver cette bête
—Qui voyage beaucoup . . .

[Then you will feel your cheek scratched . . .
A little kiss, like a mad spider,
Will run about your neck . . .

And you'll say to me “Find it!” bending your head,

—And we'll take a long time to find that creature
—Who travels far . . .]

A kiss begins its journey; as a spider, it shares with the outer world the quality of darkness; its threatening aspect is underlined by the repetition of the adjective “mad.” The outside invades the inside, the nursery is threatened by erotic madness. Closing the eyes awakens the possibility of haptic perception—touch rather than an abstracted and distanced mastery of the scenery. The word *égratignée* signals the movement from *voir* to *faire*; the violence of contact is reminiscent of key moments in many of the poems of *opening*, moments when seams are exposed, the instant of scratching the surface: the fingernails on the child's scalp in “Les Chercheuses de poux,” the *picotement* of “Sensation,” the holes in the pockets and trousers in “Ma Bohème”; “A blast of air pierces gaps in the partitions, . . . blows away the limits of homes” (“Nocturne vulgaire”). Rimbaud's poetry as a poetry of transformation is crystallized in this moment: the phenomenon of an absolutely commanding perception of the transformation brought on in us by the event of “contact,” “opening,” “rupture.” Thus the importance of the reflexive form in many of these moments: “Puis tu te sentiras . . .”

The adjective *petit* used to describe the carriage in the first verse is repeated apropos of the kiss; the kiss shares with the carriage the properties of motion and time as well. The movement of the poem follows the invisible silent machine, the carriage, tracing its passage through space, and the spider/kiss, tracing its passage along the microgeography of the woman's body. These two transgressive movements become one, and what has initially functioned as a mode of separation, an enclosed module transporting its passengers through space, becomes in the intruding spider/kiss what articulates or breaks down the division between interior and exterior. Roland Barthes, speaking of the more extensive and dramatic play with the boundary between inner and outer space that occurs in Rimbaud's “Bateau ivre,” calls this the move beyond a psychoanalysis of the cavern to a true poetics of exploration.² And indeed, the lover's exclamation, “Cherche!” the only sound in the poem, becomes a true *invitation au voyage*—the invitation to conceive of space *not* as a static reality but as active, generative, to experience space as created by an interaction, as something that our bodies reactivate, and that through this reactivation, in turn modifies and transforms us. The space of the voyage, whose unmapped itinerary lies in the dashes and ellipses that crowd the end of the poem, merges with a temporal passage (“And we'll take a long time . . .”) that guarantees that the voyagers will not be the same individuals at the end of the trip that they were at the beginning.

The poem, as such, constitutes a movement and not a tableau, a *récit* rather than a map. Instead of the abstract visual constructions proper to the stasis of a geographic notion of space, the poem creates a “nonpassive” spatiality—space as a specific form of operations and interactions. In the late 1860s the expression

“chercher la petite bête” was prevalent slang for wanting to know the inner workings of a thing, the hidden reasons of an affair—like a child wanting to know what lies beneath a watch face. But it was also a slang expression popular among literati, who used it to signify amusing oneself on the level of stylistics instead of bearing down on serious matters of content.³ The turns and detours of the spider—ruse, madness, desire, passage—are at once the turns and detours of figures of style, an erotics, and a manner of moving through the world. It is this refiguration of a reactivated space that in turn becomes transformative that we will take as our point of access to the event or “working existence” of the Commune.

II

In his *Mémoires*, Gustave-Paul Cluseret, the Commune's first Delegate of War, reflects on the lessons to be learned from the street fighting at the end of the Commune, and, in the process, details the philosophy and strategic use of that topographically persistent insurgent construction, the barricade. The building of barricades was, first of all, to be carried out as quickly as possible; in contrast to the unique, well-situated, and centralized civic monument, whose aura derives from its isolation and stability, barricades were not designed around the notion of a unique “proper place”: street platoons were to set up as many barricades as they could as quickly as possible. Their construction was, consequently, haphazard and makeshift:

It is therefore not necessary for these barricades to be perfectly constructed; they can very well be made of overturned carriages, doors torn off their hinges, furniture thrown out of windows, cobblestones where these are available, beams, barrels, etc.⁴

Monumental ideals of formal perfection, duration or immortality, quality of material and integrity of design are replaced by a special kind of *bricolage*—the wrenching of everyday objects from their habitual context to be used in a radically different way. A similar awareness of the tactical mission of the common-place can be found in Rimbaud's parodic “Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs” where standard Parnassian “tools” are rendered *truly* utilitarian: “Trouve, ô Chasseur, nous le voulons, / Quelques garances parfumées / Que la Nature en pantalons / Fasse éclore!—pour nos Armées! . . . Trouve des Fleurs qui soient des chaises!” (“Find, O Hunter, we desire it, / One or two scented madder plants / Which Nature may cause to bloom into trousers—For our Armies! . . . Find Flowers which are chairs!”) In this poem and elsewhere Rimbaud's paradoxical solution to the sterility of Parnassian imagery is, on the one hand, an unqualified return to the full range of ordinary experience—everyday life—at its most banal and, on the other hand, a breakthrough to a distinctly uto-

pian space. Similarly, anything, writes Cluseret, can serve as building material, anything can be a weapon—“explosives, furniture, and in general, anything that can be used as a projectile”—and any person can be a soldier:

Passersby were stopped to help construct the barricades. A battalion of National Guards occupied the area, and the sentries called on everyone passing to contribute their cobblestone willy-nilly to the defense effort.⁵

But perhaps the most crucial point to emphasize concerning the barricades was their strategic use: they were *not*, as Auguste Blanqui also makes clear in his *Instructions pour une prise d'armes*, to be used as shelter. Barricades, writes Cluseret, “are not intended to shelter their defenders, since these people will be inside the houses, but to prevent enemy forces from circulating, to bring them to a halt and to enable the insurrectionists to pelt them with . . . anything that can be used as a projectile.” Cluseret's remarks are reflections that took place after the event on how the defense should have been carried out; in fact, much of the actual fighting, particularly during the final massacres of the *semaine sanglante*, took the form of traditional hand-to-hand combat. Nevertheless, some of the urban guerilla strategies outlined or prescribed by Cluseret and Blanqui seem to have been followed. In the memoirs he dashed off immediately after the demise of the Commune, Catulle Mendès describes the difficulties experienced by the disciplined Versaillais soldiers in gaining access to certain Parisian *quartiers*:

But at other points in Paris, military operations were less successful. In the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the army advances very slowly, if it advances at all. The federalists fight with a heroic brutality; from street corners, from windows, from atop balconies ring gunshots, rarely ineffective. This sort of war tires the soldiers, whose discipline does not allow them to respond with similar maneuvers. In Saint-Ouen as well, the forward march of the troops has been halted; the barricade on the rue de Clichy holds strong and will hold for a long time.⁶

The immediate function of the barricades, then, was to prevent the free circulation of the enemy through the city—to “halt” them or immobilize them so that they, the enemy, could become targets. The insurgents, meanwhile, who have mobility on their side, offer no targets: “offering them no targets. . . . No one is in sight. This is the crucial point.” To this end Blanqui advocated the strategy known as “piercing the houses”:

When, on the line of defense, a house is particularly threatened, we demolish the staircase from the ground floor, and open up holes in the floorboards of the next floor, in order to be able to fire on the soldiers invading the ground floor.⁷

Cluseret writes of a “lateral piercing” of the houses: “Troops guard the ground

barricade
to bricolage

floor while others climb quickly to the next floor and immediately break through the wall to the adjoining house and so on and so forth as far as possible." Houses are gutted in such a way that the insurgents can move freely in all directions through passageways and networks of communication joining houses together; the enemy on the street is rendered frozen and stationary. "Street fighting does not take place in the streets but in the houses, not in the open but undercover." Street fighting depends on mobility or permanent displacement. It depends on changing houses into passageways—reversing or suspending the division between public and private space. "A blast of air pierces gaps in the partitions . . . blows away the limits of homes" ("Nocturne vulgaire"). Walter Benjamin writes that for the *flâneur* at the end of the Second Empire, the city is metamorphosed into an interior; for the Communards the reverse is true: the interior becomes a street.

III

Commentators on the Commune from Marx and Engels on have singled out the Communards' failure to attack that most obvious of monumental targets, the Bank of France:

The hardest thing to understand is certainly the holy awe with which they remained outside the gates of the Bank of France. This was also a serious political mistake. The Bank in the hands of the Commune—this would have been worth more than 10,000 hostages.⁸

Engels evaluates the "serious political mistake" by calculating a rate of exchange between bank and hostages. Not surprisingly, his analysis is situated soundly in the realm of political economy. In the early 1960s the Situationists—a group whose project lay at the intersection of the revolutionary workers' movement and the artistic "avant-garde"—proposed another sort of analysis, one that altered the sphere of political economy by bringing transformations on the level of everyday life from the peripheries of its analysis to the center. To the extent that the Situationist critique of everyday life was inseparable from the project of intervening into, transforming lived experience, the activities of the group can be seen to fall under the dual banner of Engels's "making conscious the unconscious tendencies of the Commune" and Rimbaud's "Changer la Vie." In the failure of the Commune—its failure, that is, in the classical terms of the workers' movement, to produce what later, more "successful" revolutions produced, namely, a state bureaucracy—in that failure the Situationists saw its success. To view the Commune from the perspective of the transformation of everyday life would demand, then, that we juxtapose the Communards' political failure or mistake—leaving intact the Bank of France—with one of their more "monumental" achievements: the demolition of the Vendôme Column, built by Napoléon to glo-

rify the victories of the Grand Army. On the one hand, a reticence, a refusal to act; on the other, violence and destruction as complete reappropriation: the creation, through destruction, of a positive social void, the refusal of the dominant organization of social space and the supposed neutrality of monuments. The failure of the Communards in the "mature" realm of military and politico-economic efficacy is balanced by their accomplishments in the Imaginary or preconscious space that lies outside specific and directly representable class functions—the space that could be said to constitute the realm of political desire rather than need.

What monuments are to the Communards—petrified signs of the dominant social order—the canon is to Rimbaud:

Les blancs débarquent. Le canon! Il faut se
soumettre au baptême, s'habiller, travailler.
J'ai reçu au coeur le coup de grâce. Ah! je ne
l'avais pas prévu!

[The whites are landing. The cannon! We will
have to submit to baptism, get dressed, and work.
I have received in my heart the stroke of
mercy. Ah! I had not foreseen it!]

This imaginary historical reconstruction, which occurs near the middle of the "Mauvais Sang" section of *Une Saison en enfer*, depicts a scene in the colonization of everyday life. In his attempt to rewrite his genealogy, to find another history, another language, the narrator has adopted the persona of an African. Precisely at that moment, the colonists arrive. The "coup de grâce" is also the shot of the cannon: in this context, the word *canon* should be taken, as Rimbaud said elsewhere, *littéralement et dans tous les sens*—not only as a piece of artillery or as a law of the church, but as the group of books admitted as being divinely inspired. The cannon is also an arm that implies an economic investment that only a state apparatus can make.

(The issue of canonization should play an important role in any discussion of Rimbaud *today*, given the ideologically significant modification of the "place" of Rimbaud in the literary canon that has occurred over the last twenty years. Dominant methodological or theoretical concerns have always generated a list of chosen texts that best suit their mode of analysis. Literary theory of the last twenty years—from structuralism to deconstruction—is no exception. It has, to a certain extent, brought about a rewriting of the canon that has elevated Mallarmé while visibly neglecting Rimbaud; this rewriting in and of itself attests to Rimbaud's resistance to a purely linguistic or "textual" reading.)

It is, however, the most extended sense of the word *canon*—the set of rules or norms used to determine an ideal of beauty in the Beaux Arts—that dominates

Une Saison en enfer. Beauty appears in the opening lines of the poem, capitalized and personified, seated on the knees of the narrator and cursed by him: "Un soir, j'ai assis la Beauté sur mes genoux. Et je l'ai trouvée amère. Et je l'ai injuriée." ("One evening I sat Beauty on my knees. And I found her bitter. And I cursed her.") It is the transformation of this idealized beauty into a "decanonized," lowercase form by the end of the narrative—"Je sais aujourd'hui saluer la beauté"—that constitutes, along with the gradual construction of a plural subject, the primary direction and movement of the poem. But the decanonization of beauty is not just a change in the object; it is a transformation in the relation of the narrator to the object—a transformation signaled by the verb *saluer* (a greeting that is both a hello and a farewell): thus, a relation to beauty that is no longer timeless or immortal, but transitory, acknowledging change and death.

The verb *saluer* appears again near the conclusion in one of the poem's most celebrated passages:

Quand irons-nous, par delà les grèves et les monts, saluer la naissance
du travail nouveau, la sagesse nouvelle, la fuite des tyrans et des
démons, la fin de la superstition, adorer—les premiers!—Noël sur la
terre!

[When will we journey beyond the beaches and the mountains, to hail
the birth of new work, new wisdom, the flight of tyrants and demons,
the end of superstition; to adore—the first!—Christmas on earth!]

Here *saluer* is unambiguous and the poem concludes with the anticipation of, the unmitigated yearning for, the birth of new social relations figured in properly spatial terms: the as yet to emerge revolutionary space of "Noël sur la terre." The various geographic synonyms for "Noël sur la terre" that spring up at the end of the poem, the "splendid cities," the "beaches without end," are all situated in a future time, which suggests that "Noël sur la terre" is to be construed not as the founding of a new "proper place" but rather as that which, in its instability, in its displacement or deferment, exists as the breakdown of the notion of proper place: be it heaven or hell, Orient or Occident, winter or summer. The dizzying religious or vertical topography of the poem, with its meteoric descents and ascensions ("I believe myself to be in hell, so I am"; "hell is certainly below—and heaven above"; "Ah! to climb back up into life"; "It's the flames which rise up with their damned one"), is resolved in the narrative's final sections by a horizontal and social topography ("I, who called myself magus or angel, exempt from all morality, I am given back to the earth, with a task to pursue"), a kind of lateral vision that is not so much a vision as a movement ("The song of the heavens, the march of peoples!"), and not so much a movement as a future movement: "Let us receive all the influx of vigor and real ten-

derness. And, at dawn, armed with an ardent patience, we will enter into splendid cities."

To the extent that the particular revolutionary realization of the Commune can be seen in its political understanding of social space, we can speak here of an analogous breakdown of the notion of "proper place." Class division is also the division of the city into active and passive zones, into privileged places where decisions are made in secret, and places where these decisions are executed afterward. The rise of the bourgeoisie throughout the nineteenth century was inscribed on the city of Paris in the form of Baron Haussmann's architectural and social reorganization, which gradually removed workers from the center of the city to its northeastern peripheries, Belleville and Menilmontant. An examination of the voting records in the municipal elections organized by the Commune shows this social division clearly: less than 25 percent of the inhabitants of the bourgeois *quartiers*, the 7th and 8th, voted in the election; only the 10th, 11th, 12th, and 18th, workers' *quartiers*, and the 5th, the university district, voted at more than half.⁹ The workers' redescend into the center of Paris followed in part from the political significance of the city center within a tradition of popular insurgency, and in part from their desire to reclaim the public space from which they had been expelled, to reoccupy streets that once were theirs.

If workers are those who are not allowed to transform the space/time allotted them, then the lesson of the Commune can be found in its recognition that revolution consists not in changing the juridical form that allots space/time (for example, allowing a party to appropriate bureaucratic organization) but rather in completely transforming the nature of space/time. It is here that Marx's "Transform the World" and Rimbaud's "Changer la Vie" become, as the Surrealists proclaimed, the same slogan. The working existence of the Commune constituted a critique pronounced against geographic zoning whereby diverse forms of socioeconomic power are installed: a breakdown of a privileged place or places in favor of a permanent exchange between distinct places—thus, the importance of the *quartier*. Lefebvre's work is especially important in emphasizing the disintegration of the practical, material foundations and habits that organized daily life during the hardships of the siege of Paris in the fall and winter of 1870.¹⁰ In the midst of this disintegration sprang up new networks and systems of communication solidifying small groups: local neighborhood associations, women's clubs, legions of the National Guard, and, above all, the social life of the *quartier*—groups whose often avowedly revolutionary aspirations were allowed to develop freely in part because the government lacked both the means and the authority to police the city. The local *arrondissement* gained a considerable degree of autonomy, and the heavily populated popular districts had come close to being self-governing. The siege allowed new ambiances, new manners of encountering or of meeting with one another to develop that are both the product and the instrument of transformed behavior.

The breakdown of spatial hierarchy in the Commune, one aspect of which was the establishment of places of political deliberation and decision making that were no longer secret but open and accessible, brought about a breakdown in temporal division as well. The publicity of political life, the immediate publication of all the Commune's decisions, and proclamations, largely in the form of *affiches*, resulted in a "spontaneous" temporality whereby citizens were no longer informed of their history after the fact but were actually occupying the moment of its realization. If the city and its streets were in fact reappropriated by the Communards, this undoubtedly entailed a Commune reinvention of urban rhythms: white nights and "revolutionary days" that are not simply certain days marked off on a calendar, but are rather the introduction to and immersion in a new temporal movement. Journals and accounts of everyday life during the Commune written by people active in the insurrection suggest a particular and contradictory movement of time, a duration experienced as being at once more rapid and more slow than usual.¹¹ We will return to this peculiar temporality at some length in the next chapter; for now, we can describe the sensation as being a simultaneous perception of events passing by quickly, too quickly, and of each hour and minute being entirely lived or made use of: saturated time.

The workers who occupied the Hôtel de Ville or who tore down the Vendôme Column were not "at home" in the center of Paris; they were occupying enemy territory, the circumscribed proper place of the dominant social order. Such an occupation, however brief, provides an example of what the Situationists have called a *détournement*—using the elements or terrain of the dominant social order to one's own ends, for a transformed purpose; integrating actual or past productions into a superior construction of milieu.¹² *Détournement* has no other place but the place of the other; it plays on imposed terrain and its tactics are determined by the absence of a "proper place." Thus, the *détournement* of churches: using them to hold the meetings of women's clubs or other worker organizations. *Détournement* is no mere Surrealist or arbitrary juxtaposition of conflicting codes; its aim, at once serious and ludic, is to strip false meaning or value from the original:

When the Club Communal of the Salle Molière took over the church of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, "a public monument that until then had served only a caste, born enemy of all progress," this was announced as a "great revolutionary act" by the population of the district.¹³

A similar aim is apparent in Rimbaud's "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs," where the literary code of Parnassian aestheticism is "detoured" by a jarring influx of social, utilitarian vocabulary:

Ainsi, toujours vers l'azur noir
Où tremble la mer des topazes,

Fonctionneront dans ton soir
Les Lys, ces clystères d'extases!

[Thus, continually toward the dark azure
Where the sea of topazes shimmers,
Will function in your evening
Lilies, those enemas of ecstasy!]

Here the echo to Lamartine at his most elegiac ("Ainsi toujours poussés vers de nouveaux rivages . . .") coexists with the most mechanistic and technical of jargons: *fonctionneront* and *clystères*. What is the effect of the audacious realism of a word like *fonctionneront*? Rimbaud's insertion of technical vocabulary is purely strategic, and the word takes on significance only in the context of its Parnassian surroundings—of its relations with it and in dynamic criticism of it. Rimbaud's lexical anomalies, in other words, should not be considered as the mutation of isolated elements. We should always bear in mind that change lies in the relation of elements to each other: the particular dynamic created by what we might call lexical shock, incest, bastardism, or other such arrangements. Nor should the oppositional dynamic at work in "Ce qu'on dit . . ." be understood as accidental or haphazard—an arbitrary, extrinsically conceived assemblage of juxtaposed disparate parts or discourses. Rather, the poem produces its own parts by active differentiation that in turn reform themselves into a new unity.

Certainly, the introduction of a jarringly "nonpoetic" word like *fonctionneront*, placed in such close proximity to "shimmering topazes," serves to assault the elite enclosure of Parnassian aesthetic isolationism, marooned and cut adrift as it was from the world of working relations and wider social institutions. It lays bare the Parnassian high bourgeois flight from the realm of utility—a flight governed, it would seem, by fear of the very contagion the poem enacts: fear of contact with the popular, fear of industrial "progress" conceived of as social equality. But Rimbaud's gesture is double-, perhaps triple-edged. For although his use of technical vocabulary allies him with a class culture whose concerns—science, politics, social organization—are distinct from the aesthetic and metaphysical interests of orthodox Parnassian culture, it does not, on the other hand, imply his entrenchment in some distinct, preconceived, countercultural identity. By the same token, the abrupt shock of lexical juxtaposition manages on a formal level to keep at bay the smooth ideological agenda—the whole reasoned march of progress regulated by instruction, by scientific principles and by the general interest, progress as the dominant explication of the social order, and of a society that thinks itself under the aegis of perfectibility—associated with the vocabulary of utility.

Elsewhere in Rimbaud's poetry, a similar subversion is carried out by the trivial, commonplace nature of the represented object, the introduction of the detail

that is neither distinguished nor abject, the detail that has no higher significance than itself: the clove of garlic in "Au Cabaret-Vert."

IV

Accounts of the Commune and accounts of the "phenomenon" of Rimbaud rely on a shared vocabulary:

Rimbaud erupts into literature, throws a few lightning bolts and disappears, abandoning us from then on to what looks like twilight. We had hardly time to see him. . . . This is enough for the legend to be born and develop.¹⁴

The seventy-two days from 18 March to 28 May 1871, the length of time Paris was able to hold out against the National Government at Versailles and its army, though too short to carry out any permanent measures of social reform, were long enough to create the myth, the legend of the Commune as the first great workers' revolt.¹⁵

Brevity, eruption, lightning flash, myth, legend—these are the words that recur. Mallarmé, for example, uses the metaphor of a meteor when speaking of Rimbaud; René Char writes of his "sudden evaporation." Qualities of speed, brevity, and brilliance are transferred from the biographical phenomena to the production and reception of the work: anarchist art and literary critic Félix Fénéon, one of the first serious readers of the *Illuminations*, describes these poems in 1887 as having "suddenly appeared, scattered by shocks into radiant repercussions";¹⁶ Leo Bersani writes of Rimbaud's work as that of someone who wants to "stay" in language as briefly as possible.¹⁷ Neither Rimbaud, "the first poet of a civilization that has not yet appeared" (Char), nor the Commune, that "unplanned, unguided, formless revolution,"¹⁸ reached maturity. Perhaps it is this joint lingering in the liminal zone of adolescence—what Mallarmé, referring to Rimbaud, called "a perverse and superb puberty"—that tends to create anxiety. For it is striking to see the way in which narratives of both subjects, for the most part, adhere to a traditional developmental model, concluding almost invariably with a consideration of the reasons for the failure of the Commune to become stabilized, of Rimbaud to remain loyal to literature, and ensuing motifs: the silence of Rimbaud, the demise of the Commune. Speculations abound as to what "fulfillment" or "adulthood" might have looked like: the poems Rimbaud would have written in Africa, the social reforms the Commune would have put through had it been given the time to stabilize.

But such an omniscient theoretical viewpoint gives way to easy proofs that the Commune was objectively doomed to failure and could not have been fulfilled. This viewpoint, as the Situationists point out, forgets that for those who really

lived it, the fulfillment was *already there*. And as Mallarmé said of Rimbaud, "I think that prolonging the hope for a work of maturity would harm, in this case, the exact interpretation of a unique adventure in the history of art."¹⁹ It is in this sense that Marx should be understood when he says that the most important social measure of the Commune was its own *working existence*.

The Commune, wrote Marx, was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body. Its destruction of hierarchic investiture involved the displacement (revocability) of authority along a chain or series of "places" without any sovereign term. Each representative, subject to immediate recall, becomes interchangeable with, and thus equal to, its represented.

The direct result of this kind of distributional and revocable authority is the withering away of the political function as a specialized function. Rimbaud's move beyond the idea of a specialized domain of poetic language or even of poetry—the fetishization of writing as a privileged practice—begins not in 1875 with his "silence" but rather as early as 1871 with the "Lettres du voyant." In these letters, writing poetry is acknowledged as one means of expression, action, and above all of *work* among others:

I will be a worker: that is the idea that holds me back when mad rage drives me toward the battle of Paris—where so many workers are dying as I write to you!

The *voyant*, as has been frequently pointed out, "*se fait voyant*": "I work at making myself a *voyant*." The emphasis here is on the work of self-transformation as opposed to the Romantic commonplace of poetic predestination. The *voyant* project emerges in the letters as the will to combat not merely specific past or contemporary poetic practices, but the will eventually to overcome and supersede "poetry" altogether. Like the "abolition of the state," the process outlined by Rimbaud is a long and arduous revolutionary process that unfolds through diverse phases. The work is not solitary but social and collective: "other horrible workers will come: they will begin at the horizons where the first one has fallen!" In fact, the *voyant* project can be taken, in its totality, as a figure for nonalienated production in general. Its progress is to be measured, Rimbaud implies, by the degree to which "the infinite servitude of women" is broken: "When the unending servitude of woman is broken, when she lives by and for herself, when man—until now abominable—has given her her freedom, she too will be a poet!" An exclamation from the letters like "Ces poètes seront!" must be placed in the context of the emergence, particularly in Rimbaud's later work, of a collective subject: the *nous* of the concluding moments of *Une Saison* ("Quand irons-nous . . ."), of "A une Raison," of "Après le Déluge." Masses in movement—the human geography of uprisings, migrations, and massive displacements—dominate the later prose works: "the song of the heavens, the march of peoples" ("*Une Saison*"); "migrations more enormous than the

women
| X

ancient invasions" ("Génie"); "the uprising of new men and their march forward" ("A une Raison"); "companies have sung out the joy of new work" ("Villes"). The utopian resonance of *travail nouveau*—"to greet the advent of new work"—can be found even in the project of *voyance*: an enterprise of self- and social transformation which implies that poets themselves accept their own uninterrupted transformation—even when this means ceasing to be a poet.

Notes

1. The one notable exception is Steve Murphy, in his "Rimbaud et la Commune?" In Alain Borer (ed.), *Rimbaud Multiple. Colloque de Cérisy* (Gourdon: Bedou & Touzot, 1985), 50-65. I came across Murphy's very valuable and erudite research as I was completing this book; although our arguments and findings frequently overlap, Murphy's goal, as I take it, to enhance explications of particular poems by Rimbaud, is more circumscribed than mine.
2. Roland Barthes, "Nautilus et Bateau ivre," *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), 91.
3. Alfred Delvau, *Dictionnaire de la langue verte* (Paris: Marpon & Flammarion, 1883), 87.
4. Gustave-Paul Cluseret, *Mémoires du général Cluseret*, vol. II (Paris: Jules Levy, 1887); citations taken from 274-87.
5. Louis Rossel, *Mémoires, procès et correspondance* (Paris: J. J. Pauvert, 1960), 276.
6. Catulle Mendès, *Les 73 journées de la Commune* (Paris: E. Lachaud, 1871), 311.
7. Auguste Blanqui, *Instructions pour une prise d'armes* (Paris: Editions de la tête de feuilles, 1972), 61.
8. Friedrich Engels, introduction to Karl Marx and V. I. Lenin, *The Civil War in France: The Paris Commune* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 18.
9. Pierre Gascar, *Rimbaud et la Commune* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 66.
10. See Henri Lefebvre, *La Proclamation de la Commune* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).
11. See, especially, Louis Barron, *Sous le drapeau rouge* (Paris: Albert Savine), 83-87, for one of the best descriptions by an active Communard of the sense of daily life under the Commune.
12. For a description of *détournement*, see especially Guy-Ernest Debord and Gil J. Wolman, "Mode d'emploi du détournement," *Les lèvres nues*, no. 8 (May 1956); reprinted in Gil Wolman, *Résumé des chapitres précédents* (Paris: Editions Spiess, 1981), 46-53; English version in Ken Knabb (ed. and trans.), *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, Calif.: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 8-14.
13. *Bulletin Communal*, May 6, 1871, cited in Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (Devon: Newton Abbot, 1972), 284.
14. Gascar, *Rimbaud et la Commune*, 9.
15. Stewart Edwards (ed.), *The Communards of Paris, 1871*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), 9-10.
16. Félix Fénéon, "Arthur Rimbaud: *Les Illuminations*," in Joan Halperin (ed.), *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, vol. II (Geneva: Massot, 1970), 572.
17. Leo Bersani, "Rimbaud's Simplicity," in *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 247.
18. Edwards (ed.), *The Communards of Paris, 1871*, 10.
19. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 518.

Chapter 2

The Right to Laziness

The origin of the Commune dates back in effect to the time of Genesis, to the day when Cain killed his brother. It is envy that lies behind all those demands stuttered by the indolent [des paresseux] whose tools make them ashamed, and who in hatred of work prefer the chances of combat to the security of daily work.

Maxime du Camp

"Ideology" is perhaps the fact that each person does what he or she is "supposed to do." . . . Ideology is just the other name for work.

Jacques Rancière

I

In his essay "Le Chant des sirènes," Maurice Blanchot places Rimbaud's *Une Saison en enfer* within a curious constellation of texts, in the community of narratives he calls *récits*: the tale of Ulysses and the Sirens, for example, *Moby-Dick*, Nerval's *Aurélia*, *Nadja*. The constituent elements of the genre, or rather antigenre, *récits* are, at least initially, relatively straightforward; the *récit* is the narrative of a single episode: "something has happened, something which someone has experienced who tells about it afterwards."¹ I say antigenre because Blanchot defines the *récit* in opposition to the novel; the distinction he proposes