

Articulations of Anarchist Modernism: Putting Art to Work

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ABSTRACT

Carrie R. Matthews: Articulations of Anarchist Modernism: Putting Art to Work
(Under the direction of John McGowan and Eric Downing)

This dissertation connects literary modernism's treatment of time to the historical and theoretical framework of anarchism. I show that anarchism's identification of time as a political problem informs modernist experimentation with temporality and that we should look to literary texts' conceptualizations of time to understand the relations of modernist genres like the prose poem and avant-garde manifesto to political concerns. By situating the work of Charles Baudelaire, Gertrude Stein and Tristan Tzara in juxtaposition to André Breton's surrealism and in a historical context that has been largely obscured, I am able to delineate an anarchist modernist poetics. This anarchist modernism proposes a specific kind of work for the artwork that counters three conceptions of literary modernism: as uncritically embracing newness and novelty; as indicative of a division between art and life; and as concerned with the individual genius over and above collectives.

My project reads literary modernism's appropriation of the manifesto and development of the prose poem as formal experimentation yoked to inherently political sensibilities. As modernist genres, both the prose poem and manifesto look back to nineteenth-century Paris and a historical context of failed revolution in important ways. Yet while scholars routinely hear echoes of the 1848 *Communist Manifesto* in aesthetic manifestos' call for revolution, few discern the complementarity between the Baudelairean prose poem and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's anarchist analysis of 1848.

My work argues that as genres, prose poems and manifestos come apart at the seams, even bleeding into one another. Yet as two ideal types of literary modernism's attitude towards time, prose poems and manifestos offer a historically viable and theoretically useful way to clarify two very different politics of time, one of which-- the anarchist modernist retemporalization of form found in Baudelaire, Stein, and Tzara-- has not been widely explored. My contribution to this area of scholarship is to offer a counterpoint to neo-Marxist readings that privilege the genre of the manifesto, futurity, and international revolution through a perspective that prioritizes the prose poem, artworks that work *with* and *in* the present, and a transnational task of re-infusing temporality with difference.

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INTRODUCTION

Prose Poems' and Manifestos' Politics of Time

This study takes two assumptions for granted, one about politics, the other about art: that “all politics... centrally involve[s] struggles over the experience of time”¹ and that aesthetic endeavor can furnish us different experiences of time, can alter our temporality or time-sense. To a large degree, the time of modernism/modernity has been evaluated by literary critics and theorists as something to escape, to somehow get outside of, or to get on the right side of. As collective signifiers for a variety of artistic movements, the terms “modernism” and “avant-garde” use temporal categories to organize our perception of artworks during a particular (if contested) period. The choice of terms is symptomatic of a historical impasse, the question of whether moderns’ time-sense emphasized the hellish repetition of the new or imminent revolution. Yet how does one escape time, being stuck in the modern or constantly worried about being on the right side of it, as with the avant-garde?

Following the work of Peter Osborne, Andrew Benjamin, and David Cunningham, among others, I try to articulate another option within modernism, a project not of escape or revolution but of retemporalization, of an art that redispenses of time, altering our relations to it and within it. As Osborne and Benjamin point out, the “horizon of expectation” possible at a given time has a political valence, as does the doxical character of time during a period moment. Benjamin states starkly, with another Benjamin in mind, “This positioning of time [“the premise that historical time is inherently chronological and reciprocally that chronology

¹ Peter Osborne, *Politics of Time: Modernity and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995), 200.

is the temporality proper to the unfolding of history”] is in the service of one political position rather than another.”² My study grows out of an interest in the ways art might reshape our experience of time and specifically in how particular political sensibilities animated literary modernism’s formal innovations. What work can an artwork perform to alter a period’s temporality? In the case of mid-nineteenth-century Paris, and through transatlantic modernism at the end of two world wars, what temporalities did artists confront, and how, beyond withdrawal and attempted revolution, did they seek to engage and alter them?

I investigate texts and writers at the heart of even the narrowest of transatlantic canons to suggest that the politics of time at issue in their texts trouble common characterizations informing our critical apprehensions of the field(s) of modernism and the avant-garde. My readings of Baudelaire, Gertrude Stein, Dada, and Surrealism not only displace the long-problematic oppositions between new and old, individual genius and the urban masses, and aesthetic and political production, they demonstrate each pair’s conceptual or processual interrelation within texts. Stereotypes of modernist temporalities emphasize extremes, a rush to the new and revolution, or a hermetic retreat into aestheticism, or a futile longing for a lost past, Eliot’s fragments shored against ruins. Thus, in terms of literary form, modernist studies frequently coalesce around the avant-garde manifesto, the escapist pastiche (Pound) or pure formalism of lyric, often analyzing texts in conjunction with political turns to Marxism or fascism. These stereotypes elide much temporal complexity, the interpenetration of concerns about form, history, and experience, and give rise alternately to a murky continuum or overdrawn distinction between the realms of modernism and the avant-garde.

² Andrew Benjamin, *Style and Time* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006), x.

I argue that we can gain a clearer appreciation of the character of much modernist and avant-garde literary experimentation if we replace the foci of formal innovation, historical character, and/or everyday experience with their imbrication in a politics of time. In this view, genres such as the prose poem (with its oscillations of form, new juxtaposition of pre-existing genres, and engagement with readers in a dialectic of familiarity and alienation) engender a richer temporality than manifestos, pastiches, or pure lyric. Most significantly, we make these texts' politics of time more readily available for our own appropriation as well as identify a signal theoretical contribution of modernism and the avant-garde if we abandon the distinction between the two fields in favor of a political sensibility that bridges them: anarchism.

As a historical phenomenon, anarchism's origins in the 1840s antedate conventional periodizations of modernism and the avant-garde, and not without justification, the anarchist imaginary has been linked to nostalgia, for example to images of the medieval commune, not to "the new." Theoretically, one of anarchism's key departures from Marxism, "the other (French) socialism," is its insistence on grassroots, bottom-up action and disavowal of vanguardism. These anarchist modernist paradoxes actually clarify the politics of time I locate within key modernist texts by alluding to two important consequences: the questioning, loosening and even undermining of historical periodization, and a replacement of teleological trajectories (advanced by the avant-garde/vanguard) through a project of retemporalization. This retemporalization seeks future collective reinscription within a dynamic polity through the reactivation of unfilled past tasks and unrealized trajectories within a prolonged present duration of repetition. I follow David Cunningham in conceiving the avant-garde not as "a conventionally received art- [or literary-] historical category, but

rather as a general concept through which particular movements or works articulate themselves or come to be articulated in a way that is inseparable from more general questions concerning the nature of historical time (including the time of art and literary history).”³ Yet Bürger’s delineation of a historical avant-garde provides an important backdrop for my study, since part of my interest in conjoining anarchism and modernists’ exploration of temporality stems from a sense of a historical convergence, a false but productive repetition of these writers’ concerns and our own, a sense that “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”

This question about literary modernists’ strategies of temporal engagement matters because the modernism/modernity problem remains before us and more intractable than ever. Fredric Jameson provides one illustration of how we might conceive of this convergence or a present return of a historically modernist/avant-garde problematic in an argument for a social temporal problematic as a constitutive condition of contemporary (twenty-first century) art.⁴ Postmodern artists, he claims, are linked not by a “period style” but in their confrontation with an “end of temporality,” “a dramatic and alarming shrinkage of existential time and the reduction to a present that hardly qualifies as such any longer, given the virtual effacement of that past and future that can alone define a present in the first place” (708). In contrast, modernists provided a “comparatist perception of the two socioeconomic temporalities” of their experience (699). When the premodern is effaced and supplanted, we lose “the very sense of an alternate temporality.”

³ David Cunningham, “The Futures of Surrealism, Hegelianism, Romanticism, and the Avant-Garde,” *SubStance* 107, 34.2: 49. Also see Cunningham’s “Making an Example of Duchamp: history, theory, and the question of the avant-garde” in Dafydd Jones, ed., *Dada Culture: Critical Texts of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 254-279.

⁴ Fredric Jameson, “The End of Temporality,” *Critical Inquiry* 29.4 (Summer 2003), 695-718.

I look to modernist experimentation with form to resurrect possibilities of an alternate temporality. While some modernist movements fell prey to a “politics of *conflicting* temporalities,”⁵ as did surrealism, I contend that some modernist experimentation with form sought to create a different temporality. This experimentation involved more than critique of a historical experience of temporality or its retrospective diagnosis via an “after-image of praxis”: it attempted to intervene in the production of temporality itself. I read debates over the role of art, value of autonomous art, and relation of art to the political sphere as arguments about the time character proper to change.

Anarchism, Art, and Time

It has long been noted that a desired complicity in political and social change characterizes much art situated within modernist and the avant-garde taxonomies. I argue that we can trace at least one kind of complicity to the founding of anarchism with Proudhon and the advent of modernity with Baudelaire in nineteenth-century Paris.⁶ While some chronologies of anarchism begin with British “proto-anarchists” such as William Godwin or French forerunners Saint-Simon and Fourier, anarchism is first invoked in a positive sense by Proudhon in 1840 in *What is Property?*. Anarchism enters French history at a moment when industrial capitalism is rapidly becoming the norm (although belatedly, compared to England) and during which France is still grappling with the political consequences of 1789 and the juxtaposition of being in many ways relatively politically avant-garde and socio-

⁵ Cunningham, “The Futures of Surrealism,” 50.

⁶ In relation to political and social transformation in an anarchist context, it makes little sense to try to separate out the avant-garde from modernism. As I noted earlier, unlike Marxism anarchism did not place its faith in a vanguard, and Baudelaire recorded in *Les Fusées* his disdain for the notion of an avant-garde as a small group who goes first in order to force everyone else to conform and follow.

economically retarded. The history of anarchism, like that of Marxism, is the history of an attempt to redress the greatest perceived ills of modern life in an industrial, capitalist nation state.⁷

Anarchism, Marxism and, slightly later, fascism, each originated in important ways in nineteenth-century France. While anarchism and Marxism initially developed in tandem to address “the social problem” and crystallized around the failed revolutions of 1848, they differed even then in important ways. Anarchism, especially in the figures of Proudhon and Bakunin, critiqued Marx for underestimating the role of political coercion and according economics causal primacy for widespread inequity. Anarchists found Marxism insufficiently attentive to the individual; Richard Sonn, referencing a critique by Murray Bookchin, summarizes: “Marxism was devoted to objectifying and dominating the masses, anarchism to liberating the subjective individual” (109). Fascist ideology appeared in France as “a synthesis of organic nationalism [and an] antimaterialist revision of Marxism” whose conceptual framework was “nonconformist, avant-garde, and revolutionary in character.”⁸ Fascism’s “communal, anti-individualistic, and antirationalistic” character reflected “the great discovery Sorel made: The masses need myths in order to go forward. It is sentiments, images and symbols that hurl individuals into action, not reasonings” (28).

⁷ As historian David Berry explains, “Anarchism first appeared in France as a distinct ideology in a period characterized by the development of industrial capitalism. From 1815 on, and especially after the July revolution of 1830, the new industrial technology and the free market economy began to establish themselves. The results were rapid urbanization and immigration into the towns from the countryside, social dislocation, and the birth of a factory proletariat, the gradual decline of the artisanat. It was amongst the latter, during the years after 1830, that the origins of a working-class consciousness can be located.” David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917-1945* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), 10. See also John Ehrenberg, *Proudhon and His Age* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996); and Richard D. Sonn, *Anarchism* (New York: Tawnyne, 1992).

⁸ See Ze’ev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*. Trans. David Maisel (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1994), 4, 6.

I want to claim two chief points of difference with respect to both Marxism and fascism: (1) anarchism critiques each one's regard for individuals, Marxism as insufficiently attentive to the individual, failing to differentiate sufficiently within the mass, and centralizing, statist in its incarnations so far; and fascism as anti-individualist and nationalist; and (2) anarchism is more critical of revolution, or at least conceives of revolution differently, in terms of transformation and embodiment, becoming, not temporally-contracted, teleological change; non-directive.⁹

A chief characteristic separating anarchism from Marxism is a suspicion of fixed categories and modes of exclusion, of borders, both literal (as in the nation state) and figurative. Unlike communism, at least in its expression through states up to our present moment, anarchism avoids centralization, either in a state government or imagined international collective, focusing instead on individual and local autonomy with transnational and federalist linkages. And in lieu of advocating an expected unfolding of a particular historical trajectory, anarchists eschew grand teleological visions: they advocate situated practice in the here and now over and under future ends. But this thumbnail typology misses the many points at which anarchism and Marxism, if not statist communism, converge historically and practically. For example, as Richard Sonn observes in analyzing May of '68 in Paris, "If the difference between Marxists and anarchists was that the former sought freedom through equality and the latter sought equality through freedom, then this neo-Marxism of the New Left seemed closer to the latter. For all of the dispossessed and

⁹ One could argue that some anarchists' recourse to violence, especially in advocating 'propaganda by the deed' in the late nineteenth-century, falls on the side of violent revolution. I don't address this, and my basic arguments for skipping over it are that it was always a minoritarian strain within anarchism and that it does not characterize the anarchist modernism I seek to delineate.

alienated groups demanding social change, the clarion call was “Freedom now!”¹⁰

Anarchism has been attracted to persons, concepts and practices that upset categorization, from the lumpenproletariat to, I contend, the prose poem, and vice versa. Though given to moral justification and an adherent to certain positions perceived as exceptionally conservative or reactionary now and during his own time,¹¹ Proudhon affirms a commitment to open-ended practice and debate over doctrine, famously writing in a letter to Marx that they must at all costs not replace religion with their own dogma and should debate unendingly any claim they are tempted to adopt as belief. I read Proudhon as a figure who advocates radical change but who is also reluctant to promote the absolute rupture of revolution and claims for a utopia.

Proudhon’s overarching aim is to reinstate (in the absence of a state) society, conceived from his position as a member of the constantly imperiled petit bourgeois class, as a collective of freely associating small-property owners. In Proudhon’s assessment the revolution of 1848 sought to end “by and through” democracy “a monstrous abnormality,” the state’s usurpation of the country or nation. The constellation of terms Proudhon invokes throughout his promotion of anarchy in the aftermath of 1848—either positively, as in “society” and “democracy,” or critically, as in “simplification” and “centralization”—promotes a pluralism Proudhon’s anarchism sought to secure in practice even as Proudhon himself envisioned a very particular kind of society. Arguably, Proudhon’s espousal of

¹⁰ Sonn, *Anarchism*, 105.

¹¹ Proudhon’s dedication to a restrictive notion of family and reactionary attitudes towards women are well-documented. See, for example, John Ehrenberg’s intellectual biography *Proudhon and His Age* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996).

anarchism safeguards against the hegemony of a single vision for a given society's character by substituting continuous, inclusive debate for commitment to any specific ends.¹²

Anarchism can be defined loosely as an attitude towards power and ethos of practice. Because anarchism is generally hostile to theoretical orthodoxy and centralization, much of its theoretical content is subsumed by specific and variable instances of practice. As Richard Sonn generalizes, anarchism is “more an attitude toward power, a way of conducting one's daily life, than... an application of theory.”¹³ This attitude has generally translated into a preference for specific embodiment over representation, valorizing the individual person, particular object, and singular event, situated (but not frozen!) in their spatio-temporal contexts, over their appropriation into categories, typologies, or other groupings that emphasize similarity and conformity and facilitate hierarchy. Anarchism seeks to preserve instantiations of difference in fields of relation free of domination. It engages complexity, in all its messiness, and warns against the simplifications and substitutions of abstraction.

Anarchism and art join forces in anarchist modernism through a desire for embodiment that temporalizes form. The works of art I discuss in chapters one, two and three perform anarchist revolution, which, unlike most conceptualizations of revolution, is not temporally contracted, teleological or inherently violent. In characterizing anarchism by way of contrast to Marxism, David Graeber asserts: “Marxism has tended to be a theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy,” while “Anarchism has tended to be an

¹² Daniel Guérin locates an overlapping diversity of theoretical frameworks and practical applications in our inheritance from Proudhon, crediting him as “the father of ‘scientific socialism,’ of socialist political economy and of modern sociology, the father of anarchism, of mutualism, of revolutionary syndicalism, of federalism and of that particular form of collectivism that has recaptured a fresh relevance today as ‘self-management.’” Richard Sonn notes anarchism's internal diversity throughout its history “among advocates of individualist, mutualist, communist, and syndicalist approaches.” See Daniel Guérin, *No Gods No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Trans. Paul Sharkey, Oakland, California: AK Press, 2005), 39 and Sonn, *Anarchism*, 45.

¹³ Sonn, *Anarchism*, 46.

ethical discourse about revolutionary practice.”¹⁴ Graeber asserts that anarchism needs “what might be called Low Theory: a way of grappling with those real, immediate questions that emerge from a transformative project” (9), and that such a theory would need to include two assumptions, that it would be both feasible and desirable to create a world without institutions “like the state, capitalism, racism and male dominance” and that the creation of such a world would not involve leadership by some vanguard (11).¹⁵ Given these assumptions, anarchism needs a sort of ‘High Practice’ at least as much as a ‘Low Theory,’ a means of imagining this better world and of provoking movement towards it without giving over leadership to a particular group. This is where art comes in.

Anarchism requires a process in accordance with its aspirations to overturn hierarchy, inequity and other forms of domination, a means of embodying unending, peaceful revolution: literally, a way of getting people to “live the revolution.” As Cornelius Castoriadis has argued, a society without domination demands a polis that recognizes the interdependence of individual liberty and collective freedom. Castoriadis envisions such a polis occurring through a process of “social self-institution” in which individuals “institute” themselves into a collectivity in which each participates equally and which, collectively, has the freedom to determine its own character. Such a project necessitates what Paul Patton, assessing Deleuze’s political thought, terms “critical freedom,” which is attendant on “the conditions of change or transformation in the subject,” the “freedom to transgress limits of what one is presently capable of being or doing” *and* which maintains “indifference to the individual or collective nature of the subject” (83). Art provokes this critical freedom.

¹⁴ David Graeber. *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 9, 11.

Art does this in a particular way. It is not a matter of Peter Bürger's avant-garde challenging "the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends," nor, exactly, "the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy." It is a question, rather, of what Krzysztof Ziarek calls "forcework," of approaching art not in terms of its formal qualities or as commodity (though it remains that), but of encountering artworks non-aesthetically, so as to allow them to work. In *The Force of Art*, Ziarek characterizes avant-garde art as performing a particular kind of transformative work, "forcework."¹⁶ In Ziarek's conception an artwork functions as a force field that strips social relations of power and redeploys them in a different modality, freeing them "into a becoming, which is apart from the habitual relations of representation, action, and knowledge that form and regulate social praxis" (12). Art's force field of non-power opens up a different kind of relationality, orienting forces towards freedom rather than subordinating them to power, such that "art can be said to instantiate not only an alternative politics but an alternative *to* politics" (14). Yet art's efficacy as an alternative depends on "a specific kind of reception, when the artwork is encountered as a work, that is, nonaesthetically" (28). And to impact life and resist co-optation by power, art requires "a continuous reactivation of the transformative work," an "ongoing reactivation [that] requires radical democratic politics" (13). Art needs a kind of politics that will allow it to perform a political alternative, a politics without form— an anarchism; anarchism needs a means of discovering alternative modes of collective existence apart from domination, which art provides.

¹⁶ Krzysztof Ziarek, *The Force of Art* (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2004). Subsequent parenthetical references are to this text. I rely on Ziarek's conception of forcework and description of its effects but, once again, would be more careful in attributing it exclusively to works labeled 'avant-garde,' since the term implies a vanguard, and I argue that anarchism's disavowal of a vanguard is one reason art's forcework is so important to anarchism's aims. See n. 6 above.

Ziarek describes forcework in terms that make it of direct interest to anarchism, in relation to societal change, freedom and practice. Ziarek explains,

Forcework could be called a power-free praxis if this were not an oxymoron. Among avant-garde artworks, Stein's texts... elicit this kind of "praxis," where textuality, working against linguistic, literary, and cultural conventions, reformulates the mode of relationality so as to give a different texture to "experience," one fundamentally at odds with the constitution of reality dictated by the power-oriented social sphere. (148)

The ways in which Stein's writing breaks with conventions of meaning and asks its audience to alter their habits of reading, reconceive grammar and conceptualize reality in terms foreign to their experiences of it, come together as a kind of forcework that reorients readers to the world, changing their perceptions of the interconnectedness that constitutes a given reality. Ziarek insists: "In recoiling from action, artworks not only negate reality but also instantiate, as demonstrated by Dada art, Gertrude Stein's works, or Wodiczko's vehicles and instruments, forcework as an alternative to praxis" (147). Forcework posits "a redistribution of forces beyond production," a "possibility of reassigning the momentum of relations, of releasing forces from the formative sway of power" (197). In reference to what I label anarchist modernism rather than a specific historical avant-garde or broader conceptual avant-garde, forcework produces a modality for reinscribing time-sense, retemporalizing.

Exemplum: The Structure of Possibility

The first quatrain of an Emily Dickinson poem provides an apt point of departure for broaching this study's conceptual center, a theorization of the modernist prose poem. The speaker opens the descriptive claim that constitutes the poem:

I dwell in Possibility--
A fairer House than Prose--

More numerous of Windows--
Superior--for Doors—

Dickinson conceives of “Possibility” and “Prose” architecturally, as houses one inhabits. The poem’s speaker justifies her judgment of Possibility as “A fairer House than Prose” by evoking both aesthetic qualities—the openness of its architecture, with “Gambrels¹⁷ of the Sky” (line 8) as Possibility’s roof—and functionality: the structure of Possibility allows the speaker the “Occupation” of “spreading wide... [her] narrow Hands /To gather Paradise” (lines 11-12). Form and function interpenetrate, as the “numerous” doors and windows facilitate the comings and goings of “the fairest” visitors (line 9) and the roof’s opening onto the sky permits the occupant to extend her arms toward the heavens and Paradise.

Dickinson’s poem-claims surprises in the entities she compares and in the concrete character of her comparison of these abstract categories. We would expect a privileging of ‘Possibility’ over ‘Necessity,’ ‘Potentiality,’ or ‘Impossibility,’ or a slighting of ‘Prose’ in favor of ‘Poetry,’ especially in a comparison articulated in a poem. On what grounds does it make sense to oppose Possibility and Prose? The poem answers “architecture,” in its structural, aesthetic, and functional aspects, and specifically “as houses.” Through Dickinson’s positive evocation of the house of Possibility, we infer the less desirable architecture of Prose. By implication, the house of Prose is less open, possesses fewer windows and doors and perhaps a lower, less ethereal roof, and thus, by inference, does not allow the same functionality as Possibility, a reaching out “To gather paradise.” In the context of the traditional opposition between prose and poetry, this house of prose is shocking. It is poetry, not prose, that imposes architectural constraints of stanzaic structure,

¹⁷ The *OED* defines the now-obsolete “gambrel” or “cambrel” variously as “a bent piece of wood or iron” on which butchers hung animal carcasses or people hung clothes, or as the joint in the upper part of a horse’s hind leg. A gambrel roof is “a curved or hipped roof, so called from its resemblance to the shape of a horse’s hind-leg.”

meter and rhyme. The concreteness of Dickinson's architectural comparison begs the question "Where does this house, which is 'fairer' than prose and thus not prose, yet which is too open to be poetry, exist?"

I argue that the most sensible answer to this question is the prose poem, and that both the terms of Dickinson's comparison—Possibility and Prose—and its architectural grounds furnish us with an important conceptual framework for approaching the modernist prose poem. As the fairer house in question, the prose poem possesses both the architectural form and functionality Dickinson ascribes to Possibility. Architecturally, the prose poem is constructed from already-given materials, the conventions of prose and poetry, and as a hybrid and variable form offers numerous means of entry and egress, many windows and doors. Its inclusive nature (the freedom it offers to borrow from a grab-bag of forms and devices) invites "the fairest" visitors from numerous realms: narratives, fables, lyric, even drama. Functionally, as a place in which to dwell, the prose poem's principal of open selection and combination promotes agency, the ability to "spread...wide... [one's] narrow Hands" and "gather" from a cornucopia of elements as one wishes.

Just as the speaker of Dickinson's poem "gather[s] Paradise," the prose poem, in many readings, takes on a utopian function. Jonathan Monroe describes the prose poem as "a critical, self-critical, utopian genre, a genre that tests the limits of genre," and Michel Beaujour, borrowing from Mary Douglas's conception of dirt's system-revealing function, conceives of prose poems as a kind of dirt that affords an opportunity to study and re-evaluate the system of genres, perhaps to re-think and renew the system.¹⁸ Beaujour writes

¹⁸ See Jonathan Monroe, *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 16; and Michel Beaujour, "Short Epiphanies: Two Approaches to the French Prose Poem," in Caws and Riffaterre, *The Prose Poem in France*.

grandly, “Anomalous and ambiguous as it is, the prose poem is the chosen ground for assertions concerning the supralinguistic, metatextual, and ontological status of poetic language: a fantasy, perhaps, of poetry as one might wish it to be.”¹⁹ Michel Delville labels the prose poem “a self-consciously deviant form,” and Margueritte Murphy and Richard Terdiman both highlight the prose poem’s actual or potential subversive nature.²⁰

While appreciative of the prose poem’s capacity for critique and subversion, I make two somewhat different claims about its chief merits: that its most salient characteristics as a modernist literary genre are its rejection of utopia in favor of possibility and its social cultivation of difference. As a house named Possibility, the prose poem is a place in which to dwell. Its temporality is that of the present in process and in context, not a future (utopic) vision. The structure of possibility is one of manifestation, one that considers courses of action in view from the vantage point of the present, distinguishing it from potentiality, which allows for the hidden, the latent. And as Dickinson’s house of Possibility facilitates its inhabitant’s action of gathering her paradise, the prose poem augments individual or singular agency. As Caws notes, “Its defining characteristic is its own self-definition. Having no necessary exterior framework, no meter or essential form, it must organize itself from within.”²¹ The prose poem’s emphasis on self-determination in the present promotes difference—the instance of each prose poem’s unfolding— within a specifically social

¹⁹ Beaujour, “Short Epiphanies,” 51.

²⁰ Michel Delville, *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1998), 9; see Margueritte S. Murphy, *A Tradition of Subversion: The Prose Poem in English from Wilde to Ashbery* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); and Richard Terdiman, *Discourse / Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1985).

²¹ Mary Ann Caws, “The Self-Defining Prose Poem: On Its Edge,” in Caws and Riffaterre, *The Prose Poem in France*, 181.

context. I read the prose poem as a refusal of genre and simultaneous commitment to working within ‘the system’ or existence of genre, if not working within a genre. As such, the prose poem performs a kind of social work, enacting a dialectic between individual agency and collective norms that enriches both and keeps both in motion

Anarchist Embodiment: Prose Poems and Manifestos as Ideal Types

One can multiply endlessly the variety of approaches to the anarchist vision of a liberated society, but all were born of the desire to embody the principles of revolution rather than either theorizing or endlessly plotting one. In this sense anarchists were practical revolutionaries, not chiliasts awaiting the judgment day. On the other hand, their intense desire to ‘live the revolution’ dispersed their energies and, arguably, made it less likely that the revolution would ever come. (Sonn, *Anarchism*, 62).²²

I am writing this manifesto to show that you can do contrary actions together, in one single fresh breath; I am against action, for continual contradiction, for affirmation also, I am neither for nor against and I don’t explain because I hate common sense. (Tristan Tzara, *Dada Manifesto* 1918)

Anarchist modernist texts focus not just on formal innovation or novelty for the sake of novelty but on performing a certain kind of politically useful, radical work by constructing a politics of time. Yet formal innovation and the obsession with novelty shape (literally) and inflect the texts that perform this revolutionary work. Attention to literary form provides one useful way to investigate ties between form and concepts of the new, on the one hand, and literary texts’ contribution to anarchist alteration, on the other.

Broaching form through considerations of genre in the work of Baudelaire and Stein shows the importance of “the modality of relating” to the work their texts accomplish. As

²² Critiques of anarchists’ emphasis on revolution through embodiment or enactment may stem from concerns about a lack of instrumentality, but they seem to rely on the illogical stance that change (in practice) does not in fact equal change unless it is mediated by law or a political entity. In this respect liberals, with their focus on rights, join Marxists. Hobsbawm includes anarchists among his *Primitive Rebels*, calling them “pre-political.”

Ziarek points out, “Art’s transformation works not on the level of objects, people, or things but in terms of the modality of relating, which, in the forms of perception, knowledge, acting, or valuing, determines the connective tissue of what we experience as reality” (28).

“Modality” comes from *modalité*, which enters the French lexicon in terms of music—as “making use of a particular mode or modes, especially one other than the modern major or minor”— in 1840, the year Proudhon first articulated anarchism positively, a decade and a half before Baudelaire would undertake the prose poems as a way to make writing accord with “the music of modern life.”²³ Modality’s valences in terms of logic, sense perception and psychology, medicine, music, and politics suggest something of the variety of possible alternatives of relation art might make possible.²⁴

The importance of this work the prose poem performs becomes clear when we turn to its historical and literary historical context. Scholars generally attribute the origin of the prose poem to Aloysius Bertrand, who published a volume of prose poems, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, in 1842. Bertrand’s collection did not attract a wide audience, and the more significant instantiation of the prose poem as a modernist genre occurs in the 1850s and 60s, with Baudelaire’s adoption of the form. Baudelaire began the prose poems collected in *Le Spleen de Paris*, or *Petits poèmes en prose*, in 1855, two years before the publication of the more famous *Les Fleurs du mal*, and the volume was published posthumously in 1869. Although the Symbolists, and Mallarmé in particular, wrote numerous prose poems, Baudelaire

²³ Ziarek does a nice reading of an Amiri Baraka poem in which, he argues, rhythm becomes the modality of relating, the other to modalities of relation determined by power. PP #S

²⁴ *OED* definitions of modality include: in the field of logic, “the property by which a proposition is qualified as possible, impossible, necessary, or contingent”; in psychology, “a faculty or sense, such as sight, hearing, etc.; a category of sense perception” and “an attribute or trait of personality; a way of behaving”; in medicine, “a symptom, procedure, or other factor which aids diagnosis” and “any more or less distinctive method or technique used in the treatment of a specific condition”; and, in politics and diplomacy, “a procedure or method; a means for the attainment of a desired end.”

arguably provides the most important precedent for modernist and avant-garde prose poems and offers a particularly interesting case study of prose poems as literary workhorses, as attempts of aesthetic endeavor to engage and alter social conditions by focusing on the possibilities for individual agency. Murphy makes a connection between Baudelaire's prose poems and those of American Modernists, noting,

the American avant-garde of the twentieth century felt impelled to reject the *fin-de-siècle* version of the genre, with its self-evident detachment from 'life', and reintroduce the 'prose of the world,' the idiolects of everyday life, as a part of its aesthetic, [...] This 'new' aesthetic or program—or revived, for it was present from the start in Baudelaire—was 'successful' in reinfusing the energy of living language into the prose poem.²⁵

As Richard Terdiman notes in his investigation of the prose poem in nineteenth-century France in relation to symbolic resistance, the socio-critical nature of the prose poem emerges much more perceptibly in Baudelaire's work than in that of the Symbolists. Terdiman notes that "tensions were more evident in the earlier incarnations of the prose poem, particularly in Baudelaire. There they are often overtly represented as the stresses within the social formation."²⁶ Murphy's emphasis on "living language" and Terdiman's attention to the context of social cleavage allude to the social problem and the historical context of 1848 and failed revolution that, I argue, animate the prose poem as a modernist genre.

I now turn to the simultaneous historical development of the genre of the aesthetic manifesto. If the prose poem emerges as a novel genre in its conjoining of two generic categories frequently treated as oppositional, the modernist manifesto engages issues of novelty and form doubly, first by injecting new content into an old form and secondly by

²⁵ Murphy, *A Tradition of Subversion*, 94

²⁶ Terdiman, *Discourse / Counter-Discourse*, 314.

conjoining that form with another, the prose poem.²⁷ Like the prose poem, the modernist manifesto emerges in Paris, first as prototype, with the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, and secondly as type, with Marinetti's publication of the founding manifesto of Futurism in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* in 1909.²⁸ Marx and Engels completed the foundational (for the modernists) *Communist Manifesto* in Belgium in 1848 after becoming acquainted in Paris, where Marx lived from 1843 until the French expelled him in 1845, on the eve of the revolutions. Unlike the prose poem, the manifesto screams its novelty, since the manifesto is an assertive, 'strident' genre, but like the prose poem, the manifesto also embodies, "embodying rather than explicating the aesthetic gesture of the new—even while exploding the very category of the aesthetic" (Kolocotroni xix). Janet Lyon calls the aesthetic manifesto "a singularly overdetermined form," "linking aesthetic practice with political militancy, modern rupture with revolutionary history, and bourgeois critique with aesthetic abstraction." And finally, Martin Puchner characterizes Marinetti's transformation of the political manifesto into an avant-garde aesthetic manifesto in terms of performativity caving to theatricality. Puchner explains: "The distinction between performativity and theatricality can be phrased in terms of means and end: the socialist manifesto has tended toward seeing itself as an instrument, as a means to an end, whereas the avant-garde manifesto had tended toward seeing the manifesto as an end in itself."²⁹

²⁷ May Ann Caws calls modernist and avant-garde manifestos prose poems. I think that some are and some aren't.

²⁸ Marx and Engels completed the *Communist Manifesto* in Belgium, but only because of Marx's expulsion from France. Marx and Engels became acquainted in Paris on the eve of the revolutions, and Marx was strongly influenced by the French socialists he met there, including Proudhon, so it doesn't seem unreasonable to me to approach the manifesto as a product of nineteenth-century Paris in significant ways.

²⁹ See Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 5; and Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 261.

In adopting the genre of the manifesto, art asks to be encountered as an event, as Ziarek argues art needs to be encountered to transform. Ziarek writes: “Since art works in the specific sense of being an act, an event of transformation, it should be thought of in a verbal fashion... as a happening, reactivated each time differently in its reception, rather than being seen as an object of the aesthetic and cognitive gaze” (28). As a manifesto, art asks to be taken as a happening, though often impatiently, preferring to usher in a real (or the actual) revolution.

In her history of the genre, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*, Janet Lyon links the form to post-Enlightenment, rationalist discourse and universalist notions of the subject. Lyon claims: "the manifesto is the form that exposes the broken promises of modernity: if modern democratic forms claim to honor the sovereignty of universal political subjecthood, the manifesto is a testimony to the partiality of that claim."³⁰ In Lyon's conception, the manifesto operates in paradoxical fashion, both reifying and critiquing modernist claims to universal political subjecthood. She attributes three generic conventions or "argumentative gestures" to the manifesto: (1) a concise, teleological encapsulation of history leading up to the current state in which the manifesto attempts to intervene; (2) a litany of complaints or stipulations that characterize a fight between oppressed (the movement behind the manifesto) and oppressive (the status quo the manifesto challenges) agents; and (3): rhetoric that calls out, directly challenges an oppressor, and impels the audience to action.³¹ Unlike the prose poem, the manifesto lends itself to more formulaic conventions. It constructs the universe in “you’re with us or against us” binaries and dodges

³⁰ Lyon, *Manifestoes*, 3.

³¹ *Ibid*, 14.

fine-grained analysis. More often than not, a revolutionary future orients its time-sense. It is distinctly not an architecture in which one can dwell, not a House of Possibility.

While the most interesting generic convention of the prose poem involves calling genre and generic conventions into question, the manifesto's most significant convention appears as its own self-assertion in a call to rise up against the (wrongful) status quo. As Caws notes, manifestos assert themselves as new and oppositional, always against conventional wisdom. And yet Caws also declares confidently, "The manifesto, at its height, is a poem in heightened prose," a claim bolstered by Johanna Vondeling's observation that some manifestos appeared in the form of prose poems, as well as in the introduction to collected texts of Modernist manifestos.³² Marjorie Perloff locates a prose poem at the heart of the foundational manifesto for modernism and the avant-garde, observing "Indeed, it is the curiously mixed rhetoric of the Communist Manifesto, its preamble itself something of a prose poem, that paved the way for the grafting of the poetic onto the political discourse that we find in Futurist, and later in Dada and Surrealist, manifesto."³³ No matter. As modernist genres, prose poems and manifestos may overlap, fall apart at the seams, or circulate within one another. The interest of this study is to use them as heuristics to think about two distinctly different politics of time instantiated in the formation and deformation of literary modernist works of art.

³² Johanna E. Vondeling, "The Manifest Professional: Manifestos and Modernist Legitimation." *College Literature* 27, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 127-45; Mary Ann Caws, *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln, Nebraska and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), xxvii.

³³ Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment : Avant-garde, Avant guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 82.

CHAPTER ONE

Baudelaire's Prose Poems: From Artwork to Putting Art to Work

For anarchist modernism and, arguably, modernism more generally, *Le Spleen de Paris*, not *Les Fleurs du mal*, constitutes Baudelaire's signal poetic text. Formal innovation unfolds almost exclusively in the prose poems, whose dynamism contrasts starkly with the petrified lyric of the profane *Fleurs*. *Le Spleen de Paris* reunites the now archaic lyric poet with his own contemporaries, reconnecting him to the social world, albeit it critically. This chapter approaches Baudelaire's prose poems as doubly volatile forms, as the means through which the grounded albatross-poet of the *Fleurs du mal* learns to walk despite his heavy wings and perhaps re-attains the capacity to take flight, even in the unpoetical world of Haussmann's Paris; and as themselves intentionally unstable, shifting entities, changeable deformations.

Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* fame has helped construct him for literary posterity in the figure of a rebel aesthete, concerned with drugs, prostitutes, dream-states, evil and ennui. Baudelaire can be read elegiacally, as a diarist of temporal and spatial dislocation, perhaps most famously in the allegory Benjamin analyzes in "Le Cygne." Most frequently, he is taught as the *poète maudit* who fits lascivious content to classical alexandrines, or as the perpetual dandy. In *Les Fleurs du mal*, disjuncture manifests itself thematically, for example in the figures of the prostitute and lesbian, whose existence marks discrepancies between traditional women's roles and those produced by the increasing commodification of Parisian society, and in the figure of the poet himself, the misanthropic *flâneur* who loathes society

but loves crowds. The *Fleurs du mal* is the text to which Benjamin refers in claiming for Baudelaire the status of the last widely-read lyrical poet. Benjamin captures the trace of loss in the volume's success: it brings poetry to *cliché*.³⁴

Yet Baudelaire continued to write after 1857, and the prose poems offer a window onto a much less aestheticized Baudelaire, a poet who in many ways appears to question the isolation of the aesthetic from the rest of life. We see this in the poet's preoccupation with material circumstances, in the connections he draws between the poet and the poor, and in his yoking together of contemplation and violence. Artistic and philosophical thought, which cannot be easily assigned a monetary value, and corporeality, usually depicted through the suffering of those at the bottom of the economic strata, appear time and time again in the prose poems as the suppressed remainders of means-end rationality and the exchange value economy. Most notably, the prose poems question the formation of an aesthetic realm apart from the rest of life by depicting moments of moral judgment artistically apprehended. Baudelaire provides evidence that moral evaluation requires the participation of artistic assessment: in the prose poems, art explicitly undertakes a kind of social work.

It is *this* Baudelairean modernity that re-purposes the artwork by reformulating it in relation to modernist temporality. The chasm between lowbrow content and high art form in the *Fleurs du mal* announces a point of transition, as Benjamin puts it, a historical moment in which the traditional verse forms no longer seem appropriate due to a change in the structure of experience. In *Le Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire negotiates this transition aesthetically. As one study of the prose poems notes, "Baudelaire's poetry in verse represents, through its inability to assume the real world and through its self-conscious references to itself, a form

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 155-200.

become self-reflexive to the point of sterility... by smashing the form of verse, Baudelaire liberates his voice and his vision so that poetry can be born once again in prose.”³⁵

I think that we can best make sense of this rebirth of poetry in prose by reading it in terms of a specifically modernist problematic. The problematic, conceived generally, is simply that at the center of the modernism/modernity conundrum, the double problem of time as the rapid pace of economic, social and political change in the transatlantic metropolis, and of temporality as such. The suddenness with which traditional lyric became irrelevant indicated both a massive cultural shift and a reconfiguration within temporality most apparent in the speed at which commodification, industrialization and urbanization rendered persons, practices, and objects outmoded. The variety of novelty generated by an increasingly short shelf-life produces an allure of difference undercut by the mandate to move on to the next vogue, such that novelty in fact marks a failure to generate genuine change, perpetuating “difference within variety rather than difference as a founding interruption.”³⁶

More specifically and contestably, I argue that we can read this temporal problematic in terms of a political failure, France’s failure to instantiate the republican promise of 1789, a pledge of political inclusion in which each (male) citizen would be incorporated into the polis in a collective embodiment of the nation. We might read this incapacity of France—and perhaps of the modern nation state as a political form-- in Bergsonian terms as an inability to engage temporal multiplicity, or through a poststructuralist lens that focuses on a failure to

³⁵ Kathryn Sinclair Oliver, “Through a Glass, Darkly: Baudelaire's Break from 'Les Fleurs du mal' to 'Les Petits poemes en prose'” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1994), 13.

³⁶ Andrew Benjamin, *Style and Time: Essays on the Politics of Appearance* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006), xvi.

recognize and grapple with difference. I will begin more simply, offering a historical reading of this problem through the shared concerns of Baudelaire and Proudhon in the 1840s and '50s, a desire to preserve the individual (artist or petit bourgeois) from the tyranny of monarchy above and looming masses below.

I. Converging Diagnoses: Baudelaire and Proudhon on the Failures of 1848

The work Baudelaire's prose poems undertake is informed by an understanding of power that links its character to the composition of its wielding. This understanding grows out of a particular reading of the social problem in mid-nineteenth-century France and the failures of the revolutions of 1848, and it reflects the same concern Baudelaire's work evinces for the threat masses pose to the cultivated individual. Because political change far outpaced the economic transition to industrial capitalism in France, its history offers a clear view of how the effects of the formation of the mass as a political entity, first, and then as an economic one, could produce analogically an understanding of the social problem in terms of a theory linking the character of power to configurations of people. As historian David Berry notes, "For Proudhon and the mutualists, the lessons of the workers' uprisings of 1830 and 1848 were that the powers of the state were merely another aspect of the powers of capital, and both were to be resisted equally strongly."³⁷ Since the important difference between the Proudhonian-anarchist reading of the social problem and the Marxist-socialist reading is on the role of political coercion, I focus on the political sphere here.

One of the first clear articulations of this reading of history appears in Proudhon's *La Révolution sociale démontrée par le coup d'état du 2 décembre*, published in Paris in 1852.

³⁷David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917-1945* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), 10.

Proudhon sees the French revolution as initiating a transferal of sovereignty from monarch to the people themselves, and he distinguishes between the country, the territory of shared abode [*le pays*] and the state [*l'état*], asserting that *France* has not had *even five years* of existence during the sixty-four years since the revolution. Proudhon sees a return to centralization as an interruption of the project 1789 was to have set in motion, the self-institution of French citizens. Thus the expulsion of the Girondins in 1793 and commencement of the Terror reversed the brief evolution towards freedom in which France was constituted by means of a dispersal of monarchical power across its (male) citizenry. Proudhon explains: "After May 31, the relation is reversed: power, as under the kings, subordinates the country; the nation is now nothing but an integral part of the state; the container is included in the content."³⁸ In Proudhon's reading France devolves from a self-instituting collective of people in a particular territory to an empty form, a practical conceptual tool to concentrate power in the state. This move is made possible by a ceding of power to a centralized, representative government, to which many Frenchmen, not yet having developed into self-sovereign individuals, assent. Proudhon reads in the centralization of the Jacobins a "popular instinct, more easily seized by the simple notion of power than by the complicated idea of the social contract."³⁹ Insufficiently instituted in the body politic of France as individuals, Frenchmen reconstitute a political mass.

This analysis of France's political history allows Proudhon to come to specific conclusions about the failure of 1848 and the nature of the social problem. One reason 1848

³⁸ "Après le 31 mai, le rapport est interverti: le pouvoir, comme sous les rois, se subordonne le pays; la nation n'est plus qu'une partie intégrante de l'état; le contenant est compris dans le contenu." All translations in this chapter are my own unless otherwise indicated. P[ierre] J[oseph]. Proudhon, *La Révolution sociale démontree par le coup d'état du 2 décembre* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1852), 34.

³⁹ Proudhon writes: "On reconnaît, dans la centralisation préconisée par les Jacobins, l'instinct populaire, plus facilement saisi de la notion simple du pouvoir que l'idée compliquée du contrat sociale." Ibid.

failed, Proudhon speculates, is because it should not properly have been a revolution but an undertaking to “improve” circumstances.⁴⁰ Revolutions, he declares, are a matter of negation, and the aim of 1848 was not to negate the project fought for in 1789 but to return to it, to recognize that France had not fulfilled this project, had in fact gotten quite off course.

Proudhon offers a view of 1848 as concerned with securing what had been won theoretically and formally in 1789; thus 1848 may have required a process of reform, not negation. 1848 could not but fail as a revolution because it did not aim to overturn political precedent.

Rather, 1848 aimed to re-integrate French individuals into the nation. Proudhon explains the problem:

All the strength of this nation, abstraction made of territory and of those living on it, those who constitute its importance as a political organ and function in humanity, then comes uniquely from its governmental and bourgeois feudal system. The people, the servile mass, exploited but not organized, are without political value. Their role is, more or less, that which slavery played for the ancients.⁴¹

The “abstraction” of the nation and the absorption of so many French individuals into “the servile mass” create not just an imbalance of power but determine the *kinds* of power that may exist. Those privileged to exist apart from the mass retain the creative and generative power available to individuals; those constituted in the mass seemingly possess only instinctual or destructive power; and those cast out from or resistant to the mass possess creative or generative power whose exercise is severely constrained by the other two

⁴⁰ Proudhon uses the verb *améliorer*, asking of the goals of February, 1848: “Y avait-il donc pour nous matière à négation, en février ? restait-il quelque chose à abolir, ou bien n’avions-nous qu’à améliorer ?” [And was it the case of there being something for us to negate, in February ? was there something remaining for us to abolish, or was it really a matter of improvement?] Ibid, 18.

⁴¹ “Toute la force de cette nation, abstraction faite du territoire et des habitants, ce qui constitue son importance comme organe politique et fonction dans l’humanité, lui vient donc uniquement de sa féodalité gouvernementale et bourgeoise. Le peuple, la masse servile, exploitée mais non organisée, est sans valeur politique. Son rôle est, à peu de chose près, celui de l’esclavage chez les anciens.” Ibid, 23.

groups.⁴² In Proudhon's judgment, the answer to the social question—what should have been properly the project of 1848—was to return to the project of 1789, to instantiating a country embodied in individuals, not representation of the mass.

Proudhon thus reads 1848 in France as a pro forma revolution standing in for a long-term movement away from political representation and towards political embodiment. Proudhon does clearly state that real inroads to his ideal anarchy will require some process of education and debate among Frenchmen as a collective to prepare them for self-rule. This assessment historically grounds a specific understanding of the interrelation of different kinds of power, representation, and process that aligns a political project with an aesthetic one: rescuing the cultivated individual from the mass. Proudhon's analysis foregrounds the mass as victim but then shows its unfitness for political power. His solution to the problem of a mass of poor people is to transform them into individuals who are sufficiently cultivated for full, direct participation in the polis. Yet a representative government precludes their full participation; in fact, Proudhon's reading suggest that the very principal of representation, the one standing in for the many, creates a mass with limited power of a type that is singularly unhelpful for ending its own subordination, something like base instinct, an animalistic, lowest-common-denominator manifested in satisfaction of the senses or violence. What is needed is a process that will yield cultivated individuals from the mass. This political approach makes art enormously important, since the work of extracting a cultivated individual from the mass requires culture and a means—practices and processes—for cultivating individuals. And a political ideal of free association lies at the heart of the

⁴² I am associating this reading of power with Proudhon by drawing inferences also from his discussions of class, distinction between the *petit bourgeoisie* and *proletariat*, and wariness of instantaneous change, of the efficacy of another violent revolution.

aesthetic project, since it is the nature a person displays as part of a crowd, not one intrinsic to the individual, that requires action.

II. Translating the Problem of the Mass: Proudhon to Baudelaire

The period from the end of the First World War to the end of the Second can be seen as a time when politics and modernist culture were separated, often forcibly, as in the notorious example in Germany when the National Socialists relegated expressionism to the realm of 'degenerate art.' Yet it may also be true that during this same period modernist art willingly separated itself from politics, largely because there is something inherently unaesthetic about the kind of culture encouraged by mass movements in any form, whether fascist, communist or even anarcho-syndicalist. Indeed, an aversion to the masses appears to be an element in the formation of the modernist aesthetic. According to Gustave Le Bon, who announced the science of crowd psychology in 1895 with his *Psychologie des foules*, the person who participates in any mass activity risks a loss of culture: "Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd he is a barbarian—that is, a creature acting by instinct." (David Weir, *Anarchy and Culture*, 261)⁴³

In the account I wish to offer of anarchist modernism, Weir's commonly held assertion that "an aversion to the masses appears to be an element in the formation of the modernist aesthetic" does not result in art separating itself from politics. Canonical modernists found in crowds a source of titillation as well as aversion, and their attitudes towards "the masses" involved more than a simple aesthetic calculus. The distinction Le Bon drew between "cultivated individual" and "barbarian" is notable in that both are the same person, whose devolution depends on the nature of his association with others. In Le Bon's formulation the artist or civilized man does not differ from his neighbor categorically; rather, the comportment of each alone differs in character from each one's behavior as part of a mass. The alchemy of the crowd makes quantitative change qualitative. Artists' aversion to the masses produced attempts to avert (the problem of) the masses, which required artists not

⁴³ David Weir, *Anarchy & Culture: The Aesthetic Politics of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 261.

to withdraw from society but to find means of association with others that avoided the individual-mass dialectic.

Recognition of the crowd's transformative power provoked modernist artists to investigate, challenge and offer alternatives to the constitution of the masses: they did not all simply take cover. Whether artists engaged the phenomenon of the masses as an object of fascination or disgust, its status as a focal point or problem reverberates throughout modernism and beyond. The poet's negotiation of the crowd stands out as a central theme in the work of Baudelaire, who referred to the artist's fleeting exchange of glances with a passerby on a Parisian street as a sort of sacred prostitution.⁴⁴ Baudelaire's artist famously finds the urban mass intoxicating in its submersion of individuals into a panoply of details of the latest fashions in dress or livery, a field of motion and source of unrelenting overstimulation of the senses. Only momentary encounters with one of the crowd's bustling bodies, as in "A une passante," remind the artist of the individuals who comprise the mass, and then frequently with the effect of reinvigorating the poet's absorption by the crowd. The intoxication Baudelaire locates in the Parisian throng exists in inverse relation to individual agency: the artist's genius dominates the crowd, extracting from it the raw material of his art, and the crowd draws its dizzying potency in subsuming the agency of its individual members. Yet the masses whose fashions feed the artist's contemplation lack individuals to contemplate his product, such that the chief attraction of the crowd—transformation of the

⁴⁴Baudelaire writes: "Ce que les hommes nomment amour est bien petit, bien restreint et bien faible, comparé à cette ineffable orgie, à cette sainte prostitution de l'âme qui se donne tout entière, poésie et charité, à l'imprévu qui se montre, à l'inconnu qui passé." (That which men call love is so small, so restrained and weak, compared to this ineffable orgy, to this sacred prostitution of the soul that gives itself entirely, poetry and charity, to the stranger who appears, the unknown passerby.) "Les Foules," *Le Spleen de Paris*. The complete text of *Le Spleen de Paris* is available online as "Charles Baudelaire's Petits Poèmes en Prose ou Le Spleen de Paris," Baudelaire Online, <http://www.piranesia.net/baudelaire/spleen/frame.html>

individual and his assimilation into an amorphous collective-- also constitutes its primary problem.

It is important to remember that the seismic shifts of modernity behind this individual/crowd dialectic were largely economic (characterized by the new domination of industrial capitalism) and political (involving the consolidation of modern nation states and development of nationalisms), and that what came to be known as “the social problem” in nineteenth-century Europe, especially in France, was the collective change in relations among individuals that these economic and political and economic shifts brought about. Like the historical avant-garde⁴⁵ that was to follow, Baudelaire critiqued the emerging organization of individuals into masses of consumers or citizens; yet Baudelaire critiqued much more vituperatively the notion of a vanguard or avant-garde, conceiving of it as another vehicle of conformity. The issue was not what to do with the masses or even what the masses should do but the impingement of any mass on individuals.

Baudelaire’s art approaches the question of the masses in a way that does not constitute a retrenchment into a purely aesthetic sphere: rather, it signals the imbrication of aesthetic, political and economic concerns in the social question. To put it another way, the object of concern is the cultivated individual, not an autonomous artwork. As Foucault shows in his characterization of Baudelaire, self-fashioning is a crucial part of modernity’s project.⁴⁶ Masses are perceived to threaten most individuals doubly, with either transformative

⁴⁵ I use this term as Peter Bürger employs it in *Theory of the Avant-garde* (Trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), though noting critiques of the narrowness of Bürger’s grouping such as Richard Murphy’s argument for the inclusion of the German Expressionists. See Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” Translated by Catherine Porter, in *The Foucault Reader*, Edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32-50.

absorption into the mass, or with marginalization or worse in existing outside the mass. Just as the mass makes quantitative change qualitative in transforming civilized individuals into the barbarians of a mob, it transforms and reconfigures power. Whatever power an individual possesses metamorphoses into a different kind of power in a crowd, as the agency required for cultivation and creation degrades into a mindless groping to satisfy some instinct. As Le Bon observed, “Crowds are only powerful for destruction.”⁴⁷ Base instinct, as a lowest common denominator, constitutes the desire of a crowd, investing masses with a peculiarly negative kind of power.

Baudelaire’s aesthetics and Proudhon’s politics meet at the threshold between individuals and the worrisome collectivity of the mass. Most tellingly, the prose poet and the political thinker share a simultaneous concern *for* and loathsome fear *of* the masses. These concerns lead to a politics of time that seeks to retemporalize form to open a field for self-determination. If Proudhon sees a temporal problematic in explicitly political terms, as a political unfolding and amalgamation of processes that have yet to take place, Baudelaire’s texts directly reference an attenuation and aestheticization of time, a quickening of the pace at which people were being divested of political, economic and social agency. The prose poems show a deficit of time in which to act; the temporal character they evoke is the collectively imposed, standardized time of the mass.⁴⁸ Baudelaire’s depiction aligns with an anarchist reading of the social problem, a reading that in hindsight is much better equipped

⁴⁷ Le Bon asserts: “It is only by obtaining some sort of insight into the psychology of crowds that it can be understood... how powerless they are to hold any opinions other than those which are imposed on them, and that it is not with rules based on theories of pure equity that they are to be led, but by seeking what produces an impression on them, and what seduces them.”

⁴⁸ For an account of historical changes in the experience of time, especially in terms of technological and aesthetic innovations, see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

than an orthodox Marxist approach to account for the fact that the social problem would become increasingly entrenched over the duration of modernism even as material conditions for much of the proletariat improved. In the anarchist interpretation, political coercion equals, if not trumps, economic causality, and the political problem is one of time and action, not ideology.

III. The Prose Poems' Diagnosis of the Attenuation and Aestheticization of Time

Baudelaire's prose poems clearly announce the hegemony of a new character of time, as the temporality of ritual and tradition gives way to increments, stingily doled out by factories or, in this case, randomly ordered by the poet. The preface to *Le Spleen de Paris*, dedicated to Arsène Houssaye, indicates an awareness on the part of the author of the ways time pressures of rushed urban life impact the work of the poet. Baudelaire expresses this awareness by emphasizing his own attentiveness to readerly customer service, acknowledging his audience's lack of patience, lack of attention span, and lack of time. Baudelaire says readers may approach the poems in any order—"We can cut where we wish, me my reverie, you the manuscript, the reader his reading"⁴⁹—and has the expectation that modern life no longer permits lengthy periods of artistic contemplation (reverie). Baudelaire refers to these potentialities as "quelles admirables commodités" [such admirable conveniences], highlighting a gap between qualities readers associate with art (inconvenience, non-utility) and desirable qualities for daily life (speed, convenience, use-value).

In the following section I undertake close readings of the prose poems "Un plaisant" [A Joker], "Un Cheval de race" [A Racehorse], "Le Galant tireur" ["The Gallant

⁴⁹ "Nous pouvons couper où nous voulons, moi ma rêverie, vous le manuscrit, le lecteur sa lecture."

Marksman”], “La Femme sauvage et la petite-maîtresse” [The Wild Woman and the Gentlewoman], and “Les Dons des fées” [The Gifts of the Fairies] to illustrate Baudelaire’s diagnosis of the problems of modern temporality. These texts highlight the foreshortened character of a temporality structured by novelty and mass consumption’s flattening of time into a veneer.

The fourth poem of *Le Spleen de Paris*, “Un plaisant” [A Joker], encapsulates a critique of novelty. The temporal and spatial settings highlight a character of newness: it occurs at the “explosion of the new year,” and the protagonist of the poem is “a handsome gentleman gloved, polished, cruelly necktied and imprisoned in his completely new clothes.”⁵⁰ The association of the new year’s arrival with an explosion suggests a violent genesis of the new, as does the way in which the gentleman’s proper new clothes constrain him “cruellement.” Newness overlays the physical setting as snow, entailing the pure associations of whiteness, but the snow is mottled by underlying mud churned up by the “thousand coaches.” The poet’s word choice registers an excessive, violently greedy character of newness—the candy, the toys, the scene “teeming of cupidities and despair” manifest the “official delirium of a big city” that leaves no one in peace.⁵¹

This scene of unsettling, newly uncivilized Paris includes a ubiquitous marker of pastness, the dumb but functional beast of burden. A confrontation ensues between man and animal, stylishly arrayed novelty and abused past. In an absurdly frivolous gesture of pure theatricality—one that can carry no social meaning because of the grossly unequal stature of the participants—the gentleman salutes the donkey and formally offers good wishes for the

⁵⁰ “un beau monsieur ganté, verni, cruellement cravaté et emprisonné dans des habits tout neufs.”

⁵¹ “grouillant de cupidités et de désespoirs”... “délire officiel d'une grande ville.”

new year. The beast, not noticing the man, “continued to run with zeal wherever duty called him.”⁵² Whipped and working, the beast does not register the absurd gesture and could not take leave of his work to respond in any case. After the null exchange, the gentleman returns to his companions “with an air of self-complacency, as though to ask them to add their approval to his satisfaction.”⁵³ To complete his satisfaction from the absurdly unequal one-way interaction, the gentleman requires that his companions watch and approve of his action. Baudelaire thus substitutes a dynamic of one-way action (on the part of the gentleman) and specular satisfaction (of the onlookers) for functional social exchange. The speaker of the prose poem makes clear that such change begs condemnation, explaining “As for me, I was suddenly grasped by an incommensurable rage against this magnificent imbecile, who seemed to me to condense in himself the whole soul of France.”⁵⁴ The speaker’s reaction provides a blanket condemnation (making the gentleman synecdoche for nation) while offering nuanced evaluation in the pairing of “magnifique” with “imbécile” and the ambiguity of the referent. If we read the “magnifique imbecile” as referring to the gentleman, then the judgment seems to contrast the flawless new style of the man’s dress with his ridiculous behavior; if we read the description as referring to the donkey, it attains pathos: as beast, the animal’s lack of intelligence makes him imbecilic; as persevering beast of burden, beaten but working, the donkey exemplifies magnificence by continuing traditional, useful work in the face of the frivolous antagonism of the new.⁵⁵

⁵² “continua de courir avec zèle où l'appelait son devoir”

⁵³ “avec un air de fatuité, comme pour les prier d'ajouter leur approbation à son contentement”

⁵⁴ “Pour moi, je fus pris subitement d'une incommensurable rage contre ce magnifique imbécile, qui me parut concentrer en lui tout l'esprit de la France.”

⁵⁵ The fop’s dress in the prose poem places fashion front and center, which we might interpret through a Benjaminian lens as the moribund tiger’s leap into the past evoked in Thesis XIV of *Theses on the Philosophy*

The work the donkey performs has no connection to the modern or the new, and the new fashion bears no trace of work or labor, its own history, or that of the bypassed donkey. As in the case of the horse in “Un Cheval de race” [“A Racehorse”], Baudelaire valorizes that which has been used, abused by time, asserting in the two exclamatory sentences that begin the poem that the spent racehorse is “laide” [ugly] yet “délicieuse” [delicious]. “Marked” by Time and Love, the horse sparkles in her phenomenal ugliness: she “is really ugly; she is ant, spider, if you wish, skeleton even; but also she is potion, magistral, witchcraft! In sum, she is exquisite.”⁵⁶ The horse is “usée” [run-down] but not “fatiguée” [tired], is “toujours héroïque” [still/always heroic], and makes one think “of those great race horses that the eye of the real amateur recognizes, even attached to a rented carriage or heavy wagon.”⁵⁷ Made superior to people in the way she loves and serves (“She loves as one loves in autumn; one would say that the approach of winter lights in her heart a new fire, the servility of her tenderness has nothing tiresome in it”⁵⁸), the animal once again marks the fallen values of the modern (non artist) man. In Baudelaire’s assertion of the horse’s value to the artist it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate aesthetic from moral valuation.

In fact, it is difficult not to discern a moral character in many of the aesthetic judgments and positions in the prose poems. While the languor of drug-induced stupor and

of History. The temporal discontinuity evoked in the juxtaposition of the gentleman and the horse almost mocks the possibility of an effective discontinuity, a founding interruption. See the analyses of Thesis XIV of Walter Benjamin in Werner Hamacher, “‘Now’: Walter Benjamin on Historical Time,” in *Walter Benjamin and History*, edited by Andrew Benjamin (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 38-68 and Andrew Benjamin, *Style and Time*, Chapter 2.

⁵⁶ “est vraiment laide; elle est fourmi, araignée, si vous voulez, squelette même; mais aussi elle est breuvage, magistère, sorcellerie! en somme, elle est exquise”

⁵⁷ “à ces chevaux de grande race que l’œil du véritable amateur reconnaît, même attelés à un carrosse de louage ou à un lourd chariot”

⁵⁸ “Elle aime comme on aime en automne; on dirait que les approches de l’hiver allument dans son cœur un feu nouveau, et la servilité de sa tendresse n’a jamais rien de fatigant.”

irremediable loss of Paris before Haussman provided the temporal settings of *Les Fleurs du mal*, this mournful treatment of time gives way to a bitingly critical demonization of the clock in *Le Spleen de Paris*. The poet presents time, or its regulation by society, as symptomatic of a means-end obsession in which efficiency of production trumps all other values. Several of the prose poems show the poet's inimical relationship to quantitative time and the values associated with such regulation. "Le Galant tireur" ["The Gallant Marksman"] and "Les Dons des fées" [The Gifts of the Fairies] portray the endangerment of the poet, of unmotivated (by profit) activity generally, while "La Femme sauvage et la petite-maîtresse" [The Wild Woman and the Gentlewoman] conversely depicts the attenuated existence of the non-poet and the poet as a threat to her well-being.

In "Le Galant tireur" Baudelaire contrasts the artist's relation to time to that of society at large, represented in the poem by the artist's rather obtuse muse. The speaker of the poem stops travel to, literally and idiomatically, "tuer le Temps" [kill Time] in a shooting gallery, remarking, "Tuer ce monstre-là, n'est-ce pas l'occupation la plus ordinaire et la plus légitime de chacun?" [Killing that monster there, isn't that anyone's most ordinary and legitimate occupation?] The adjectives "ordinary" and "legitimate" reveal a problem of contradiction: while everyone may at some point kill time, making the undertaking "ordinary" indeed, the wastefulness (lack of productivity) of killing time makes it illegitimate, at least by the norms of a society that measures success in quantifiable production. And, of course, it is the artist who requires the aimlessness of killing time for creativity, making him by association both normal, in the sense of "ordinary," and illegitimate, in the sense of normative assessments of productivity and value. The speaker of the poem, accompanied by his "chère, délicieuse et exécrationnelle femme" [dear, delightful and atrocious wife] who appears incomprehending of the

artist but “à laquelle il doit tant de plaisirs, tant de douleurs, et peut-être aussi une grande partie de son génie” [to whom he owes so many pleasures, so many pains, and perhaps also a large part of his genius] shoots several bullets “loin du but proposé” [far from the intended goal]. His companion laughs at his poor aim, as though the goal—killing time—demanded that he hit the target. The speaker responds to her laughter: “«Observez cette poupée, là-bas, à droite, qui porte le nez en l'air et qui a la mine si hautaine. Eh bien! cher ange, je me figure que c'est vous.»” [Note that doll over there, to the right, who carries her nose in the air and has such a haughty demeanor. Well, dear angel, I envision it's you.] Eyes closed, the speaker shoots, cleanly decapitating the doll. He then turns to his “inévitabile et impitoyable Muse, et lui baisant respectueusement la main, il ajouta: «Ah! mon cher ange, combien je vous remercie de mon adresse!»” [inevitable and merciless Muse, and respectfully kissing her hand, he added "Oh! my dear angel, how I thank you for my dexterity!"]. While the artist's wife and muse stands in for a disagreeable society compelled to measure out increments of time and link them to productivity, she also impels the artist to create. One might read the poem allegorically, as a representation of the relations between art (the artist) and society (the wife), in which arts suffers under the tyranny of society but requires it for creation and society mistreats the artist and devalues his labor, but is attracted to art nonetheless. Baudelaire's prose poem suggests that the problematic relations between art and society might yield violence, if only in the aesthetic realm, as death by proxy.

Baudelaire depicts time's flattening into a kind of uniform mass veener in the twentieth prose poem of *Spleen de Paris*, “Les Dons des fees.” He takes advantage of the diverse possibilities of the genre as he engendering to meld the action and moral of a fable to the characters and logical universe of a fairy tale in order to emphasize the capricious nature

of success in the 'real' world. The poem opens onto a scene at which fairies have gathered together with fathers and their newborns to bestow a gift on each infant. The narrator notes that because each gift falls to a baby, the gift plays a determining factor in that person's eventual fortune or misfortune, as the newborn's fate has not yet been written. Baudelaire's fairies resemble people: they are "diverse" and overtaxed, harried, caught between "man and God, and submitted like us to the terrible law of Time and its infinite posterity, the Days, Hours, Minutes, Seconds."⁵⁹ The narrator likens the fairies to government ministers or "employees of the public pawnshop when a national holiday authorizes free redemption."⁶⁰ Subject to the same impatience, stresses and worries as humans, the fairies are not faultless, and the narrator notes analogously: "If, in supernatural justice, there is a little precipitation and chance, we will not be surprised to find the same in human justice. We would be ourselves, in this instance, unjust judges."⁶¹ Hazard and error permeate the supernatural as well as the natural.

Accordingly, some of the fairies' gifts cause unhappiness rather than joy. For example, the gift of effortlessly accumulating wealth falls to the sole heir of a wealthy family, "who, without being endowed with any sense of altruism, nor with any yearning for the most visible goods of life, would find himself later prodigiously encumbered by his millions."⁶² Similarly, if producing opposite circumstances, the fairies bestow "the love of

⁵⁹ "l'homme et Dieu, est soumis comme nous à la terrible loi du Temps et de son infinie postérité, les Jours, les Heures, les Minutes, les Secondes."

⁶⁰ "des employés du Mont-de-Piété quand une fête nationale autorise les dégagements gratuits"

⁶¹ "Si, dans la justice surnaturelle, il y a un peu de précipitation et de hasard, ne nous étonnons pas qu'il en soit de même quelquefois dans la justice humaine. Nous serions nous-mêmes, en ce cas, des juges injustes."

⁶² "qui, n'étant doué d'aucun sens de charité, non plus que d'aucune convoitise pour les biens les plus visibles de la vie, devait se trouver plus tard prodigieusement embarrassé de ses millions."

Beauty and of Poetic Power”⁶³ to the son in a miserly family, such that he is never able to climb up from poverty. The narrator notes at this juncture in the telling: “I have forgotten to tell you that the distribution, in these solemn cases, is without appeal, and that no gift can be refused.”⁶⁴

As the overworked fairies prepare to depart the gift-giving ceremony, a man whose newborn has been overlooked confronts one of the exiting fairies: “Oh! Ms.! you forget us! there is still my little one! I don't want to have come here for nothing.”⁶⁵ The fairies had by this time exhausted the gift catalogue. However, the narrator explains that there exists for such circumstances a law “which allows fairies, in a case like this one, that is to say the exhaustion of gifts, the ability to give one more, supplementary and exceptional, so long as she has adequate imagination to create it immediately.”⁶⁶ The quick-thinking fairy thus replies to the man’s request, “I give to your son... I give him... the Gift of pleasing!”⁶⁷ The father, « incapable of descending to the logic of the absurd »⁶⁸ questions the merit of such an ability. Rushed and annoyed, the fairy replies simply “«Parce que! parce que!»” [“Because! Because!”] The narrator then reports the fairy’s speech to her colleagues as they leave: “How do you find this vain little Frenchman, who wishes to understand everything, and who having obtained for his son the best of gifts, dares to question and discuss that which admits no

⁶³ “l'amour du Beau et la Puissance poétique”

⁶⁴ “J'ai oublié de vous dire que la distribution, en ces cas solennels, est sans appel, et qu'aucun don ne peut être refuse.”

⁶⁵ “ «Eh! madame! vous nous oubliez! il y a encore mon petit! Je ne veux pas être venu pour rien.»”

⁶⁶ “qui concède aux Fées, dans un cas semblable à celui-ci, c'est-à-dire le cas d'épuisement des lots, la faculté d'en donner encore un, supplémentaire et exceptionnel, pourvu toutefois qu'elle ait l'imagination suffisante pour le créer immédiatement.”

⁶⁷ “ « Je donne à ton fils ... je lui donne ... le Don de plaire!»”

⁶⁸ “incapable de s'élever jusqu'à la logique de l'Absurde »

discussion?”⁶⁹ The inference, of course, is that an ability that cannot create anything, that is without trade, vocation or direct material worth, in fact possesses in the real world extraordinary value. Yet it is hardly the stuff of fairy tales or parents’ romantic images of their children’s futures.

The singularly unimaginative yet highly useful character of the talent of pleasing evokes a disenchantment with the increased uniformity Baudelaire associates with the rise of technologies of reproduction and the development of the mass market in Paris. During a moment of direct political engagement in the hopeful chaos of 1848, Baudelaire mocked newspapers’ soliciting of a mass audience in the short-lived political journal he edited with friends, *Le Salut public*.⁷⁰ The artist-cum-activist wrote in the second number of the journal in March, 1848:

Citizen Girardin conducts himself admirably. In the midst of the upheaval, of the disorder that momentarily seizes all things public and personal, the newspaper of Citizen Girardin is better put together than ever. This known capacity, this rapid and universal aptitude, this excessive energy, all that will be to the advantage of the Republic.

Everyday the important current questions are chewed over in The Press.
Citizen Girardin takes as his mantra: ONE IDEA A DAY!
His newspaper, up to the present, says that which everyone thinks.⁷¹

Baudelaire's barbed praise of Emile de Girardin's (1802-1881) newspaper, *La Presse*, a cheap, conservative daily founded in 1836, registers his awareness of newspapers' shift in

⁶⁹ “«Comment trouvez-vous ce petit Français vaniteux, qui veut tout comprendre, et qui ayant obtenu pour son fils le meilleur des lots, ose encore interroger et discuter l'indiscutable?»”

⁷⁰ Baudelaire, Champfleury and Toubin published two issues of *Le Salut public*, a revolutionary paper, before running out of funds.

⁷¹ "Le citoyen Girardin se conduit admirablement. Au milieu du trouble, du désordre qui envahissent momentanément toutes choses publiques et particulières, le journal du citoyen Girardin est mieux fait que jamais. Cette habilité connue, cette aptitude rapide et universelle, cette énergie excessive, tout cela tourne au profit de la République.

Tous les jours les questions importantes et actuelles sont mâchées dans La Presse.

Le citoyen Girardin prend pour devise: UNE IDÉE PAR JOUR!

Son journal, jusqu'à présent, dit ce que tout le monde pense." Baudelaire, *Œuvres Complètes* II, 1037.

focus from politically divisive commentary and analysis towards polish, production value and commercial appeal. Richard Terdiman explains in the second chapter of *Discourse / Counter-Discourse*, "Newspaper Culture: Institutions of Discourse; Discourse of Institutions" that "the discourse of political *opinion* which had been a primary content of the traditional paper tended to be replaced by a flattened 'objective' discourse of *information*. For the first time, a newspaper began to conceive its audience not exclusively but inclusively, to project its mode of intervention in the broader social text not as confrontation and challenge but as co-optation" (131). Sonya Stephens concurs in *Baudelaire's Prose Poems: The Practice and Politics of Irony* that Girardin's *La Presse* initiated a move towards "a universalization which eroded political partiality and, with the newspaper's new bias towards advertising and commercialism, turned readers into consumers."⁷²

Baudelaire notes the simplification that results from newspapers' commodification of news and analysis, the reduction of content to "one idea a day." This flattening of varying perspectives into watered-down, agreeably inoffensive content involves, in Baudelaire's assessment, polish, speed, efficiency, an attenuated presentist temporal frame, and the pretense of universal consensus. These are precisely the traits his prose poems thwart. Baudelaire's prose poems offer an alternate path through the cultural landscape of post-1848 Paris, one that makes use of a new, unfamiliar genre to alienate/defamiliarize and re-habituate readers so that they take critical notice of change. Once newspapers cede their

⁷² Gregory Shaya links the development of the mass press in France during the second half of the nineteenth century to the construction of an inclusive public readership through the figure of the *badaud*, a low-class, not-too-bright gawker. It's interesting to think of the *badaud* as perhaps occupying (with respect to the prose poems) a role similar to that of the *flâneur* in the *Fleurs du mal*. See Gregory Shaya, "The Flâneur, the Badaud, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860-1910." *American Historical Review*. 109.1 (February 2004): 41-77.

critical function, assimilating to economic imperatives of profit and a rationalizing ethos, prose poems arguably take it up.

The long, disturbing prose poem “La Femme sauvage et la petite-maîtresse” [The Wild Woman and the Gentlewoman] effects one of the collection’s most visceral arguments against the attenuated temporality of the modern city, suggesting an effacing of individual difference into slick commercial veneer, mimesis in its most superficial instance as a colonizer of the human.⁷³ The poem literally regards violence and barely contains a threat of it directed at the addressee, “la petite-maîtresse.” The entire poem consists of a monologue in which the speaker, a poet, lectures the petite-maîtresse about the enclosed violence before them, all the while threatening to move from contemplation of the violence to enacting it upon her person.

The poem opens with the speaker reproaching the little bourgeoisie gentlewoman for her constant sighs and complaints, which he finds inexcusable because they do not even express genuine dissatisfaction, only a state of boredom and expectation of indulgence. He critiques, “If at least your sighs expressed remorse, they would do you some honor; but they transmit nothing but the satiety of well-being and exhaustion of rest. And then, you do not cease to spill yourself in useless words: “Love me well! I have such need! Console me here,

⁷³ In a note on the poem in the Bibliothèque de la Pléïde edition of *Le Spleen de Paris*, Claude Pichois reports that an earlier version of the poem (which appeared in this version in the August 27, 1862 edition of *La Presse*) was written in verse in the 1850s. Pichois claims: “Si Baudelaire a renoncé à la forme versifiée, c’est sans doute en raison du ton sarcastique qu’il voulait donner à sa composition” [If Baudelaire renounced the verse form, it is undoubtedly due to the sarcastic tone he wanted to give to his composition] Baudelaire, *OC*, 1315. I would also add that the prose poem form allows for stronger narrative and conversational elements, such that the speaker’s final threat attains a particularly acute tone of personal menace in the context of narrative/fabulist exposition and deceptively casual conversation.

caress me there!”⁷⁴ The speaker then announces that he will try to “cure” the woman, and that means for a cure might be quickly and cheaply obtained by walking over to the nearby fair.

At the fair the speaker directs the woman’s attention to an exhibit in which a figure “tosses about, hurling like the damned, shaking the bars like an orangutan infuriated by exile, imitating, in perfection, sometimes the circular paths of the tiger, sometimes the stupid waddling of the polar bear.”⁷⁵ This “monstre poilu” (hairy monster) resembles “vaguement” (vaguely) the gentlewoman, and the speaker clarifies, “This monster is one of those animals that one generally calls “my angel!,” that’s to say a woman. The other monster, the one yelling his head off, a cudgel in his hand, is a husband. He has chained his lawful wife like a beast, and he shows her in the suburbs, on fair days, with the permission of the authorities, that goes without saying.”⁷⁶ The speaker instructs his pupil to pay close attention to the way in which the woman rips apart the live rabbits and chickens her keeper tosses to her, and to how her teeth cling to pieces of bloody flesh when her keeper tears the prey from her mouth, admonishing her not to eat all her allotment of food in one day. As the husband hits his wife with a cudgel to tamp down her rage at having her meal taken from her, the speaker calls attention to the sound of the cudgel hitting her flesh, emphasizing the reality of the spectacle to his addressee.

⁷⁴ “Si au moins vos soupirs exprimaient le remords, ils vous feraient quelque honneur; mais ils ne traduisent que la satiété du bien-être et l'accablement du repos. Et puis, vous ne cessez de vous répandre en paroles inutiles: «Aimez-moi bien! j'en ai tant besoin! Consolez-moi par-ci, caressez-moi par-là!»”

⁷⁵ “s'agite, hurlant comme un damné, secouant les barreaux comme un orang-outang exaspéré par l'exil, imitant, dans la perfection, tantôt les bonds circulaires du tigre, tantôt les dandinements stupides de l'ours blanc.”

⁷⁶ “«Ce monstre est un de ces animaux qu'on appelle généralement «mon ange!» c'est-à-dire une femme. L'autre monstre, celui qui crie à tue-tête, un bâton à la main, est un mari. Il a enchaîné sa femme légitime comme une bête, et il la montre dans les faubourgs, les jours de foire, avec permission des magistrats, cela va sans dire.»”

The staging of this scene almost directly counters the pedagogical structure of scenes of caged animals and animal-human interaction depicted in newspaper illustrations.

Baudelaire counters that pedagogical structure in three significant ways: by altering content, in substituting for caged animals caged people—one thinks of the human zoos included in the Expositions Universelles, notably the 1867 Paris Exposition—but caged people who act like animals; by undermining the distance between viewer and spectacle; and by recommending no resolution for the spectacle depicted, no culminating expression of emotion through which readers or viewers may quit the scene.

For the remainder of the prose poem, the speaker analyzes the spectacle. He explains:

Such are the conjugal customs of those descendants of Eve and of Adam, those works of your hands, oh my God! This woman is indisputably unfortunate, even if, after all, the titillating joys of notoriety are not unknown to her. There are more irreparable misfortunes, and without compensation. But in the world into which she was cast, she could never have believed that woman deserved any other fate.⁷⁷

Addressing his companion, the speaker points out the unreality of all her sighs and complaints, “learned from books, and this indefatigable melancholy, put on to inspire in the onlooker a completely different sentiment than pity.”⁷⁸ The feigned suffering of the woman, the speaker says, makes him want to show her what real misfortune is like. The speaker concludes his lecture cure with a threat of violence, warning her “Poet though I am, I am not such a dupe as you would like to believe, and if you tire me too often with your precious whining, I will treat you like a wild woman, or I will throw you out the window, like an

⁷⁷ “*Telles sont les moeurs conjugales de ces deux descendants d’Ève et d’Adam, ces oeuvres de vos mains, ô mon Dieu! Cette femme est incontestablement malheureuse, quoique après tout, peut-être, les jouissances titillantes de la gloire ne lui soient pas inconnues. Il y a des malheurs plus irrémédiables, et sans compensation. Mais dans le monde où elle a été jetée, elle n’a jamais pu croire que la femme méritât une autre destinée.* »

⁷⁸ “*appries dans les livres, et cette infatigable mélancolie, faite pour inspirer au spectateur un tout autre sentiment que la pitié*”

empty bottle.”⁷⁹ The speaker’s threat is to move from a position of contemplation to action, from explaining a spectacle to enacting it—or another violent scenario—upon his companion.

The two threats suggest different appraisals of the woman as subject: the first threat envisions her as the pre-civilized, animalistic wild woman, the second as a useless product of civilization, a receptacle of no value, depleted of its contents. The threat to treat the little gentlewoman as a savage calls into question the woman’s status as civilized. The speaker has characterized the civilized status of the woman in terms of comfort (“you who rest only on fabric as soft as your skin, who eat only cooked meat, and for whom a domestic takes care to cut it into small pieces”⁸⁰) and education (repeating the pose of sighs and melancholy that one learns from books). If a woman with all the accoutrements and practices identified as “civilized” merits barbaric treatment, then the distinction between civilized and barbaric becomes uncertain.

The speaker’s second threat suggests that the ideal in this context has no substance; it is void, surface—or container—only, like the bottle. The woman learns a certain melancholic pose from texts, and her enaction of the pose does not represent actual melancholia, nor does she desire real empathy or some ideal response to true melancholy; rather, she mimics a certain pose of melancholy as means to specific ends, to manipulating men into lavishing upon her attention, services and material comforts, certainly, but most importantly, to reify the subject-pose she has learned to enact. The “ideal” has given way to a rationalized, closed

⁷⁹ “Tant poète que je sois, je ne suis pas aussi dupe que vous voudriez le croire, et si vous me fatiguez trop souvent de vos précieuses pleurnicheries, je vous traiterai en femme sauvage, ou je vous jetterai par la fenêtre, comme une bouteille vide.”

⁸⁰ “vous qui ne reposez que sur des étoffes aussi douces que votre peau, qui ne mangez que de la viande cuite, et pour qui un domestique habile prend soin de découper les morceaux.”

system wherein processes of iteration displace imagination. Production becomes value. Any trace of the natural-- the captive woman, recalling an orangutan maddened by exile and the absent tiger and polar bear-- has been covered over by a veneer of civilization. In the prose poem, there is literally no rhyme or reason for this blank veneer's substitution for substance. The dilemma recalls "Le Miroir," a prose poem in *Le Spleen de Paris* that explicitly calls our attention to a displeasing mirror reflection that replaces a man's reasonable self determination. In the text a man gazes at his reflection with disgust, and when the narrator inquires about why he does so, the gazer replies that "he has the right": "Monsieur, following the immortal principles of '89, all men are equal in rights; thus I possess the right to gaze at myself; with pleasure or displeasure, that concerns only my own conscience."⁸¹ The architecture of the prose poem suggests that this sad state of affairs—a joyless enactment of a right—is the end result of the promise of 1789. The citizen thoughtfully embodies his rights, the better to preserve them; and yet the rights produce no collective work of happiness (the republic). And the man's right to gaze at himself also stands in for a critical function of art, a function that in contemporaneous circumstances will no longer suffice.

IV. Art's Work as Solution: Baudelaire and Foucault

Art's participation in anarchist retemporalization begins when Baudelaire meets Proudhon, historically and philosophically. Baudelaire admired Proudhon, writing to him while he served in the brief National Assembly formed after the 1848 revolutions, and addressed him in the last line of a draft of what may be Baudelaire's most famous prose poem dealing with the problem of poverty, "Assommons les pauvres!" [Beat up the Poor!]

⁸¹ "Monsieur, d'après les immortels principes de 89, tous les hommes sont égaux en droits; donc je possède le droit de me mirer; avec plaisir ou déplaisir, cela ne regarde que ma conscience."

Their philosophical alignment becomes apparent in Foucault's demonstration of how Baudelaire's art takes up a project complementary to Proudhon's anarchism in "What is Enlightenment?"⁸²

Foucault declares Baudelaire's work emblematic of modernity as an attitude, "a form of relationship to the present" and "a mode of relationship that has to be established with oneself" (41). Foucault explains: "For the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it other than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is" (41). The relationship to the present takes the form of a transformative labor, a work of apprehending reality in its full exactitude, holding it up for critique, imagining how it might be otherwise, and through art displaying at one and the same time reality as it is and as it might become. Thus "Baudelairean modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it" (41). As with Ziarek's forework, art instantiates a different mode of relationality in grappling with things as they are and freeing them from the constraints of the actual into other possible configurations. In this context the "precept" of Baudelaire Foucault cites—his insistence "You have no right to despise the present"—possesses the weight of an ethical imperative. Like Constantin Guys, a modern artist must grasp and transfigure the present, not dodge this task by taking refuge in a past whose fashions he prefers or taking flight into a future detached from present circumstances.

It is this attention to the present with an eye to the conditions necessary for its alteration that Foucault sees linking modernity to the Enlightenment: he posits "the thread

⁸² Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" trans. Catherine Porter. In *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, 32-50. Subsequent parenthetical references refer to this text.

that may connect us to the Enlightenment is not faithfulness to doctrinal elements, but *rather the permanent reactivation of an attitude*—that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era” [my italics] (42). Like forcework, which to impact the political realm needs “continuous reactivation,” critique is not only negative but positive, in the sense that it may be transformed “into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression” (45). This project of critique “will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think... [It will] give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom” (46). The character Foucault attributes to this “historico-critical attitude” resembles that of anarchism in several significant aspects: both are experimental, wary of coalescence into “a theory, a doctrine,” or “a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating,” shy away from instantaneous revolution (Foucault calls for “a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty”) and concerned with processual, local change (50). Foucault advises

this work done at the limits of ourselves must... put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take. This means that the historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical. In fact we know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions. (46)

Like anarchism, Foucault’s attitude of modernity shuns grand designs and unitary visions for society in favor of instantiating change at specific points where it is “possible and desirable.” It is in circumspection regarding the basis for and enactment of change that Foucault finds an affinity between the attitude of modernity and the approach of the Enlightenment in this minor text of Kant. Kant’s defining of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) “in an almost entirely

negative way, as an *Ausgang*, an exit, a way out” of “our immaturity” does not attempt to locate origins, or discover some “internal teleology of a historical process,” or “seek... to understand the present on the basis of a totality or of a future achievement”; Kant “deals with the question of contemporary reality alone” to answer the question “What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?” (34). In this pairing Kant’s Enlightenment and Foucault’s and Baudelaire’s modernity both take up tasks properly delimited historically and critically.

Foucault sees in this reading of Kant the Enlightenment posed as a political problem of the exercise of reason by individuals. I argue that Foucault poses this political problem for modernity in a recognizably anarchist formulation remarkably similar to Castoriadis’s conception of social self-institution⁸³. Foucault begins with Kant’s conditions for exiting immaturity, distinguishing between realms of obedience and reasoning, and between public and private uses of reason. Kant states that reason must be submissive in its private use, free in its public use. Foucault first focuses on the conditions free public use of freedom entails: “The question, in any event, is that of knowing how the use of reason can take the public form that it requires, how the audacity to know can be exercised in broad daylight, while individuals are obeying as scrupulously as possible” (37). Foucault then examines what this means for the character of the Enlightenment: “Enlightenment is thus not merely the process by which individuals would see their own personal freedom of thought guaranteed. There is

⁸³ Castoriadis writes: “The central idea realized by the [French] Revolution... is that of the explicit self-institution of society by collective, lucid, democratic activity. But at the same time the Revolution never freed itself from the grip of this key part of the modern political imaginary that is the state. I say expressly ‘the State’—a separate and centralized apparatus of domination—and not ‘power.’ For the Athenians, for example, there is no ‘state’—the very word doesn’t exist; the power is ‘we,’ the ‘we’ of political collectivity.” See Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Rising Tide of Insignificance*. Trans. Anonymous. http://www.costis.org/x/castoriadis/castoriadis_rising_tide.pdf, 294.

Enlightenment when the universal, the free, and the public uses of reason are superimposed on one another.” (37)

The Enlightenment possesses a collective dimension that interrelates individuals through the free exercise of reason: “Thus Enlightenment must be considered both as a *process* in which men participate *collectively* and *as an act of courage to be accomplished personally*” [italics added] (35) and “Now the analysis of Enlightenment, defining its history as humanity’s passage to its adult status, situates contemporary reality with respect to the *overall movement and its basic directions*. But at the same time, it shows how, at this very moment, *each individual is responsible in a certain way for that overall process*” [italics added] (38). The Enlightenment, and by extension modernity, through the relation of similitude Foucault sketches between the two, “appears as a political problem” in a formulation that solicits anarchism for its solution. Foucault writes of the Enlightenment: “Men are at once elements and agents of a single process. They may be actors in the process to the extent that they participate in it; and the process occurs to the extent that men decide to be its *voluntary* actors” (35). Foucault writes of modernity in relation to the Enlightenment:

Thinking back on Kant’s text, I wonder if we might not envision modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history. And by ‘attitude,’ I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; *a voluntary choice made by certain people*; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time *marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task*. A bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an ethos. And consequently, rather than seeking to distinguish the ‘modern era’ from the ‘premodern’ or ‘postmodern,’ I think it would be more useful to try to find out how the attitude of modernity, every since its formation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of ‘countermodernity.’ [italics added] (39)

The chief representative of countermodernity here seems to be humanism (in which Foucault includes, notably if partially, Marxism). Foucault opposes humanism, as “a set of themes” that have appeared in European societies and which are “always tied to value judgments,” to

the Enlightenment-modernity project (44). Foucault claims that humanism “serves to color and to justify the conceptions of man to which it is, after all, obliged to take recourse” (44). Humanism limits the exercise of reason Kant proposes by foreclosing what it means to be human at a particular historical moment and confining options for action/practices to whatever value judgments a particular instance of humanism deems moral or otherwise acceptable.

Shifting to the second element comprising the attitude of modernity, the mode of relationship one has to establish with oneself, Foucault turns again to Baudelaire, noting: “To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration: what Baudelaire, in the vocabulary of his day, calls dandysme” (41). This ‘elaboration’ involves man revolting against himself and making “his very existence” into an artwork so that man can maintain the autonomy required to reason freely while participating fully in the public exercise of reason. Art furnishes the means for man to engage in reasoning—which is open-ended—and still maintain the submission (to the public exercise of reason) Kant demands of the private use of reason. Thus “Baudelaire does not imagine that these [the “ironic heroization of the present, this transfiguring play of freedom with reality, this ascetic elaboration of the self”] have any place in society itself, or in the body politic. They can only be produced in another, a different place, which Baudelaire calls art” (42).⁸⁴

To make life into art and to live the revolution (or anarchist alteration) overlap through a particular conception of art that privileges embodiment (of life in art) and

⁸⁴ For affinities between Foucault and anarchism (and anarchism and other post-structuralist theorists), see Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) and Jesse S. Cohn, *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, Politics* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Press, 2006).

enactment (of the revolution in life) and makes art and life interdependent. Man produces himself, but only in art, where it is not a question of power but of the free, private exercise of reason. Art is active, not passive, its non-power offering a kind of spectral power, experience as it might become.

V. Art's Work in the Prose Poems: The Value of Aesthetic Encounter

Richard Terdiman claims that in the prose poems “the poor do not appear as long-suffering objects of compassion but as a social force bearing latent consciousness of its power” (315). Baudelaire was certainly aware of the potential power of the poor and of conflict between the artist and the poor, and was thus frightened by the peasants in 1848 at the same time as he embraced other aspects of the revolutions. Baudelaire presents the poor most often in relation to the artist and his practice of his vocation. As numerous critics have noted, Baudelaire’s work frequently aligns the artist with the poor, since both are alienated from and mistreated by society. But the relationship between the two groups of outcasts is a problematic one for the artist: others’ poverty interferes with the artist’s aesthetic contemplation. One can read in the prose poems’ treatment of the poor and the theme of poverty an argument against separating art from the praxis of life. Over and over again, Baudelaire shows the imbrication of aesthetic and moral/ethical judgments, a co-development that requires a particular temporality of duration, a prolonged or extended present for the movement of thought.

This temporality of duration requires an escape from formal or procedural restraints into experience, an escape whose broader social ramifications Baudelaire brings to the foreground in the prose poem “Le Joujou du Pauvre” [The Toy of the Poor Child]. First

published in *La Presse* in September, 1862, the piece compares the toys of children from opposite ends of the class spectrum. The poem shares all of its text except the first two paragraphs and conclusion with the essay “Morale du joujou”, published in the April 17, 1853 edition of *Le Monde littéraire*. But unlike the essay, a much longer rumination on the relations of children to their toys, the prose poem contains an obvious patterning of a fable, concluding with a sort of moral. The poem opens with a statement of moral intention: “I want to give the idea of an innocent distraction. There are so few amusements that are not culpable!”⁸⁵ Before launching into a narrative, the speaker instructs the reader to equip herself with a variety of little toys and gadgets when she leaves in the morning to stroll the city streets so that she might surprise the children she encounters with presents of toys. Then, in a narrative from the essay, Baudelaire describes an attractive rich child playing on the grass in front of the chateau in which he lives with a “splendid” toy. The speaker remarks “Luxury, insouciance, and the habitual spectacle of wealth, render such children so attractive, one would think them made of another material than the children of mediocrity or of poverty.”⁸⁶ Despite the magnificence of his preferred toy, the child ignores it; he is gazing across the gate, at another child, a ruffian, playing with his own toy. Baudelaire describes the scene:

Across the symbolic barriers separating the two worlds, the highway and the chateau, the poor child was showing the rich child his own toy, which the other was examining avidly like a rare and unknown object. However, this toy, which the little slattern was nettling, agitating and shaking in a square cage, was a live rat! The parents, out of economic necessity no doubt, had wrenched the toy from life itself.

⁸⁵ “Je veux donner l'idée d'un divertissement innocent. Il y a si peu d'amusements qui ne soient pas coupables!”

⁸⁶ “Le luxe, l'insouciance et le spectacle habituel de la richesse, rendent ces enfants-là si jolis, qu'on les croirait faits d'une autre pâte que les enfants de la médiocrité ou de la pauvreté.”

In contrast to the patina of wealth that attaches to the rich child's toy, the poor child amuses himself with a living animal culled from the squalor of his daily life, not purchased as a commodity. The rich child does not react with horror; rather, both children laugh "at one another fraternally, with teeth of an equal whiteness."⁸⁷ This fraternal bond crosses class, and occurs at the site of the poor, over the amusement of the poor, which also represents the natural world, not that of manufactured goods. In contrast to the sparkling newness of the bourgeois or rich Parisian's surroundings, with all history and mythology jerked out of context, the poor take their entertainments from their own humble environments, those they experience over time.

Occasional moments in the prose poems hold out hope for the artist's ability to grapple with qualitative difference aesthetically, to assimilate others' duration and singularity into the artwork's work. Poverty becomes a vocational threat to the artist in "Le Gâteau" [The Cake], as the hunger of the wretchedly poor shatters the repose of a traveling artist seduced by landscape. Yet in an uncharacteristically optimistic moment the speaker rises to the occasion, demonstrating both generosity to the less fortunate and a process of experiential learning.

At the beginning of the prose poem, the speaker says of his surroundings: "Le paysage au milieu duquel j'étais placé était d'une grandeur et d'une noblesse irresistible" [The landscape in the middle of which I was placed was of an irresistible grandeur and nobility]. The magnificence of the landscape infuses his soul, elevating the experience of sensation and perception to art. As the speaker gazes at the reflection of a silently moving cloud in a lake, he hears a sensation of the sublime, "une joie mêlée de peur" [a joy mixed with fear]. As he pulls a large morsel of bread out to eat, a small ruffian appears, his eyes "devouring" the

⁸⁷ "l'un à l'autre fraternellement, avec des dents d'une égale blancheur"

piece of bread, his lips muttering “cake.” The speaker, amused, explains his reaction to the child’s desire: “Je ne pus m'empêcher de rire en entendant l'appellation dont il voulait bien honorer mon pain presque blanc” [I could not prevent myself from laughing in understanding the designation with which he wanted to honor my nearly white bread]. The speaker cuts a slice for the child, who approaches cautiously, gaze never leaving the bread, quickly grabs it and recoils “comme s'il eût craint que mon offre ne fût pas sincère ou que je m'en repentisse déjà” [as if he feared that my offer was not sincere or that I was already repenting it]. At this moment another ragged child arrives, apparently a brother of the first, and a vicious battle for the portion of bread ensues.

The fight ends when both brothers are bloody and exhausted, by which time the object of battle has disintegrated into crumbs scattered about like “grains of sand.” In the final paragraph of the poem the speaker returns to his initial subject, the landscape, which has been altered in the speaker’s perception by the fight between the children. Joy from contemplation of the natural beauty has “totalement disparu” [completely disappeared], and the poem concludes with the now sad speaker repeating to himself “sans cesse: «Il y a donc un pays superbe où le pain s'appelle du gâteau, friandise si rare qu'elle suffit pour engendrer une guerre parfaitement fratricide!»” [without ceasing: “There is then a superb country where the bread is called cake, delicacy so rare that it suffices to engender a perfectly fratricidal war!”] The elevation of bread to cake recalls the apocryphal story of Marie Antoinette offensively commanding in regards to starving peasants, “Let them eat cake!” (or brioche, as Marie-Thérèse, wife of Louis XIV, is reported to have actually said: “Qu’ils mangent de la brioche!”). The impoverished state of others interferes with the speaker’s aesthetic enjoyment. Over the course of the prose poem, a classical aesthetic experience

(contemplation of the sublime) cedes its ground to a process of socialization, as the misanthropic poet confronts the current and historical problem of hunger.

The prose poem “Les Yeux des Pauvres” [The Eyes of the Poor] similarly conjoins aesthetic and social/moral experience. Baudelaire shows explicitly how the spectacle of poverty infuses a poet’s (aesthetic) assessment and enjoyment of his surroundings and (moral and psychological) evaluation of his beloved and their relationship. The poem opens with the speaker declaiming “Oh! You want to know why I hate you today. It will be no doubt easier for you to understand it than it will be for me to explain it to you, for you are, I believe, the most beautiful example of imperviousness that can be found.”⁸⁸ Earlier the narrator and his beloved had decided to share all their thoughts in order to unite into a single soul, “a dream that had nothing original in it, after all, if it is not that, dreamed by all men, it has been realized by none.”⁸⁹ That night the couple visit a new café. Light reflects off the polished interior of the café, the mirrors, the gold trim, the mythologically-themed paintings— “all history and all mythology put to the service of supreme tackiness.”⁹⁰ Into this scene of opulence enters a tired-looking, disheveled poor man, holding hands with a young boy and carrying a little child “too weak to walk” in his arms. The speaker sees in the eyes of each figure astonishment at the interior:

The eyes of the father were saying “How beautiful it is! How beautiful! One could say that all the gold in this poor world has come to rest on these walls.” –The eyes of the little boy: “How beautiful it is! How beautiful! but it’s a house where

⁸⁸ “Ah! vous voulez savoir pourquoi je vous hais aujourd’hui. Il vous sera sans doute moins facile de le comprendre qu’à moi de vous l’expliquer; car vous êtes, je crois, le plus bel exemple d’impermeabilité qui se puisse rencontrer.”

⁸⁹ “un rêve qui n’a rien d’original, après tout, si ce n’est que, rêvé par tous les hommes, il n’a été réalisé par aucun”

⁹⁰ “toute l’histoire et toute la mythologie mises au service de la goinfrerie”

only people who are not like us can enter.” --As for the eyes of the smallest, they were too fascinated to explain anything except a stupid and profound joy.⁹¹

Confronted with the spectacle of the poor family, themselves astonished before the spectacle of the café, the speaker feels embarrassed by his wealth, the glasses and carafes “plus grands que notre soif” [larger than our thirst]. Forsaking the opportunity to malign the poor family’s genuine awe at the tacky décor, the speaker turns to his beloved for confirmation of his empathetic reaction when she says: “«Ces gens-là me sont insupportables avec leurs yeux ouverts comme des portes cochères! Ne pourriez-vous pas prier le maître du café de les éloigner d’ici?»” [“Those people there are unbearable to me with their eyes open like saucers! Couldn’t you ask the manager of the café to send them away from here?”] Baudelaire abruptly concludes the poem: “Tant il est difficile de s’entendre, mon cher ange, et tant la pensée est incommunicable, même entre gens qui s’aiment!” [How difficult it is to come to understanding with one another, my dear angel, and how uncommunicable is thought, even between people in love!]. The spectacle of the poor family has marred the speaker’s enjoyment of his surroundings and demolished his hopeful appraisal of a romantic relationship.

While the figures of poverty I have discussed in *Le Spleen de Paris* to this point have consisted almost entirely of children, who (beyond seeking out toys from their environments) possess no agency, in Baudelaire’s most extended treatment of a poor person in the prose poems, we do encounter a genuine potential threat, a poor person capable of rising up. From the vantage point of a politics of time, what I find most interesting in the text is its clever

⁹¹ Les yeux du père disaient: «Que c’est beau! que c’est beau! on dirait que tout l’or du pauvre monde est venu se porter sur ces murs.» -- Les yeux du petit garçon: «Que c’est beau! que c’est beau! mais c’est une maison où peuvent seuls entrer les gens qui ne sont pas comme nous.» -- Quant aux yeux du plus petit, ils étaient trop fascinés pour exprimer autre chose qu’une joie stupide et profonde.

juxtaposition of the misery of an urban poor lived experience, on the one hand, and the instructiveness of the immediately apprehended experience on the part of the poem's speaker, on the other hand.

Baudelaire satirizes charitable pretenses towards the poor while making clear the real quandary poverty presents in this penultimate prose poem of the collection, "Assomons les pauvres!" [Beat up the Poor!]. The poem opens with the speaker's account of his reading habits of a fortnight sixteen or seventeen years ago and his ensuing state of mind. "[C]onfiné dans [s]a chambre" [Confined in his room], the speaker surrounded himself with "des livres à la mode dans ce temps-là" [books then in vogue], books discussing "l'art de rendre les peuples heureux, sages et riches, en vingt-quatre heures" [the art of making people happy, wise and wealthy, in twenty-four hours]. These avatars of self-help books provide contradictory advice, some advising the poor "de se faire esclaves" [make themselves slaves] others "qui leur persuadent qu'ils sont tous des rois détrônés" [which persuade them that they are all dethroned kings]. As a result of his reading material, the speaker concludes the first paragraph of the text: "One will not find it surprising that I was then in a spiritual state bordering on vertigo or stupidity."⁹² This sentiment furnishes an ironic contrast for the next sentence of the poem, which opens the second paragraph with a claim to intelligence: "It seemed to me that I felt confined at the base of my intellect the obscure germ of an idea superior to all the old wives' tales I had just read."⁹³ As this idea germinates, the speaker

⁹² "On ne trouvera pas surprenant que je fusse alors dans un état d'esprit avoisinant le vertige ou la stupidité."

⁹³ "Il m'avait semblé seulement que je sentais, confiné au fond de mon intellect, le germe obscur d'une idée supérieure à toutes les formules de bonne femme dont j'avais récemment parcouru le dictionnaire."

finally leaves his room, observing that “the passionate taste of bad reading engenders a proportional need for the outdoors and refreshments.”⁹⁴

Upon approaching the entrance to a cabaret, the speaker encounters a beggar “with one of those unforgettable looks which would overturn thrones, if spirit could move matter, and if the eye of a hypnotist were to make grapes ripen.”⁹⁵ Just at that moment, the speaker hears the familiar voice “d'un bon Ange, ou d'un bon Démon, qui m'accompagne partout” [of a good Angel, or of a good Demon, who accompanies me everywhere]. The speaker compares his demon to that of Socrates but notes that unlike Socrates' demon, who “ne se manifestait à lui que pour défendre, avertir, empêcher,” [manifested himself only to forbid, warn, prevent] his demon “daigne conseiller, suggérer, persuader” [deigns to advise, suggest, persuade]. Thus “That poor Socrates had but a prohibitive Demon; mine is a great affirmer, mine is a Demon of action, a Demon of combat.”⁹⁶ Accordingly, the demon whispers to the speaker: “He is only the equal of another who proves it, and he is only worthy of liberty who knows how to conquer it.”⁹⁷

The speaker then takes action, pouncing on the beggar, beating him violently. During the beating the speaker's only concerns extend to his ability to carry out the action of beating; the speaker worries that his own fragile constitution and lack of an exercise regime might prevent him from killing the man (those facts explain why the speaker breaks a nail knocking

⁹⁴ “le goût passionné des mauvaises lectures engendre un besoin proportionnel du grand air et des rafraîchissants”

⁹⁵ “avec un de ces regards inoubliables qui culbuteraient les trônes, si l'esprit remuait la matière, et si l'œil d'un magnétiseur faisait mûrir les raisins”

⁹⁶ “Ce pauvre Socrate n'avait qu'un Démon prohibiteur; le mien est un grand affirmateur, le mien est un Démon d'action, un Démon de combat”

⁹⁷ “«Celui-là seul est l'égal d'un autre, qui le prouve, et celui-là seul est digne de la liberté, qui sait la conquérir.»”

out the beggar's teeth), and as he rams the man's head into a wall, the speaker reassures readers that "I had verified that in this deserted suburb I would find myself, for a rather long time, away from the presence of any policeman."⁹⁸ As the speaker moves to finish the beggar off by beating him with a tree branch "avec l'énergie obstinée des cuisiniers qui veulent attendrir un steak" [with the obstinate energy of cooks who want to tenderize a steak], the beggar shocks his attacker by picking himself up off the ground and fighting back.

Baudelaire writes:

All of a sudden—o the joy of a philosopher who confirms the excellence of his theory!—I saw this ancient carcass stand up, restore himself with an energy I would never have guessed at in a machine so singularly decrepit, and, with a look of hate that appeared to me a good augur, the decrepit man jumped on me, punched out my two eyes, broke four of my teeth, and with the same tree branch beat me like a sheet of metal. —By my energetic medication, I had thus returned to him his pride and his life.⁹⁹

The proud philosopher, no doubt worried about his own physical well-being, then signals to the beggar "pour lui faire comprendre que je considérais la discussion comme finie" [to make him understand that I considered the discussion over] and instructs him: "Sir, you are my equal! Do me the honor of sharing with me my winnings; and remember, if you are truly philanthropic, that you must apply to all your cohorts, when they ask for charity the theory that I have had the difficulty of trying on your back."¹⁰⁰ The poem concludes with the

⁹⁸"j'avais vérifié que dans cette banlieue déserte je me trouvais, pour un assez long temps, hors de la portée de tout agent de police"

⁹⁹ "Tout à coup, -- ô jouissance du philosophe qui vérifie l'excellence de sa théorie! -- je vis cette antique carcasse se retourner, se redresser avec une énergie que je n'aurais jamais soupçonnée dans une machine si singulièrement détraquée, et, avec un regard de haine qui me parut de bon augure, le malandrin décrépité se jeta sur moi, me pocha les deux yeux, me cassa quatre dents, et avec la même branche d'arbre me battit dru comme plâtre. -- Par mon énergique médication, je lui avais donc rendu l'orgueil et la vie. »

¹⁰⁰ " «Monsieur, vous êtes mon égal! veuillez me faire l'honneur de partager avec moi ma bourse; et souvenez-vous, si vous êtes réellement philanthrope, qu'il faut appliquer à tous vos confrères, quand ils vous demanderont l'aumône, la théorie que j'ai eu la douleur d'essayer sur votre dos.»"

speaker reporting that the beggar assured him that he “avait compris ma théorie, et qu'il obéirait à mes conseils” [had understood my theory and would obey my counsel].

In one version of the manuscript Baudelaire concludes with the line: “Qu'en dis-tu, Citoyen Proudhon?” [What do you say of it, Citizen Proudhon?]. In a letter to Proudhon dated August 22, 1848, in which Baudelaire urges Proudhon to be careful of attempts on his life, the poet writes that he has “une absolue confiance” in Proudhon. If, then, we read the poem through the lens of an anarchist philosophy, we might note the central role of the immediate apprehension of experience in the context of utterly illogical “common sense” and the irrationality of hallucinations. And yet, much madness is divinest sense: the alienists Baudelaire references in the poem-- Louis Francisque Lélut (1804-1877) and Jules-Gabriel-François Baillarger (1815-1890) studied hallucinations, and Lélut judged Socrates afflicted with insanity in *Du démon de Socrate, spécimen d'une application de la science psychologique à celle de l'histoire* (1836). But, Baudelaire seems to ask, is Socrates madder, Proudhon's theories more outlandish, and the speaker's philosophical and physiological remedy more absurd than prevailing theories on how to deal with the poor and the issue of poverty?

Like the philosopher, the artist holds the potential to see the issue of poverty in a clearer light, to see beyond the lazy and convenient truisms society proffers. In “La Corde” [The Rope], a prose poem dedicated to Edouard Manet, the impressionist painter, and ostensibly narrated in his voice, the speaker opens with the assertion that nothing is more inviolable than maternal love, than a mother's affection for her own child. The painter-speaker of the poem adopts his favorite portrait model, a young boy, from his dirt-poor parents. The boy shows a predisposition for bouts of depression and a predilection for sweets

and alcohol that causes him to steal. After one such theft, the painter threatens to return the boy to his parents. The artist returns home later that day to discover that his charge has hanged himself, and cries out to his neighbors for help. No one, notes the speaker, ever wishes to involve himself in the business of a hanged man, and none of the neighbors respond.

When the speaker summons the resolve to go and inform the boy's parents of their son's suicide, he is surprised by their stoic reaction but tells himself "Les douleurs les plus terribles sont les douleurs muettes" [The most dreadful sorrows are those suffered in silence]. The mother pleads first for her son's corpse, then, after the painter dissuades her, for a piece of the rope he used to fashion his noose that remains, much to the painter's horror, attached to the armoire. The painter, thinking the mother's grief over the loss of her son motivates her request, readily assents. The next morning he awakens to a barrage of letters from neighbors asking also for a piece of the rope, and the speaker suddenly realizes its commercial value, and that a desire for monetary profit, not sentiment, impelled the mother's request: "And then, suddenly, a light went off in my brain, and I understood why the mother wanted so badly to tear from me the remainder of the rope and by what commerce she was intending to console herself."¹⁰¹ Participation in commerce apparently reveals the illusion of maternal love, and the impersonal character of commodity exchange replaces the specific and intimate love of a mother for her own flesh and blood.

The first paragraph of the prose poem prepares readers for an investigation of the manifold illusions that, at least in the poet's estimation, surround them. The introduction makes clear not only the vast number of illusions readers confront, but the difficulty of

¹⁰¹ "Et alors, soudainement, une lueur se fit dans mon cerveau, et je compris pourquoi la mère tenait tant à m'arracher la ficelle et par quel commerce elle entendait se consoler"

discovering them, their ability to reside in some of the "truths" readers hold most self-evident. Baudelaire also makes clear through the voice of the painter that the unveiling of illusions involves a process of loss and mourning, on the one hand, and excitement before the newly apparent character of the real, on the other. "La Corde" opens:

Illusions,--my friend was saying to me,-- are as innumerable perhaps as the relations between men, or of men with things. And when the illusion is disappearing, that's to say when we see the being or the fact just as it exists apart from us, we experience a strange sentiment, half composed of regret for the disappeared ghost, half of pleasant surprise before novelty, before the real fact. If there exists any phenomenon that is obvious, trivial, always the same, and of a character it is impossible to mistake, it is maternal love. It is as difficult to conceive of a mother without maternal love as it is of a light without heat; isn't it then perfectly legitimate to attribute to maternal love all the actions and words of a mother regarding her child? But, however, listen to this little tale, through which I was singularly mystified by the most natural of illusions.¹⁰²

The mystification of the poem's speaker functions to comfort the reader, to assure her that even great artists may be duped by illusions, such that the reader may be more willing to acknowledge and search out her own delusions of reality. And yet Baudelaire's prose poems addressing the poor, poverty and the character of illusion in society suggest that problems of accurate perception--which would seem to require an ability to empathize and analyze and a willingness to grapple (perhaps physically!) with the poor and the issue of poverty—are serious. If we accept that an attenuation of time brings about a shrinkage of modern experience, then the poet's preoccupation with accurate perception signals an urgent social need. Nothing trumps knowledge acquired through experience—even the painter cannot see,

¹⁰² «Les illusions, -- me disait mon ami, -- sont aussi innombrables peut-être que les rapports des hommes entre eux, ou des hommes avec les choses. Et quand l'illusion disparaît, c'est-à-dire quand nous voyons l'être ou le fait tel qu'il existe en dehors de nous, nous éprouvons un bizarre sentiment, compliqué moitié de regret pour le fantôme disparu, moitié de surprise agréable devant la nouveauté, devant le fait réel. S'il existe un phénomène évident, trivial, toujours semblable, et d'une nature à laquelle il soit impossible de se tromper, c'est l'amour maternel. Il est aussi difficile de supposer une mère sans amour maternel qu'une lumière sans chaleur; n'est-il donc pas parfaitement légitime d'attribuer à l'amour maternel toutes les actions et les paroles d'une mère, relatives à son enfant? Et cependant écoutez cette petite histoire, où j'ai été singulièrement mystifié par l'illusion la plus naturelle.»

cannot intercept the reality of the poor before his eyes accurately until he interacts with them (the boy's mother) directly. And nothing, another prose poem suggests, is more inexcusable than subscribing to an illusion. "La Fausse Monnaie" ["Counterfeit Money"] concludes with the judgment: "One is never excusable for being evil, but there is some merit in knowing that one is; and the most unforgivable of vices is to do evil through stupidity."¹⁰³ Seeing clearly, perceiving accurately, matters.

Art, Experience, and the Politics of Deformation

The question of genre in the prose poems does not exist independently of inquiry into Baudelaire's subject matter. If accurate perception matters, and experience (unfolding in time) offers the best conduit to such perception, then the prose poem's deformation of form takes center stage, for this deformation temporalizes form to make a project of retemporalization possible. The interdependence and inseparability of form and content in the prose poems suggest how different a project they represent from *Les Fleurs du mal*, which epitomizes the modernist project of the poet as *flâneur*: to discern beauty and individuality in the modern city and to create something from it.¹⁰⁴ Intellectual historian J.W. Burrows describes the dandy-cum-*flâneur* as "at the heart of modern society... yet wholly insulated from any demands it might make on him" and characterized by "aesthetic not sentimental" sympathies.¹⁰⁵ This *flâneur* is not the heart of the speaker of the vast majority of

¹⁰³ "On n'est jamais excusable d'être méchant, mais il y a quelque mérite à savoir qu'on l'est; et le plus irréparable des vices est de faire le mal par bêtise."

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Wilson, "The Invisible Flaneur." *New Left Review* 191, no. 1 (January-February 1992): 90-110.

¹⁰⁵ J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), 173.

the prose poems. Baudelaire's thematic interest in poverty and frequently empathetic portrayals of the poor argue against a purely aesthetic interest on the part of many of the prose poems' speakers.

Or do they? Elizabeth Wilson characterizes the Modernist task of the strolling urban artist in "The Invisible Flaneur" as follows:

The heroism... is in surviving the disorientating space, both labyrinthine and agoraphobic, of the metropolis. It lies in the ability to discern among the massed ranks of anonymity the outline of forms of beauty and individuality appropriate to urban life. The act of creating meaning, seemingly so arbitrary, becomes heroic in itself. (19-20)

The deformation of the prose poem may be viewed as a response to the Herculean task of creating meaning in a society that in the main lacks a temporality for experience. In the difficult process of creating meaning, Baudelaire's prose poems work to denature the already temporally denatured habitual paradigms of reality, critically participating in newly modern habits of reading, interpreting, assigning value, and identifying content as high art or newspaper fodder. The prose poems alienate but do not shock, which allows—even demands—a longer engagement of the audience with the text, and through this more sustained engagement readers stand to gain a resuscitation of experience. In 1848 Baudelaire watched the February riots from the Place de la Concorde with Gustave Courbet, crying out in his excitement "General Aupick [Baudelaire's stepfather] must be killed!" Baudelaire diagnosed his excitement years later as "literary intoxication; memories of what I had read." It is this preoccupation with the aesthetic imagination and endeavors that permitted Baudelaire to respond to the political and social turmoil in aesthetic terms, terms which, as Baudelaire evidences in the prose poems, clearly do not preclude emotional responses or political concerns while, in my anarchist modernism reading, certainly performing social and

political work. The prose poem's refusal to adhere to a poetic form participates in the same task of promoting an indeterminacy for self-determination as does explicitly political philosophical anarchism in its rejection of political form.

CHAPTER TWO

Gertrude Stein Authors Collective Time

Gertrude Stein's writing reclaims time for experience. Rather than contract past and present in the service of future plans, engineering a plot to arrive at its end, Stein holds the future hostage to the unfolding present. As Stein scholar Ulla Dydo explains, "Stein's is a world—a space—of unending process, which does not unroll toward a climax or conclusion but *goes on*, steadily and simultaneously, in many forms" (41). We see in Stein's texts a steadfast refusal to arrest time, to halt the movement of thought and experience through coalescence into any fixed meaning which might then take its place. Experience, or duration, exceeds the ideas to which meaning reduces it, so Stein's temporal defiance leaves its traces in the appearance of a sort of remainder, text from which readers cannot extract meaning as it is conventionally construed (for example as plot, characterization, or moral in fiction or as sound effect, figurative language or poetic devices in poems and prose poems).¹⁰⁶ In a discussion of the 'openness' of Stein's work, Mac Wellman observes: "[Stein's art] is the work of somebody who continues to write when she has nothing to say, which is deeply

¹⁰⁶ I provide these examples of textual operations to which we look for meaning only as evidence of readerly habits of extracting meaning from texts. Obviously, much—if not the bulk—of Stein's writing crosses borders between prose and poetry and wander among genres. I read this wandering as a part of the avoidance of identity, teleology, and closure in Stein's texts.

terrifying for most people.”¹⁰⁷ As an ongoing, open work, Stein’s writing evokes anarchism’s ethos of practice and unease with teleology in its nondirective, processual character.¹⁰⁸

This chapter treats Gertrude Stein as a founding figure in an explicitly anti-foundationalist anarchist modernist politics of time. If Proudhon identifies republican politics’ failure to grapple with temporal multiplicity as an obstacle to realizing a republic, and Baudelaire signals literature as a locus for addressing this political failure, Stein theorizes and enacts a retemporalization, re-inflating the present and re-imbuing it with the difference of duration. Language art serves as the site for change that cannot be effected within given political procedures, and Stein responds to the attenuation and aestheticization of time by re-making it, re-infusing language with a richer experience of temporality.

I approach Stein as a political thinker who largely evades political philosophy to practice a “happy anarchism.” Stein’s disengagement with political philosophy indicates, as with Proudhon, an interest in means rather than a debate about ends: Stein basically accepted republicanism. Her contribution to political thinking unfolds as a politics of time that works by confronting readers with interaction among formal-constitutive, historical, and experiential conceptions of time, making them conscious of such interaction and its productive potential. At its most useful, Stein’s writing works toward conditions necessary for self-institution, for individuals and collectives to come into temporality to produce an actual republican polis. The creation of this polis depends on individuals and collectives coming to possess time and on replacing teleological, futurist orientations with the “peaceful and exciting” change Stein valorizes in the present. This political possession of time that

¹⁰⁷ See Bevy Rosten et al., “A Play to Be Performed,” 17-18.

¹⁰⁸ David Kadlec includes Stein in a group of modernists who “adhered more closely to the Darwinian contours of James’s more ‘metonymic,’ processual rendering of the ‘good’ anarchists’ efforts to recover true, immediate relations.” See Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism*, 30.

permits an embodiment of the republic emerges as a simultaneous cohabiting of time, in all its difference, not as synchronization, some process of jostling behind the scenes to align individuals and collectives at a starting line for a brief moment, as though before a race.

I use Deleuze's conception of the three syntheses of time as a touchstone for imagining the interaction among formal-constitutive, historical, and experiential or phenomenological time in Stein's work. In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze presents the self as a modification of time and time in terms of three syntheses: habit, the 'foundation' of time; memory or attentive recollection, the 'ground' of time;¹⁰⁹ and eternal return, the repetition of the future in which "the ground has been superseded by a groundlessness, a universal ungrounding which turns upon itself and causes only the yet-to-come to return" (91). In the third synthesis "[t]he form of time is there only for the revelation of the formless in the eternal return" (91) because this last synthesis is a "repetition by excess" in which "neither the *condition* nor the *agent*... return" (90). The first synthesis functions as the "living present" that the second synthesis grounds by registering change, "the passing of one present and the arrival of another" (94). But it is not until the third synthesis that the event of change takes place, that a new future to which the actors become equal is realized. Deleuze explains:

In the third synthesis, however, the present is no more than an actor, an author, an agent destined to be effaced; while the past is no more than a condition operating by default. The synthesis of time here constitutes a future which affirms at once both the unconditioned character of the product in relation to the conditions of its production, and the independence of the work in relation to its author or actor. In all three syntheses, present, past and future are revealed as Repetition, but in three very different modes. The present is the repeater, the past is repetition itself, but the future is that which is repeated. (94)

¹⁰⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 79. Subsequent parenthetical citations refer to this text.

Deleuze's conception yields repetition as "for itself, difference in itself" and as "the category of the future." This conceptualization of time in terms of repeated difference demands a politics of time in which movement supplants representation. While representation offers one center, one perspective that "mediate[s] everything, but mobilises and moves nothing," movement "implies a plurality of centers, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a coexistence of moments which essentially distort representation" (55-56). Stein's radically individual, nonconformist aesthetics unite Deleuze's temporality of movement with anarchism's avoidance of centralization and representation. As David Kadlec notes, Stein's "resistance to mimetic 'resembling' ... hinges... on an anarchistic decentralization of linguistic and visual 'syntax,'" and her "effort to decentralize... drove her desire to 'rid' poetry of nouns'... and to fashion the modern 'paragraph' as not a representational unit but rather as a 'space that is filled with moving'" (31).

Deleuze's theorization of the three syntheses provides a useful lens through which to consider the temporal character of Stein's writing.¹¹⁰ This chapter proceeds by describing that character and then tracing its politics. While I do look to the prose poems of *Tender Buttons* (1914) as seminal texts for thinking about retemporalization, I also consider later, more novelistic and autobiographical writings such as the memoir *Paris France* (1940), *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), and *Wars I Have Seen* (1945). The tendency on the part of Stein scholars to distinguish between "experimental" and "audience" writing does tell us something about the difference between *Tender Buttons* or *The Geographical History of America* (1936), on the one hand, and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) on the

¹¹⁰ Connecting Deleuze's conceptualization of time and the retemporalization I attribute to Stein's texts was suggested to me by Ziarek's brief analysis of Stein's art as forcework in *The Force of Art* and, especially, Todd May's reading of Deleuze's poststructuralism in terms of anarchism in *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) and Gilles Deleuze (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

other, but in terms of a politics of time I tend to see Stein's writing as more of a piece—despite or because of its wandering among genres—than as divided. Virtually all of Stein's oeuvre temporalizes form as process and experience and eschews revolutionary politics, clearly taking the side of the ideal type of the prose poem over that of the manifesto.

I pay particular attention to the ways Stein's texts, even as they frequently make outrageous political pronouncements and proffer questionably tenable readings of history, consistently articulate a temporal politics of difference and process that holds promise for a simultaneous self-determination at the level of the individual and the collectivity. Stein's conception of nation, in particular, discards the form of the nation state in favor of a dynamic collective embodiment, a living together in constant motion. From the perspective of the work of anarchist modernism, Stein's texts comprise a gold mine of strategies for reinstating time for everyone.

I. Becoming and Repeating: Fleshing out the Present

The prose poems of *Tender Buttons* and the long, often autobiographical works of Stein's last decade demonstrate a consistent focus on "fattening" the present. Stein either draws the present out by focusing on becoming and on ongoing, continuous action or situates the present in cyclical time, as a moment to be repeated.

Stein re-inflates the present by focusing on becoming, which "does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future."¹¹¹ Attending to becoming emphasizes the extent and duration of time conceived as blank linearity (continuous chronological time) and calls attention to the teleology often imposed upon it.

¹¹¹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 30.

For example, Stein asks “What is the use of being a little boy if you are going to grow up to be a man”? (*Geographical History* 58). If the boy is merely the cause of the man, why bother with him? Stein’s question echoes Bergson’s discussion of the reality of temporal movement in *Creative Evolution* (1907). Bergson writes:

Infancy, adolescence, maturity, old age, are mere views of the mind, *possible stops* imagined by us, from without, along the continuity of a progress. [...] When we say “The child becomes a man,” let us take care not to fathom too deeply the literal meaning of the expression, or we shall find that, when we posit the subject “child,” the attribute “man” does not yet apply to it, and that, when we express the attribute “man,” it applies no more to the subject “child.” The reality, which is the transition from childhood to manhood, has slipped between our fingers.¹¹²

Read in this light, Stein’s question mocks the importance assigned to end-points (“boy” and “man”) at the expense of the intervening duration. Bergson himself uses the example of a boy becoming a man to critique what he terms “the cinematographical mechanism of thought,” which ignores the actual character of duration. Bergson insists, “The truth is that if language here were molded on reality, we should not say “The child becomes the man,” but “There is becoming from the child to the man.”¹¹³ Stein’s texts take on this becoming, the passage of time characterized by ongoing change, “the difference” that “is spreading”¹¹⁴ to recharge becoming with the movement and difference normally occluded by an orientation towards ends and accompanying assumption of linear development. Stein’s time-sense counters habitual thought, in which “[b]ecomes” represents “the movement, always the same, of the cinematographical film, a movement hidden in the apparatus and whose function it is to superpose the successive pictures on one another in order to imitate the movement of the

¹¹² Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: The Modern Library, 1911), 339.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 340.

¹¹⁴ The last sentence of “A Carafe, that is a blind glass,” the first prose poem in *Tender Buttons*, is “The difference is spreading.” Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1914), 9.

real object.”¹¹⁵ To encounter the object as it actually exists in time, over time, we “must... escape from the cinematographical mechanism of thought.”¹¹⁶

Stein defines a route of escape through a coming into one’s own in language. Just as Bergson’s *durée* is not restricted to personal psychology but encompasses all of reality or ontological existence, coming into language occurs not just individually but collectively. In a favorable comparison of American soldiers of the Second World War to those who came to Europe during the first, the narrator of *Wars I Have Seen* asserts

I think of the Americans of the last war, they had their language but they were not yet in possession of it, and the children of the depression as that generation called itself it was beginning to possess its language but it was still struggling but now the job is done, the G. I. Joes have this language that is theirs, they do not have to worry about it, they dominate their language and in dominating their language which is now all theirs they have ceased to be adolescents and have become men.¹¹⁷

Two elements stand out in this passage: first, the states of adolescence and adulthood exist only in reference to linguistic facility; and second, the acquisition of adulthood shows its becoming, manifests it repeatedly, through language use. Becoming culminates in the repetition of fully inhabiting one’s language, a process rather than an end point. Language marks independence from a childish colonized status. Stein observes: “I was much taken with what one American soldier said when he was in England. He said we did not get along at all with the English until they finally did get it into their heads that we were not cousins, but foreigners, once they really got that, there was no more trouble” (*Wars I Have Seen* 25). Language is an especially crucial component of living together because of the rare security it

¹¹⁵ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 340.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Stein, *Wars I Have Seen*, 259

affords as one of the few things moderns can truly own.¹¹⁸ Through language Stein escapes the cinematographical mechanism of thought not by substituting another mechanism to connect static end points but by exchanging the idea of mechanism for dynamism, a living language.

Stein “fleshes out” the present by inflating moments into becoming and by situating the present in a context of flux, releasing time from static notions of form and highlighting the repetition of daily life to emphasize cyclical conceptions of time at the expense of linear ones. Many of Stein’s earlier writings, particularly *Tender Buttons* and the portraits, overtly throw off the yoke of form to restore the time-sense—the ongoing, everchanging character of experience—of process. For example, in “A Time to Eat,” which appears in the middle of the “Objects” section of *Tender Buttons*, the short prose poem never moves beyond its own (temporal) enactment to arrive at some formal closure. “A Time to Eat” asserts, in its entirety: “A pleasant simple habitual and tyrannical and authorised and educated and resumed and articulate separation. This is not tardy.”¹¹⁹ The poem enacts what it tells, an “articulate separation,” and exhibits many of the hallmarks of a Steinian prose poem: quotidian content, an evocation of time as simultaneously repeated and unending, and unexpected combination. The adjectives in the text suggest oppositionality, between “pleasant” and “habitual,” on the one hand, and “tyrannical and authorised,” on the other; between “simple” and “educated”; and between “resumed” and “articulate.” These adjectives seem to comment both on the “object” of the poem— a time to eat as an end—and on the

¹¹⁸ Stein contrasts Americans’ ownership of language with an otherwise precarious, borrowed lifestyle: “an industrial nation is poor, because its people don’t own anything. Americans don’t own their high standard of living, they only rent it.” *Yank—The Army Weekly* (Continental Edition), Nov. 11, 1945.

¹¹⁹ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 23.

objects of the poem, words, language. “Pleasant” calls to mind food as enjoyment; “simple,” a basic meal or eating as a fundamental act; “habitual,” the fact that eating occurs all the time; “tyrannical,” the requirement that one has to do it; “authorized,” that eating fits with accepted social norms; “educated,” that one learns the proper way to do it; and “resumed,” that eating ends and begins again. Then “articulate” would seem to present an obstacle to the logical path: in evoking the articulation of words in succession like the bones of a skeleton, the sentence shifts from conveying content to calling attention to medium (word-bones) and to its own enactment in time: “This is not tardy.” Stein’s prose poem announces itself in the act of its realization—its reading and interpretation—as composed of entities, medium and act inextricably bound up in process, not as a form with a content distinct from its container. Words and food, eating and reading, comprise the indissoluble stuff of daily life as objects are gathered into the temporal contexts of their use.

II. Open Time: Incorporating Entities and Forces in Expression

Tender Buttons reveals Stein’s—and modern physics’-- seemingly paradoxical advocacy of two distinct views of reality, one of atomistic elements that retain their autonomy as entities, coming together and moving apart without violation, the other of the “unfixability,” the formlessness, of each experienced moment.¹²⁰ This double view takes on additional significance for Stein’s aesthetics in the context of her study under William James while she was a student at Radcliffe and, as I emphasize here, with respect to the ethical and

¹²⁰ “In a way that is similar to the assumption that quantum entities can have properties of waves and particles without actually being either of the two, Stein’s aesthetics and linguistic practice move beyond mere dichotomies towards a state in which the conditions of a word as a phonetic particle and a semantic wave exist at the same time.” Jan D. Kucharzewski, “There is no ‘there’ there’: Gertrude Stein and Quantum Physics,” 501. See also Steven Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science* (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2001).

political implications of Stein's writing.¹²¹ The question is how to preserve the conditions under which both these descriptions of reality might exist, or in Gödel's terms, to maintain the incompleteness of any systematization.

Stein's emphasis on individual autonomy, on the one hand, and capturing the dynamic and relational nature of experience, on the other, cohabit in the temporality of her writing as entities and forces. Rather than choose between entities—words, people-- and dynamic forces, Stein gathers their interaction in expression, the webbed character of specific circumstances, forcefields of relation. She opts for a semi-autonomy in which entities relinquish any notion of a context-free existence and in which the freedom of forces is limited by an ethics that recognizes the reality of relations and their effects. This aesthetically-rendered depiction of the world possesses a time sense which, put into practice in the operations of texts, includes much more experience—temporal and spatial multiplicity—than existing political mechanisms can take into account, and in that capacity continues the anarchist modernist project Baudelaire inaugurates in *Le Spleen de Paris*. Most remarkably, Stein's sort of literary physics works within notions of the sanctity of the individual even as it attends to contexts in which form, thought here as the autonomy of the individual, is deformed in relation and context. The next two sections of this chapter emphasize the ontological mobility of Stein's experiential world in comparison to the more static political imagination. I also delineate some of the ways Stein suggests, explicitly and implicitly, for politics to catch up to experience.

Movement links entities and forces by situating them in experience. Like Baudelaire, Stein wrote prose poems that engage readers in a dialectical process of defamiliarization and

¹²¹ Stein's interest in experiments involving parts of speech rather than in laboratory performances of automatic writing while a student of James are instructive in clarifying the differences between Stein's impersonal interest in process and the surrealists' focus on a psychology of revolt.

reconstitution of the textual universe. Her generic innovations, largely hybridizations and mixed generic texts, advance an ambitious poetics that loosens familiar social constructions to make them more flexible and multiple, allowing alterations to existing frameworks of perception and action and giving rise to new ones. *Tender Buttons* makes art out of life by taking everyday household items—“Food,” “Objects” and “Rooms”—and converting domestic economy to word arrangements that fail to make sense, at least in terms of referential value and conventional language usage. Stein’s failure to make sense emerges in the creation of an art of common objects, and frequently, in the context of Cubism, scholars have referred to Stein’s prose poems as “still-lives.” Yet like the work the genre of the prose poem performs, provoking an oscillation on the part of the reader between familiar (generic convention) and unfamiliar (switching from one generic register to another), what matters in Stein’s still-lives is movement. If cubist painting explores the perception of movement in time and space, *Tender Buttons* focuses on the movement of perception, its fluidity and changeability.

Stein’s emphasis on movement is linked to the temporality of her texts and to a conception of knowledge she explains in *The Geographical History of America*. Stein distinguishes between the knowledge allowed by the human mind and that permitted by human nature, declaring: “To understand a thing means to be in contact with that thing and the human mind can be in contact with anything. / “Human nature can be connected with anything but it can not be in contact with anything” (66). Understanding’s dependence on contact (offered by the human mind) rather than connection (a characteristic of human nature), makes freedom of movement paramount. One might contrast this freedom with the stasis of representation. Stein’s nonconformist aesthetics share anarchism’s avoidance of

domination, particularly with respect to centralization and representation, even at the level of self-knowledge, where her preference for contact over connection decenters, if not undoes, identity in favor of creation.

As a centralized representation of the self to the self, identity opposes the conception of knowledge Stein associates with the human mind and links to contact. The self as a form is not exempted from Stein's temporalization of form in her language art, and as such possesses a variable semi-autonomy dependent on context. Consequently, while knowledge of the self depends on its contact with the world beyond it, the self's very existence happens, not is: the self is constantly in process. The self's status as particle (an entity in contact with other entities) and wave (in process) allows an analogy between the temporal character of the self and that of the expression of an artwork. Both the self and the artwork emerge through poesis, as the following reading of *What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them?*, a lecture Stein delivered at Oxford in February 1936 and published in 1940, illustrates.

Stein links an evasion of identity to creation and the freedom of self-determination in her discussion of expression as the practice of a freedom that surpasses or exceeds the individual person or artwork. In *What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them?* Stein characterizes a masterpiece in terms of an escape from identity and school. The process of producing a masterpiece entails a momentary forgetting or break with everyday reality, a departure from normal consciousness. Stein explains:

The thing one gradually comes to find out is that one has no identity that is when one is in the act of doing anything. Identity is recognition, you know who you are because you and others remember anything about yourself but essentially *you are not that when you are doing anything*. I am I because my little dog knows me but, creatively speaking the little dog knowing that you are you and your recognizing that he knows, that is what destroys creation. That is what makes school. Picasso once remarked I do

not care who it is that has or does influence me as long as it is not myself. [my italics]
(355)

Creation involves *not* perceiving oneself or one's context as one normally does, not knowing according to prevailing norms or what a school of thought teaches, avoiding the easy connection (of human nature) in favor of the experience of contact (of the human mind). This alienation from self and context might be read as self-absorption, but also as absorption of the self in the act of imagining a new context. The first reading emphasizes an introspection and individualism characteristic of one modernist stereotype; the second interpretation envisions the self as extrusive and attached to process and environment. Loss of identity occasions a momentary disinterest that is productive, and as Stein shows later in this text, the artist creates a masterpiece that raises the question of identity and which may then spur a reflection on identity that could yield alternate identities or more dynamic alternatives to identity.

Stein's move away from identity is explicitly a move toward creation or making (poiesis). Subjects step outside identity to create themselves anew. Stein asserts: "At any moment when you are you you are you without the memory of yourself because if you remember yourself while you are you you are not for purposes of creating you" (356). This seemingly paradoxical declaration that one must forget oneself in order to become oneself, or a different instantiation of oneself, makes sense in the context of school and of the dialectic of recognition between the subject and her dog. The reference to school evokes the context of received notions and pedagogy in which identities are constructed, a context indicative of the category of knowledge Stein labels human nature. Likewise, the recognition between the subject and her dog invokes an already given connection, not an understanding generated in the specific encounter or contact. So to mitigate the influence of school and escape the

constraints of connection, subjects must forget themselves. In this forgetting lies the possibility of forging something other, because the present temporality of contact can generate an understanding only if connections to the past, to preformed notions, are loosened.

Stein explains this potential for creating something other than what context has already developed by opposing necessity and human nature to possibility and the human mind. The possibility of going on, of a masterpiece maintaining an impact, is that of creation, which depends on open engagement rather than on necessity, which is unreflective, consumed rather than expressed. Necessity and human nature meet in naturalized preconceptions, in accordance with the Kantian formulation of necessity as bound to a “coherence with the actual... determined according to universal conditions of experience.”¹²² Creation lies outside these, the product of the human mind to imagine something other than what human nature believes, values and does during a specific period in a particular place.

Stein argues:

...action is direct and effective but after all action is necessary and anything that is necessary has to do with human nature and not with the human mind. Therefore a master-piece has essentially not to be necessary, it has to be that is it has to exist but it does not have to be necessary it is not in response to necessity as action is because the minute it is necessary it has in it no possibility of going on. (357)

Kant formulates the principle of possibility as "What agrees (in terms of intuitions and concepts) with the formal conditions of experience is *possible*."¹²³ What is judged necessary cannot “go on” because the perceived universal conditions of experience, as the modern experience of time, do not admit of its temporality. Both the specific masterpiece and

¹²²Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), A218/B266.

¹²³ Ibid, A218/B265.

individual artwork as Stein conceives them can exist only in the temporality permitted by a poietic temporalization of form.

In the contest between contact and connection, human mind and human nature, only contact preserves the difference intrinsic to temporal multiplicity. Masterpieces raise questions that allow those who regard them to think beyond the status quo: What does a masterpiece do? Which approaches does it require to be intelligible? How should we regard it? What contexts does it need, suggest? What, if any, means, frames, practices does it need? In being out of relation, a masterpiece begs consideration of what would have to change to bring it into relation. But bringing the masterpiece “down to earth” comes at a cost: “The moment it is in relation it is common knowledge and anybody can feel and know it and it is not a master-piece” (358). The proper mode of engagement with a masterpiece is through contact, not connection, such that an understanding of it can develop relationally, processually.

Stein suggests that it may be easier to understand masterpieces from antiquity than those from our own time because they are less readily apprehensible through connection. Historical difference usefully estranges them. Stein notes the contemporary salience of ancient art:

The manner and habits of Bible times or Greek or Chinese have nothing to do with ours today but the masterpieces exist just the same and they do not exist because of their identity, that is what any one remembering then remembered then, they do not exist by human nature because everybody always knows everything there is to know about human nature, they exist because they came to be as something that is an end in itself and in that respect it is opposed to the business of living which is relation and necessity. (358)

Two antipodes emerge here, that of “manner and habits,” human nature, identity, relation and necessity, versus “something that is an end in itself.” The masterpieces of antiquity have

come “to be as something that is an end in itself” because their contexts are alien to our own “manner and habits.” Like prose poems, masterpieces are able to perform a specific work of retemporalization through the engagement (the contact) they demand to overcome their initial alienation.

In the last part of *What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them?* Stein intimates the political utility of an abandonment of identity. The value of knowing that one has no identity, of masterpieces’ re-fashioning of temporality, is a full, open present, a broader realm of the possible. Creation staves off time (the determinism of the past, contractedness of the passing present, or teleology of a given future), as Stein insists “time and identity is what you tell about as you create only while you create they do not exist.” She explains:

But what can a master-piece be about mostly it is about identity and all it does and in being so it must not have any. I was just thinking about anything and in thinking about anything I saw something. In seeing that thing shall we see it without it turning into identity, the moment is not a moment and the sight is not the thing seen and yet it is. Moments are not important because of course master-pieces have no more time than they have identity although time like identity is what they concern themselves about... (360-61)

Masterpieces step outside time and identity to make time and identity the terms they contest, or at least put back into play. The time-sense masterpieces produce is opposed to the arrested time of governance, so masterpieces perform a politically significant work of delivering from power relations. Stein reasons:

If there was no identity no one could be governed, but everybody is governed by everybody and that is why they make no master-pieces, and also why governing has nothing to do with master-pieces it has completely to do with identity but it has nothing to do with master-pieces. And that is why governing is occupying but not interesting, governments are occupying but not interesting because master-pieces are exactly what they are not. (363)

Outside identity, masterpieces also exist apart from governance, aware of freedom from constraint but disinterested in using that freedom for a power grab, for purposes of governance. As metanarratives, masterpieces tell about the context they eschew and escape and allow us to perceive conditions that usually govern our perception and evaluate them. In this text as in *Tender Buttons* Stein is a reviser, constantly revising perception to allow political re-visioning and revising. This revising occurs in a particular temporality, between the “occupying” of identity and governance and the present of engagement of the interesting masterpiece. The former colonizes and dominates, while the latter appeals, rousing curiosity.¹²⁴ Masterpieces provide a way of perceiving, re-viewing current contexts, practices, governance; “master-pieces” are literally pieces of mastery, of momentary triumph over prevailing identities.

To re-focus from the artwork to the individual, Stein’s evasions of identity cast her texts’ refusal of a stable or isolate “I” in a positive light. Charges of extreme subjectivism misread Stein’s project of recontextualization and overestimates the difficulty her writing poses to readers.¹²⁵ This kind of charge mistakes Stein’s concern with apperception for solipsism, reading an investigation into self-consciousness and the operations of individual minds within particular social contexts as a retreat into a single mind’s most obscure preoccupations. The pronoun “I” does not appear, for example, in *Tender Buttons*, and as Ulla Dydo has noted, Stein “neutralizes” language through a variety of means, such as substituting impersonal pronouns (chiefly “it” and “this”) or pronouns without antecedents

¹²⁴ Stein’s conception of a masterpiece seems almost directly opposite to an ideal type of manifesto: manifestos force identity—they call identities into being—so they force government.

¹²⁵ See, for example, Robert Chodat “Sense, Science, and the Interpretations of Gertrude Stein.” *Modernism/Modernity* 12, no. 4 (November 2005): 581-605 or Janet Malcolm, *Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

for specific subjects: recontextualization (to engender “peaceful and exciting change”) begins with decontextualization. Of Stein’s “Identity A Poem” (1935), which is in fact more play than poem, Charles Bernstein notes, “Stein celebrates her suspension of identity, this holding off naming to see what otherwise emerges. Her writing becomes a state of willing, of willed, unknowingness.”¹²⁶ Even when Stein takes herself as the subject of her writing, she seeks distance, writing her autobiography in the voice of Alice.

Such writing encapsulates the instability of experience, its non-reducibility to subjects and actions, entities and forces. Stein’s texts involve shifting subjects and entities and lack clearly defined subjects. The complexity of dynamism evades reduction to stable identity or, sometimes, any identity at all. As contact, knowledge of self cannot be separated from knowledge of selves, which we see in the ways Stein’s individuals and collectives can only be thought together, in relation in time.

III. Authoring Time Collectively: Nation

Like self, Stein takes on collectives as a matter of expression, not simply as entities in and of themselves. Her investments in collectives emerge in her writings in terms of two general types: an investment in actual, embodied groups of individuals, from the artists and writers who comprised her salons to grounded, living French people in the memoir *Paris France* (1940); and an investment in collectives as people in dialogue. Stein’s treatment of nations and national identity provides a good model of both of these types of collective investment. Embodied as individuals, nations are not abstract ideals, superior to or different from the people that comprise them—they are just as prone to silliness and foibles as individuals. As people in dialogue(s), nations are not static entities but ongoing practice,

¹²⁶ Charles Bernstein, “Stein’s Identity,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, 487.

dynamic, with their character constantly in play. Given Stein's grounding of nation in a specific kind of community and attention to an ethics of communal life and openness to identity, collectives for Stein consist of individuals living together, not as representations or fixed or static categories.¹²⁷ Stein's writing follows her thinking of nations: the barrier between form and content evaporates in practice, such that Stein's reliance on mixed genres and generic hybrids has less to do with instantiating new forms than with transgressing form altogether.

It is important, then, to understand Stein's interest in nations and affection for many of them apart from the form of the nation-state. Stein broaches nations as expression and as community. As Catharine Stimpson has noted, "Although Stein believed in the free individual, she did not want to be free, atomistic, and isolated. She was sociable and gregarious, and her units of preference were the couple, the marriage..., the local community (be it a rural village or urban neighborhood with a common life and custom), and finally the nation, although her nationalism is cultural rather than political."¹²⁸ Barbara Will similarly reads Stein's nationalism in terms of social interaction and communal belonging, perceiving it as "linked to a shared set of experiences and beliefs—cultural, geographical, and linguistic—as well as to the ongoing dialogue that takes place through and as a sign of this

¹²⁷ Stein expresses this notion of nation particularly clearly in *Geography and Plays*, where she pokes fun at nationalist pretensions and avoids any specificity of identity in pieces named for national identities. For example, in the eighteen-page prose piece "Italians," Stein uses only thirty-seven different nouns (even counting the singular and plural expressions of the same noun separately), none of them "Italians," none of them identifying the "one" and the "ones" she discusses as Italian. (Stein employs these words as nouns in the text: "some," "them", "others," "one," "kind," "thing," "it," "more," "place," "enough," "feeling," "desire," "anybody," "anything," "knowing," "ones," "they," "way," "noise," "fingers," "arms," "hands," "noises," "number," "many," "hair," "nail," "nails," "colors," "something," "things," "decision," "everything," "men," "time," "teaching," and "needing.")

¹²⁸ See Bevy Rosten, Anne-Marie Levine, Catharine Stimpson, Richard Howard, Wendy Steiner, Maria Irene Fornes, Mac Wellman, Al Carmines, Richard Foreman, Charles Bernstein, Jane Bowers. "A Play to Be Performed." Excerpts from the Gertrude Stein Symposium at New York University. *Theater*. 32.2 (Summer 2002): 12.

shared experience. [...] Without this love, without this profound sense of belonging, without this collective ‘talking and listening,’ allegiances in the name of abstract ideas become ‘disgusting.’”¹²⁹

Stein announced in 1935: “Political theories bore me because political theories end in nothing. Soviet Russia will end in nothing and so will the Roosevelt administration end in nothing because it is not stimulating it will end in nothing.”¹³⁰ In Stein’s aesthetics, as evidenced in the syntax of her pronouncement, ending is overrated, so the real bite of her critique comes from calling politics “not stimulating,” failing in practice. Catharine Stimpson identifies three foci of Stein’s political ire: communism, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and revolution, and also alludes to Stein as a closet anarchist, likening her to a “premature” Ayn Rand. Stein, writes Stimpson, “has whiffs of the closeted and demure anarchist... approvingly quot[ing] her friends [in the 1930s] who say that Sovietism and collectivism are out of style and conservative. And what matters now, she says, happily, is anarchism.”¹³¹ I read Stein as a left-leaning (rather than individualist) anarchist, a reading linked to others that view Stein as a small-town Jeffersonian or as a “peaceful and exciting” (as Stein describes Paris in the first sentence of *Paris France*) pragmatist.

My discussion here examines Stein’s conceptualization of nation in two works in relation to states and politics, on the one hand, and aesthetics and ethics, on the other, to explore her aesthetics more directly in relation to ethical anarchism. Stein advocates nations,

¹²⁹ Barbara Will, “Gertrude Stein and Zionism.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2005), 449. Cf. Daniel Kadlec’s distinction between anarchism and socialism with respect to abstraction: “Contrasted with an anarchistic ethic of untheorized action, radical socialist principles were thought to be easily uprootable because they were abstractly derived.” See Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism*, 3.

¹³⁰ *New York Herald Tribune*, May 19, 1935, qtd in Mellow 416.

¹³¹ Stimpson in Rosten et al. “A Play to Be Performed,” 12.

in this instance the United States and France, not states, and conceives of nations in ethical and communal terms that partake of her aesthetics of process and relationality.

In *The Geographical History of America; or, The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind* (1936) and *Paris France* (1940) Stein reflects on the two nations that comprise her home. Stein writes “America is my country and Paris is my home town”¹³² and asserts that as a republic, the U.S. “can have everything in common with France” (versus “a great deal in common with England” and “nothing in common with Germany”).¹³³ Stein’s re-encounter of the United States during her 1934-35 tour after three decades of expatriate living in France “provided a core of new voices and new experiences” which she assimilated and processed in *The Geographical History of America*.¹³⁴ Conversely, Stein’s little book on France emerges from a context that is literally more conservative, an accumulation of Stein’s daily living in the country, under threat of war as Stein wrote. Stein’s biographers read *Paris France* as homage-- Wagner-Martin calls it “her book about her loyalty to France”¹³⁵ and James Mellow cites Stein friend Kate Buss’s description of the book as a ‘love letter’ to France”.¹³⁶ In contrast, *The Geographical History of America* has been received as “a work primarily of ideas, or, more precisely, of one idea,”¹³⁷ an attempt “to arrive at something

¹³² Stein, *Paris France*, 3.

¹³³ Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (Harcourt Brace and Company, New York: 1933), 188.

¹³⁴ Linda Wagner-Martin, "*Favored Strangers*": *Gertrude Stein and her Family* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 227.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹³⁶ James Mellow, *The Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 438.

¹³⁷ John Malcolm Brinnin, *The Third Rose: Gertrude Stein and Her World* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1987), 350.

beyond identity.”¹³⁸ While *The Geographical History of America* overtly explores philosophical concerns, such as the nature of a masterpiece and of identity, and *Paris France* displays characteristics of the genre of the memoir, both texts conceptualize nation similarly. Read comparatively, these two works show how aesthetic and ethical concerns conjoin in the nation, an ongoing project of individuals interacting in community.

Stein opens *The Geographical History of America* by situating herself in the context of U.S. history, beginning the text: “In the month of February were born Washington Lincoln and I.” Stein aligns herself with Washington and Lincoln and later in the text critiques Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt, but in many ways her concept of nation most resembles that of Thomas Jefferson. Stein’s assertion that “what makes America what it is” is that “In the United States there is more space where nobody is than where anybody is”¹³⁹ echoes Jefferson’s belief that the United States will remain “virtuous... as long as agriculture is our principal object, which will be the case while there remains vacant lands in any part of America.”¹⁴⁰ Stein also resembles Jefferson in her attention to size, perceiving it as an aide to freedom, space in which to wander unrestrained by centralized control. As Jefferson wrote, “Our country is too large to have all its affairs directed by a single government.”¹⁴¹

Stein condemned politics as a “trade based entirely on human nature without the constructive aid of the human mind,” insisting “People have a peculiar attitude toward being governed, in that they allow themselves to be governed not by people who think but by

¹³⁸ Mellow, *Charmed Circle*, 418.

¹³⁹ Stein, *The Geographical History of America or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936) ,46.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to James Madison, Paris, December 20, 1787.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Gideon Granger, Monticello, August 13, 1800.

people who never have thought in their lives.”¹⁴² So Stein conceives of politics as inherently uninventive, a (dull) dead end in which individuals subject themselves to thoughtless domination. Yet she wrote books lauding nations.

The Geographical History of America presents the U.S. in terms of action that has creative potential, as a large field of continuing processes in spatial relation. The book spatializes time through both verb tense and structure, creating a panorama that from the first sentence—“In the month of February were born Washington Lincoln and I”—makes time part of a landscape of apparently limitless expanse. The chapters of the book disrupt linear time by repeating and skipping, positing, for example, numerous “Chapter V”s and inserting “Chapter 91” in between a “Chapter I” and “Chapter II” that appear mid-way through the work. The spatialized temporality of the text enacts the nation’s geographical history by wandering. As Dydo notes of Stein’s sense of geography, it “is not about places visited during travels” or “setting or scenery” but “words in relation in the space of the composition.”¹⁴³ Dydo’s definition allows us to read in parallel Stein’s text and the text whose geography she takes for content, the U.S. Stein’s musing “What has excitement got to do with geography and how does the land the American land look from above from below and from custom and from habit” interrogates the interrelating components of the nation and of her text.¹⁴⁴ Stein writes: “Wandering around a country has something to do with the

¹⁴² Stein continues: “Do you think men like Hitler and Mussolini ever think? Not on your life. Human nature, not the human mind guides their actions, and the people, mind you, put up with it. And yet in every other kind of human relations the people demand the use of the human mind as well as human nature. Obviously nothing constructive can develop in government so long as the leaders are in a state of identity instead of entity.” *New York Herald Tribune*, Dec. 2, 1935, qtd in Mellow 420.

¹⁴³ Ulla E. Dydo, *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises, 1923-1934* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 71.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

geographical history of that country and the way one piece of it is not separated from any other one” (84-85) and “wandering has something to do with the human mind” which “has neither identity nor time and when it sees anything has to look flat” (176). Action, not stasis, occurs without awareness of identity or time, and Stein valorizes this kind of action as creative. The book’s fifth “Chapter II” asks and answers: “Are there any customs and habits in America there is geography and what what is the human mind. The human mind is there because they write and they do not forget or remember and they do not go away and come back again” (72). The U.S. has human mind, which has nothing and everything to do with habit, because its inhabitants write—they do, they act—rather than remember or forget or become weighted down by the connections of human nature. Americans in this conception are paradoxically in the habit of not succumbing to habits, instead continually doing, changing.

Stein associates this freedom of the human mind with what “ordinary” people do, not politicians. She insists: “A communist and individualist a propagandist a politician cannot listen to the human mind, a business man can and anybody who can sit and write can he can listen to the human mind” (74). Politicians and propaganda rely on programs and call on identity, but “anybody who can sit and write” and maintain an open mind may access human mind. Stein defined genius as listening and talking at the same time, and Charles Bernstein observes that much of her work espouses an “ethics of dialogue.”¹⁴⁵ In *Wars I Have Seen* Stein praises “this army” for their skill at dialogue: “they talked and they listened” and “they consider that people have their habits and their ways of living, some you can get along with

¹⁴⁵ Charles Bernstein explains: “Gertrude Stein was trying to negotiate a poetics that was an antidote to antagonism. She didn’t manage to obliterate antagonism, but the basic orientation of her work was to create an ethics of dialogue as much as an aesthetics of presentness. I would emphasize this ethical, as opposed to moral, orientation as a way to approach the politics of her work.”

and others you can't, but they are all perfectly reasonable for the people who use them.” Stein calls this “the great change in Americans, that “they are interested, they are observant, they are accustomed to various types of people and ways of being,” that “they [now] have plenty of curiosity, but not any criticism, this is the new army.” Stein concludes: “It was all very exciting.”¹⁴⁶

A Geographical History of America defines the nation in terms of its genius, an ongoing openness and dialogue facilitated by spatial relation, by geography. As Stein declares from the first page, “In the United States there is more space where nobody is than where anybody is. This is what makes America what it is” (46), and she noted during her recent lecture tour of the U.S., “it is something strictly American to conceive a space that is filled with moving, a space of time that is filled always filled with moving.”¹⁴⁷

If space underpins the genius of the U.S., time and tradition form the backdrop for the nation of France. Stein valorizes France as a nation that thinks historically and peacefully, individually and communally, and most of all conservatively.

Stein's preference for France's temporality is linked to her perception of it as conservative. Seemingly eternally preoccupied with fears of teleological visions of history and threats of revolution, Stein insists: “I cannot write too much upon how necessary it is to be completely conservative that is particularly traditional in order to be free. And so France is and was. Sometimes it is important and sometimes it is not, but from 1900 to 1939, it certainly was” (38). The recognition that “sometimes it is important” to be “completely conservative” or “particularly traditional” and “sometimes it is not” makes clear Stein's

¹⁴⁶ Stein, *Wars I Have Seen*, 254.

¹⁴⁷ Stein, *Lectures in America* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1935), 161

attention to context: specific beliefs and practices do or do not make sense, are more or less desirable, according to geographical and historical circumstance. Context trumps ideology. This position makes Stein both more attuned to issues of temporality and insufficiently attentive to imminent possibilities for sweeping historical change. The chatty, fond tone of *Paris France* provides an interesting illustration of Stein's lack of attention, as the memoir was published on the day the Germans took Paris, June 14, 1940.

Stein lauds her home nation especially because she judges the United States as the best expression of difference due to its sheer variety. Stein aimed in *The Making of Americans* (written 1911, pub. 1925) to give "a complete description of every kind of human being that ever could or would be living." This early work shows Stein to have been preoccupied with working out a means of negotiating between the particular or individual and the general/collective from very early in her literary career. "Kind" and type give way to a less structured, less stratified relation of individual/particular to collective/universal, which becomes apparent in radical individual perception as early as *Tender Buttons* and later in the loose culture of *Paris France*. Stein fondly wrote about nations as experiments in living together which were somehow delightfully always the same despite their dynamic characters. Stein revels in thinking through a comparison of the U.S. army of World War II to that from the previous war, reflecting

this army conversed, it talked it listened, and each one of them had something to say no this army was not like that other army. People do not change, no they don't, when I was in America after almost thirty years of absence they asked me if I did not find Americans changed and I said no what could they change to except to be Americans and anyway I could have gone to school with any of them they were just like the ones I went to school with and now they are still Americans but they can converse and they are interesting when they talk. The older Americans always told stories that was about all there was to their talking but these don't tell stories they converse and what they

say is interesting and what they hear interests them and that does make them different not really different God bless them but just the same they are not quite the same.”¹⁴⁸

I read Stein’s vacillation here between recognizing effects of change and refusing to admit of real change as a relief that no matter what has or hasn’t changed, her countrymen remain comfortingly familiar as she sees them. Ideally, by coordinating individual and collective self-determination, nations offer a way to manage change and make change manageable.

Stein’s writing about nations provides additional evidence of the centrality of issues of temporality to Stein’s thinking. Because in her view the U.S., at the turn of the century, makes a requirement or necessity of newness, Stein argues that its lack of time-sense makes France a more important nation for thinking about temporality. France’s sense of stability and continuity, Stein asserts, made it the perfect environment for Modernism’s radical innovation and creation during the first decades of the twentieth century. Stein explains:

So Paris was the natural background for the twentieth century, America knew it too well, knew the twentieth century too well to create it, for America there was a glamour in the twentieth century that made it not be material for creative activity. England was consciously refusing the twentieth century, knowing full well that they had gloriously created the nineteenth century and perhaps the twentieth century was going to be too many for them, so they were quite self-consciously denying the twentieth century but France was not worrying about it, what it was and what was is, was their point of view of which they were not very conscious, they were too occupied with their daily life to worry about it. (*Paris France* 24)

Absent-mindedness acts as a virtue, allowing fertile ground for creation, change. This absent-mindedness corresponds to a belief “in civilisation in and for itself,” as an end. Stein contrasts this belief in civilization, which she ascribes to France, with a faith in progress and, therefore, interest in means, which she associates with England: “England had the disadvantage of believing in progress, and progress has really nothing to do with civilisation, but France could be civilised without having progress on her mind, she could believe in

¹⁴⁸ Stein, *Wars I Have Seen*, 248.

civilisation in and for itself, and so she was the natural background for this period” (39). In Stein’s view, England’s progressivist creed disqualifies it from being “the natural background” for modernism just as strongly as the United States’ insistence on newness: open time is a prerequisite to creation, not progress, which already fills time up, or a fetish for novelty, which makes time stutter.

While Stein’s conceptualization of nation steers well clear of fascism’s sentient organism guided by myth, in Ze’ev Sternhell’s formulation, her belated condemnation of fascism and National Socialism and appearance of occasional complicity with fascists (she was to write an introduction to Pétain’s speeches, for example) have obscured the radical challenge her work poses to such ideologies. Stein’s naïve and often disastrously wrong political assessments tend to reveal either an optimistic misattribution of her specific aesthetic and ethical principles to people’s actions in the political sphere or a refusal to think dystopically on her part. For example, Stein’s argument against the plausibility of a second Great War relies on others’ ethical behavior:

Why Europe is too small to wage war.

Why is Europe too small to wage war because war has to be waged on too large a scale to be contained in a small country therefore as they think about war they know that they can only think and not do. They are like our dogs who make believe do things to each other but they know that they can be seen and if you can be seen then you cannot do anything to one another. (*The Geographical History of America* 61-62)

Stein assumes that leaders would not dare begin a war when everyone will see them and/or that people would stop their governments from making war in broad daylight. Stein sounds more common-sensical than idealist or utopic here, wryly noting that Europe “can have a great many troubles but they cannot wage war” (62). Conversations between the narrator and a French villager in *Paris France* show a desperate attempt to try to hold off war by arguing

that it goes against common sense, as when the villager says “It is not logical mademoiselle” that there will be another war because he fought in the last one and, at forty-five, would have to fight again were war to occur, as would his seventeen-year-old son (42). Too terrible to contemplate, war should be staved off by argument.

In Stein’s conception of nations, words have a chance of holding war at bay: her aesthetics of process and relationality, akin to the ethics she ascribes to nations, are smarter than her politics. Stein thinks in nations, not states, which accounts for her failure as a political pundit, her love of the U.S. and France, and her loathing of leaders of each who she perceives as paternalist, imperialist, domineering. In *The Geographical History of America* Stein links Napoleon and Louis Napoleon with Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt, finding in the French and American nations the unwanted repetition of autocrats.¹⁴⁹ She labels these leaders “foreign” to their nations, announcing “Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt like Napoleon and Louis Napoleon even though they belonged to the country to which they belonged were foreign to it” (127). The Napoleons even died obligingly in exile, Napoleon on St. Helena, Louis Napoleon in England proper, in Kent.

Stein lumps together for condemnation the authors of the Civil (Napoleonic) Code, the Square Deal, the Second Empire and the New Deal. Her critique of leaders from the right and left sides of the political spectrum indicates not that she is a centrist but that she opposes any augmentation of executive power. Stein’s conception of nations precludes states, or at least any strong centralized structure. Her repeated condemnation of the Napoleons and Roosevelts for amassing centralized power recalls the injunction early in her career, linked to her power struggle with her brother Leo, to “Act so that there is no use in a centre” (63) in

¹⁴⁹ Brinnin writes that Stein saw FDR “as a minor dictator in a succession begun by Theodore Roosevelt” (314).

the “Rooms” section of *Tender Buttons* (1914). Stein’s politics are in fact an ethics of nations, a call for individuals to act together by interacting with one another in open-minded fashion, unfettered by the confines of a particular political program or dictates of a state. Nations, it would seem, have a shot at the human mind, while states, like propaganda and politicians, wallow in human nature. Understanding, Stein suggests, occurs not subjectively but contextually, relationally, and thus depends on free interaction. Connection loses the specific thing or individual by making it subject to something else (like the state); contact permits the individual to encounter a plurality of different entities. Near the end of *Paris France* Stein recounts the story of Anatole France telling Madame Pierlot, who was visiting Paris for the first time at forty after growing up in the provinces and living in “various capitals” around the globe (as the wife of a military attaché): “continue, live in Paris but always remain provincial” (118). We may read Stein’s nations as collectives comprised of provincials, whether Jeffersonian federalists or ‘happy’ anarchists.

IV. The Fashionable Free Exercise of Habit: Gertrude Stein Eyeballs Utopia

Stein insists in *Paris France*:

And France and England after the war began to feel that the twentieth century would have to get civilised. It would have to go through that period of revolution that every young person goes through, when they think that systems will not be systems but something else, when every one is certain that they can reform everybody if they only go the right way to work at it.

[...]

So this book is dedicated to France and England. (118-119)

This dedication shows not only Stein’s wishful thinking for the character of the twentieth century but her association of France with civilization and continuity and her disdain for revolution, linked here to immaturity and imperialism. Stein opposes revolution to tradition

and peaceful change throughout the text, frequently by juxtaposing war with fashion. In *Paris France* fashion represents something quintessentially French and functions synecdochically as France's genius for peaceful change over time. Fashion intersects with the idea of tradition as a particular tradition of France and as a historical phenomenon of nonviolent alteration, the antithesis of revolution as bloody, teleological, temporally-contracted change. It is important to note that Stein's conception of fashion as such in the text is not that of mass production or even haute couture but a more democratic and miniaturist, petit-bourgeois artisan model. For example, Stein praises the variety in style and cost of hats one season, reading the phenomenon as indicative of the nation's economic and creative health in alluding to all the successful, individual milliners selling hats at different prices to Frenchwomen across classes. Stein contrasts this bounty of beautiful hats to "the first war period, a period of fashion without style, of systems with disorder, of reforming everybody which is persecution, and of violence without hope" (119). Fashion represents France's facility for voluntary change by individuals of the nation in direct opposition to involuntary change imposed on the masses through bloodshed and rupture. As a global leader in national revolution, France has done with its adolescence and is ready to be a model of a civilized adult.

Stein eyeballs utopia to avoid the revolutions its image provokes, in search of ways to construct a "peaceful and exciting" present that will forestall revolution. I see fashion as a concept and phenomenon to which Stein returns over and over again as a way to think about a collective practice that will possess a temporality and enact a polity hostile to revolution. Stein borrows from fashion to replace development and a progressivist sense of history with *mode* (fashion), which in Middle French (1393) meant "collective manner of living or

thinking proper to a country or age.” In what follows I explore how Stein envisions politics as fashion and advocates a pluralist conception of fashion made into habit.

Stein sees politics in terms of the day’s fashion and fashion as a potentially significantly useful phenomenon at moments of political and social upheaval. She offers the simile “In a French village they understand all about that [politics as a change in fashion], they say the men in politics are like the women in dressing, sometimes the skirts are long and sometimes the skirts are short.” In Stein’s analysis fashions matter “in the great moments when everything changes” because they provoke action “that has nothing to do with anything.” Stein’s hope for fashion is not dialectical but alternative: fashion does not respond to cataclysmic change so much as take off from it, using the event as fuel and as a point of departure.¹⁵⁰ Fashion funnels and diffuses historical momentum across collective life in a way that is never revolutionary but that may generate radical change in the relations among individuals and between individuals and collectives (most often nations in Stein’s texts). Importantly for Stein, fashion generates this change in a way that preserves a space for the individual within a collectivity through the interplay of fashion with fashions. In the singular, “fashion” signifies a current, collective pre-occupation, a trend endorsed and/or practiced by many individuals at a given moment and familiar to most members of a society. In the plural, “fashions” signals a variety of objects and practices that one may purchase or adopt, securing pluralism. The internal logic of fashion makes it useful in three key ways: as a collective touchstone that gathers together entities and behaviors, embedding objects in the contexts of

¹⁵⁰ The catalyzing event for fashion, of course, is never the historical event itself but the event of a population’s response or perception of the historical event, however nebulous, muddled, and multiple. This collective response is rarely primarily intellectual or analytical in nature; it is affective. (It is not analysis, as in a decision that the revolutionaries’ aspirations were no longer worthwhile, or even that they could best be accomplished through other means, which scuttled the Revolution of 1848 for the French but rather the visceral memory of the Terror, of the bloodshed that followed 1789.)

their use, actors in the process of acting; as a guarantor of the existence of multiple and overlapping practices within a collective (one may choose to follow some fashions, one, or, perhaps, none); and as a conterminous process of individual and societal self-determination.

Stein sees in fashion's dependence on change and manipulation of commodities and behaviors a possibility to replicate the ethos of her writing, to continually re-work the relations among entities (objects, people, ideas), maintaining ongoing processes that do not arrive at teleological or temporal ends. In the most optimistic and proleptic assessment, fashion, like Stein's writing, collapses distinctions between content and form in pursuit of a positive freedom that imbricates individual and collective agency. In this discussion I will focus on the most hopeful vision of fashion that may be distilled from Stein's oeuvre to sketch the contours of a character and practice of fashion that might perform the tasks of her work. This fashion does not yet exist.

Stein relies on popular practices of art, in the form of fashion, to yield collective access to a peaceful, ongoing process of experimentation. Masterpieces allow for re-perceiving the status quo, but fashion actually tries on new or different practices, offering low-risk opportunities to enact changes: for Stein fashion comprises a mode of change more than a category of endless novelties. Stein sees Paris' role as fashion center as equally crucial to its suitability for forming the backdrop of Modernism. She notes:

It was important too that Paris was where fashions were made. To be sure there were moments when they seemed to dress better in Barcelona and in New York but not really.

It was in Paris that the fashions were made, and it is always in the great moments when everything changes that fashions are important, because they make something go up in the air or go down or go around that has nothing to do with anything. (*Paris France* 11)

Fashion matters in its very inconsequentiality, as a realm that tells us something about conditions (like masterpieces tell us about identity) and for its potentiality to serve as a stable vehicle for constant change. Stein associates fashion with the stability of conservatism, or at least tradition, and optimistically sees fashion as indicative of a society at peace with itself, sufficiently comfortable to permit change(s), albeit in non-committal way.

Stein not only includes fashion in the realm of art, alongside literature, she sees fashion as an indicator of national health. Stein writes:

It is funny about art and literature, fashions being part of it. Two years ago everybody was saying that France was down and out, was sinking to be a second-rate power, etcetera etcetera. And I said but I do not think so because not for years not since the war have hats been as various and lovely and as french as they are now. Not only are they to be found in the good shops but everywhere there is a real milliner there is a pretty french little hat. (*Paris France* 11)

Stein refuses to entertain the notion that France is “sinking to be a second-rate power” on the grounds that the hats of the moment are unusually “various and lovely and [...] french.” As frivolous and ludicrous as this reasoning may appear at first read, that state of hats indicates quite a bit about the state of economic relations. Because the hats are “various,” they signal multiple artisans expressing individual visions, abilities and craftsmanship. And these milliners are not just crafting for a very wealthy class—the hats are not only “to be found in the good shops but everywhere.” Presumably there are hats of different prices in these variably posh stores which consumers of varying incomes can purchase. As “characteristic art product[s]” hats may have little or “nothing to do with... material life,” but they have quite a lot to tell about relations of production.

Fashion in 1930s Paris involves commodification *and* craftsmanship. Stein writes during a period of transition in which Parisians reaped some benefits of industrialization and capitalism that are democratizing—mass production makes lots of things available for a lot

of people— and before the advent of capitalism on steroids, a global free market in which price rather than design or craftsmanship serves as the primary differentiator of fashion. Stein’s fashion designers are a constellation of local milliners, not an international oligarchy of designers directing assembly lines.

Stein links France’s focus on civilization in and of itself to a refusal to change. But since Stein also valorizes French fashion, which in her view depends on change, I read “change” here as “perceptible change.” Change in France happens gradually, over time, imperceptibly, and therefore peacefully. And, Stein suggests, peaceful change—good or bad—enters through fashion. Stein offers a very clear example contrasting (native French) civilization and (foreign-sourced) fashion:

And so France cannot change it can always have its fashions but it cannot change. And this brings me to dogs.

The french dogs which are native are useful dogs beautiful dogs but dogs that work. They are shepherd dogs and hunting dogs.

[...]

The french have to have as pet dogs foreign ones which they change and fashion in their own way, and the mode in these dogs changes, they mostly always come back again, as long as I have known / France first it was poodles then it was Belgian griffons, ... [...] Now all these dogs being of no use can be made fashionable, because fashion must never be useful, must very often be exotic, and must always be made to be french. That is what fashion is and it must change. (33-35)

In using the particular example of dogs to contrast that which is useful and native to something frivolous and foreign in origin, Stein positively construes possibilities of contamination and hybridization. The foreign dogs are out of context but may be brought into relation with the rest of French civilization. Fashion constitutes a border area between useful and frivolous, individual and collective, artisan and machine—it is an area where the new intrudes and gets worked out in various ways, or doesn’t get worked out and dominates as one, mass-produced, context-less thing for everyone. Fashion mediates between old and new,

organic and inorganic, managed in a special temporality that is discontinuous and repetitive, as something remains fashionable only for a short time (guaranteeing change) even as the repeated establishment of fashions maintains a civilizing stability.

Fashion as Habit

Stein's project of retemporalization opts for a logic of recontextualization, not shock. In an article that uses Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire to distinguish Gertrude Stein's work from that of the avant-garde manifesto mongers, Lisi Schoenbach writes of Benjamin: "Through his reading of Baudelaire, he imagines an aesthetic that remains equally attuned to the power of habit and to modernity's endless jolts to habit, an aesthetic that, like pragmatism, sets these two states in a necessary and ongoing relation to one another."¹⁵¹ Just as Baudelaire, in Benjamin's reading, parries shock on behalf of readers, Stein, Schoenbach argues, employs a strategy of recontextualization to grapple with "modernity's endless jolts to habit." Schoenbach contrasts this focus on recontextualization to avant-garde manifestos' tendency to use strategies of opposition, citing Stein's disdain for "an attention-grabbing performance or outrageous manifesto." Stein foregoes spectacle for "civilization, in the form of daily behaviors accumulated over time" (Schoenbach 245), shock for recontextualization.

I think the major difficulties of Stein's writing stem in large part from her attention to fine-grained recontextualization, from her attention to capturing the instability of ongoing processes precisely and from readers' habits of approaching texts teleologically, to enjoy a narrative or learn content, for example. As David Jarraway notes of Stein, linking her, as does Schoenbach, to pragmatism, Stein's writing focuses on process, on capturing the

¹⁵¹ Lisi Schoenbach, "'Peaceful and Exciting': Habit, Shock, and Gertrude Stein's Pragmatic Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity* 11, no. 2 (2004): 243.

mutable nature of experience, or as Randa Dubnick explains, “the process of experiencing each moment in the present tense as it intersects with consciousness” (29). One of the difficulties readers encounter in *Tender Buttons* and other writings by Stein stems from a disjuncture between a reader’s expectations of referentiality and Stein’s interest in processes of perception. As Ulla Dydo observes of Stein’s writing,

Her stripped words cannot be joined by unthinking habit. Their exploration requires thought. Out of the physical properties uncovered by the process of reduction, she builds new, unstable and ambiguous forms and meanings. They sound strange precisely because they are new and unfamiliar. They are indeed anarchistic. (17)

Stein’s anarchism results from a refusal to accept norms of referentiality—this is the woman who upon penning “Rose is a rose is a rose” claimed that roses were red for the first time in the English language in many years-- and an interest in using language to engage in practices of recontextualization, reorganizing and reconstituting reality at a given moment.

The possibilities Stein envisions for fashion emerge in her writing’s displacement of form in favor of process and playfulness with genre. Stein experimented with multiple genres, mixed genres, and intergeneric work throughout her career, and the formal and generic variety of Stein’s oeuvre embodies a consistent resistance, if not outright opposition, to form as domination, the imposition of unity and stasis on an everchanging field of difference. Stein’s attention to process is innately hostile to form but her emphasis on community yields an attitude toward genre that is less hostile than (to use exactly the wrong word) ‘reformist.’ Stein’s anarchist poetics works against form but for a democratization of genre. Only once the strictures of form have been sufficiently loosened and genre made a changing repository of inclusive preferences can fashion perform truly useful work.

James's thinking on habit in *Principles of Psychology* produces at least two differing conceptualizations of habit, and I argue that one of these is particularly amenable to anarchism and to Stein's aspirations for securing self-determination relationally, dialogically, and without any restrictions on the character a polis, society or nation will possess. James offers four maxims, the first two from Alexander Bain's chapter "The Moral Habits," the latter two of his own devising. The first two maxims emphasize absolute rupture in changing from one habit to another. James asserts, "...in the acquisition of a new habit, or the leaving off of an old one, we must take care to *launch ourselves with as strong and decided an initiative as possible*"; and "The second maxim is: *Never suffer an exception to occur till the new habit is securely rooted in your life.*"¹⁵² These two maxims describe habit in terms antithetical to Stein's "peaceful and exciting" and open anarchist poetics, unlike the maxims James derives, "*Seize the very first possible opportunity to act on every resolution you make, and on every emotional prompting you may experience in the direction of habits you aspire to gain*" (124) and "*Keep the faculty of effort alive in you by a little gratuitous exercise every day*" (126). The first two maxims are dictatorial, fashion as propaganda. James refers to the last statement as "a final, practical maxim."

I see two important shifts in the conception of habit between the first two and second two maxims. The first two maxims demand absolute change and a change in content, or program, from practicing one specific habit to replacing it with another. James's own maxims, however, focus on the practice of change and the ability to change, not on adopting one program of action, one habit, in place of another. As James makes clear in the chapter, his interest in habit stems not from the question of how to replace one program with another

¹⁵² William James, "Habit," *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1890), 123.

but from the concern of how to make ongoing change possible and probable, how a concept of habit might contribute to individuals' character development. James writes: "No matter how full a reservoir of *maxims* one may possess, and no matter how good one's *sentiments* may be, if one have not [*sic*] taken advantage of every concrete opportunity to act, one's character may remain entirely unaffected for the better. With mere good intentions, hell is proverbially paved" (125). Action itself, not intention, not action to advance a particular program or ends, is what matters, and habit helps encourage this action on the part of individuals.

This conception of habit—as the ongoing, continuous realization of individual agency—comprises the logic of Stein's anarchist poetics. We can see Stein's texts as constantly trying to work out an anarchist conception of habit, and she makes revealing comments on this project in her discussions of both habit and anarchism. For example, Stein thinks through the problem and possibilities posed by James's paradoxical pragmatist notion of habit not just in early texts such as *Tender Buttons* but over the course of her career. In *Wars I Have Seen* Stein muses:

And then also and this is strange if you like but I was then already skeptical about Utopias, naturally so, I liked habits but I did not like that habits should be known as mine. Habits like dogs dogs have habits but they do not like to be told about their habits, and the only way to have a Utopia is not only to have habits but to like to be told about these habits, and this I did not like. I can remember very well not liking to be told that I had habits.¹⁵³

The crux of the issue is utopias' apparent requirement that people not only practice habits but be told about them, and in the telling lies the problem. Stein writes that she likes habits, valorizing their practice. But once habits become the subject of telling, are characterized and codified into norms and even laws, they become a problem, a limiting rather than enabling

¹⁵³ Gertrude Stein, *Wars I Have Seen* (London: Brilliance Books, 1984), 12.

institution. In practice, habit provides the means through which individuals enact freedom dialogically. Frozen into prescriptive form, most notably as laws, habits govern, limiting individual action and therefore collective change.

An often occluded linchpin of Stein's poetics, habit functions as a mechanism of peaceful change; a means of registering time (taking into account tradition); as a mediation between individuals and collectives that promotes positive freedom; and as a way of staving off centralization, boundaries, and the limitations of fixed forms while *avoiding* anarchy. An anarchist conception of habit does not entail chaos. In fact, Stein intimates that habit organizes nations. Anarchist habit is not about absolute change, rupture or revolution, not about stasis, and not about sameness. It serves as a means to facilitate peaceful, ongoing change and in so doing to preserve the capacity for effecting change (positive freedom), not to replace one program of domination with another, however well-intentioned.

On a spectrum between ethical anarchism, with its orientation towards a concept of freedom that links individual autonomy to collective self-determination, and individualist anarchism, with its solipsistic focus on specific individuals, Stein's writings seem much closer to the left in their focus on individuals living in community, peoples, and nations, unfettered by a strong state's imposition of restraints. Stein claims freedoms for individuals and collectives simultaneously, calling to mind both Castoriadis's symbiotic relation of individual self-institution to that of the polis and Jefferson's equivalence of personal ethics with those of nations. Jefferson's valorization of an agrarian nation, insistence on a non-energetic federal government, and equanimity towards rebellion re-emerge in Stein's notion of governance without government, facilitated by space and an ethics of democracy. This ethics relies largely on an anarchist conception of habit as a mechanism of peaceful change.

Ideally, habit functions beyond the perceived boundaries of the aesthetic realm as a means to hold off form analogously to the ways in which Stein's writings stave off form through unending process.

IV. The Difference of Democratic Time

In the final section of this chapter, I revisit the chapter's major themes and offer a close reading of a small series of prose poems to argue that we should revise portraits of Stein as yet another unreasonably difficult modernist poet/writer. Instead, we should take stock of her contribution in terms of anarchist modernism's project of retemporalization, an aesthetic endeavor grounded in augmenting individuals' political agency. Stein's texts work towards a democratization of time. Her language generally and the language of *Tender Buttons* specifically is not easily consumed, but it be may consumed by just about everyone. Others have defended Stein from charges of nonsense by locating various values in her work, including cubist, Gnostic, feminist, lesbian, and pragmatic strains.¹⁵⁴ My interest lies less in reprising these various readings than in showing that Stein's work actually matters outside the purview of art.

Positive freedom, in the sense of individual agency, is a consistent concern for Stein, who battled her older brother Leo (at the time of the composition of *Tender Buttons*) and the domination of rigid cultural norms and pressures of conformity to think, express, and act out

¹⁵⁴ On Stein and cubism, see Randa Dubnick, *The Structure of Obscurity: Gertrude Stein, Language, and Cubism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); on Stein and Gnosticism, see Lisa Ruddick, *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990). For a survey of the large body of Stein criticism attending to feminist, lesbian and pragmatist strains, see Kirk Curnutt, *The Critical Response to Gertrude Stein* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 2000) and Deborah M. Mix, "Gertrude Stein: A Selected Bibliography" *Modern Fiction Studies*, 42.3 (Fall 1996), pp. 661-680.

singularly. The liberties Stein sought to secure include the freedom not to maintain a particular individual identity, to take on multiple identities (even to write as someone else) or to momentarily shirk identity altogether to create.¹⁵⁵ Stein broaches this problem by scrupulously attending to relationality, to the character and kind of relations that obtain and may yet obtain across time. A key anxiety for Stein, “the tyranny of the organized,” in Catharine Stimpson’s apt phrase, is held at bay by focusing on process in terms of relations in time. Process places less emphasis on the discrete entity than on the character of experience constituted relationally, such that the household objects in Stein’s prose poems frequently do not appear (in the semantic web of the prose poems) to be the objects their names evoke: they step away from being locked into signifying identities as Stein loosens words’ referential function. Yet this step away from signification does not deprive words of autonomy. Stein insists on a kind of grammatical equity among all the parts of speech, imbuing the relation among words with the power usually ascribed, for example, to nouns as actors. Stein’s sentences reach for a politics (inclusive democracy) and an economic equivalent.

Tender Buttons offers a model of production (of language art and of sense) that actually adheres to “free and fair” trade, bringing Stein’s domestic economy to households everywhere. Her prose poems are both radically singular and impersonal. One can see Stein’s notion of radically individual linguistic production in the way she tends to strip words at least partially of referential value to call attention to the work words perform in a given context, their relationality. For example, in the first two of four prose poems entitled “Chicken” in

¹⁵⁵ Stein discusses the need to step outside identity to create in “What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them,” a lecture she delivered at Oxford in February, 1936. See *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, eds. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman. (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 353-63.

the “Food” section of *Tender Buttons*, Stein seems to have much more to say about the way the word “chicken” is perceived in relation to other words in specific contexts than she does about poultry. The first poem in its entirety reads: “Pheasant and chicken, chicken is a peculiar third.”¹⁵⁶ Stein does not describe a difference between the birds that makes chicken comparatively “peculiar” but rather a peculiar position for the word “chicken”: to begin a sentence “Pheasant and chicken” and then return to chicken as the third noun in the sentence is indeed peculiar, as one would expect either a predicate to follow or, if pheasant and chicken are to be part of a series, that the third noun in the series not repeat the second. Stein continues in this vein in the second poem “Chicken,” which reads: “Alas a dirty word, alas a dirty third alas a dirty third, alas a dirty bird.”¹⁵⁷ Is “chicken” a “dirty word” because it is wrong for its position in the sentence, wrong for sense, or because chickens are in fact dirty birds, or both? Is chicken a dirty word because it is a wrong as a third noun, as the second clause suggests, and repeated as the third clause so that “chicken” will in fact re-occupy its position as third noun? Stein’s conclusion to the poem, “alas a dirty bird” brings a sense of unity through sound, rhyming with “word” and “third,” and sense, as many readers likely know that fowl is foul, that chickens are not the cleanest members of a farm community.

As the “Chicken” poems illustrate, Stein produces in *Tender Buttons* a language of moments of radically singular perception, capturing “the process of experiencing each moment in the present tense as it intersects with consciousness.”¹⁵⁸ The impersonality of this singularity is its guarantee. What seems to go unnoticed all too often in Stein’s writing is

¹⁵⁶ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 54.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Randa Dubnick, *The Structure of Obscurity: Gertrude Stein, Language, and Cubism*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 29.

that its mode of apprehending experience in language (art) is intelligible to readers: my reading of the chicken poems depends on rules of grammar, habitual language use, and a little knowledge about chickens. Stein's language production is not elitist: the knowledge one needs to read *Tender Buttons* is much more widely held than the knowledge required to imbibe high Modernist texts such as Eliot's "The Waste Land" or Joyce's *Ulysses* or to understand the mythological allusions in H.D.'s poetry. Stein challenges readers in a different vein from that of her difficult Modernist contemporaries. Robert Chodat recognizes this difference when he claims that Stein's writing "loses sense *within* descriptions," while the writing of High Modernists such as Eliot and Pound "loses sense *between* descriptions."¹⁵⁹ The problem with this distinction is that it substitutes level or locus of difficulty for kind. Stein does not use fragments or esoteric allusions "within" descriptions; in fact, she tends toward lengthy elocutions and a small, common vocabulary. Stein's language generally and the language of *Tender Buttons* specifically is not easily consumed, but it may be consumed by just about everyone; it is largely democratic in its difficulty.

Intelligibility and agency come together through an anarchist notion of habit generally identifiable in James and compatible with a "grammar of democracy" (to borrow Ulla Dydo's term) wary of form. Interesting work on Stein has highlighted her attention to habit, focusing on pragmatist conceptualizations.¹⁶⁰ Yet Stein's avoidance of all things teleological makes James's anarchist bent much more amenable to Stein than that of a more

¹⁵⁹ Robert Chodat, "Sense, Science, and the Interpretations of Gertrude Stein." *Modernism/Modernity* 12, no. 4 (November 2005): 599.

¹⁶⁰ See Liesl M. Olson, "Gertrude Stein, William James, and Habit in the Shadow of War," *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 328-359; David R. Jarraway, *Going the Distance: Dissident Subjectivity in Modernist American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); and Lisi Schoenbach, "'Peaceful and Exciting': Habit, Shock, and Gertrude Stein's Pragmatic Modernism." *Modernism/modernity* 11, 2 (2004): 239-259.

faithful pragmatist, such as Dewey.¹⁶¹ As Dydo observes, Stein “builds new, unstable and ambiguous forms and meaning” that “sound strange precisely because they are new and unfamiliar. They are indeed anarchistic.”¹⁶² Dydo characterizes Stein’s writing in terms of a battle against a long list of ills anarchism seeks to remedy and summarizes Stein’s oeuvre as grappling with democratic prospects:

Her rejection of the rigid conventions of language led her gradually to dissociate herself from all inflexible forms, including hierarchical thinking, authoritarian organization, prescriptive grammar, and chronological narrative-- aspects of the patriarchy. In a sense, all her work is a demonstration of possibilities of grammar for democracy. She was interested in spacious, living sentences.¹⁶³

The intelligibility of Stein’s language resides in its grounding within a community or overlapping communities of users. For singular language use to possess any social resonance, for it to escape exile in an aestheticist realm, Stein suggests, requires a governing logic of free and unfettered interaction, a logic never submitted to any *one*’s governance. Radical language use, defined as multiple instances of singularity, ultimately depends on a commensurately radical, open-ended organization of society, one which disdains the teleology of revolution. This freedom can neither exist apart from norms nor endure within inalterable ones: fashions and fashioning take place in the context of logic and civilization. The basis for Stein’s aesthetics is identical to that of a republic or self-determining polis: both rely on a logic of ongoing interaction as the underpinning for an inclusive democracy.

¹⁶¹ For example, though Stein’s interest in cubism and in process generally did lead her to make use of serial succession, the way in which Dewey uses it (after Matisse) to define form as a process culminating in an integral unity seems antithetical to Stein’s refusal of form, however much we think of this unity as a force rather than a physical entity or circumscribed boundary.

¹⁶² Dydo, *The Language That Rises*, 17.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER THREE

Keeping Time in Play: Tristan Tzara Spreads the Word (Dada)

DADA is not a doctrine to be put into practice: Dada—if it's a lie you want—is a prosperous business venture. –Dada runs up debts and will not stick to its mattress. God has created a universal language, that is why no one takes him seriously. A language is a utopia. God can afford to be unsuccessful: so can Dada. That is why the critics say: Dada is a luxury article or Dada is in heat. God is a luxury article or God is in heat. Who is right: God, Dada or the critic?

“You digress,” says a charming reader.

“No, not at all! I simply wanted to arrive at this conclusion: subscribe to Dada, the only loan that brings in nothing.”¹⁶⁴

--Tristan Tzara, “Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love”¹⁶⁵

He [Tzara] was awaited like a sort of Anti-Messiah whose anti-gospel would mobilize minds and anti-minds that the war had left prepared to accept anything.

--Hans Richter on the anticipation of Tzara's move to Paris in 1919.¹⁶⁶

This chapter interprets the question Tzara poses somewhat facetiously—“Who is right: God, Dada, or the critic?”-- as a bad-faith riddle whose answer is “language.” And language's “rightness” depends more on its spreading than on words, like Gertrude Stein's difference (“The difference is spreading”).¹⁶⁷ Language keeps time, which in a secular

¹⁶⁴ DADA n'est pas une doctrine à mettre en pratique : Dada, -- c'est pour mentir : une affaire qui marche bien. – Dada fait des dettes et ne vit pas sur son matelas. Le bon Dieu a créé une langue universelle, c'est pourquoi on ne le prend pas au sérieux. Une langue est une utopie. Dieu peut se permettre de ne pas avoir de succès : Dada aussi. C'est pourquoi les critiques dissent : Dieu fait du luxe, ou Dada est en rut. Qui a raison : Dieu, Dada ou le critique?

-- « Vous déviez », me dit un charmant lecteur.

-- Mais non, pas du tout! Je voulais seulement arriver à la conclusion : Souscrire à Dada, le seul emprunt qui ne rapporte rien.” Tristan Tzara, Manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer,” *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. Henri Béhar (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 386. Subsequent citations of Tzara's manifestos are from the *Œuvres Complètes* (OC) unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶⁵ Tristan Tzara, “Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love.” English translations are by Ralph Manheim from the version of Tzara's *Seven Dada Manifestos* included in Robert Motherwell anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), 73-98 unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶⁶ Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, trans. David Britt (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 167.

¹⁶⁷ “The difference is spreading” is the last line of Gertrude Stein's poem “A carafe, that is a blind glass,” the first poem in *Tender Buttons* (*Buttons*) (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1914).

universe makes it sovereign. Literary Dada worshipped and exploited language for the cause of good governance.

Under Tzara's leadership, Dada attempted to change the character of the polity by reconfiguring relations within language and altering people's relationship to language. Dada performances, beginning at the Cabaret Voltaire at the Meirei bar in Zurich and extending to soirées across Paris, reintroduced people to language as the bearer of multiple times. *Poèmes simultanés*, abstract poems, bruitist and static poems, and many other experimental genres put verbal virtuosity on display. These performances exposed audiences to non-rational, unfamiliar creation in language, literally setting the stage for audience members to confront language in new ways. But it was the manifestos that actualized Dada's project by bringing language and time together for the audience in the context of enacting change.

Tristan Tzara's *Seven Dada Manifestos* undertake a project of repopulating time and re-infusing temporality with the movement and activity of human thought, debate and creative activity. By simultaneously performing and overturning the generic conventions of the manifesto, Tzara transmutes its desired future moment of revolutionary action into a present intensity of unknown duration. This intensity functions as a force field in which preconceived barriers among art, life and anti-art; intelligence, intuition and automatism; and between subject and world, collapse, opening language to different concepts and altering people's experience within it. In articulating the call for a new world these Dada manifestos enact the ground conditions for its creation.

In what follows I explore Tzara's Dada manifestos as the centerpiece of a religio-political project devoid of religious or political content. My aim is threefold: to distinguish Tzara's use of the manifesto as a literary genre from that of other modernist and avant-garde

groups; to bring to light some of the affinities between Dada and anarchism, which have often been obscured by associations of Dada with anarchy; and to show how Dada's retemporalization of language recodes the surface as the site of meaning, temporally evacuating the trajectory from aestheticism to asceticism and mysticism.

I. The Avant-Garde Manifesto as Liturgy

Seven Dada Manifestos borrow from the conventions of other modernist and avant-garde manifestos, particularly those of the futurists, to flout the programmatic aims of their discourses and further refashion the manifesto as a genre proper to aesthetic endeavors or *poesis*. Like the futurists, Tzara incorporated visual art, such as drawings by Francis Picabia, and typographical and collage techniques into his manifestos; he also read his manifestos as part of mixed media and multi-generic public performances. Unlike the futurists (and even more unlike the patricidal Surrealists Dada would birth) Tzara deploys the manifesto as a means to instantiate open-ended collective creation, not for the establishment or governance of a particular aesthetic or political program.

Dada's, and particularly Tzara's, use of the manifesto has been obscured due to Dada's eclipse by Surrealism and to a tendency in scholarship to see Dada and Surrealism as part of a continuum. The extent to which *Seven Dada Manifestos* differ radically from Breton's surrealist manifestos and the futurist manifestos becomes clear in considering the general context of avant-garde manifestos. It is worthwhile to consider briefly the questions: What did modernist movements accomplish, aesthetically or politically, by producing manifestos? Why write them? Why did so many avant-garde groups, with very different

artistic and social goals, feature the manifesto as a significant, and in the case of futurism, as Marjorie Perloff has argued, even the preeminent, genre?¹⁶⁸

In the introduction to her collection of modernist and avant-garde manifestos, Mary Ann Caws remarks “The manifesto, at its height, is a poem in heightened prose.”¹⁶⁹ In likening the manifestos to prose poems, Caws recognizes their aesthetic value, their status as literary works of art in and of themselves. In the context of the prose poem’s engagement with issues of time, this resemblance raises the question of whether the modernist manifesto also possesses a temporalizing dimension. Yet generically manifestos focus on political, not aesthetic, aims and on the enactment of a particular program posthaste, not through some belabored process of temporal unfolding. The paradox this resemblance poses points to a question at the heart of the genre as it is practiced by various modernist movements: does the avant-garde manifesto re-form a political genre to articulate a message about aesthetics, or does it represent a new literary, sometimes visual, genre that uses the rhetorical conventions of the political manifesto for its own ends?

If the case is the former, if the avant-garde manifesto signals a political power play by art, then the development of the manifesto in conjunction with avant-garde art movements can be read as a sign of anxiety about the perceived marginalization of art, or (frequently “and”) conversely, as dissatisfaction with the character of modern life and a need for art to assert dominance over it. Luca Somigli proffers the first interpretation in his study of futurism and imagism, declaring “[I]t is precisely through manifestoes that avant-garde artists

¹⁶⁸ Perloff writes “To talk about art becomes equivalent to making it, and indeed most historians of Italian Futurism agree that the series of fifty-odd manifestos published between 1909 and Italy’s entrance into the war in 1915 were the movement’s literary form par excellence.” Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-garde, Avant guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 90.

¹⁶⁹ Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln, Nebraska and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), xxvii.

and writers confront their audiences with the problem of the loss of the halo [alluding to Baudelaire's prose poem] and attempt to articulate new strategies of legitimation of their activity."¹⁷⁰ Peter Bürger famously argues for the second interpretation, conceiving of futurist, Dadaist, and surrealist manifestos as part of a struggle to undo art's autonomy status and locate in art the basis for a new praxis of life.¹⁷¹ In both instances, the avant-garde manifesto retains the traditional political function of the genre, articulating a grievance—the mistreatment of art, the awfulness of the character of contemporary life—and a solution in the form of a program to be enacted. In this conception the manifesto orients itself spatially to the domain over which it plans to extend its program. Time is contracted to the moment of revolution when, in the best-case scenario, the manifesto's demands will be implemented.

If, on the contrary, the manifesto incorporates the conventions of a political genre into a new aesthetic expression, then the question shifts to what role the political articulation plays within the artwork. Martin Puchner identifies this role as theatricality. Puchner characterizes Marinetti's transformation of the political manifesto into an avant-garde aesthetic manifesto in terms of performativity (or instrumentality) giving way to theatricality, explaining: "The distinction between performativity and theatricality can be phrased in terms of means and end: the socialist manifesto has tended toward seeing itself as an instrument, as a means to an end, whereas the avant-garde manifesto has tended toward seeing the manifesto as an end in itself."¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Luca Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist: Manifesto Writing and European Modernism 1885-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 20-21.

¹⁷¹ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*.

¹⁷² Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 261.

Puchner reads the development of Dada manifestos in terms of an additional displacement of content by form, asserting “While in futurism the form of the manifesto informs the content—the obsession with progress and its machinery, the exclusive invocation of the future—Dadaism discards any such modernizing content and instead practices the form of the theatrical metamanifesto, the act of founding a movement, of creating a label, of forming a collective as an end all in itself” (153). This analysis captures Dada’s lack of program, yet Puchner’s focus on form obscures the temporal character of Dada manifestos, the ways in which they arrest, repeat, and draw out time.¹⁷³ Dada’s refusal of a program, or content, in Puchner’s terms, leads to a preoccupation with the practice of the manifesto, not its form. Viewed through the lens of repetition and reiteration that lead nowhere, Tzara’s manifestos manifest time.

Time is not a distinctly aesthetic or political category, so it’s difficult, if not impossible, to classify Tzara’s manifestos in terms of a specific reconfiguration of the relations between aesthetic and political spheres. At the same time, *Seven Dada Manifestos* engage the commonplaces of modernist and avant-garde critique such as pressures of conformity, mass culture, commodification, alienation, and nationalism, and they often voice identical complaints. Perhaps the clearest way to situate Dada among the manifesto movements is through a categorization based on each movement’s approach to the problems they all confront.

¹⁷³ Puchner also vacillates between thinking of the space of Dada manifestos as discontinuous and transnational or as contiguous and international. Puchner recognizes Dada as a network that ‘criscrosses’ nation states but more often analyzes Dada as cohesively international because of his—and many Dadaists—Marxist framework. See Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 136-146, especially 136-36.

The path each movement envisions as leading to a solution constitutes the field of action for its manifestos, determining audience, aspects of engagement (which problems matter most), and character (pessimistic or optimistic, strident or cynical or enthusiastic, etc.). Modernist manifesto movements suggest at least four paths: withdrawal, colonization, participation, and reconstitution. Aestheticism provides the classic example of withdrawal, of art's rupture with the social and political realms. This withdrawal promotes distance so that art may demand almost holy veneration from a mass public who cannot be expected to understand or appreciate it. The path of colonization replaces rupture with suture, conceiving art not as different from life but as of a piece with it (or what it could be) and superior to its dominant character. Surrealism, under Breton, provides a model of this artistic vanguard approach. In contrast, the participatory approach pragmatically and agnostically seeks a way for art to survive and flourish under the conditions of industrial capitalism and mass production, thus Pound's exhortation to "Make it New!" and instances of shameless self-promotion. Finally, the path of reconstitution, rather than seeking a niche for art within society, aspires to a kind of social art, a collective *poiesis* that will reconstitute society by enacting it. Dada follows this approach.

Somigli shows how the manifesto functioned as a way for modern artists to re-connect with bourgeois audiences and simultaneously articulate their difference from such audiences, linking the modernist adoption of the manifesto to fin-de-siècle artists' publication in newspapers in order to "appeal to... [their] bourgeois audience through the media that are proper to it."¹⁷⁴ To a large extent, Dada used the manifestos to opposite effect. Manifestos are hardly the "proper" genre for either like-minded artists and peaceniks (in Zurich) or

¹⁷⁴ Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist*, 27.

complacent bourgeois Parisians seeking to familiarize themselves with the latest trend. They are redundant for the first group, self-defeating for the second (who have already absorbed any shock from the futurists' manifestos.) *Seven Dada Manifestos* do not re-position art vis-à-vis bourgeois consumers; they use the manifesto, noticeably devoid of any instrumentality, to bring artist and audience together to jointly confront their alienation from time after its attenuation and re-apportioning by industrial capitalism and nation states.

Tzara places the manifesto's inability to effect actual change center stage, next to other veneers, like fellow Rumanian Marco Janco's masks. He declaimed his seven manifestos (as well as other short declaratory texts, like the colonial syllogism) to live audiences in Zurich and Paris between 1916 and 1921.¹⁷⁵ These texts and performances relied on the conventions of political manifestos to undermine the genre and, more importantly, the historical claims of radical politics underlying it. Janet Lyon attributes three generic conventions or "argumentative gestures" to the manifesto: (1) a concise, teleological encapsulation of history leading up to the current state in which the manifesto attempts to intervene; (2) a litany of complaints or stipulations that characterize a fight between oppressed and oppressive (the status quo the manifesto challenges) agents; and (3) rhetoric

¹⁷⁵ Each of Tzara's manifestos was read aloud to audiences in Zurich and Paris and subsequently published. Henri Béhar records the following performance and publication history for the manifestos in the edition of Tzara's *Œuvres complètes* he edited: the "Manifeste de monsieur Antipyrine" was read at the first Dada manifestation in Zurich July 14, 1916 and published in *La Première Aventure celeste de M. Antipyrine* in 1916 and in *Littérature*, no. 13, May, 1920, pp. 16-17; the "Manifeste Dada 1918" was read in Zurich March 23 1918 and published in *Dada 3*, December, 1918; the "Proclamation sans prétension" was almost read-- Béhar claims Tzara was forbidden from reading this at the eighth Dada soirée in Zurich on April 9, 1919 due to the crowd's rioting; the "Manifeste de monsieur Aa l'antiphilosophie" was read at the Grand Palais des Champs-Elysées on February 5, 1920 and published in *Littérature*, no. 13, May, 1920, pp. 22-23.; "Tristan Tzara" was read at the Université Populaire in Paris on February 19, 1920, and published in *Littérature*, no. 13, May, 1920, p. 2; "Monsieur Aa l'antiphilosophie nous envoie ce manifeste" was read at the Festival Dada, at the Salle Gaveau in Paris on May 26, 1920 and published in *391*, n. XIII, July, 1920, p. 3; and "'Manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer" was read at the Galerie Povolozky, Paris, on December 9, 1920: and published piecemeal in *Littérature* and *Cannibale*, in its entirety in *La Vie des lettres*, no. 4, 1921.

that calls out, directly challenges an oppressor, and impels the audience to action.¹⁷⁶ Tzara takes as his history that of the manifesto, as his litany of complaints its pretensions to significantly alter the balance of power relations and their character; and as his call to action the insistence on the creation of a new mode for change, one that trades illusions of instantaneous revolution for a more pluralist conception of time.

Tzara thus denigrates the genre of the manifesto even as he writes within it. His and Dada's most famous manifesto, "Dada Manifesto 1918," begins by launching a self-critique:

To put out a manifesto you must want: ABC
to fulminate against 1, 2, 3,
to fly into a rage and sharpen your wings to conquer and disseminate
little abcs and big abcs, to sign, shout, swear, to organize prose into a form of
absolute and irrefutable evidence, to prove your non plus ultra and maintain
that novelty resembles life just as the latest appearance of some whore proves
the existence of God. His existence was previously proved by the accordion,
the landscape, the wheedling word. To impose your ABC is a natural thing—
hence deplorable.¹⁷⁷

This description of the manifesto links it to the worst tendencies human behavior exhibits: domination, exclusion, sophistry, illogic and self-serving irrationality in the guise of reason, etc. Tzara offers a similarly negative, tongue-in-cheek appraisal of the genre in "Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love," explaining "A manifesto is a communication addressed to the whole world, in which there is no other pretension than the discovery of a means of curing instantly political, astronomical, artistic, parliamentary agronomic and literary

¹⁷⁶ Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 14.

¹⁷⁷ "Pour lancer un manifeste il faut vouloir : A.B.C., foudroyer contre 1, 2, 3, / s'enlever et aiguïser les ailes pour conquérir et répandre de petits et de grands a, b, c, signer, crier, jurer, arranger la prose sous une forme d'évidence absolue, irrefutable, prouver son non-plus-ultra et soutenir que la nouveauté ressemble à la vie comme la dernière apparition d'une cocotte prouve l'essentiel de Dieu. Son existence fut déjà prouvée par l'accordéon, le paysage et la parole douce. Imposer son A.B.C. est une chose naturelle,-- donc regrettable. "Tzara, *OC* 359.

syphilis” (86).¹⁷⁸ Manifestos threaten peace and stability with their imperial aims, claims to knowledge, and, perhaps worst of all, insistence on instantaneous cure-alls. Tzara concludes this passage of his manifesto by reminding audiences that manifestos are in vogue at the moment, and since he is delivering one at that very moment, then they must actually (though now counterfactually) be “gentle, good-natured, ... always right, ...strong, vigorous and logical.”

In critiquing the motives intrinsic to the genre he is performing, Tzara warns listeners and readers not to trust him (he is one of those manifesto mongers) and to trust him (he is proclaiming a manifesto, which is “always right”). As a genre, the manifesto creates a subject position from which to speak and calls into being an “us” to which it then appeals to take some action against a “them”(the purveyors of some intolerable status quo). Manifestos thus imagine a particular future and attempt to offer a means to achieve it. Tzara dismantles the subject position of his manifestos even as he inhabits it in order to speak in the first place. As a political subject, the “I” Tzara speaks does not cohere: it rejects what it claims to want and contradicts and disavows its own desires and attributes, leaving listeners and readers only with its speech and un-anxiously repeated assertions that it is “charming.” Tzara unsettles the us/them binary opposition manifestos characteristically posit. His amicable first-person voice engages an audience poised in uncertain relation to three other terms: the speaking subject, a nebulous we (which at times seems to be, but can’t be, Dada, because Tzara proclaims Dada a sign signifying nothing) and multiple unsavory “thems.” This four-term model perfectly

¹⁷⁸ “Un manifeste est une communication faite au monde entier, où il n’y a comme prétention que la découverte du moyen de guérir instantanément la syphilis politique, astronomique, artistique, parlementaire, agronomique et littéraire. Il peut être doux, bonhomme, il a toujours raison, il est fort, vigoureux et logique.” Tzara, *OC* 378.

suits the call to action the Dada manifestos articulate, a call to devise another way of attempting to bring about change.

Tzara's dismantling of the conventional manifesto's clear us/them dialectic would seem to leave him in the lurch, unable to clarify the single serious difference between two groups necessary for advancing a program of action and motivating partisans to enact it. But Dada depends on holding opposing tendencies in tension; it revolts not against a group but against a binary oppositional scheme. This revolt makes the manifesto central to Dada, because it allows the movement to take up the site where binary oppositions are clearly articulated in the service of revolutionary action, undo those binaries, and thus prevent a revolution. Tzara insists:

I write a manifesto and I want nothing, yet I say certain things, and in principle I am against manifestos, as I am also against principles... I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking one fresh gulp of air; I am against action; for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too, I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense. ("Dada Manifesto 1918," 76)¹⁷⁹

This refusal to do anything a manifesto requires indicates an attempt to undo the framework of the manifesto to replace it with an inclusive (non-oppositional) alternative that can accommodate difference. A footnote in "Manifesto of Mr. Aa the anti-philosopher" reads "No more manifestos" (84).

Readings of Tzara's manifestos and Dada generally as pure revolt or nihilism confuse content with character, teleology with aspirations, critique with creation. The discontent Dada articulates aims not to scold but to move beyond, to create more tolerable conditions. It

¹⁷⁹ "J'écris un manifeste et je ne veux rien, je dis pourtant certaines choses et je suis par principe contre les manifestes, comme je suis aussi contre les principes... J'écris ce manifeste pour montrer qu'on peut faire les actions opposés ensemble, dans une seule fraîche respiration; je suis contre l'action; pour la continuelle contradiction, pour l'affirmation aussi, je ne suis ni pour ni contre et je n'explique pas car je hais le bon sens." Tzara, *OC*, 359-360.

is how Dada goes about creating these conditions that distinguish its use of the manifesto from that of other avant-garde groups: its manifestos focus on enacting collective change, not on authoring the visions to which change should adhere. This change depends on retemporalization, on a process, not moment, of enactment. Dada challenges the time-sense, the idea of revolution set forth in that foundational modernist manifesto, the *Communist Manifesto*. Puchner, after Blanchot, argues that manifestos after Marx and Engels are characterized by “impatience,” by dissatisfaction that “the manifesto will always remain a split second removed from the actual revolution itself.”¹⁸⁰ Tzara’s manifestos, in contrast, are not impatient; they are sometimes momentary, sometimes meandering and drawn out, and always repetitive: they organize a changeable liturgy, a ritual of collectively reconfronting the problem of change and enacting a process of salvation.

II. Bergson’s Gospel of Temporalization and Creation

The alternative approach Dada sought for change required a repopulation of time, a way to bring others into a realm not of fixed structures, set hierarchies, and already delimited paths but of openness and possibility. Dada demolished barriers between art and anti-art and art and life so that each person might emerge as an artist, as co-creator of this alternative. Tzara called for a collective that was non-coercive and which ignored nationality, class, talent, and erudition. The manifestos articulate this call and seek simultaneously to establish the conditions for enacting such a collective by opening up a collective time.

Dada organized a collective for no purpose other than to create something other than the conditions giving rise to World War I. In this way it gathered a multitude of dissatisfactions together provisionally in the service of engendering an alternative whose

¹⁸⁰ Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 22.

character was unknown but which would result from voluntary collaboration. Hugo Ball claims to have organized the Cabaret Voltaire in order to show the public that different modes of living, outside nationalism and war, did in fact exist. Ball wrote in the first pamphlet Dada issued:

When I founded the Cabaret Voltaire, I was sure that there must be a few young people in Switzerland who like me were interested not only in enjoying their independence but also in giving proof of it. [...] The present booklet... is intended to present to the Public the activities and interests of the Cabaret Voltaire, which has as its sole purpose to draw attention, across the barriers of war and nationalism, to the few independent spirits who live for other ideals.¹⁸¹

Dada emerged in Zurich not only to introduce to the public people who did not support war and nationalist programs but to show these people's independence. Showing independence consisted in critiquing nationalism and the war and, more importantly, in demonstrating the positive character of independence. Critique took the form not of opposition or revolution but of a loosening and dismantling, identifying logical inconsistencies, a-logical constructions, and unhappy consequences of the status quo in order to make room for alternatives.

Dada engaged a double object of critique, specific ideals and their consequences, the ways of living they allowed and encouraged. This critique resulted in a general wariness towards ideals such that the response to critiques of nationalism was not to erect other ideals in its place but to undertake a different project: to experiment with other ways of living, to create the alternative whose need the critique signals. Considered collectively, this project aimed to replace ideals with a Bergsonian *élan* appropriate to an open society. Ball's collective of independent souls undertook "successive efforts" to yield an *élan* rather than "the progressive realization of an ideal," as no preconceived ideal could "represent an

¹⁸¹ Hugo Ball quoted in Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, 13-14.

ensemble of acquisitions of which each one, in creating itself, would also create its own idea of itself; and yet the diversity of efforts would concentrate themselves in something unique: an impulse.”¹⁸² The focus here is modal: not to execute a particular (substantive) project but to enact it in a certain way, intensely, through creative concentration.

Henri Bergson’s notions of dynamism and creation provide a framework for understanding Tzara’s manifestos in relation to a Dadaist ethos of action independent from general conventions and particular programs. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932), Bergson presents dynamic religion as the expression of open morality. Religion in this usage concerns a mode of existence rather than a specific doctrine. The author asks “When one makes a critique or apology for religion, does one always realize what it is religion possesses that is specifically religious?” and displaces dogma with a state of being in his response: “One attaches oneself to it [religion] or attacks it in terms of the accounts it perhaps needs to obtain a state of the soul that will propagate itself; but the religion is essentially that state itself.”¹⁸³ For our purposes this state has the advantage of not existing for any particular end.

Bergson then posits two kinds of society, closed and open, which differ in “essence.” The closed society values social cohesion, relies on the exclusion of others to maintain its identity, tends to get involved in wars, and practices static religion. The open society values all humanity and aspires to universality and peace through dynamic religion. Obviously, an open society is preferable to a closed one; what makes the distinction interesting is the role Bergson attributes to creation in the open society and the way in which he envisions such

¹⁸² Henri Bergson, *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 285 [my translation].

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, 286. [my translation]

creation coming about. While creation in a closed society is reactive, a response to a representation, creation in an open society proceeds from emotion and from or through creation to representation. Expressing dynamic religion, this society “realizes each time something of itself in the creations of which each one, through a more or less profound transformation of the man, permits surmounting difficulties until then insurmountable.”¹⁸⁴ Individual aspirations and social obligations align, becoming indistinguishable in practice, but an open society borrows its form--obligation-- from the closed society, just as “dynamic religion can propagate itself only through the images and symbols” of the same organizing trope, “la fonction fabulatrice.”¹⁸⁵ The fabulative or mythmaking function acquires an “exceptional force” when exercised in the religious domain, insinuating a tyrannical character in the closed society and a facilitating character in the open society. We may understand the religious character of Dada’s project as an aspiration to a society whose principal mode is creative and whose end is a state of being conducive to free creation.

The political character of this project follows from its secular, temporal element: the problem of prolongation. Bergson notes that the maintenance of an open society requires people to triumph over an instinct that believes persons in superior positions to be superior.¹⁸⁶ Bergson offers examples of the nobles in 1789 and the bourgeoisie in 1830 and 1848 to argue for their importance, over and above the action of the peasants or proletariat, in bringing about revolution: “The truth is that if an aristocracy believes naturally, religiously, in its innate superiority, the respect it inspires is not less religious, not less natural.” Only when

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 285. [my translation]

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 299 [my translation]

enough “superior” figures are won over to the cause of revolution does it acquire the critical mass to take off. Declaring democracy the political conception most distant from nature, Bergson asserts that it is also the only political conception “that transcends, in intention at least, the condition of the ‘closed society.’”¹⁸⁷ But democracy requires creative instantiation. Referring to the cases of France and the U.S., Bergson notes that historically democracy has come about largely as protest, and that “democratic formulas” lend themselves to facile rejection, reversal and interdiction. He emphasizes, “Especially, they [democratic formulas] are only applicable if they are transposed, absolute and almost evangelical, in terms of purely relative morality, or rather the general interest” and that this “transposition always risks leading to an “incurvation” in the sense of particular interests.”¹⁸⁸ The political actualization necessary for the creative open society requires this society as a precondition. Thus we arrive at Tzara’s and Dada’s conundrum, the problem of how to enact both simultaneously.

Bergson again seems to offer a view towards a solution: replacing a mechanistic outlook with a dynamic one, shifting from the rule of law and abstraction to an emphasis on multiple unfolding in time. Bergson contrasts mechanism with dynamism by depicting their different conceptions of simplicity. Mechanism regards what is most simple as that which has effects one can predict, perhaps even calculate, at the outset, such that “the notion of inertia is then by definition, simpler than that of liberty, the homogeneous simpler than the heterogeneous, the abstract simpler than the concrete.”¹⁸⁹ Dynamism seeks the real relation, something the mechanist regards as “primitive” but which is

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 301. [my translation]

¹⁸⁹ Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, 96th edition (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), 106.

arrived at through a fusion of several “rich” notions, a transformation without remainder or trace, like the darkness that results from interference of two lights.¹⁹⁰ Mechanism starts with the abstract law, dynamism with the specific circumstances surrounding our encounter of something. While mechanism relies on static conceptions and assumptions of uniform processes, dynamism always starts again, re-confronts the present each time, in each situation. Mechanism uses law to take time into account primarily as it is mediated by procedure. Dynamism unfolds in time multiply (in each specific encounter), rendering law a “more or less symbolic” expression of reality.¹⁹¹ As Bergson notes, mechanism and dynamism represent two very different views of human activity.

Dada adopts dynamism to bring specific, different, real individuals and concepts into an unfolding project of creation. Tzara opens the first of his *Seven Dada Manifestos* with the declaration, “Dada is our intensity.”¹⁹² This intensity constitutes open, creative time. Novelty is valued only insofar as it registers a desire for change that has been short-circuited and compressed to an impossible moment. Tzara writes of the modern fetish for the new: “The love of novelty is the cross of sympathy, demonstrates a naïve je m’enfoutisme [Idon’tgiveadamnism], it is a transitory, positive sign without a cause” (76).¹⁹³ A desire for novelty signifies a need to replenish time, to shift collectively towards a more dynamic and less mechanist mode. This mode requires a creation that is at once inextricably aesthetic and political, incorporating art and anti-art to fashion an open society.

¹⁹⁰ Bergson’s example. Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 105.

¹⁹² “Dada est notre intensité.” Tzara, *OC*, 357.

¹⁹³ “L’amour de la nouveauté est la croix sympathique, fait preuve d’un je m’enfoutisme naïf, signe sans cause, passager, positif.” Tzara, *OC*, 359.

Dada calls for the transformation of protest into creation in “Dada Manifesto 1918”:
“The new artist protests: he no longer paints (symbolic and illusionist reproduction) but creates... locomotive organisms capable of being turned in all directions by the limpid wind of momentary sensation” (78).¹⁹⁴ In a society of artists, these dynamic, responsive organisms could be the desired results of self and communal creation.

III. Thou shall not do x and thou must do x: Anarchist attitudes as values

Creation demands a restoration of time in which to enact salvation or freedom. Re-infusing time with difference and possibility makes everything subject to creation and recreation and requires a demolishing or at least loosening of current categories of perception and classificatory schemes. Tzara portrays himself as a madman, hoping for the best as he unleashes chaos: “I destroy the drawers of the brain and of social organization: spread demoralization wherever I go and cast my hand from heaven to hell, my eyes from hell to heaven, restore the fecund wheel of a universal circus to objective forces and the imagination of every individual” (Dada Manifesto 1918, 79)¹⁹⁵ Even as the speaker looks to improvement, his eyes moving from hell to heaven, his hands have already begun altering heaven and re-making the universe.

The project of retemporalization and re-creation extends and repeats time to generate the conditions necessary for enacting a new collective. There is no formal contraction of time into a foundational act. As Dada participant and historian George Ribemont-Dessaignes

¹⁹⁴ “L’artiste nouveau proteste: il ne peint plus (reproduction symbolique et illusionniste) mais crée directement en pierre, bois, fer, étain, des rocs, des organismes locomotives pouvant être tournés de tous les côtés par le vent limpide de la sensation momentanée.” Tzara, *OC*, 362.

¹⁹⁵ “Je détruis les tiroirs du cerveau et ceux de l’organisation sociale : démoraliser partout et jeter la main du ciel en enfer, les yeux de l’enfer au ciel, rétablir la roué féconde d’un cirque universel dans les puissances réelles et la fantaisie se chaque individu.” Tzara, *OC* 366.

observed, Dada's character depended on a tension between forces of dissolution and "other forces seeking form and substance."¹⁹⁶ Tzara's manifestos operate within this Dada force field, reconceptualizing form and content as intensity. Tzara divests the manifesto of both form and content, preserving only its rhetorical context, the articulation of a call for change. But this change requires a process, if not a teleology, and Tzara's manifestos do articulate a set of values or conditions for producing this process.

In place of commandments or laws, Tzara articulates a set of anarchist attitudes. *Seven Dada Manifestos* call for *poiesis* by maintaining a carefully provocative tone and establishing a set of values to promote collective creation. The tone of the manifestos oscillates between two sets of antipodes, one set an attitude towards the world, the other the speaker's attitude toward his audience. The portrait the manifesto offers of the world alternates between despair and serious dissatisfaction, on the one hand, and amusement and joy at the richness and possibilities the universe presents for experience, experimentation, and creation, on the other. Regarding readers (literally, during performances), Tzara alternately lavishes them with praise and affection and mocks them, occasionally even adopting a hostile register. The manifestos intertwine hyperbolic claims of revolt and regeneration with claims to love and adore listeners and readers, all in a context of sweeping statements about the awful state of humanity and the force Dada will bring to bear on it. These enormous shifts in tone and attitude accomplish three very specific tasks (at the moment of their performance and over the course of four years of Dada): they make the case for change, portraying the status quo as unpleasant, untenable, wrong-headed, and quite open to creation and correction; they bring audiences into the Dada collective; and they use sympathy and revulsion to establish a dialectic that subsequently alienates the audience from

¹⁹⁶ Ribemont-Dessaignes quoted in Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, 185.

Dada (and then perhaps re-integrates it) in order to maintain the independence of each audience member. After all, Dada's collective poesis is grounded in difference, not unity; the dissolution of audience members into some Dada essence would be antithetical to Dada's project.

The first Dada manifestation in Zurich on July 14, 1916 leveled established value systems to clear the ground for Dada in the first reading of a movement manifesto, Tzara's "Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine." The manifesto introduces Dada in four ways, three defining it by what it refuses, the fourth in terms of its aims. The manifesto proclaims refusals to advocate a particular program, to exist for anyone, and to inhabit a position of judgment vis-à-vis norms ("Dada is not madness—or wisdom—or irony").¹⁹⁷ In terms of aspirations, it promises to recognize art as "not serious" and give its audience pleasure. Performed on Bastille Day, the manifesto ventriloquizes "vive la France" through an absurd "Ambassador of sentiment," whose speech serves to undercut nationalism, psychology, science, and their pretences of seriousness and intelligence. In their stead Dada promises a non-serious art for their audience's pleasure.

Yet the continuous creation of art (and anti-art) entails its own values, and the *Seven Dada Manifestos* consistently impart five values in the guise of attitudes and modes of action. These values focus on generating the ground conditions for Dadaist practice.

1. Sufficient and sufficiently tenuous faith. Tzara begs readers to indulge Dada with a sort of limited faith, a belief in the need for change and in the multitude of possibilities to create change through art accompanied by a suspicion of Tzara's—and, perhaps, by extension, Dada's—own sincerity, rightness, and authority. The "Manifeste de monsieur

¹⁹⁷ "DADA n'est pas folie, ni sagesse, ni ironie." Tzara, *OC*, 358.

Antipyrine” ends “But we DADA are not of their [the Ambassadors of sentiment] opinion for art is not serious I assure you and if in exhibiting crime we learnedly say ventilator, it is to give you pleasure kind reader I love you so I swear I do adore you” (76).¹⁹⁸ Read as sincere, this assertion assures readers that Tzara and Dada do not wage high stakes in their rebellion and wish their audience well. Read more skeptically, Tzara seems to mock the intellectual grounds of those who would lay claim to readers’ loyalties with pretensions of good will that perhaps involve higher stakes (like those entailed by nations whose asserted good will towards their citizens may occasion serious sacrifice).

Rather than elicit audience members’ faith, Tzara’s declarations produce two useful doubts: in the sincerity and rightness of those who speak with the authority of nations or science, and in the sincerity of Tzara or of anyone in a position of authority who claims affection as the justification for wielding power over others. As Tzara warns in the “Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love”: “A priori, that is with eyes closed, Dada places before action and above all: *Doubt*. *Dada* doubts all. *Dada*’s an awl. All is *Dada*. Watch out for *Dada*” (92).¹⁹⁹ The manifestos ask listeners and reader to take *Dada* the phenomenon seriously enough to engage it, but not to actually take *Dada* seriously. Tzara almost resembles a liberal Anglican minister reassuring his flock that religious zeal is unseemly, that the important thing is to come to church, enact the rituals, and share fellowship.

2. *Uncertainty*. The manifestos cultivate uncertainty to position Dada against the future and replenish the present with its full experiential value. In dismantling all universal

¹⁹⁸ “Mais nous, DADA, nous ne sommes pas de leur avis, car l’art n’est pas sérieux, je vous assure, et si nous montrons le crime pour dire doctement ventilateur, c’est pour vous faire du plaisir, bons auditeurs, je vous aime tant, je vous assure et je vous adore.” Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ “A priori, c’est-à-dire les yeux fermés, Dada place avant l’action et au-dessus de tout : Le Doute. DADA doute de tout. Dada est tatou. Tout est Dada. Méfiez-vous de Dada.” Tzara, *OC*, 381.

laws and permanent, foundational claims, the manifestos deprive their audience of any certainties beyond the status quo (which they deplore) and the creation that might unfold presently. Dada's intensity is discomfiting and vertiginous, "life without carpet-slippers or parallels." Tzara addresses the future negatively and obliquely, imbuing it with an awareness of imminent degeneration ("our brains will become downy pillows") and task yet to be accomplished, notably attaining liberty ("we are not free yet shout freedom" [75]). A presentist orientation advocates both *Carpe diem*, as a letting go of futurity, and ascetic efforts to on behalf on creation. As a value, uncertainty functions to negate actions based on certainty, reducing deferred action to deferral, expectation to self-abnegation, and force action grounded in present circumstance.

3. *Multiplicity*. Negotiating uncertainty happily leads to an embrace of multiplicity. Variety in the here and now, the plenitude of the present, fulfills the vacancy of a projected future. Flexibility emerges as the best strategy for preparing for an unknown future, enacting difference the best guarantee for preventing a coalescence of power that will foreclose future options. The manifestos offer a choice between uncertain creation and submissive automatism. Dada remains alone among modernist movements in thinking multiplicity. On the one hand, as a collective Dada's thinking and creating together respects and enacts difference harmoniously and simultaneously, as shared but individuated time. On the other hand, this collective that gathers together and empowers specific individuals to create makes the individual less salient as *the* quantitative unit, opening up possibilities for ontological mobility. The enactment of creation and ongoing process of experience—inseparable in Dada's refusal to distinguish between art and life—allow for new connections and the

potential for a multiplicity of machines, in Deleuze's terms, to replace the individual as the focal point of epistemological and political concerns.

4. *Enactment, discovery through doing.* While artists such as Duchamp also worked to restore temporality through art, moving from Cubist painting of successive motions to three-dimensional works like *The Large Glass*, which requires observers to circulate around the piece, literary Dada was better positioned to make audience members confront the movement of thought. Indeed, even Duchamp frequently resorted to the strategy of writing to infuse his visual art with a sense of time, not only through perplexing titles to prolong viewers' encounters with a visual artwork ("The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even" comes to mind), but by making his years of notes for a work-- *The Large Glass*-- into an artwork itself, *The Green Box*.²⁰⁰ Duchamp also wrote "Kind of Sub-Title" (1934) in which he exhorts readers to substitute a temporal vocabulary for a visual/spatial one: "Use 'delay' instead of 'picture' or 'painting'" in order to succeed "in no longer thinking that the thing in question is a picture."²⁰¹ Duchamp claimed that he wished to reconceive of painting in purely intellectual, not visual-sensual, terms.

Without endorsing Lessing's and similar arguments from aesthetic theory on the spatial quality of painting and temporal purview of literary arts, it's important to note that "Paris Dada, unlike the Zurich, New York, Berlin, Hanover and Cologne movements, belonged almost exclusively to writers, not to visual artists."²⁰² In the preface to his anthology, (painter) Robert Motherwell cautions readers with the even broader claim: "Dada,

²⁰⁰ The two works are presented next to one another in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

²⁰¹ See Marcel Duchamp, "Kind of Sub-Title" in Caws, 324.

²⁰² Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, 170.

like surrealism, was probably more the work of poets than painters, however inspiring the cubist revolution in painting may have been to both, and ... Dada's permanent effects have been on contemporary French literature, not on modern painting."²⁰³

The manifestos make listeners and readers aware of the transition from one thought to another by employing strategies of contradiction, disavowal, disjunction, and false conclusions, and through frequent recourse to non sequiturs. Tzara undermines relations of cause and effect and rejects set methods and predetermined means for arriving at an end to a thought process. And he vilifies nothing as much as systematic thinking, mocking: "The system of quickly looking at the other side of a thing in order to impose your opinion indirectly is called dialectics, in other words, haggling over the spirit of fried potatoes while dancing method around it" (79).²⁰⁴ Tzara valorizes *poiesis* as unplanned and unregulated unfolding of creation in time, arguing that we create, discover, and actualize possibilities in the making.

5. *Repetition and Re-iteration.* Martin Puchner points out that "unlike futurism, vorticism, and surrealism, Dada never expressed any reverence for its own foundational manifesto; in fact there is no First Dadaist Manifesto the way there is a Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism or a First Manifesto of Surrealism."²⁰⁵ Dada celebrated "the endless repetition and iteration of consecutive foundational acts. What Dada thus highlighted was that the foundational force of the manifesto is a performative effect that can and must be

²⁰³ Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xix.

²⁰⁴ "La façon de regarder vite l'autre côté d'une chose, pour imposer indirectement son opinion, s'appelle dialectique, c'est-à-dire marchander l'esprit des pommes frites, en dansant la méthode autour." Tzara, *OC*, 363.

²⁰⁵ Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 158.

repeated: Dadaism is being founded and manifested over and over again.”²⁰⁶ As such Tzara’s manifestos call into question not just political programs but the procedural constitution of the polity. Procedures determine what can be done and are neither neutral nor universal. It’s not just that they evoke certain values—rationality, mechanism, hygiene—but that they depend on a false distinction between means and content, between how something is done and what is decided, what is possible. Foucault’s assertion “Liberty is a practice” gets at Dada’s anxiety over procedure and insistence on temporal difference: freedom must be constantly reasserted or it doesn’t really exist; it requires exercise. Freedom is not out there: it is a project to be continually realized and re-realized in time, the collective time of intersecting *durées*.

Dada’s anarchistic values leave it vulnerable to the same critiques anarchism confronts routinely, particularly the charge of what Murray Bookchin termed “lifestyle anarchism.” Dada was critiqued on grounds that its theoretical evacuation, on the one hand, and apoliticism, on the other, allowed its practice to be absorbed as consonant with the functioning of the very society it wished to change. In a tough critical assessment of Dada in 1920, Albert Gleizes inveighed against the movement’s showy and superficial character. As he observed Dada’s very lack of substance or doctrine, Gleizes asserted ironically “Of all human beings it is the Dadaists who have the greatest appreciation for the discovery of printing.”²⁰⁷ Gleizes noted the Dadaists’ habit of giving their books and pamphlets away to as many people as possible as quickly as they can. And yet, Gleizes claims, the Dadaists have

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Albert Gleizes, *The Dada Case*, trans. Ralph Manheim. In Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 302. Originally published in *Action* (Paris, 3, April, 1920).

nothing to say—they are simply “mortally afraid of silence” and “cannot live alone.” Gleizes sees Dada as prostrate before the crowd, hardly a force for changing its character:

They [Dada] seek the crowd, in which they believe. They are flat on their bellies before it, or else they engage in all sorts of clownery in order to coax catcalls or invective from it. They invite it to their demonstrations and stranger still, the crowd comes and does their bidding. As they disperse after their meeting, the Dadaists rub their hands and say, “Big success!” This crowd is composed of curiosity seekers and of highly Parisian boulevardiers, the arbiters of artistic fashion for snobbish circles. These elements are in quest of the ‘modern direction.’ The fear of no longer being modern holds them in its grip, and they keep asking each other what to do. Let them be of good cheer and take up Dada without further hesitation, for Dada is modern if by this we mean that it is the great attraction of the day, the ‘great event of the season.’²⁰⁸

Gleizes’ critique turns on the power relations between Dada and its audience, Dada’s lack of program, and the temporal element—the fashionable momentariness—of Dada. Gleizes sees Dada in a servile role, needful of the audience’s attention, and unable or unwilling to impel the audience to real change, for which it lacks a program in any case.

Gleizes overlooks the flip side of this power dynamic and of Dada’s lack of program. If, as Bergson and others have noted, social change still depends largely on the endorsement and participation of at least some members of a society’s “upper crust,” then it would seem to make sense both for Dada to cater to trendsetters and followers and to do so in a manner that will allow them a decisive role in enacting change. The positive case for Dada is that by not dictating a program and instead gathering together the “major players” in a way that will provoke them to ponder change, Dada augments the chances that change will take place. And Gleizes’ vision of Dada as the “great event of the season” alludes to it as a happening rather than a simple regime change, calling attention to its potential for a non-directed or multi-directed character.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 302-03.

While they despised nationalist and fascist rhetoric as well as most conservative literary and (visual) artistic aesthetics, Paris Dada lacked clearly defined positions in relation to the political and cultural left. Unlike Berlin Dada, Paris Dada veered away from ideological positions and political activism. Richard Huelsenbeck and Raoul Hausmann contrast the self-consciously socialist character of Berlin Dada with the apolitical character of Zurich and Paris Dada. Huelsenbeck writes: “Here the difference between our conception and that of Tzara is clear. While Tzara was still writing: “*Dada ne signifie rien*”—in Germany Dada lost its art-for-art’s-sake character with its very first move. Instead of continuing to produce art, Dada... went out and found an adversary. Emphasis was laid on the movement, on struggle. But we still needed a program of action, we had to say exactly what our Dadaism was after. This program was drawn up by Raoul Hausmann and myself. In it we consciously adopted a political position.” The program, entitled “What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany?” lists as Dada’s first demand: “The international revolutionary union of all creative and intellectual men and women on the basis of radical Communism.”²⁰⁹ In contrast, most participants and audience members of Paris Dada were bourgeois or haute bourgeois, or even minor members of the aristocracy (like Picabia on his mother’s side). The few direct encounters between Paris Dada and the working class political left made clear a structural and procedural disjuncture: Dada’s antics and the form of fora for explicitly engaging the French political (socialist) left were not a good fit. Dada performed irreverence, undermining ideologies and entrenched identities through creative critique that

²⁰⁹ See Richard Huelsenbeck, *En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism.*, trans. Ralph Manheim. In Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 41. Originally published as *En Avant Dada: Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus* (Hannover: Paul Steegemann Verlag), 1920. In Hausmann’s discussion Dada emerges as a Marxist vanguard: when Berlin’s working poor fail to react to the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, Dada steps in. Hausmann explains, “The proletariat was paralyzed and did not awake from its paralysis... Therefore, we had to make the Dada-action stronger: against a world that did not react decently even when faced with unforgivable atrocities.” Raoul Hausmann quoted in Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 156-57.

worked best with audience participation (if only through heckling, protests, and projectiles launched at the stage). The French left relied on specific forms of communication (lectures, polemical tracts and pamphlets, reasoned debates) of a set of themes and entrenched (national, class and regional—at least Paris vs. the rest) identities. Without formal innovation or compromise on one or both sides, Dada and the main leftwing elements were in no position to converse: they could speak at, but not to, one another.

Two trainwrecks of encounters illustrate the failed communication between Dada and the constituents of France's political left. Both occurred in February 1920, just after Tzara's arrival and the launching of Paris Dada 'proper.' On the seventh Dada accepted an invitation by Léo Poldès to speak at his debate club, the Club du Fauborg, "before an audience of [over a thousand] workers, labor leaders, leftist intellectuals, and minor politicians" (128). Breton, Tzara, Aragon and Ribemont-Dessaignes represented Dada mostly by declaiming manifestos to the group. Breton biographer Mark Polizzotti reports that Aragon accomplished a brief rapprochement with the anarchists in attendance through an impromptu "eloquent harangue against the audience's armchair socialism... until Breton's recital of Tzara's nonsensical 'Dada Manifesto 1918' ('Ideal, ideal, ideal. Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge. Boomboom, boomboom, boomboom') alienated all factions equally" (128). Polizzotti's account of the event seems to take a perspective similar to Breton's, viewing Dada's lack of articulation of clear, positive political content as a failure; Tzara, however, might have considered such an end result—audience members' equal alienation—a resounding success, though Dada's subsequent visit to a leftist forum that month suggests that he also had yet to address the obstacles to communication confronting such encounters.

Hans Richter provides an account of Dada trying to reach the working class after accepting an invitation to the Université Populaire “a center for adult education,” “an old liberal institution” whose students were “mostly workers.” Richter registers the uncharacteristic “markedly civilized atmosphere” of the encounter, speculating that “Tzara’s style may have been a little cramped by his respect for the working class.”²¹⁰ This astute observation gets at the heart of the problem, one of style, not political ideology (or the failure to advocate one): what alterations to style did such an audience require? Ribemont-Dessaignes asserts, “It was necessary to make them [the workers] understand that we were against Culture, and that we were rebelling not only against the bourgeois order but against all order, all hierarchy, all sacralization, all idolatry, whatever might be the idol” (176). Yet Dada seems to have lacked the means to do this. Richter sums up the result:

Claims of this sort became progressively more ‘theoretical’ as the evening went on. The audience clearly found difficulty in swallowing ideas that consigned Napoleon, Kant, Cézanne, Marx and Lenin to the same scrap-heap. Ribemont-Dessaignes is forced to admit that the Dadaists failed to convince the workers. And this is not to be wondered at, since the movement as a whole tended towards the anarchism of Picabia. It was not until the advent of surrealism that a socio-political program, opposed to anarchism, was to reappear and be followed up systematically.²¹¹

Richter’s conclusion sounds a very un-Dada-like note: since when did Dada aim to convince? As Hugo Ball explained Dada in its infancy in Zurich, it aspired to show, to “give proof” that non-nationalist individuals of independent spirit existed. Convincing someone, especially in relation to a proper perspective on culture or politics, sounds a Bretonian note, and Richter’s last sentence reminds us that he writes retrospectively, after surrealism. As I argue in the previous chapter, Dada’s refusal to advocate a specific “socio-political program” lies at the heart of its political and cultural import. Dada’s problem here seems to be one of

²¹⁰ Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, 174.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

communication, perhaps mostly of style, perhaps also of content (Napoleon, Kant, Cézanne, Marx and Lenin), tone, or approach, but not of “essence,” ideology, or lack thereof.

A Dada-esque response to this disjuncture between Dada’s and French socialist foras’ modus operandi would have been for Dada to refashion its critique to target this particular audience more viscerally, for Dada to enter into better proximity with “the workers” so as to be able to perform its dialectic of incorporation and alienation. Breton’s response was to abandon Dada for a movement that would articulate positive political content: still preferring the label thief to poet, he trades the *poiesis* at Dada’s heart, the experimenting with producing different social relations, for programmatic clarity, cashing in an aesthetic (but not aestheticized!) take on politics for a politicized aesthetic.

In the final section of this chapter I bring together Proudhon’s and Deleuze’s ideas of the event to argue for a conception of Tzara’s manifestos as an opportunity for historical intervention, for a transformation of historical narrative into lived multiplicity.

The temporal character of the event instills a way to envision change in terms of a fairly open-ended present, as either ongoing and open to popular participation through that extension in time or repeatedly asserted and thus open to mass participation through distinct, multiple opportunities for involvement. Dada works toward collective, non-revolutionary change in contrast to the programmatic shifts much of the avant-garde solicits, changes occasioned by absolute rupture and imposed on a collective by circumstances or a tiny minority. Moreover, Tzara’s manifestos envision a status quo where peaceful instability is the norm. If change is continuous rather than sporadic, the character of any single change matters far less than maintaining a process of ongoing change open to multiple actors. Dada replaces stable substance (values and ideals) and structure with style and a habit of change.

That said, it is not my intention in this retrospectively proleptic reading of Tzara's manifestos to discount the serious obstacle Gleizes emphasizes, the question of how to convert "charming" manifestos and fashionable soirées into real social transformation on a broad scale. Rather, I wish to establish what Dada might have done to explore a road mapped but ultimately not traveled outside literary modernism. I try to offer a plausible account of the failure to enact widespread social transformation in the next chapter, casting André Breton in the role of chief villain.

IV. Dada as Event: Against Ætiology

Here again are some other variants on the same event:

It's the Left who assured the success of the coup d'État, in voting, on the 17th of November, against the proposition of the quaestors.²¹²

It's the press of the Elysée who frightened the bourgeois with their stories and retained their indignation.

It's the army, ferocious and venal, whose character caused the citizens to lose their patriotism.

It's this, it's that!

Always such large events explained by little causes!

Oh! If I had only to reply to those ignorant pedants! If it were but a matter of me flagellating one more time those mystifiers, lackeys of revolutions they didn't foresee and which have surpassed them!

--P. J. Proudhon, *La Révolution sociale démontree par le coup d'état du 2 décembre, 1852*²¹³

In all historical phenomena like the Revolution of 1789, the Commune, the Revolution of 1917, there is always one part of the *event*, irreducible to social determinisms, to causal series. The historians don't like this aspect very much: they restore causalities afterwards.

--Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "May '68 Did Not Take Place"²¹⁴

In Proudhon and Deleuze anarchism and poststructuralism meet in a historically-inflected philosophy of the event that refuses to confine events to temporal or formal bounds. This philosophy emphasizes experience and experimentation, notably the irreducible

²¹² A *questeur* manages internal administrative and budgetary matters of the National Assembly. The "Proposition of the Questeurs" to give the President of the National Assembly direct control of the army failed on November 17, 1951. Louis Napoleon's coup d'état took place on December 2nd.

²¹³ P. J. Proudhon, *La Révolution sociale démontree par le coup d'état du 2 décembre* (Paris: Garniers Frères, 1852), 16-17 [my translation].

²¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Mai 68 n'a pas eu lieu," *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, May 3-9, 1984, reprinted in Gilles Deleuze, *Deux régimes de fous: Textes et entretiens, 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2003), 215. [my translation]

particularities and complexities that make up a mass event in Proudhon's thinking and the temporal continuity of an event-- its lived afterlife-- in Deleuze's conception. In combination, Proudhon's and Deleuze's reflections allow us to read Tzara's manifestos as the aesthetic and linguistic enactment of such an event.

As collective, ongoing phenomena that register and enact change, events occupy a tendentious position in relation to historical narrative. Proudhon and Deleuze share a conviction that the character of certain historical events exceeds and differs from the causal explanations history attributes to them retrospectively and the motivated interpretations stakeholders promulgate in their aftermaths. Proudhon critiques the way in which the uprising and subsequent political consequences of 1848 were reduced to one logic or another; Deleuze critiques the dead character attributed to such events, the location of their importance in the past. Both thinkers argue for a concept of a mass event that defies a specific temporal perspective—relegating what matters about an event to a precursor, usually to some cause—and a tendency to efface the variable instantiation of the event with a unified view. Events both generate and thwart history, leading Deleuze to claim “History is made only by those who oppose history.”²¹⁵ Proudhon and Deleuze suggest that we should reckon with events in their immediate irreducibility as relevant to the present moment and to the shaping of the future.

Events offer opportunities to challenge historical narratives and change course. Borrowing from Nietzsche, Deleuze defines the time of the event as untimely, as subhistorical or superhistorical. The problem turns on how to recuperate or continue the event, to inhabit it rather than deform it to conform with a historical narrative. Deleuze

²¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, “What Is Multiplicity?” *Difference and Repetition*. In *The Deleuze Reader*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 50.

argues for a collective taking up and inhabiting of the event over and above historical analysis, echoing Bergson's argument for a turn above interested analysis towards experiential knowledge, a leaping inside that allows one to go within and experience *durée*. In what follows I argue that Tzara's Dada attempts to bring about such an event. I use Deleuze's idea of reversion as a framework for assessing the interrelations among language, time, form and audience in Tzara's manifestos. Reading *Seven Dada Manifestos* as an attempt to generate a mass, variable event to shape the present and future argues for a practical dimension at the heart of Dada.

A full event—one not immediately wrested from happening and relegated to history - - acquires a mass character by virtue of bringing together as many different elements (people, ideas, perspectives) as possible into a locus of interaction. This event depends on what Deleuze calls “reversion” for actualization, a collective response that takes the character of a social change or transformation. Deleuze and Guattari explain, “When a social mutation appears, it does not suffice to draw out its consequences or effects, following lines of economic or political causality. The society must be able to form new collective dispositions corresponding to the new subjectivity, in such way as it wishes the mutation. That is a real ‘reversion.’”²¹⁶ By making transition and futurity the proper temporal nature of events, Deleuze empowers them to happen. For the events to really occur, and for us to react to them ethically, we must grapple with them, let them work on us, and actively respond. This response is not to the event itself; it is the product of our engagement with the event, like the parrying of shock Benjamin sees in the confrontation with the forces of the modern European city that resulted in Baudelaire's poetry.

²¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, “May '68,” 216.

Put simply, Deleuze's conception of reconversion permits a democratic engagement with events. Tzara's manifestos broach this kind of engagement by opening up form to creative enactment of diverse, changeable perspectives. The tripartite form of the manifesto follows a procedural logic, stating a problem with the status quo, offering up a solution, and concluding with a call for its enactment. *Seven Dada Manifestos* disorders the manifesto's procedural form through repetition and change within each movement of a manifesto, positing and re-positing the same and different problems, echoing and varying solutions. Repetition and variation replace macro-level structure and furnish multiple opportunities for new audience members to "catch up" and enter into the discussion at hand: the manifestos repeat and offer anew starting points as they unfold. Even as the sole speaker, Tzara presents his manifestos as dialogues or conversations among himself, Dada, and the audience. The identities of the participants in the conversation are uncertain, at times overlapping or changing. The imperiled line between author and audience falls away in the manifesto's confused intermingling of Tzara, Dada, audience, revolutionaries, and keepers of the status quo. Tzara does not make clear who is to author the new world the manifestos seek to create: Tzara? Dada? The people? Which is which and who is who? Uncertainty precludes knowledge of to which group one belongs and the boundaries and character of that group. Such uncertainty calls one to act as if she possesses membership in multiple groups. Stakes in the outcome of revolution and creation for multiple groups involved make change more thoughtful (thought from more vantage points) and more likely peaceful.

Tzara's manifestos mix not only group membership but time, commingling the pregnant now of a manifesto—a moment—with an ongoing past penetrating the now and the future unfolding right now and for the longer term. On the one hand, as with multiple and

uncertain group membership, residency in multiple or unclearly differentiated temporalities confers responsibility for more times, for the realization of the past and future on whose continuity of existence the present moment depends. On the other hand, the confusion of identity and temporality engenders a kind of nonsense that makes the task at hand uncertain. The audience for Tzara's manifestos find themselves in a universe and rhetorical situation that more closely resembles the nebulous alterity of the prose poem than the definite contours of the manifesto.

Tzara shows how language, in relation to time, reveals the falsity of many distinctions between surface and depth, undoing critiques of language as social veneer, as hiding some private experiential, visceral depth beneath it. Language functions as becoming, intersecting sedimented pasts and moments, as a force working to efface and replace borders between individuals and groups: "it is the task of language both to establish limits and to go beyond them."²¹⁷ The most social medium of the surface (for humans) is language, so an event that infuses or infects language on a mass scale has a shot of going somewhere. Bergson emphasizes language's inability to capture the depth of individual experience, contrasting the presentation of love in a novel, which offers only the "objective and impersonal aspect" of a person's experience of emotion, to a more substantial character of individual experience. While the novel, Bergson states, tries to capture love by juxtaposing "a multiplicity of details" in "their primitive and living individuality," in individual experience "states of consciousness cease juxtaposing themselves to interpenetrate, melt together, and each one

²¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, "What Is an Event?" *Difference and Repetition*. In *The Deleuze Reader*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 46.

become tinted with the coloration of all the other.”²¹⁸ Because juxtaposition is not interpenetration, Bergson faults language for failing “to translate entirely what our soul senses,” for an incommensurability with thought.²¹⁹ Yet the failure Bergson attributes to language more accurately belongs to narrative, to its sequential ordering. Tzara’s use of language challenges borders of form, genre and identity, re-making language as interpenetration.

Tzara’s manifestos charge the atmosphere with linguistic richness, saturating the air so that those present must wade through a language (much of) whose diversity has been actualized. Tzara releases hyperbole, contradiction, excess, lies, obfuscations, unsupportable claims, ridiculous repetitions, commonplaces and banalities, making them present for incorporation, alteration, transformation and generation. Moreover, he opens language to experimentation by imbuing it with a different temporality, a presentness open to creation and subject to continual change. As he announces in “Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love”: “Here is the great secret: The thought is made in the mouth” (87).²²⁰

Tzara’s assertion echoes the same spatialization of time as surface that Deleuze finds in his reading of the Stoics: “The event is coextensive with becoming, and becoming is itself coextensive with language... Everything happens at the boundary between things and propositions. Chrysippus taught: ‘If you say something, it passes through your lips; so, if you say ‘chariot,’ a chariot passes through your lips.’” Deleuze finds ‘the only equivalents’ of such paradox in Zen Buddhism and English or American nonsense, in their “dismissal of

²¹⁸ Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, 96th edition (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), 123.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 124.

²²⁰ Le grand secret est là: La pensée se fait dans la bouche.” Tzara, *OC*, 379.

depth, ...display of events at the surface, and... deployment of language along this limit.”²²¹

What matters about real events, then, is breadth, not depth, the ways in which they bring so many different elements into a force field of multiplicity, not the way in which they cultivate a linear, teleological depth. Reconversion happens on the surface, sometimes on a surface not fully accessible hitherto (think of what has been buried, kept under wraps, occluded), and charges this surface with a particular kind of energy, an intensity that changes its generational possibilities, what it can grow, produce, and what can live on it.

In the context of the Bergsonian conception of dynamic religion discussed above, we might conceive of the (language) event as the practice of this religion, the means to create an open society. The transformative creation enacted and encouraged in Tzara’s manifestos revolts against the “practices of critique and contestation” of the manifesto genre. Tzara is able to “transform critique into a ‘re-volt,’ ...a turn within power, *beyond* forms of power.” In Ziarek’s reading, “Dadaism was never simply a revolt against bourgeois culture and morality but rather a turn within the logic of Enlightenment rationality—which Tzara identified as the organic disease of modern life—and toward an eventlike rupture of experience free from investments of power.”²²² Dada suggests that by extending creation to everyone, not just artists, Ziarek’s redistribution of forces and its reception as such, as work, might occur simultaneously and unreflectively, as a plural norm of experience. Thus the “re-volt” within power, a “critical inflection in the tonality of power, a change of momentum whereby forces become released from the circuit of power and are given a free space of

²²¹ Deleuze, “What Is an Event?” 46.

²²² Ziarek, *The Force of Art*, 174.

occurrence,” becomes the norm, not the exception.²²³ Power does not coalesce; it exists provisionally and in becoming.

Ziarek’s definition of force as “the very temporality of happening, in which occurrence has the structure of an event extended into the coming future and therefore irreducible to any particular instant of the now”²²⁴ returns us to Proudhon and Dada. Proudhon’s insistence on the irreducibility of the revolutions of 1848 (and their failure) to any single interpretation resonates with Dada’s avoidance of unified content or program as a means of protecting the multiplicity it actively solicits from selective simplification. Tzara’s manifestos refuse causality without refusing antecedents: they evoke traditions, norms, and contemporaneous contexts of experimentation (cubism and futurism) to gather multiplicity together so that all its different components might interact. Dada divests itself of revolution so that it may enter and endure in perception as a full event, not merely a consequence, and endure as becoming rather than coalesce into form or a static identity. This conception of Dada as concerned with “the specifically poetic momentum of force relations opened up by the artwork” makes much of its nonsense *lisible*, as its refusal of a unifying logic is central to pre-empting a reading of it that relegates it to the past, to some causal principle.²²⁵

Proudhon and Deleuze both advocate a perspective on events that prioritizes their prolongation through future action over debates about interpretation. This perspective reflects an anarchist preoccupation with open-ended, participatory action over top-down dictated

²²³ Ibid, 11.

²²⁴ Ibid, 32.

²²⁵ Ibid, 34.

ends. Assigning events causality and specific interpretations consigns them too quickly to a particular historical narrative, effectively ending their availability as means for self-determination. Keeping events in play, in contrast, provides an opportunity for more people to participate in them and makes them means and ends for exercising collective agency. Released of the dominance of causality, events can make proper use of the past, connecting with its richness rather than coalescing it into a single point of grievance.²²⁶ The past functions as body and substrate, both locus and object of transformation. The orientation of events towards reconversion makes the past accessible outside the confines of historical narrative as context and raw material for creation. Deleuze's constant attention to releasing events and creation from history—"There is no act of creation that is not transhistorical"—re-imbues the past with virtual presence, permitting not just aporias but an escape from narrative (returning us to the manifesto as prose poem).²²⁷ As aesthetic creation aiming to generate an event, Tzara's manifestos reactivate the past to escape the teleology of history. Literary creation thwarts the temporal character history has produced for language, the times of the assembly line, the train schedule, the nation.

²²⁶ Pragmatists also frame the event in terms of its temporality and public response, focusing on the need for a context of continuous attention and analysis. Dewey faults public opinion for its intermittence, asserting that because it "appears only in crises" it cannot serve public interests effectively: its momentary "rightness concerns only an immediate emergency," while "Its lack of continuity makes it wrong from the standpoint of the course of events." See John Dewey, "Search for the Great Community" from *The Public and Its Problems* [1927] in *The Essential Dewey*, vol. 2, eds. Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 304-05.

²²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, "What Is Multiplicity?" *Difference and Repetition*. In *The Deleuze Reader*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 50.

CHAPTER FOUR

RedisCIPLINING THE MANIFESTO: Breton's Surrealist Vanguard

My approach to anarchist modernism in the preceding chapters argues for a textual politics of time as a signal contribution of modernist and avant-garde art. In this chapter I approach Surrealism as a movement on the cusp of anarchist modernism, torn between a politics of time and politics proper, the actual political domain. The circumstances of Surrealism's formation, Breton's personality and leadership style, and most significantly, surrealists' oft-voiced anxieties of being perceived as 'merely' aesthetic, ultimately prevented Surrealism from sustaining the conventionally apolitical ethos that seems a necessary precursor to the development of a politics of time within a framework of aesthetic production.²²⁸

I propose to read the following quandaries as false choices emblematic of Surrealism's anxieties about its relation to aesthetic and political production: (1) making art and participating in political activism vs. making political art; (2) organizing social revolution vs. encouraging individual revolt; and (3) producing new art (forms) vs. breaking with art altogether.²²⁹ The surrealists confronted each of these choices over and over again as

²²⁸ As my reliance on the term "politics of time" implies, I am not arguing for an apolitical character of anarchist modernist art: to the contrary. I *am* arguing that the creative, multi-temporal engagement that gives rise to a politics of time in modernist and avant-garde texts depended on a freedom to imagine beyond the temporal and ideological constraints that inhere in an art bound to actual conventional politics.

²²⁹ Alain Joubert (a surrealist from 1955-69) provides concrete illustrations of the first two choices in his recent memoir *Le Mouvement des surréalistes*. Joubert refers to Benjamin Péret as an example of a surrealist whose political activism occurred outside Surrealism, contrasting Péret's lifelong activism in various left-wing groups with Jean Schuster's desire "de *forger*, en quelque sorte, la *ligne politique* du surréalisme, et d'accrocher le wagon du groupe à d'autres groupes ou personnalités extérieurs." Joubert notes that Schuster was not an

they configured and re-configured the relations between aesthetic undertakings and socio-political programs within the Surrealist movement.

I read these sets as positing false choices because they force unnecessary and, I argue, even undesirable distinctions: between aesthetic and political endeavors, between collective and individual change, and between forms and practices. The dangers of conflating phenomena represented by one term with those represented by its mate are well-documented by a huge body of critical work, particularly in regards to fascism.²³⁰ And yet insisting, reifying and policing the borders within each set induces comparably dangerous blindnesses.²³¹ It is not a matter of forcing a distinction or insisting on a lack thereof: rather, as the anarchist avant-garde's politics of time allows, one might simultaneously think and practice a sort of flexible and plural semi-autonomy. Categorization and identity should not limit invention but serve as changing-sames that facilitate it.

As I show in my analyses of Gertrude Stein and Dada, this flexible and plural semi-autonomy requires a theoretical suppleness (a willingness not to lock in definitions) and, especially, a specifically multi- or intra-temporal orientation. While Breton refused on Surrealism's behalf the disparaging dichotomy of socio-political inefficacy or aesthetic

artist; organizing political undertakings for Surrealism "constituait pour lui un substitut fondamental à son absence de création, que cette activité-là était sa manière, à lui, de *créer*." (195). Joubert's book includes the full text of a survey issued at a café meeting in 1955 that asks group members to yet again reconceive the relation between individual revolt and social revolution. See Alain Joubert, *Le Mouvement des surréalistes ou le fin mot de l'histoire* (Maurice Nadeau, 2001), 194-98, 190-91. As for the perceived dilemma between new art and breaking with art, it pervades Breton's oeuvre and is particularly visible in his attitude toward poetry at a given time: at times it is preferable to be a thief than a poet; at times poetry constitutes the pure practice of life.

²³⁰ See, for example, Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Tim Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Paul Morrison, *The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Paul de Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Laura Frost, *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); and particularly Zeev Sternhell's intellectual history *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).

²³¹ See my discussion of the blindnesses of these and other purported binaries prevalent in nineteenth-century modernist or proto-modernist France in Chapter 1.

compromise, his movement never acquired the time-sense that would allow it to throw off the yoke of these false choices. In this chapter I offer a reading of Breton and Surrealism in terms of an oscillation between creating and advocating a politics of time, on the one hand, and putting this aesthetic practice of temporality aside in favor of more explicit political interventions, on the other.

Surrealism wavered discomfitingly among conceptions of art as the practice of ultimate living, art as mysticism, and art as politics by other means. The “sinuous evolution” of Surrealism’s positions might cause whiplash in an overly attentive observer; Breton himself readily admits in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* that in less than six years political ideology had displaced automatism as the movement’s center of gravity. Partly due to the very unambiguous effects of Breton’s doctrine du jour on his fellow surrealists, I offer a less sympathetic and less dialectical or evolutionary reading of Surrealism’s sequence of positions.²³² Despite Breton’s concerns about contradiction, which I discuss later, the frequent shifts in surrealist positions are not so surprising in the context of the movement’s almost myopic focus on the future. Surrealism is “rooted” in a future time and “in the space which imagination creates beyond the borders of everyday life.”²³³ Numerous studies have argued that Surrealism’s reckoning with temporality demands a corresponding re-evaluation of our own time-sense in analyzing the movement, and Mary Ann Caws has claimed that this emphasis on what is beyond present quotidian life exempts Surrealism from the restrictions of time and locale placed on other literary movements. Following Blanchot, David

²³² For a more sympathetic reading of Surrealism’s intellectual trajectory, see particularly Jean-Michel Rabaté, “La révolution péripatéticienne du surréalisme,” in Michel Murat, ed., *André Breton* (Paris: Éditions de l’Herne, 1998), 259-267. In commenting on Breton’s departure from “even the expanded conception of Hegelianism” he [Rabaté] had developed, Rabaté notes “It seems that the appropriation of the word ‘Surrealism’ ... played the role of a synthesis... in which contrary theses would oppose one another in an incessant tourniquet” [my translation]. 264.

²³³ Mary Ann Caws, *André Breton* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971), 23.

Cunningham asserts that “a genuine account of Surrealism should take into account the challenge that it produces to the temporal modalities and categories of historicism itself.”²³⁴

While Surrealism, like its modernist and avant-garde confreres, does call for a re-thinking of our temporal categories, I argue that this emphasis on a future accessible only by breaking with contemporaneous everyday life comes at the cost of socio-political efficacy and a coherent politics of time; most notably, this emphasis points to an aporia between current and desired experiences and practices without offering a means to bridge it or close the gap. Preoccupied with a radically different future detached from the present, in its socio-political dimension Surrealism undermined the potential of its (extra)aesthetic innovations, short-circuiting possibilities for actually enacting change through the tools it developed with an unwavering emphasis on that which is beyond. For all its innovations, Surrealism proved too often unable (or unwilling in its impatience for change) to think processually or to grasp the character of time as *difference in kind*, as a multiplicity of heterogeneous and virtual qualitative difference that any socio-political program seeking to break with western Europe’s status-quo -isms (nationalism, industrial capitalism, imperialism, etc.) should take into account.

This chapter approaches Surrealism from two vantage points: its political commitments and practices, and its time-sense, its theorization of temporality. In the previous chapters I have argued that conceptualizing an anarchist avant-garde provides us a way to understand time as a mediating category between literary experimentation and aspirations for significant social change. In this chapter I explore Surrealism largely as a counter-example to the anarchist avant-garde for two purposes: first, to clarify the usefulness

²³⁴ David Cunningham, “The Futures of Surrealism, Hegelianism, Romanticism, and the Avant-Garde,” *SubStance* 107, 34.2: 61. See also Maurice Blanchot, “Le demain joueur,” *L’Entretien infini* (Éditions Gallimard, 1969), 598 and Caws, *André Breton*, 23.

of temporality as a category for understanding the linkage of formal innovation to sociopolitical concerns in modernism and the avant-garde; and second, to identify what in Surrealism is dead (surrealist revolution) and what remains vibrant (specific aesthetic strategies and material practices) and potentially of use to us today.

Apart from its material legacy, specific works of art and the infamous surrealist objects, Surrealism spawned important experiential concepts at the interstices of form and practice such as automatic writing, objective chance, and Dali's paranoia-critical method. These concepts offer tools that may yet yield social change, provided a specific experiential context in which to work and open-ended space for action, a concrete time in which their effects might unfold apart from predetermined ends. Surrealism neglected to furnish its tools a present existence: its times are those of the future revolutionary moment, the past, or the non-time of the state between waking or sleeping. Time is either completely abstracted (a category not tied to anything, metaphysical) or spatialized, harnessed to a person or a collective or object, here or there (Europe vs. its colonies, elsewhere).

In short, I argue that Surrealism's theoretical attenuation and outright devaluation of present existence cuts the legs out from under its socio-political aspirations. Surrealism's embrace of a political program, though not without alterations and inconsistencies, is characteristic of its avoidance of temporal multiplicity, with its inherent dynamism and social complexity. Through their attempts to make qualitative duration available—literally present—for aesthetic and political undertakings, Baudelaire, Stein, and Zurich and Paris Dada exemplify an anarchist modernism that intertwines aesthetic and political undertakings under the sign of avant-garde poetics. Surrealism, in contrast, favors a much more common 'modernist' project of revolution, one ultimately far less radical in terms of social and

political experimentation. The distinction I make here relies largely on a diverging time-sense. My linking of generically modernist undertakings to revolution and anarchist modernist ones to radical change corresponds to a view of a different central preoccupation for each. Following Perry Anderson, the “horizon of revolution”—whether welcomed, feared, or abhorred—forms the backdrop for modernist movements.²³⁵ In contrast to faith in or fear of drastic, temporally contracted change, anarchist modernist movements, following Peter Bürger’s description of the avant-garde, orient around projects of radical change to collective life, often through re-imagining and seeking to reconfigure the relations between aesthetic practices and ‘the praxis of (everyday) life.’ The time-sense of anarchist modernism, like that attributed by Bürger to the avant-garde, is not inherently infused by a (forthcoming) contraction of the present; in fact, as I argue for the project of retemporalization, it should generally oppose such contraction.

The first part of this chapter offers a literary historical account of the death of Dada and development of Surrealism that emphasizes how the movements’ theoretical disparities, especially those related to time-sense, translate into important concrete differences in practice. Breton’s execution (in both senses of the word) of Dada reveals a break between Dada and Surrealism of a character rarely recognized: the abandonment of a transnational project of retemporalization for a national and international project of attempted revolution. The shift in power relations between Tzara and Breton represents not just a move from political noncommitment to “revolutionary discipline,” but also a change in orientation from transnational and potentially democratic to national and international and resolutely vanguardist. Tristan Tzara’s self-proclaimed sadness in the country (his pseudonym’s

²³⁵See Perry Anderson, “Modernity and Revolution,” *New Left Review*, no. 144 (March-April 1984): 96-113.

approximative meaning in his native Rumanian) gives way to Parisian urbanity; Dada's decentralized transnationalism (its varying movements in Zurich, Cologne, New York, Berlin, Hanover and Paris) is overtaken by a Surrealism governed from Paris.²³⁶ After characterizing the schism between Dada and Surrealism, I focus on the political character Breton inculcates in Surrealism, particularly its focus on governance, and the consequences of Surrealism's uneasy allegiance to the French Communist Party (PCF). I explore Surrealism's intrusions into the political realm, in terms of both its own politics and the political ideologies it advocated, to clarify the conventional nature of Surrealism's political thought.

I. Political Praxis I: Executing Dada in Paris

Though hardly a feminist *avant la lettre*, Breton might well have said about his roles in Dada and Surrealism, "The personal is political." The slogan and its inverse describe Breton's management style more aptly than Surrealism's philosophies, which lend themselves at least as much to political action through "bodily collective innervation," as Benjamin hoped, as through individual agency.²³⁷ Yet because Surrealism existed as means to an as yet unattained end, in the meantime Breton's management style mattered more than Surrealism's potential meanings. Breton was indisputably the chief theoretician and dominant force of Surrealism until the Second World War, and the movement bore a very deep imprint of his character. His amalgamation of personal and political realms somewhat

²³⁶ From 1922, after the break with Dada, Breton didn't budge from his apartment at 42 Rue Fontaine (moving only within the same building), until desperate financial straits and a desire to meet Trotsky and visit the land Artaud raved about led him to a brief stay in Mexico. Soon upon his return to France World War II caused him to flee to New York, but Breton was able to return to 42 Rue Fontaine after the war.

²³⁷ Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), 192.

paradoxically paired the “sinuous evolution” of surrealist theory and practice with expectations of absolute adherence to its positions at every moment.

The conjoining of personal and political realms of feeling and action subtends Breton’s embrace and eventual disavowal of Dada. Intensely felt affiliations and friendships with other (male) intellectuals provided much of the energy and content that infuse Breton’s intellectual production at any given time. Breton first fell under the spell of men of letters, Mallarmé, then Rimbaud, and perhaps most notably, Isadore Ducasse, the Count of Lautréamont, whose *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Poésies* he discovered as a young man. As a budding poet himself, Breton chose mentors in Valéry, Apollinaire, and Reverdy, each of whom encouraged and eventually disappointed him. Breton was involved in serial passionate friendships, with Théodore Fraenkel from childhood, Jacques Vaché as a young man (and forever after as a ghost), then Soupault, Aragon, Picabia, Tzara, Eluard, and Péret. Of all these relationships, only the one with Péret would endure until (Péret’s) death. Breton’s relationships rarely allowed a distinction between friend and collaborator, which sometimes required a balancing act or even dissimulation, for example in maintaining good relations simultaneously with powerful figures in the Parisian literary world—such as Jacques Rivière and Jean Paulhan-- and his immediate cohort, the *Littérature* group or Dada. The overlap of friend and collaborator also meant that an emotional hurt could translate into a professional break and vice versa. Breton’s relationships constituted acts of faith and demanded extraordinary commitment on both sides, including, on Breton’s part, at least, the belief that personal loyalty and esteem were inseparable from professional and ideological accord.

Of these soul mates, Jacques Vaché, the first to die, had the most significant influence on Breton personally and professionally. Breton chose to interpret Vaché's 1919 death by opium overdose as suicide, linking it to his long-affected nihilism, and made Vaché into a sort of high prophet of Surrealism, an originator of black humor and the most important proto-surrealist. At the same time, Breton fortified himself against falling prey to the intensity of his sequential passions with Vaché's notion of 'desertion within oneself,' a protective mechanism of interior nihilism based on a grasp of 'the utter pointlessness of everything' that provided Breton a veneer of indifference in the midst of emotional tumult.

Breton came to Dada (just before Dada came to Paris with the arrival of Tristan Tzara in 1920) with a history of intense but time-delimited relationships, a sort of Platonic serial monogamy with men and their writings. The tendency for Breton's object of adoration and philosophical position to go hand-in-hand would present a specific problem vis-à-vis Tzara and Dada, given both's refusal to avow any particular philosophy or even to seriously entertain the prospect of doing so. If Dada could stand no doctrine in place of heterogeneous possibilities, Breton could brook no ideological uncertainty over the long haul of a friendship or professional collaboration. Breton's conflation of the personal with the professional and political left very little room for tolerance and virtually none for significant difference.²³⁸

Breton's attraction to Tzara owes much to chance circumstances and timing. While Breton admired "Dada Manifesto 1918," which he read in *Dada 3* (published in December 1918, encountered by Breton in January 1919) and found resonances in it with Vaché's 'umor,' he had dismissed the two earlier issues of the journal, which he had perused at Apollinaire's, as "largely derivative of prewar experiments" (90). Breton re-encountered

²³⁸ Breton himself confessed to leaning towards "ideological" rather than (only) "affective" friendship. See Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 199), 502. Subsequent parenthetical references in this section are to the Polizzotti biography.

Dada at a moment when he was foundering personally and philosophically: Vaché had just died, Apollinaire had died a few months before, and Breton was at loose ends artistically, producing nothing. It certainly mattered that Dada went beyond conventional aesthetic boundaries and that it was resolutely nonconformist and international; it may have mattered most that Tzara's first letter to Breton, requesting a poem for the journal (*Dada*), was penned the day Vaché died, January 6, 1919. In Breton's January 22 reply to Tzara, he writes:

What I loved most in the world has just disappeared: my friend Jacques Vaché is dead. Lately it had been my joy to think how well you would have liked each other; he would have recognized your mind as akin to his own, and by common consent we would have been able to do great things... I am really enthusiastic about your manifesto. I no longer knew where to turn to find the courage you have shown. Today all my attention is turned toward you. (Breton qtd in Polizzotti 91)

The relationship between Tzara and Breton began with an intensity on Breton's part that in fact antedated the actual relationship. Indeed, Breton's expectations of greatness—as well as the anticipation generated by numerous false announcements of Tzara's arrival in Paris before he finally showed up on Picabia's doorstep on January 17, 1920—led to momentary disappointment on the part of Breton upon discovering in person that Tzara was dark and diminutive, with very odd-sounding French, and not at all imposing or serious. In a way the Dadaist, the promoter of absurdity and decomposition, was too moderate for Breton's inclinations, physically and philosophically.

As a participant in Paris Dada, Breton found himself in a position of personal and political discomfort. Personally, he became frustrated by Tzara's and Picabia's lack of seriousness, their refusal to commit to a program beyond nonconformism and general irreverence for established norms. And he came to find Dada's posture of noncommitment on the political (ideological) front comparably discomfiting. To be fair, no one else in the Paris Dada group seems to have had a strong sense of where Dada stood politically, with the

possible exception of Tzara, who insisted on a politics for Dada (nondirection, spontaneity, and performance) and on an apolitical stand towards politics itself, at least until he joined the PCF several years later. Initially, Dada's non-endorsment of a political ideology may have mattered less to Breton than its lack of identifiable substance and nomenclature: Breton sought some kind of definite, positive content. He had asserted that he would rather be a thief than a poet; what he needed was a name and a program to articulate what it was he was doing that was not poetry or 'merely' art.²³⁹

Tzara and the other participants in Paris Dada were either unable or unwilling to describe what Dada was if not art: they either dodged the question, referred to Dada by way of negative reference to art as anti-art or non-art, or defined Dada in purely negative ways, for example Tzara's famous declaration that Dada was the greatest swindle of all time. Had Breton possessed a looser educational formation and tolerance for open-endedness, he might have arrived at a description of Dada based on its methodologies and practices, but for all his protestations to the contrary, Breton's intellectual formation was primarily literary, secondarily psychological and medical, and his interests tended more to personal introspection, on the one hand, and grand ideas and mystical musings, on the other, not to the specifically social.²⁴⁰ After all, Breton's idea of revolution involved language because he was

²³⁹ Breton wasn't joking. On April 25, 1921 a waiter at the café where the Paris Dadaists met accidentally left behind his tip money--1,000 francs—next to where the Dadaists were sitting. Some of the group argued for returning the money to the working man 'who doubtlessly needed it'; others argued that anyone could steal from the rich but that it would be a Dadaist coup to steal from the poor. Breton argued that he himself should keep the money to replace funds of his own he claimed to have spent on the group. (In the end the group couldn't come to an agreement and gave the wallet to Eluard to keep until the debate could be continued the next day; Eluard instead returned the money, earning jeers about his 'bourgeois mentality.' Polizzotti *Revolution of the Mind*, 153.)

²⁴⁰ Before arriving at Surrealism Breton considered founding a "mouvement flou", or "Vague Movement," "impossible to define by its very nature" (Ibid, 176). Apparently fuzzy definitions were acceptable so long as Breton controlled them.

interested in a revolution of the mind, not primarily in the way language functions exterior to any one mind—socially-- and explicitly interpersonally.

Breton's usurpation of Dada unfolded as an exercise of top-down judgment over flexible pluralism. Breton asserts, "For my part, I shall try, once again, to join the fight, as far forward as possible, although I do not, like Francis Picabia: [*sic*] 'One must be a nomad, pass through ideas as one passes through countries and cities,' make a rule of hygiene or a duty out of it. Even should all ideas be of a nature to disappoint us, I propose none the less to devote my life to them."²⁴¹ Breton hated both travel and theoretical uncertainty, while multiple geographical and theoretical wanderings define Dada: "passing through becomes the condition of Dadaism par excellence."²⁴² Breton's adherence to ideas, regardless of the "disappointing" consequences, came to characterize the rigid governance of Surrealism, beginning with an imposition of morality on aesthetics, a move traceable in part to the dualism that consistently haunted Breton's thought.²⁴³

II. Political Praxis II: Breton Lays Down the Law

If experimentation characterized whatever political character can be ascribed to Dada's aesthetically-generated pluralism and flexibility, Surrealism's intrapolitical

²⁴¹ English translation from André Breton, "After Dada," *Three Dada Manifestos*, trans. Ralph Manheim. In Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 206. Published in André Breton, *Les Pas Perdus* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1924). "Pour moi, je tâcherai, une autre fois, de m'engager plus avant, si possible, non pourtant qu'à l'instar de Francis Picabia: « Il faut être nomade, traverser les idées comme on traverse les pays ou les villes », je m'en fasse une règle d'hygiène ou un devoir. Quand bien même toutes les idées seraient de nature à nous décevoir, je ne me proposerais pas moins, en commençant, de leur consacrer ma vie." "Après Dada," *Les Pas perdus*, OC 261.

²⁴² Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 139.

²⁴³ Frederic Jameson's discussion of the problems of ethical binaries aptly describes how Breton's practices of judging warp (in my estimation) Dada: "What the ethical binary now means for other kinds of dualism is that it always tempts us to reinsert the good/evil axis into conceptual areas supposed to be free of it, and to call for judgment where none is appropriate." Frederic Jameson, "Marxism and Dualism in Deleuze," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96 (Summer 1997): 412.

organization and style mark a return to established norms, just as Breton's use of the manifesto constitutes a return to the traditional political genre. Breton imbued Surrealism with a clear sense of order, a *de facto* if not *de jure* hierarchy, and thoroughly regulated message. This revolutionary discipline emerged first in his use of the manifesto form, which was retrograde politically, aiming for the authority to govern by establishing a speaking position and platform/program as well as constructing a foundational literary historical narrative of surrealists, and avant-garde aesthetically, in its typography and prose poem features, though not stylistically avant-garde in any noticeably new ways.

The surrealist *Manifestos* neatly encapsulate the movement's overall lack of innovations in political form and thus its failure, arguably, to attain an actual avant-gardist extraesthetic existence.

Given the immediate context of Surrealism's origins, its lack of innovation in political form should not be shocking. Surrealism emerged through dissatisfaction with Dada's lack of socio-political content, not disagreement primarily predicated on its aesthetic practices. Breton broke with Dada over its incommensurability with any ideology, acceptance of peaceful instability as a virtue, and increasing public acceptance. And he made clear the political nature of the break through his means of effecting it (a power grab and coup d'état) and call for explicitly political action (a revolution and style of governance resonant with the Terror).

The power grab that preceded Breton's rupture with Dada aimed to re-make Paris Dada into an animal of governance or else consign it to the dustbin of modernist movements. In early 1921 Breton persuaded the Dadaists to undertake a project of collective cultural assessment in the form of a conventional educational task: grading. Dada members graded

men respected as writers, thinkers, or geniuses in other fields—almost two hundred of them—on the scale French schools use, assigning each a score from an abysmal -25 to a nearly unheard of 20.²⁴⁴ The top averaged score, 16.85, went to Breton, with Rimbaud, Ducasse (Lautréamont), Vaché and Charlie Chaplin also earning high marks; poet Henri de Régnier and Anatole France received the lowest scores. The results were published under the heading “Liquidation” in the March 1921 issue of *Littérature*. Breton thus began his shift towards a movement that dictated proper standards of judgment.

The push toward governance that effectively killed Paris Dada began with overt attempts to take on juridical and legislative functions, with Breton playing judge, convener of the legislature, and ghost executive. Most notably, Breton pushed Dada into a mock trial of literary lion Maurice Barrès in 1921 and tried to organize an international congress of artists in Paris at the beginning of 1922. The founding manifesto of Surrealism did not appear until 1924, by which time Breton had declared Dada a corpse, severed ties to Tzara (until the end of the decade), and made clear that he would occupy the highest leadership role in any future movement he would promote.

The role Breton’s personal insecurities played in his political decisions quickly became apparent in his call for the mock trial. As a youth Breton (and Aragon) had deeply admired both Barrès’s anarchist views in works such as *Un Homme libre* (1889) in the *Culte du moi* trilogy and *L’Ennemi des lois* (1892), and the exoticism of *Du sang, de la volupté, de la mort* (1893). But after Barrès became a Boulangist, anti-Dreyfusard, and politician (he served as a deputy from 1889-1893), his works began reflecting an ardent nationalism, especially the trilogy *Les Bastions de l’Est* (comprised of *Au service de l’Allemagne*, 1905; *Colette Baudoche*, 1909 and *Le Génie du Rhin*, 1921), disappointing Breton and other

²⁴⁴ See Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 151.

admirers among the Dada/*Littérature* group. Moreover, Barrès's apparent transformation and betrayal of his earlier platform of individualism called to mind Breton's own worries about the limits of acceptable self-contradiction. Aware of his personal history of shifting alliances, philosophical, ideological and interpersonal, Breton's shifting charges against Barrès in fact revealed his own Janus character: Breton originally charged Barrès with "conspiracy against the security of the Mind"²⁴⁵ but later amended the accusation to efface any contradiction on Barrès's part, claiming that "upon closer examination of that in his [Barrès's] first books which inspired praise, one finds nothing that one cannot perfectly reconcile with his current stance."²⁴⁶ The metamorphosis of the chief charge intimates Breton's need for control to determine truth and pass moral judgment for popular consumption.

The trial contained only a few recognizably Dada elements: effective advance publicity through widely disseminated flyers proclaiming the "Trial and Sentencing of M. Maurice Barrès, by DADA";²⁴⁷ Tzara's testimony, which concluded with a "Dada song"; and a ruckus among the crowd (at the appearance of Péret as the "Unknown [German] Soldier").²⁴⁸ Ribemont-Dessaignes describes an unusual development in the history of Dada performances, the spectacle of established literati supporting Dada's undertaking: "Serious and benevolent citizens defended 'these young people' who were offering an inimitable spectacle of intellectual justice. Mme Rachilde, who for a long time had boasted of her

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 156.

²⁴⁶ "En examinant d'un peu plus près que l'ont fait ses laudateurs la matière de ses premiers livres, on n'y trouve rien qui ne puisse parfaitement se concilier avec son attitude actuelle." Breton, *L'Affaire Barrès*, OC I, 417.

²⁴⁷ The trial was held in the Salle des Sociétés Savantes on Friday the 13th of May, 1921.

²⁴⁸ Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 158.

weakness for the Dadaists, spoke in their favor and also in favor of Maurice Barrès.”²⁴⁹ Yet the upheaval among the crowd included their collective singing of “La Marseillaise” in reaction to the figure of Péret’s German soldier, a nationalist response hardly characteristic of the reactions Dada wished to elicit. And despite the ballyhoo, Breton managed to convict the defendant of “offense against the security of the spirit,”²⁵⁰ though the sentence, twenty years of hard labor, fell “short of the death penalty Judge Breton had wished.”²⁵¹

The mock trial violated Dada’s nongovernmental and nondiscriminatory ethos. Breton coaxed, cajoled and bullied the Paris Dadaists into the trial. Some participants, notably Tzara, treated the entire undertaking as a Dadaist performance, another occasion to embody the nonsensical nature of conventional reality rather than a weighty, reasoned juridical proceeding. A plurality of the Dadaists thought the trial un-Dada-like. Picabia disowned the trial from the beginning, commenting: “Having been ill for the last six weeks, I had nothing to do with arranging this activity. All that I hope is that it will not become political, clerical or anticlerical, because I will never take part in an activity of that kind, since I regard Dada as a personage having nothing to do with beliefs, whatever they may be.”²⁵² Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, who reluctantly played the role of prosecutor in the trial, announced after the fact, “Dada could be a criminal, a coward, a destroyer or a thief, but not a judge.”²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, *History of Dada*, trans. Ralph Manheim. Originally published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, Paris, no. 37 (July 1931). In *The Dada Painters and Poets*, ed. Robert Motherwell (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951), 116.

²⁵⁰ Ribemont-Dessaignes, 116.

²⁵¹ Polizzotti *Revolution of the Mind*, 158.

²⁵² Francis Picabia qtd in Georges Hugnet, *The Dada Spirit in Painting*, trans. Ralph Manheim. First published in Paris in *Cahiers d’Art*, 7:1-2, 6-7, and 8-10 (1932) and 9:1-4 (1934). In *The Dada Painters and Poets*, Motherwell, 184.

²⁵³ Ribemont-Dessaignes qtd in Richter, *Dada*, 186.

Hans Richter and Georges Hugnet echoed this sentiment, with Richter coming to view Breton as almost inhumanly judgmental²⁵⁴ and Hugnet noting that “the role of judge did not suit it [Dada] at all.²⁵⁵ Breton’s mock trial staged nothing less than Dada’s demise.

Appropriately self type-cast as judge, Breton attempted in his verdict to convert Dada into a force for law and order: “Dada, judging that the time has come to endow its negative spirit with executive powers, and determined above all to exercise these powers against those who threaten its dictatorship, is beginning, as of this date, to take appropriate measures.”²⁵⁶ The statement rings far truer if one substitutes “Breton” for “Dada.”

Breton’s trial produced a negative of Dada: instead of manifesting and promoting free collective creation to replace social and governmental norms, Dada now functioned as an extension of government into the realm of aesthetic endeavor, valorizing stability over creation. Dada historian Hugnet also reads the trial as the beginning of the end of Dada:

The “Barrès trial,” though disapproved of by Picabia and Tzara, surpassed any preceding demonstrations by Dada in Paris, and foreshadowed future activities induced by the threat of an unsolved problem. The tone of the verdict is somewhat different from that of the usual Dada writing. Only certain parts of the testimony gave to the trial a Dadaist, anarchist, contradictory and humorous tinge. [...] Practically speaking, the result of the new extravaganza was general dismay, expressed, as far as the critics were concerned, in a threat never again to mention Dada in their columns.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Richter writes of Breton: “None of the anti-authoritarianism of Dada had rubbed off on him. None of the humor either! He was a dynamic principle, whose human side could only be discovered by the use of a special kind of compass that I did not possess. [...] His *humour noir*, the only kind of humor I ever discovered in him, was always a judgment, made final by his penetrating, leonine gaze.” Richter, *Dada*, 177. In contrast, Richter’s memories of Dada and of Tzara reflect a lack of judgmental temperament and political coercion: “If I am to believe the accounts which appear in certain books about this period, we founded an association of revolutionary artists, or something similar. I have no recollection of this at all, although Janco has confirmed that we signed manifestos and pamphlets, and Georges Hugnet (who admittedly gets his information at second hand) says that Tzara received one of those manifestos from me, scored it through with red pencil, and refused to publish it in *Der Zeltweg*. I regard this as doubtful. Tzara was no red pencil dictator” (80).

²⁵⁵ Hugnet, *The Dada Spirit*, 185.

²⁵⁶ André Breton cited in Hugnet, *The Dada Spirit*, 185.

²⁵⁷ Hugnet, *The Dada Spirit*, 185.

Both fascist nationalism (represented by Barrès) and Communism (nascently and problematically incarnated here by Breton) posed deadly threats to Dada's anarchism.²⁵⁸ In this case, as almost two decades later in Spain, the actual death blow to the anarchists came from the left, not the right, in this instance through Breton's intrusion of conventional political governance into the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic sphere of Dada.

This emerging predilection for status quo governmental projections onto aesthetic production foreshadowed the Congress of Paris Breton undertook to convene in the aftermath of the trial, a parliament of artists with proportional representation of the futurists, cubists, Dadaists, emerging surrealists, and various other "isms." On January 3rd, 1922, Breton announced in the journal *Comoedia* an upcoming "International Congress for the Determination and Defense of the Modern Spirit," soon abbreviated to "Congress of Paris." Though the announcement was signed by a seven-person organizing committee (all French), the conference was Breton's brainchild. It was to be a sort of League of Nations to negotiate among all the modernist and avant-garde movements to determine the appropriate "modern spirit" and, presumably, means of safeguarding it. Tzara already found the idea of such a congress dubious, noting that its purpose was to solve such burning dilemmas as "whether a railway-engine was more modern than a top-hat."²⁵⁹ Breton soon authored a statement that he

²⁵⁸ While Breton opposed fascist governments consistently throughout his career, there are disturbing parallels between fascists' cultural politics and some of his own aesthetic stances. Ze'ev Sternhell emphasizes the anti-intellectualism of the fascists in their disregard for logic: "Rationalism, they claimed, belongs to the "deracinated"; it blunts sensitivity, it deadens instinct and can only destroy the motive forces of national activity. Barrès believed that only the emotional content of a situation had any real value; for him, the process of what is known as thought took place on the level of the unconscious." Breton sought to destroy "latin logic," valued—at least for a time-- emotional content above any literary expression, and esteemed access to the unconscious as a means of access to revolutionary transformation. Ze'ev Stenhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 10.

²⁵⁹ Tzara quoted in Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, 187.

finagled everyone on the organizing committee into signing (except Jean Paulhan, who was conveniently absent) and which denigrated Tzara as “a publicity-mongering imposter... known as the promoter of a ‘movement’ that comes from Zurich, whom it is pointless to name more specifically, *and who no longer corresponds to any current reality.*”²⁶⁰ Breton’s slur against Tzara ultimately incurred such disapproval among the congress invitees that the gathering did not take place. However, the damage was done. As Tzara pointed out in his reply to Breton (published in the next day’s *Comoedia*), “an ‘international’ Congress that reprimands someone for being a foreigner has no right to exist.”²⁶¹ The rift between Breton and Tzara made the collapse of Paris Dada indisputable, and Breton’s implicit critique of Tzara’s foreignness revealed the insular outlook he and much of the Parisian avant-garde shared despite their opposition to nationalism.²⁶²

As the attempted Congress suggested, Breton would make Paris *the* center for Surrealism. As Breton’s surrealist sun was rising from Paris, its rays emanating on other parts of the globe, Dada’s multiple stars fizzled out. Dada’s funeral “officially” occurred in May of 1922, multiple times in different locales as befitted Dada’s decentralized transnationalism. Tzara gave graveside homilies in Weimar, Jena and Hanover, which Kurt Schwitters printed in *Merz* as “Conférence sur la fin de Dada.” Breton was conspicuously absent, “marshal[ing] his forces” and preparing “a policy speech on the character (and the

²⁶⁰ Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 171.

²⁶¹ Tzara quoted in Polizzotti, *Ibid.*

²⁶² Tzara was insulted on the basis of his non-French (Rumanian) origins on more than one occasion, suggesting widespread ethnocentrism in Paris if not outright xenophobia. A journalist for *Fantasio* writing after Dada’s February 5, 1920 performance at the Grand Palais as part of the Salon des Indépendents, inquired in an open letter to the Ministry of Public Instruction how “the Dada movement, whose leader, Mr. Tristan Tzara, is not French, gained access to this national monument.” Gide’s xenophobic and anti-semitic article on Dada in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (April 1, 1920) observes that it’s no surprise that the flagging Dada movement is led by a foreigner and a Jew, to boot, and he registers the hope that the destruction of the movement will not destroy with it the (implicitly French) “best wine of youth.” See Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 127.

characters) of the evolution of modern art,” which he delivered in Barcelona in 1923 at the premiere of a Picabia exhibition.²⁶³

Breton spent the next two years assimilating and reflecting on his experiences of the last few years to distill Surrealism. He was assured a splashy official beginning for the movement simply by choosing a term that originated with Apollinaire (and carried resonances of Gérard de Nerval’s *surnaturalisme*), and arguments over the nature of “Surrealism” and ownership disputes played out in the pages of literary journals. Breton’s main competition was bilingual poet and Apollinaire confidant Yvan Goll, but Breton easily triumphed over him, largely through the well-crafted power play of the 1924 foundational *Manifesto of Surrealism*.

The genre of the manifesto itself, of course, was an apt choice for a foundational act, especially given its recent history as the establishing, governing and, often, most important *aesthetic* form for Modernist and avant-garde movements. Breton deployed both the traditional polemical and avant-garde stylistic elements of the genre masterfully. Equally important, he used the manifesto to codify key components of *his* Surrealism as digestible bits, offering readers important specifics, such as dictionary- and encyclopedia-style definitions of Surrealism and a membership roster. Breton also used geographic imagery to make Surrealism concrete and, simultaneously, present a sort of hierarchy of surrealists in terms of proximity to the new movement. Breton discusses Surrealism in terms of a chateau “not far from Paris” inhabited by himself, Aragon, Soupault, and Eluard (the four musketeers). Just outside the edifice, Robert Desnos and Roger Vitrac duel in the park; hovering nearby, Théodore Fraenkel waves from his hot-air balloon. Picabia comes to visit,

²⁶³ Ibid, 191.

Duchamp just visited for the first time, and “Picasso hunts thereabouts.”²⁶⁴ Such place-based imagery translates easily into Surrealism’s continued development, with Breton’s apartment on Rue Fontaine and the Certa (the first café to host daily meetings of the surrealists) vying for the role of the chateau and the Bureau of surrealist Research as the site for visitors, would-be surrealists, and curiosity seekers. One also imagines a hinterland where the ignorant and, increasingly, the purged and excommunicated reside. Breton’s imagery both concretizes the movement’s existence and reflects his (and therefore its) penchant for hierarchy and centralized governance.

The actual governance of Surrealism makes apparent its “old-school” adherence to political imperatives of control, order, and stability, on the one side, and compromise, contradiction and shifting coalitions on the other, especially upon its embarkment on a decade-long alliance with Communist organs and factions, most tendentiously with the French Communist Party (PCF). In 1925 Breton and the surrealists entered into a union with the staff of the Marxist periodical *Clarté*.²⁶⁵ The immediate cause of the surrealists’ explicit engagement of the political realm was their unpopular support for Abd-el-Krim, who was leading the Rif opposition to French colonial rule in Morocco. Under Jean Bernier *Clarté* had recently shifted “from pedagogy to undermining the dominant bourgeois culture” (248), an undertaking that allied it with Surrealism’s goals, and the *Clarté* group was also one of the few to show sympathy for the surrealists’ vicious attack against Anatole France upon his

²⁶⁴ *Manifeste du surréalisme, OC*, 321-22.

²⁶⁵ *Clarté* emerged in 1919 as an anti-war periodical begun by Raymond Lefebvre, Henri Barbusse, and Paul Vaillant-Couturie. Its board initially included notables such as Anatole France and many non-French intellectuals, such as Upton Sinclair, Stefan Zweig, Thomas Hardy, and H.G. Wells. As its tone became increasingly inflexible and its mission moved towards indoctrination, *Clarté*’s leadership changed, with Barbusse leaving in 1923, and by 1924 it even attacked Anatole France, who the PCF organ, *L’Humanité* (and the far right) lauded. See Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 247-49.

death in the pamphlet *A Corpse*. On October 5th, *Clarté*, the magazine *Philosophies*, and the surrealists officially joined forces. The large group agreed that the revolution consisted of the totality of occurrences bringing about a shift in power from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat and pledged fidelity to the Communist International and to the PCF (249).²⁶⁶ Most significantly for Surrealism's internal politics, the group declared that anyone who challenged this definition of revolution should automatically be branded a counterrevolutionary, setting the stage for the numerous purges from the surrealist ranks that were to follow.

While the group declaration did not equate to absolute commitment to the PCF, it was put to immediate use as grounds for exile from Surrealism.²⁶⁷ The purges that became a regular occurrence within Surrealism reflect a rigorous emphasis on ideological adherence in which Breton's need to maintain discipline conveniently aligned with the practices of the Communist International, the PCF, and, of course, Stalin (though Breton came to strongly oppose Stalin, especially after the Moscow Trials). Roger Vitrac was the first casualty of Surrealism's newly declared ideological purity; he was drummed out of the group that same month. The movement's recentering in political ideology instead of psychic automatism did spark an increased intolerance of departures from Surrealism's (shifting) norms on Breton's part. Discipline extended beyond an ideological litmus test to minor infractions such as behavior perceived as damaging to Surrealism's public perception. For example, in 1926 Breton and Aragon, who was to become his bitterest enemy a few years hence in 1932, wrote a pamphlet to protest Ernst's and Miró's work as set designers for a Diaghilev-directed ballet

²⁶⁶ For an overview of the surrealists' involvement with *Clarté*, see Polizzotti's chapter "Revolution by Any Means (July 1925-December 1926)" in *Revolution of the Mind*, 241-276.

²⁶⁷ At the October meeting the surrealists decided that the decision to join the roster of the PCF should be left to individuals, and Breton himself did not seek membership in the PCF until the next year.

of *Romeo and Juliet*. Breton and Aragon had originally approved of the project and then apparently changed their minds after Picasso denigrated Ernst and Miró for collaborating with a White Russian. The pamphlet accused the artists of selling out Surrealism, contributing to the “downgrading [*déclassement*] of the *surrealist* idea” in putting their individual talents to work for money. From the opening sentence, “It is not acceptable for thought to be at the command of money,”²⁶⁸ the attack highlighted a willingness of the surrealist leadership to militate for an utterly impractical ideal at the expense of their comrades’ basic need for employment. On May 18, 1926 the surrealists dropped the pamphlet over the heads of audience members at the ballet and proceeded to run about the auditorium yelling “Long live the Soviets!” and “Long live the Russian Revolution!” The audience retaliated, and the police arrived in time for the “wives and girlfriends in the café next door” to see the men escorted out.²⁶⁹ Ernst, likely assuming that a large part of what irked Breton and Aragon had more to do with pride than ideological disputes, critiqued Breton’s “pretty revolutionary stances, carefully studied in front of a mirror.”²⁷⁰

Perhaps most damningly, Breton’s authoritarian-style politics took advantage more than once of supposedly pluralist occasions and opportunities for joint action to express themselves most vituperatively. For example, in February of 1929 Breton ostensibly undertook a project of collective action, sending a letter to 76 artists and intellectuals (many of them current or past collaborators of Surrealism) to ask respondents’ thoughts about individual versus joint action. In addition to conveying willingness or refusal to partake of

²⁶⁸ “Il n’est pas admissible que la pensée soit aux orders de l’argent.” Louis Aragon and André Breton, *Protestation*, OC vol. 1, 922.

²⁶⁹ Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 260.

²⁷⁰ Ernst to Goemans, June 2, 1926, in *Lettres surrealistes 1924-1940*, edited by Marcel Mariën, (Brussels: Les Lèvres Nues, 1973), 18. Cited in Polizzotti 260.

joint action, each respondent was asked to tell with whom he would and would not be willing to collaborate. Upon reading the responses, Breton chose to disinvite some of the addressees and invite the others (57) to a group meeting on March 11th at the Bar du Château. Thirty-two of the invitees attended the meeting, which Breton began by asking Raymond Queneau, the secretary, to read each person's response aloud to the full group. Breton commented on each response, announcing that before getting down to the business of any collective action, such as support for Trotsky, it was necessary to ascertain "the qualifications, moral or otherwise—but moral without a doubt—of each man present" (Polizzotti 316). Breton then set to ripping apart Surrealism's intellectual competition, a young group of intellectuals and artists in their twenties who had formed a group called *Le Grand jeu* [The Great Game]. Breton had judged only three of the six core members-- poets Roger Gilbert-Lecomte and René Daumal and then-critic Rolland de Renéville—worthy of inviting, but they all came. Breton first attacked Gilbert-Lecomte and then, most devastatingly, Roger Vailland, a novelist and—to Breton's disapproval—journalist, for a feature article he had written for (conservative) *Paris-Midi* that praised the police commissioner. Character assassination took over the meeting; Gilbert Lecomte never got to the notes he had brought with him on ideas for future projects of collective action.²⁷¹

Breton didn't leave it at that: he and Aragon wrote up the event, including the invitees' responses and the surrealists' judgment of them, in *À Suivre: Petite Contribution au dossier de certains intellectuels à tendances révolutionnaires*, published in the Belgian revue *Variétés* in a June issue dedicated to Surrealism. In contrast to the white paper of the rest of that issue, *À Suivre* was printed on pink stock with roman numeral pagination, making it

²⁷¹ Polizzotti offers detailed account of the debacle in *Revolution of the Mind*, 316-318.

difficult for a reader to overlook. In response to the tenor of the meeting, Vailland had written a letter to Breton explaining that while he understood concern over his collaboration with a bourgeois newspaper and could imagine others' worry over whether such collaboration might impact his participation in a group advocating revolutionary action, Breton's conduct was unacceptable. Vailland protested,

But to take the context of collaboration [towards joint action] as an occasion to pronounce a moral judgment on me, or, more generally, that one would take as pretext an act whose motives one doesn't know, to judge someone, that I cannot accept. You yourself will recognize that that is the normal procedure of bourgeois tribunals.²⁷²

That Breton and Aragon included excerpts from Vailland's letter in *À Suivre* testifies to a conviction in the moral correctness of their behavior and a security in their own power within Surrealism and the literary world. That the surrealists would publish *À Suivre* makes clear their preoccupation with moral and ideological accord over collective action, a stance that characterized Surrealism throughout its official existence.

Polizzotti characterizes the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, published that same year (1929), as "the culmination of a grand sweep that had begun with the exclusions of 1926...; a purge of every discordant element in Surrealism; of every figure, idea, or inspiration that had not managed to follow the sinuous developments of Breton's own evolution" (323).²⁷³ Like the first *Manifesto*, the *Second Manifesto* provides a "Who's Who" of the surrealist movement and notes the dismissals of Artaud, Limbour, Masson, Soupault and Vitrac, etc.,

²⁷² "Mais qu'on prenne prétexte de cette collaboration pour prononcer sur ma personne un jugement morale, ou, plus généralement, qu'on prenne prétexte d'un acte dont on ignore même les mobiles, pour juger un être, je ne puis l'admettre. Vous reconnaîtrez vous-même que c'est là le procédé habituel des tribunaux bourgeois." Vailland quoted in Louis Aragon and André Breton, *À Suivre*, OC, 987.

²⁷³ Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 323.

engaging their opposition at length to dismantle it and charting the changes to Surrealism's roster during the intervening years. In the *Second Manifesto* Breton announces the conclusion of the first period of Surrealism, which was marked in part by a change in the movement's journal from *La Révolution surréaliste* to the subdued, 'serious' *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*. At the same time as this shift shows Surrealism's adoption of Communism, the title belies Breton's constant quest to maintain autonomy for his movement rather than submit it wholeheartedly to Communist dictates, particularly the dictates of the PCF, with whom Breton had a fractious relationship. As Polizzotti alludes here and others have recognized, Breton and Surrealism evolved "sinuously," not linearly. The movement's intolerance for ideological divergence was not matched by a consistent ideological purity.

Surrealism's defections to Communism and Breton's own rejection of Stalin and, eventually, Communism itself, resulted from an unraveling of an alliance that was never absolute and always characterized by problems of trust and respect on both sides. Breton lost his two closest confidants, Aragon and then Eluard, to Stalin, and the leader always desired a freedom of expression that thwarted Stalinist attempts to harness art for the purposes of propaganda. At the same time, Breton's primary focus on a sort of aesthetic autonomy frustrated many of his colleagues concerned with practical action to confront the immediate threat of fascism. Tzara, who had renewed relations with Breton at the beginning of the decade, and René Crevel both broke with Surrealism in 1935, arguing that Breton critiqued the Soviets while offering nothing in their stead. They found the aestheticist leanings of recent texts such as *La Grande Actualité poétique* particularly frustrating. Breton had little tolerance for Communist critiques of surrealist revolution, and during a chance encounter of Ilya Ehrenburg in the street responded to the latter's accusations against Surrealism with

multiple slaps.²⁷⁴ Breton's violence led the organizing committee of the upcoming Paris Congress of Writers to bar Breton from the program. Even in the face of passionate pleas from Crevel, who despite his recent defection from Surrealism was doing his utmost to secure Breton a speech slot at the upcoming Congress, Breton refused to apologize to Ehrenburg. After Crevel's suicide (accompanied by the note "Disgust, Please cremate me"), the commission agreed to grant Breton a slot at the last minute, 'out of respect for Crevel,' but prohibited Breton himself from delivering his speech. Breton chose Eluard to read the speech, which he presented to a largely empty hall upon being disfavored with a midnight time slot.

Breton's differences from Communism were also apparent in the resemblance of his purges to excommunications. As "the pope of Surrealism," Breton believed that a spiritual revolution must precede the material one, and he insisted that Surrealism merited an autonomous space within Communism as its moral arbiter. Breton's preference for the spiritual over material issues was reflected in his view of purges as excommunications: he saw the men he threw out of Surrealism as having failed Communism politically, perhaps, but more significantly as having failed him personally, and themselves and the universe spiritually and morally.

As the *Manifestos* announce, Surrealism itself—in terms of essence—may have changed center of gravity from psychic automatism to political ideology, but its structure and character of governance did not change. One could draw an analogy between Surrealism's political aspect and the merely literary realm or novelistic genre Breton loathed: Surrealism's

²⁷⁴ Ehrenburg attacked Surrealism in his survey of contemporary writers in France published the year before, *Vus par un écrivain d'U.R.S.S* (1934) [As Seen by a Writer from the U.S.S.R.]. In the text Ehrenburg accused surrealists of loathing work and being a bunch of mad dilettantes living off their wives' money.

politics simply presented differing content (literature) in traditional (political) form, operating through conventional political structures and procedures. Breton's failed desire for Surrealism to escape the formal bounds of aesthetics emerges most often and tellingly in his explicit, repeated reliance on literary references and means in an attempt to forge an "extra-aesthetic" movement. Surrealism, most vociferously through Breton, disavows the "merely" literary even as it relies on it.

In the second part of this chapter I explore Surrealism's temporal dimension in two senses of the word: Surrealism's conceptualization of the secular realm (its shifting aesthetico-political configurations) and Surrealism's time-sense. In the latter half of the chapter I focus on the movement's political manifestations, arguing that they emerge in lieu of a politics of time

III. The Problem of Conjoining Art and Revolution: From *Surrealist Revolution* to *Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution* to an *Independent Revolutionary Art*: Surrealism's Temporal Configurations

Just as Surrealism's claims to an extra-aesthetic existence were destabilized by its reliance on literary history and means and its claims to revolution undercut by its own conventional intrapolitics, the movement's theoretical self-conception vacillated in its conceptualization of the relation of aesthetic pursuits to political aims. As the shifting titles of the movement's primary journal and a late manifesto intimate, Surrealism's configuration of aesthetic and political aspects passed through at least three stages from the 1920s to the Second World War:²⁷⁵ a conjoining of art and politics in an aestheticized ideal of revolution;

²⁷⁵ While it is easy to characterize these conceptualizations chronologically as stages, the implicit assumption of progress does not apply in this case: within each stage some elements of the other two exist; the label of 'stage' merely indicates the official line of Surrealism at the time, a line which just about all the surrealists at any given time—including Breton—would transgress.

an equally problematic conscription of art to purportedly advance political aims; and a peaceful, glasnost-like co-existence of art and politics within a particular political model. I interpret each stage with respect to Surrealism's difficulty in conceiving of a political function for art without subordinating it to politics or the political realm.

Stage 1: The 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism* presents an ideal of revolution that enlists art to dismantle social norms and forms and then retreat from constructing alternatives into a spiritual and psychological interiority cut off from social time. Surrealism intervened into social norms in part by opening art to non-artists through exploratory techniques such as automatic writing and drawing. At the same time as Surrealism empowered non-artists to participate in aesthetic creation, it removed the processes, subjects and interpretations of such creation from the social realm. Surrealism focused on psychological methods with mystical overtones, substituting non-rational, individual exploration over social engagement. "Poetic Surrealism" often argued on the basis of foundational assertions about aesthetic and spiritual norms that it claimed antedated current social behaviors. Early Surrealism thus presented a newly aestheticized and tentatively formless unity as a return to origins and essence. The extra-aesthetic character of poetic Surrealism re-coups social dimensions of human existence for an aesthetic and spiritual cultivation *au-delà*, beyond reach. It is tempting to read early Surrealism in terms of an aestheticization of politics, or at least of social behavior intrinsic to political life, because its pairing of interiority and that beyond reach, a mysticism culled from a partial rejection of religion and infusion of psychology, encroach on social and political terrain.

Surrealism's claims about the proper originary character of dialogue provide a good example of its recuperation of a politically-relevant social norm for interior individual

aesthetic exploration. In the *First Manifesto*, Breton states as a key goal of poetic Surrealism to alter the ways in which people converse. He posits a foundational view of dialogue that evokes ideas of the primitive that reduce civilization to mere veneer. Stylistically, Breton's conception of dialogue imagines a primitive existence unmarked by formal conventions of etiquette and social niceties. Substantively, Breton's retrospective definition of dialogue relies on a belief in some ideal of a pure, primitive existence beyond sociability, a paradoxical freedom that rescues the participants in a dialogue from any implied obligations and outcomes of social interchange even as it limits their agency. Surrealism's dialogue transforms interlocutors into soliloquizers. Breton explains:

Poetic Surrealism, to which I devote this study, has to this point applied itself to reestablishing dialogue in its absolute truth, in freeing the two interlocutors from obligations of politeness. Each of them simply pursues his soliloquy, without seeking to extract from it a particular dialectical pleasure and impose it on everyone and his neighbor. The intentions in mind are not, as is ordinary, for the goal of developing an argument, no matter how negligible; they are as withdrawn as possible. As for the response they call for, it is, in principle, totally indifferent to the amour-propre of the one who has spoken. The words, the images offer themselves only as springboards to the spirit of he who listens.²⁷⁶

The practice of dialogue the *Manifesto* calls for opposes “absolute truth” to the articulation of arguments, needs, and desires. This truth has nothing to do with the specific complexities and practicalities people negotiate in social interactions; it is beyond the social sphere.

²⁷⁶ “Le surréalisme poétique, auquel je consacre cette étude, s’est appliqué jusqu’ici à rétablir dans sa vérité absolue le dialogue, en dégageant les deux interlocuteurs des obligations de la politesse. Chacun d’eux poursuit simplement son soliloque, sans chercher à en tirer un plaisir dialectique particulier et à en imposer le moins du monde à son voisin. Les propos tenus n’ont pas, comme d’ordinaire, pour but le développement d’une these, aussi négligeable qu’on voudra, ils sont aussi déaffectés que possible. Quant à la réponse qu’ils appellent, elle est, en principe, totalement indifférente à l’amour-propre de celui qui a parlé. Les mots, les images ne s’offrent que comme tremplins à l’esprit de celui qui écoute.” Breton continues on to promote his and Soupault’s *Les Champs magnétiques* as the “premier ouvrage purement surréaliste” and call readers’ attention to the Barrières section in which “Soupault et moi nous montrons ces interlocuteurs impartiaux.” Breton, *OC I*, 49.

The 1924 *Manifesto* characterizes social interaction negatively throughout the text by linking it to imposition, curtailed freedom, and petty class-climbing. The surrealists root all cultural accomplishments of note, in aesthetic or extra-aesthetic fields, in a disdain for specific social goals. For example, the *Manifesto* insists on a frenzied distraction from specific social realities, not an interest in altering them, as the motive for invention, asserting that the inventor leaves the ‘futile’ task of curing the sick to others and has no plan, only a “sacred fever.” Just as the absolute truth of dialogue replaces specific goals of social interaction with a nonteleological withdrawal from social concerns, the genius of invention emerges as a divinely-inspired drive leading to discoveries whose social utility is only incidental.²⁷⁷ From this surrealist perspective the key to creation lies in a withdrawal from social considerations; only absent-mindedness and distraction permit the nonconformism Surrealism prizes for its creative potential. Yet claims to value nonconformism contrast with Surrealism’s tendency toward fusion, particularly its avowal of a oneness that undoes contradiction. A surrealist glimmer, a fusion of human individual and universal force, produces divine moments where there is no longer any point of contradiction.²⁷⁸ Coupled with its flight from concrete social interactions, Surrealism’s evocations of “absolute truth,” a *rayon invisible*, and moments where contradiction is momentarily effaced bring it perilously near to supplanting social norms and forms with a tyrannical formless unity.

Surrealism’s flirtation with aestheticism emerges most clearly in its simultaneous refusal of form and evocation of an indefinable, atemporal formless unity in form’s stead. In an early interview with Roger Vitrac (April 7, 1923), Breton clarifies the desire that

²⁷⁷ Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, OC I, 346.

²⁷⁸ See particularly Breton’s discussion of Nerval’s poem “Vers dorés” in *Du surréalisme en ses œuvres vives*.

underwrites surrealist texts such as his and Soupault's *The Magnetic Fields* as a project of breaking with forms of expression altogether, not simply another venture into formal literary experimentation: Breton announced to Vitrac his intention to give up writing because "Literature gives one license never to change anything... [Poetry] is not where one thinks it is. It exists outside of words, style, etc... Only the entire system of emotions is inalienable. Therefore I cannot recognize any value in any means of expression."²⁷⁹ Without form, without means, only Surrealism's "glimmers" of "absolute truth" remain. Divested of any worldly social context and thus cut off from social time, this formless unity comes to be represented most frequently through images. Despite early Surrealism's almost complete negligence of visual art, even the 1924 *Manifesto* notes the importance of the image to the movement, noting "the atmosphere created by mechanical writing... lends itself particularly to the production of beautiful images."²⁸⁰ The temporality of the image fits that of automatic writing: it is both spontaneous and atemporal, disconnected from worldly temporal flow in its production and value. The *Manifesto* highlights the static dimension of the image through paradox and imbues it with a hidden depth of power, characterizing Surrealism itself as the "'invisible ray' that will permit us one day to triumph over our adversaries."²⁸¹ What constitutes triumph, if not some measurable alteration of the social world? The *Manifesto* suggests an ambitious and aestheticist answer: not change but a transformation of perception,

²⁷⁹ Breton quoted in Polizzotti *Revolution of the Mind*, 189.

²⁸⁰ "l'atmosphère surréaliste créée par l'écriture mécanique... se prête particulièrement à la production des plus belles images" *Manifeste du surréalisme*, OC, 338.

²⁸¹ "Le surréalisme est le «rayon invisible» qui nous permettra un jour de l'emporter sur nos adversaires." *Manifeste du surréalisme*, OC, 346.

an ability to observe “This summer the roses are blue; the wood is made of glass.”²⁸² Once freed from the fetters of form, surrealist revolution culminates in a mental image, safely walled off from the world Surrealism revolted against.

Stage 2: Surrealism would re-confront the world of surrealist revolution and reconsider the question of political engagement by the end of the decade, choosing to affiliate the movement more directly with Communist aims. Yet even in the service of political revolution, the movement retained its aestheticist disdain for engaging specific social and political realities in practice. Without questioning their sincerity, I argue that surrealists’ professions of ideological faith had little effect on the substance of the movement, its works of art/non-art and techniques. Rather, the explicit (and explicitly troubled) alliance of Surrealism with the PCF merely provided another lens through which observers might regard its practice and a more concrete baton with which Breton could lash out against disobedient group members

Though the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* appeared in the December 15, 1929 edition of *La Révolution surréaliste*, its appearance marked the end of an era that took that periodical with it. The *Second Manifesto* declares a shift in the movement’s core emphasis from psychic automatism to political ideology. The title of the new surrealist periodical, *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, which appeared from 1930 to 1933, announces this change up front, masking the fact that the shift from a set of techniques (psychic automatism) to beliefs did not imply any particular change in aesthetic practice, and indeed, Surrealism continued to make use of automatic writing and other techniques of psychic automatism. On

²⁸² “Cet été les roses sont bleues; le bois c’est du verre.” Ibid. Arguably, Surrealism’s most lasting influence—certainly internationally—was on the visual arts. Both Breton biographer Mark Polizzotti and the editor of his collected works, Marguerite Bonnet, note Breton’s attraction to visual art and disinterest in music. In a commentary on Breton’s (partial but significant) embrace of Hegel, Bonnet notes that Breton simply drops music out of Hegel’s hierarchy of the arts.

the one hand, the *Second Manifesto* boldly calls for a renewal of surrealist revolution around this new orientation; on the other hand, the Second Manifesto evidences the movement's continued reluctance to address social and political worlds. The 1929 *Manifesto* opens in grand style: "Despite the specific moves of each of those who have called on or [now] call on it, in the end one grants that Surrealism aims at nothing so much as to provoke, from an intellectual and moral point of view, an attack of conscience of the most general and serious kind and that the achievement or inachievement of this result alone decides its success or failure historically."²⁸³ But this attack of conscience can occur only in the most nebulous and vaguely general way, as "Surrealism is not interested in taking great notice of that which produces itself alongside it under the pretense of art, that's to say of anti-art, of philosophy or of anti-philosophy"; Surrealism is not interested "in... all that does not conclude in the annihilation of the soul of ice as well as that of fire. What really could those people expect of Surrealism who maintain concerns about the place they will occupy in the world?"²⁸⁴ Surrealism may now claim a political ideology for this world, but in practice it has no interests in social or political engagement, in people's "concerns about the place they... occupy."

As before, in the aestheticized ideal of revolution that revolted against social and political forms to take refuge in stillborn images of formless unity, Surrealism's primary

²⁸³ "En dépit des démarches particulières à chacun de ceux qui s'en sont réclamés ou s'en réclament, on finira bien par accorder que le surréalisme ne tendit à rien tant qu'à provoquer, au point de vue intellectuel et moral, une *crise de conscience* de l'espèce la plus générale et la plus grave et que l'obtention ou la non-obtention de ce résultat peut seule décider de sa réussite ou de son échec historique." *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, OC, 781.

²⁸⁴ "...le surréalisme n'est pas intéressé à tenir grand compte de ce qui se produit à côté de lui sous prétexte d'art, voire d'anti-art, de philosophie ou d'antiphilosophie, en un mot de tout ce qui n'a pas pour fin l'anéantissement de l'âme de la glace que celle du feu. Que pourraient bien attendre de l'expérience surréaliste ceux qui gardent quelque souci de la place qu'ils occuperont *dans le monde*?" *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, OC, 782.

focus is to marshal the forces of the aesthetic realm for annihilation. This intent is most famously conveyed in the *Second Manifesto* in the description of ‘the simplest surrealist act,’ firing randomly into a crowd. The *Manifesto* endorses the act in terms that make clear its fidelity to the movement’s overarching goal of lashing out against contemporary social forms and norms (like the crowd) to attain that mystical surrealist glimmer: “The simplest surrealist act consists, pistol in hand, of descending into the street and shooting randomly, as much as one can, into the crowd. Who has not had, at least once, the desire to have done with this little system of degradation and idiocy in force has his place marked out in this crowd, stomach at canon level. The legitimacy of such an act is not, in my understanding, at all incompatible with the belief in this glimmer that Surrealism seeks to discover in our depths.”²⁸⁵ As with the notion of dialogue in the 1924 *Manifesto*, the surrealist conception of “absolute truth” depends on a breakdown of social forms to release some previously subjugated formless freedom. Interestingly for a man who took on the role of judge, Breton advocates a kind of rebellion here foreign to juridical notions of justice, restitution, rehabilitation and alteration. The concept of “legitimacy” Breton finds in accord with this act bears no relation to legal or political definitions of legitimacy: it locates value in forms (or formlessness), not individuals, and its sources are mystical and irrational, not socially generated and reasoned. It is difficult not to see nihilism-- Vaché’s desertion within oneself—at the heart of the simplest surrealist act, and indeed, Vaché’s biography may be even more closely linked to Breton’s conceptualization of this simplest act, as Vaché

²⁸⁵ “L’acte surréaliste le plus simple consiste, revolvers aux poings, à descendre dans la rue et à tirer au hasard, tant qu’on peut, dans la foule. Qui n’a pas eu, au moins une fois, envie d’en finir de la sorte avec le petit système d’avilissement et de crétinisation en vigeuer a sa place toute marquée dans cette foule, ventre à hauteur de canon. La légitimation d’un tel acte n’est, à mon sens, nullement incompatible avec la croyance en cette lueur que le surréalisme cherche à déceler au fond de nous.” *Second Manifeste du surréalisme, OC*, 782-83.

reportedly did threaten once to shoot randomly into a crowd, the crowd being his fellow spectators at the opening of Apollinaire's *Les Mamelles de Tiresias*. Apparently Vaché approved of neither the play nor the self-congratulatory avant-garde taste of the audience.

Given Surrealism's fallback tendency to revolt against established social forms and norms and its continued disinterest in specific, concrete social realities, it is not surprising that the movement relied on its normal modus operandum—a mobilization of aesthetics to annihilate the social status quo conceived as a more or less unified form—even upon its embrace of a practical program in Communist political ideology. The unwieldy excess of annihilation emerged as Surrealism's response to any and all actual political failings, such that no matter how incisive a critique any one surrealist might offer of a particular political dispute, the movement lacked a comparatively nuanced plan of redress. This inflexibility ill-equipped Surrealism to deal with the major political issues of its time. Take, for example, the movement's first major political involvement, its opposition to the Rif War. Surrealism's critique of colonialism, bent on annihilation, not just correction of the immediate problem (France's support to quell Abd-el-Krim), developed into an indictment of humanism and a desire to destroy Western Civilization wholecloth. In July 1925's "Open Letter" to Paul Claudel, fellow man of letters and Ambassador to Japan, the surrealists declared "Creation matters little to us. We profoundly hope that revolutions, wars, and colonial insurrections will annihilate this Western civilization whose vermin you defend even in the Orient. We take this opportunity to dissociate ourselves publicly from all that is French, in words and actions."²⁸⁶ The surrealists were responding to an interview with Claudel that ran in the June 24 issue of *Comoedia* in which Claudel had mocked the capabilities of any artistic movement then extant in France and asserted that Surrealism meant nothing but pederasty. However

²⁸⁶ Cited in Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 237.

offended Breton and Co. were at Claudel's remarks, their shrill condemnation of Western Civilization did little to undermine Claudel's assertion of contemporary artists' irrelevancy, and it hardly garnered them effective like-minded political cohorts.

The surrealists accompanied their wholesale condemnation of Western Civilization with a comparably unreflective endorsement of Middle Eastern cultures as a desirable other and appropriate antidote to European and American shortcomings. In a response to a question in the journal *Cahiers du mois* about the likelihood, desirability and character of influence of the Orient on the Occident, Breton heaped adulation on his idealized construct of the Orient. His response, which appeared in the February-March 1925 issue, enthusiastically anticipated the Orient's curative powers to combat the moral failures of the West, proclaiming "The Orient of dreams... will dissipate this somber politics of this last period of our decadence. It will leave us indifferent to all that... is not our proper dictatorship."²⁸⁷ Characteristically, the excess of judgment here (of the Orient's future worth) was not accompanied by thoughtful political consideration which might have revised the affirmation of a "proper dictatorship" [*dictature*].

The tenor of Surrealism's political judgments remained similarly offensive and practically sterile throughout the '20s and '30s. The 1932 "Murderous Humanitarianism" essay lumps together humanitarian undertakings with humanism, imperialism, colonization and capitalism, to declare "Our gallant sailors, policemen and agents of imperialist thought, in league with opium and literature, have swamped us with their irretentions of nostalgia; the

²⁸⁷ "Que l'Orient du rêve... dissipera cette politique somber des derniers temps de notre decadence. Il nous laissera indifférent à tout ce qui... n'est pas notre proper dictature." See "Réponse à l'enquête des Cahiers du mois: Orient/Occident" OC 899.

function of all these idyllic alarms among the dead and gone being to distract our thoughts from the present, the abominations of the present.”²⁸⁸

Drafted mainly by René Crevel, the essay furnishes yet another example of the utter lack of nuance and pragmatism in Surrealism’s political thinking. In zealously tarring everyone with any political power with the same brush of “Murderous Humanitarianism,” it empowers no one to take any steps to remedy specific situations. Crevel quit Surrealism two years after writing the essay, in part due to what he perceived as Surrealism’s political inefficacy, its unwillingness to marshal sufficient forces or to consider more practical means of combating fascism. Even as critique, as opposed to prescription, the surrealists’ capability was limited by generality. And, as surrealist sympathizer Aimé Césaire noted, no one in Europe—including the surrealists—seems to have cared much about imperialism until it threatened them in the form of fascism. Without a talent for political analysis or problem solving, and without the ability to muster sustained interest in a particular, concrete situation, the surrealists’ commentaries on politics had little practical impact. To be of service to the Revolution, Surrealism needed to do more than espouse loyalty to a political ideology; it needed to innovate in its own area of expertise and expand the possibilities of aesthetic and extra-aesthetic creation to address social and political grievances.

Stage 3: After a decade-long, problem-fraught alliance of Surrealism to Communism, Surrealism became preoccupied with carving out an autonomous space for itself, particularly after its disastrous and marginalizing experience at the Paris Writers’ Congress. Breton’s 1938 stay in Mexico and his collaboration with Trotsky there helped determine a new outlook for Surrealism’s relation to political ideology, one that reinscribed some boundaries

²⁸⁸ This declaration, written in 1932, first appeared in Nancy Cunard’s *Negro Anthology* (1934), translated by Samuel Beckett.

between the aesthetic and political domains. Breton and Surrealism returned to imagining a broader role for art beyond the confines of a particular political ideology, through with the risk of cutting art off from the political imagination.

Interestingly, Trotsky seems to have been much more reliable than Breton in desiring to protect art from ideological conscription as propaganda and, particularly, to protect artists from pressures to declare political allegiances. As Trotsky observed to his secretary, Breton seemed to persist in believing that artists had something to do with advancing specific political ideologies. The challenge for Trotsky was to marshal artists as a force against political dictates, as a means of resisting Stalinist or fascist attempts to put a lockdown on creative freedom and harness art to particular political exigencies. Art's relevance resided in its refusal of totalitarian conditions. The challenge for Breton was to provide Surrealism a comfortable distance from the French Communist Party and recast its political revolutionary role as necessary. Trotsky was more successful, at least on the theoretical front; while Breton did manage to move Surrealism further away from the PCF, he largely failed at his second task, reconceiving art's possible political import. By the outbreak of World War II, Breton had oriented Surrealism toward subscription to a politics from which it would claim a large degree of exemption on separate but not equal grounds between artists and citizens. Rather than find a way to link aesthetic practices to political innovation, Breton aimed to grant art at a kind of political exceptionalism.

"Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art" (1938) provides in Breton's own words my argument for Surrealism's stance with respect to anarchism and art's work of revolution. Signed by Breton and Rivera but actually authored by Breton and Trotsky, the

manifesto (inadvertently) makes a mockery of art's possible revolutionary character.²⁸⁹

Breton and Trotsky initially seem to adopt the reverse of the position of the 1925 manifesto, in which Breton makes art handmaiden to revolution, proclaiming: "One must not prescribe the themes of art in accordance with alleged reasons of state"(475). But the word that matters here is "themes": art may choose its content, but not its scope for action. In this context art has no role to play in imagining a collective or work to perform in discovering alternative ways of living together, because it is already a foregone conclusion that socialism offers the right kind of government. Breton and Trotsky enforce a strict boundary between art and state, asserting:

Granted that, in order to develop the material forces of production, the revolution has no other choice but to build a *socialist* regime with centralized control; however, it must from the very beginning, when it comes to intellectual creativity, establish an *anarchist* system based on individual freedom. No authority, no constraint, not the slightest trace of orders from above!

"Individual freedom" apparently only matters for artists and action in a clearly delimited aesthetic realm. No one may tell art what to do, so long as art has nothing to do with politics. The manifesto ends: "Our goals: *the independence of art—for the revolution; the revolution—for the liberation of art once and for all* (477). Yet the 'independence' and 'liberation' of art and the very idea of revolution ring hollow, since neither will be allowed to perform transformative work.

²⁸⁹ Caws, *Manifestos*, 472-77.

Breton's and Trotsky's immediate practical goals were to establish "local and national" congresses that would then unite in "a world congress that... [would] officially consecrate the foundation of the International Federation."²⁹⁰ This task echoes the failed Congress of Paris Breton attempted in the 1920s, although in much more serious and grimmer circumstances. After a brief period of limited success, this project also failed. The problem of organizing a union to protect art's freedom around a pre-ordained ideology again proved unresolvable.

As we see in Breton's rule over Surrealism as a movement in the development of his philosophy of Surrealism, only (bourgeois) artists, not the public at large, were to be granted full access to a poetic form of existence. At its worst, Surrealism loathed and man-handled the masses it portended to love. In fact, it strove to destroy all the institutions near and dear to their hearts. As the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* asserted, "all the means are fair game for shattering the ideas of *family*, of *fatherland*, of *religion*."²⁹¹ Surrealism's preoccupations with aesthetic autonomy and political revolution culminate in a perilous asociality and a false substitution of a needless and problematic asocial concept of individuality for singularity.

IV. 'Existence is Elsewhere': Surrealism's Flight from Social Time

The anarchist modernist engagement with formal-constitutive, historical and experiential time occurs in a social dimension and demands a reckoning with qualitative difference. Whether one imagines this difference in terms of distinct individuals, as did

²⁹⁰ "Lorsqu'un premier contact international aura été établi par la presse et la correspondance, nous procéderons à l'organisation de modestes congrès locaux et nationaux. A l'étape suivante devra se réunir un congrès mondial qui consacrera officiellement la fondation de la Fédération internationale." (Ibid, para 16)

²⁹¹ "...tous les moyens doivent être bons à employer pour ruiner les idées de *famille*, de *patrie*, de *religion*." *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, OC, 785.

Proudhon, or as the subjectless multiplicity of poststructuralism matters less than keeping its existence at the forefront of temporal exploration. Many surrealist texts, however, evince a double social disconnect: insufficient recognition of a heterogeneous multiplicity and a concomitant disregard for the connections among individuals or interpenetration of temporalities. In short, Surrealism lacks social time. To make this case I offer a strong argument—a characterization of social time that makes clear its difference from the temporality of Surrealism—and a weak one, evidence of Surrealism’s social temporal “disconnects.”

The political-philosophically-oriented approaches to time I have distilled primarily from Proudhon, Bergson, Benjamin, and Deleuze and attributed to an anarchist avant-garde project of retemporalization have a tenuous foothold in the domain of physics. In a paper entitled “Time and Classical and Quantum Mechanics: Indeterminacy vs. Discontinuity,” Peter Lynds revives and advances the Bergson-Einstein debate over the character of time, updating Bergson to show how a qualitative, intensive account of time in which it is not equated to the space on which it unfolds is compatible with Einstein’s physics.²⁹² I will briefly summarize Lynd’s argument here in order to then affirm Sebastian Olma’s reading of it in terms of social time, which clarifies its relevance for any modernist and avant-garde politics of time.²⁹³

²⁹² Peter Lynds, “Time and Classical and Quantum Mechanics: Indeterminacy vs. Discontinuity,” *Foundations of Physics Letters*, 16, no. 4 (August 2003): 343-355. The full text is available online at <http://doc.cern.ch/archive/electronic/other/ext/ext-2003-042.pdf>. For an interesting account of the contemporary political fallout of the Bergson-Einstein debate, see Jimena Canales, “Einstein, Bergson, and the Experiment That Failed: Intellectual Cooperation at the League of Nations,” *MLN* 120:5 (December 2005): 1168-1191.

²⁹³ Sebastian Olma, “Social Time,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, nos. 2-3 (May 1, 2006): 127-129.

Lynds asserts that time cannot be a chain of static instants because that would render motion impossible: there can be “no precise instant in time underlying a dynamical physical process,” for if that were the case, “the relative portion of a body in relative motion or a specific physical magnitude, although precisely determined at such a precise static instant, would also by way of logical necessity be frozen static at that precise instant.”²⁹⁴ Lynds thus escapes Zeno of Elea’s paradoxes of Achilles and the Tortoise, the Dichotomy, and the Arrow, as they depend on time’s division into units affixed spatially. The tortoise who challenges Achilles to a race affirms that Achilles will never catch up to him because, once motion is correlated to space, Achilles will always have a further fraction to move; he can never attain the end point of the race to best the tortoise, however slowly the animal moves, provided that the tortoise has a head-start. Lynds concludes, “if a physical value were precisely determined, it could never change.” As in Bergson, time subsists apart from simple quantity. But unlike Bergson, Lynds offers an explanation for his proposition’s compatibility with Einstein’s theories from within physics, explaining “It is relative interval as measured by all clocks (whether digital, atomic, light, biological or other) that is warped and mutable at relativistic velocities and in the spatial vicinity of gravity, not any physical progression of time.”

Lynds’ physics rescues Bergsonian *durée* from speculations that it is ‘merely’ a philosophical or psychological notion and re-poses the question “What makes time?” Sebastian Olma convincingly speculates “If time is not a succession of instants, no more is the time of physics determined by a succession of masterminds. It would be a more sensible hypothesis that a particular society’s historical conception of time emerges out of that

²⁹⁴ Lynds, “Time and Classical and Quantum Mechanics.” All subsequent quotations of Lynd are from this paper.

society's material practices.”²⁹⁵ This description of time as contingent on social practice alludes to a field of action for a literary (or broadly aesthetic) politics of time, and it makes conceptions of time dependent on collective material practices and, presumably, a collectively-generated—or at collectively accepted—reflection on the signification of such practices. In other words, any specific historical conception of time emerges in relation to the public sphere, to habits of action and social interpretations of such action.

Yet Surrealism generally seems more interested in isolating both the individual from social ties of any duration (as in its enthusiasm for spontaneous erotic encounters) and the moment (also from duration). As in its conception of an originary ideal of ‘dialogue’ (as solipsistic public monologue permitting sparks of reaction), Surrealism preoccupies itself with the mind outside temporal consideration: there is the time of the individual mind, with has no connection with anything, and historical time, which isn't really historical because it is fixed. Surrealism's “latent revolution” is focused inward, as Breton had thought originally of Tzara: “At the end of 1919, Tzara arrived in Paris a little like the Messiah. After two or three words I attributed a very rich interior life to him.”²⁹⁶ Breton only deems Dada a failure because, he claims, it focused on the external social world and failed to alter it: “As far as I was concerned, it was impossible for me to remain any longer with Dada, which, as a force turned entirely against the exterior, was losing all reason to exist the moment it showed itself powerless to change the proportions of the conflict.”²⁹⁷ Presumably, had Dada focused

²⁹⁵ Olma, “Social Time,” 128.

²⁹⁶ “Fin 1919, Tzara arrive à Paris un peu comme le Messie. À deux ou trois mots qu’il prononce je lui suppose moi-même une vie intérieure des plus riches” *Caractères de l’évolution moderne*, OC I, 305.

²⁹⁷ “En ce qui me concerne, il m’était impossible de tenir plus longtemps à Dada qui, en tant que force tournée tout entière contre l’extérieur, perdait toute raison d’être du moment qu’il se montrait impuissant à modifier les proportions du conflit.” Ibid, 306

inward, a lack of success in remaking the exterior social world would not have been a problem.

The first *Manifesto* does recognize historical specificity-- “Le merveilleux n’est pas le même à toutes les époques”--, noting that the place of ruins in Romanticism is accorded to the mannequin today.²⁹⁸ But it then seeks to arrest time with definition and retroactively read Surrealism through literary history, from Dante and Shakespeare “on his best days” to Reverdy, Saint-John Perse and Roussel.²⁹⁹ As Mary Ann Caws has also noted, Surrealism aspires to transcend history, a movement “that, as the concretization of certain eternal phenomena, would never age.”³⁰⁰ Breton in particular favors revolution to escape time, to get out of his time rather than work within it, assailing both his present moment and a precoccupation with time generally in a near hysterical tone:

if we do not find enough words to condemn the servility of Western thought, if we do not fear to enter into insurrection against logic, if we would not swear that an act one accomplishes in a dream has less sense than an act one accomplished awake, if we are not even certain that one will never have done *with time*, old sinister farce, perpetually derailing train, crazy pulsation, inextricable heap of grueling and worn out beasts, how is it that you can expect for us to show some tenderness, for us even to exercise tolerance towards an apparatus of social conservation, whatever it may be? That would be the only really unacceptable vain delirium on our part.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ *Manifeste du surréalisme*, OC, 321.

²⁹⁹ This list of literary lions of the international movement of Surrealism consist of all French artists except for Swift and Poe and no visual artists.

³⁰⁰ Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 538.

³⁰¹ “...si nous ne trouvons pas assez de mots pour flétrir la bassesse de la pensée occidentale, si nous ne craignons pas d’entrer en insurrection contre la logique, si nous ne jurerions pas qu’un acte qu’on accomplit en rêve a moins de sens qu’un acte qu’on accomplit éveillé, si nous ne sommes même pas sûrs qu’on n’en finira pas *avec le temps*, vieille farce sinister, train perpetuellement déraillant, pulsation folle, inextricable amas de bêtes crevantes et crevées, comment veut-on que nous manifestations quelque tendresse, que même nous usions de tolerance à l’égard d’un appareil de conservation sociale, quel qu’il soit? Ce serait le seul vain délire vraiment inacceptable de notre part.” *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, OC, 785.

In light of such sentiment it is difficult to take Breton's claim that he writes to lengthen time seriously (116).

Breton's description of Dada echoes Deleuze's description of the multiplicity of temporality in his book on Bergson. In a long text (pp. 7-44) that appeared in a special surrealist issue of Edward Titus's British revue *This Quarter* in September, 1932, "Surrealism: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," Breton asserts his own theory of Dada's downfall and the need for Surrealism as its replacement:

There is no doubt that before the surrealist movement proper, there existed among the promoters of the movement, and others who later rallied around it, various, very active but unfortunately very antagonistic nonconformist desires that, from 1915 to 1920, tended to align themselves quite superficially in Switzerland, in Germany and in France under the sign of Dada. Post-war disorder, the essentially anarchic state of mind that guided that cycle's diverse manifestations, the deliberate refusal to judge—for lack, it was said, of criteria—the actual qualifications of each individual, and perhaps, in the last analysis, a certain spirit of negation which was making itself apparent, brought about too quickly the dissolution of a group almost imagined, by reason of its dispersed and heterogeneous character...³⁰²

Breton's critique of Dada extends beyond its 'anarchic,' 'inchoate,' 'dispersed,' and 'heterogeneous' composition to its character as a movement, its "deliberate refusal to judge" individuals' qualifications on grounds Breton finds dubious ("for lack, *it was said*, of criteria"). The desire for individuals to possess "actual qualifications" to participate runs

³⁰² My translation. Although Titus himself translated the text for the issue, Breton was very unhappy with his English rendering. Breton's text reads: "Il n'est pas douteux que préexistèrent au mouvement surréaliste proprement dit, dans l'esprit des personnes qui s'en firent les promoteurs et de quelques autres qui plus tard s'y raillèrent, diverses volontés non conformistes très agissantes mais malheureusement assez antagonistes qui, de 1915 à 1920, tendirent à se coordonner très superficiellement en Suisse, en Allemagne et en France sous l'emblème de *Dada*. Le désarroi de l'après-guerre, l'état d'esprit foncièrement anarchique qui présida aux diverses manifestations de ce cycle, le regus délibéré de juger, faute disait-on de critérium, de la qualification réelle de chacun et peut-être, en dernière analyse, un certain négativisme qui se mit de la partie, entraînent trop promptement la dissolution d'un groupe presque fictive à force de dispersion et d'hétérogénéité." Breton, *Le Surréalisme hier, aujourd'hui, demain*, OC, 515.

counter to Dada's nature and ignores the specific historical context of its emergence in Zurich.³⁰³

Ball's assertion that the "sole purpose" of the Cabaret Voltaire is to "give proof" of the existence of at least a "few independent spirits who live for... ideals" other than "war and nationalism" makes clear the absurdity of Breton's suggested "qualifications." In Ball's account Dada emerged to focus the public's attention on independent spirits and not to accomplish any other aims for which specific qualifications might matter. Breton's ultimate disregard for Dada stems from its refusal to coalesce generally, to cohere into a group that emanates from a central point, and to coalesce around a specific program for whose advancement one could devise certain qualifications.

Walter Benjamin's Surrealism essay ("Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia") provides a useful vantage point from which to compare Dada and Surrealism as avant-garde movements, and, especially, to distinguish the political function of each movement's manifestos. Benjamin proposes the spatial position of the German "in the valley" rather than that of the Frenchman "at the head of the stream" as a place from which to evaluate Surrealism. As one "long acquainted with the crisis of the intelligentsia" and "its highly exposed position between an anarchistic *fronde* and a revolutionary discipline" (177), Benjamin's German gazes through a critical lens calibrated to catch political, organizational variation among aesthetic philosophies of the European intelligentsia.

³⁰³ Breton frequently describes Dada in terms of anarchic and egalitarian tendencies, both of which he characterizes as unfortunate. As early as 1922, when Breton declared Dada dead to an audience in Barcelona that included self-identified Dadaists, Breton references Dada's "vexing egalitarianism" and "the anarchic character of its protests" as part of its "offensive style." The text of the talk Breton delivered at the opening of Picabia's exhibition on November 17 summarizes, "Dada, sa negation insolente, son égalitarisme vexant, le caractère anarchique de sa protestation, son gout du scandale pour le scandale, enfin toute son allure offensive, je n'ai pas besoin de vous dire de quell cœur longtemps j'y ai souscrit." *Caractères de l'évolution moderne*, OC I, 305.

While “anarchistic fronde” and “revolutionary discipline” serve to some extent as useful shorthands to differentiate Dada and Surrealism, attention to each movement’s spatial and temporal orientation permits a more precise reading of the causes and consequences of each one’s organizational impulse.³⁰⁴ While Dada dodges spatial and temporal boundaries, calling into question the constitution of any here and now, it yet engages that here and now, whatever it may be. Surrealism, in contrast, is escapist: rather than open up the here and now for remaking, it flees place and time. Contrary to a common sensical reading, Dada’s anarchism mines political potential while Surrealism harnesses revolutionary discipline against political action. While Benjamin’s valorization of Surrealism over the more anarchistic Dada movement seems to stem from a fear of frivolity and disorder taking the place of discipline and organization, I argue that the different temporalities of the two movements ultimately render Surrealism politically inconsequential and Dada politically useful.³⁰⁵ Breton’s preoccupation with an originary myth as a sort of static touchstone for Surrealism after the break with communism hardly seems compatible with Benjamin’s *Jetztzeit* that interrupts continuous time to break free of the given continuum or perceived character of a particular historical moment.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Of course, in referencing the *fronde* Benjamin’s characterization of the anarchist pole carries in it a presumption of political failure.

³⁰⁵ Surrealism’s successes risked frivolity and complacent absorption into the status quo as much as Dada’s: Dali rejoiced from New York to a horrified Breton after the opening of the MOMA exhibit “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” in December 1936 “The influence of Surrealism is enormous; they’re decorating the windows of the most luxurious stores with Surrealism. [...] I’m doing my best for our activity.” Cited in Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 439.

³⁰⁶ Breton asks in the “Prolégomènes à un troisième manifeste” [Prolegomena to a Third surrealist Manifesto], “dans quelle mesure pouvons-nous choisir ou adopter, et *imposer* un mythe en rapport avec la société que nous jugeons désirable?” [to what extent can we choose or adopt, and *impose* a myth that accords the society that we judge desirable?] See Breton, “Prolégomènes,” in *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1969), 168-69.

In a recent essay on the relationship between Breton and Trotsky, Pierre Taminiaux clarifies Surrealism's ultimate political ambivalence by thinking through the implications of its ties to utopia.³⁰⁷ Taminiaux notes "surrealist politics had much more to do with the collective attempt to create an ideal world in which art and poetry would define the human condition as a whole than with the material and historical production of a state" (59). One might well offer the same assessment of Dada. Yet Taminiaux's explanation of the effects of Surrealism's utopian thinking shows how it cleaves itself from the political realm in a way that Dada's own revolt does not. Surrealism's preoccupation with utopia entails a refusal to commit to a place—utopia is no place—as well as an abandonment of the present. Enamored of both utopia and revolution, Surrealism pursues a temporally paradoxical project in seeking to retrieve a lost paradise and to bring about a new world. While Surrealism's emphasis on memory distinguishes it from Marxism, the two hold in common a high esteem for the theoretical and the possible over the actual. As Taminiaux explains, "For Breton, the fascination for communism and the Marxist view of the world largely stemmed from the profound love of *elsewhere* (*ailleurs*), an essentially poetic notion that implied the sense of the unknown and of what could only be *imagined* because of its utmost remoteness" (66).³⁰⁸ But even given this shared abhorrence of the merely here and now, Breton's sympathy for Trotsky, and the commitment of many surrealists to the French Communist Party (PCF), Breton asserts Surrealism as an aesthetic undertaking independent of political commitment. The great escape artist, Breton guides Surrealism into the human interior of the psyche, to

³⁰⁷ Pierre Taminiaux, "Breton and Trotsky: The Revolutionary Memory of Surrealism," *Surrealism and Its Others*, *Yale French Studies* 109 (Yale University, 2006), 52-66.

³⁰⁸ Breton concludes the (first) *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924): "C'est vivre est cesser de vivre qui sont des solutions imaginaires. L'existence est ailleurs" [It's living and ceasing to live that are the imaginary answers. Existence is elsewhere." My translation].

dreams and hallucinations, and to collective phantasmagoria, to relations with the nonrational, but only rarely to dynamic relations within collectives. Surrealism's flight from time and place lend it a peculiarly static, mystical quality very different from the dynamic, political or "practical religious" character of Dada.

To return to Benjamin's essay for a moment, it is interesting to note the disparate spatial and temporal positioning he takes vis-à-vis Surrealism. While the perspective of the German "in the valley" provides a fuller, more specific context from which to perceive (largely French) Surrealism, Benjamin's own temporal positioning, in contrast, seems affected by the temporal collapse of his object of study. Benjamin's German considers Surrealism from the vantage point of a still moment removed from temporal flow, in terms of that last snapshot, the European intelligentsia on its deathbed, and the sphere of images and bodies left after "dialectical annihilation." Benjamin concludes with a stillborn transcendence, the replacement of "the play of human features" by "the face of an alarm clock that in each minute rings for sixty seconds" (192). It is as though Benjamin has translated the stasis of Breton's mysticism into political dead-time, a nihilistic void peculiarly bereft of action. Individual man gives way to what Benjamin calls an interpenetration of body and image in technology that looks a lot like the enslavement and devolution of the human by industrial time. So while Benjamin writes in a position of belatedness and extemporality, I take his endpoint—"the sphere, in a word, in which political materialism and physical nature share the inner man... with dialectical justice, so that no limb remains unrent" (192)—as temporally contiguous, inseparable from, not outside, historical and actual (experienced) time. This difference matters because it accounts to a large degree for my

argument that Benjamin's pessimism overestimates Breton's Surrealism (and stasis) at the expense of a more optimistic (Dada-esque) understanding of dynamism.

V. Coda: Surrealism and the Terror

There is only one thing that can allow us to go out, at least temporarily, from this awful cage in which we struggle, and this thing is revolution, any revolution, as bloody as one wants, which I call for today with all my strength. Too bad if Dada was not that... If Dada enlisted men who were not ready for everything, men who were not of explosive material, I repeat, too bad for it. And one should not expect me to be more gentle than necessary towards those among us who have worn, for such a small glory, the uniform of volunteers. It would not be bad to re-establish for the mind the laws of the Terror.³⁰⁹

--André Breton, *The Characteristics of Modern Evolution*, 1922

The link this passage establishes between the idea of revolution Breton held at Surrealism's genesis and the historical phenomenon of the Terror crystallizes my argument that Surrealism's impatience for socio-political action precluded it from espousing a coherent politics of time. Breton's untroubled invocation of the law of the Terror expresses a desire for fixed randomness universally applied, the antithesis of anarchist retemporalization's imaginary of an open-ended multiplicity.³¹⁰

Breton prepared the ground for Surrealism by looking back to the Terror and ahead to a revolution yet to come. In this talk on the evolution of modern art at the opening of a

³⁰⁹ "Il n'y a qu'une chose qui puisse nous permettre de sortir, momentanément au moins, de cette affreuse cage dans laquelle nous nous débattons et ce quelque chose c'est la révolution, une révolution quelconque, aussi sanglante qu'on voudra, que j'appelle encore aujourd'hui de toutes mes forces. Tant pis si Dada n'a pas été cela... Si Dada a enrôlé des hommes qui... n'étaient pas prêts à tout, des hommes qui n'étaient pas de la matière explosive, je le répète, tant pis pour lui. Et qu'on ne s'attende pas à me trouver plus tendre qu'il ne faut pour ceux qui ont porté parmi nous, pour une si petite gloire, l'uniforme des volontaires. Il ne serait pas mauvais qu'on rétablît pour l'esprit les lois de la Terreur." *Caractères de l'évolution moderne*, OC I, 305. My translation. All subsequent translations are my own unless otherwise attributed.

³¹⁰ I am not endorsing broader critiques of Surrealism in terms of a notion of terror, such as the absurd claim that Surrealism 'prepared the mind' for terror, advanced by Jean Clair, or even views of Surrealism as on the side of terror rather than rhetoric in French letters (Jean Paulhan and Michel Beaujour). Clair suggests that just as Marinetti and the futurists helped pave the way for fascism by enabling people, in Benjamin's words, to experience joy at the contemplation of their own destruction, so Surrealism helped "prepare the mind" for September 11th and a collapse of the West and rise of the Orient. See Jean Clair, *Du surréalisme dans ses rapports au totalitarisme et aux tables tournantes* [On Surrealism, In Its Relations with Totalitarianism and the Occult] (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2003).

Picabia exhibition in Barcelona, he effected a coup d'état of sorts, declaring Dada dead, much to the surprise of the self-declared Dadaists in the audience, who had come to see a leading figure of Dada's Parisian manifestation. These Dadaists encountered instead a rallying cry for the movement that would develop into Surrealism. Breton's case for revolution articulates a vision of absolute tyranny: the content of the revolution does not matter, so long as it overturns the status quo completely and establishes total dominance. The coup d'état character of Breton's declaration is analogous to the oppositionality of the nascent surrealist movement to Dada. Visions of Surrealism as a more evolved Dada obscure the radically different political natures of the movements. While Dada's project of revolt and re-creation embraced contradiction, pluralism and inclusion, Surrealism's insistence on revolution valorized unity at the price of the automatic exclusion of many ideas, genres, individuals, and whole classes of people.

What would it mean to apply, as Breton considered, the laws of the Terror to the mind? Historian Carla Hesse distills the character of legislation during the Terror to three attributes: (1) total disavowal of the past, of the monarchy and its symbols; (2) "abstraction: the defense of abstract... values, rather than the institutional forms, of the emergent sovereign"; and (3) a "proliferation of specificity," the seemingly endless production of laws based on individual acts perceived to violate the core abstract values.³¹¹ The laws of the Terror detemporalize, since changes in abstract values over time are conceptual and hidden from view, unlike the more readily visible, concretely embodied changes of monarchs and institutions, and easily acquire a timeless character. Perhaps most frighteningly, the laws

³¹¹ Carla Hesse, "The Law of the Terror" *MLN* 114, no.4 (1999): 713.

result not from a process of deduction but from unexplained interpretations of specific acts converted into universal proscriptions: “Every individual act of resistance was thus generalized into a law.”³¹² Despotism no longer resides in a monarch or institution; it inhabits the law itself. Neither properly deductive or inductive, law formation during the Terror obscured processes of exegesis and reasoning, which occurred out of view and without justification, allowing a particular act (mysteriously judged a transgression), stripped of its context, to be made into an (attenuated) universal proscription imposed on the public. Like the call for “revolution, any revolution,” the laws of the Terror provide a vehicle for absolutism, however unreasoned.

Breton’s well-known loathing of “Latin logic” aside, the most important aspect of the project he advocates is not its disdain for rationality but its insulation from critical engagement and revision. Just as the Terror legislation’s basis in abstract values protected it from having to confront shifting interpretations over time, Breton’s location of Surrealism’s meaning in future revolution forestalled critique. The most significant distinction between Dada’s theoretical inclusivity and Surrealism’s practices of exclusivity stems from their temporal, not specifically aesthetic or political philosophical, differences. As I discussed in chapter three, Dada’s temporality favors an extended duration of the present in which to engage artists and audiences together in reconsidering the boundaries between art and non-art and venturing alternatives to such dichotomies. Surrealism, in contrast, sacrifices the present on the altar of future revolution. While Dada’s meaning and action unfold simultaneously as ongoing poiesis, Surrealism divides ends from means. Its deferral of meaning postpones collective creation until a future moment, after the revolution. Until then, two exclusions

³¹² Ibid, 716.

predominate: that of artists who fail to adhere aesthetically and ideologically to a surrealist vision of revolution, and that of a creative pluralism, since the surrealist version of art and politics intertwined favors only those (aesthetic and political) undertakings it perceives at a given moment as generating the conditions that will bring about revolution

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