

COMMUNAL LUXURY

The Political Imaginary
of the Paris Commune

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1. *Beyond the "Cellular Regime of Nationality"*

Our Flag Is the Flag of the Universal Republic

When Marx wrote that what mattered most about the Paris Commune of 1871 was not any ideals it sought to realize but rather its own "working existence," he underlined the extent to which the insurgents shared no blueprint of the society to come. The Commune, in this sense, was a working laboratory of political inventions, improvised on the spot or hobbled together out of past scenarios and phrases, reconfigured as need be, and fed by desires awakened in the popular reunions at the end of the Empire. An insurrection in the capital fought under the flag of the Universal Republic, the Commune as event and as political culture has always proved resistant to any seamless integration into the national narrative. As one of its former members recalled years later, it was, above all else, "an audacious act of internationalism."¹ Under the Commune Paris wanted

¹ M. Chauvière, cited in *La Revue blanche*, 1871: *Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 51.

to be not the capital of France but an autonomous collective in a universal federation of peoples. It did not wish to be a state but rather an element, a unit in a federation of communes that was ultimately international in scale. Yet aside from a regular nod from historians to the number and prominence of some of its foreign members, the non-nationalist originality of the Commune has not been central to the way it has been remembered. And the traces of the way that this aspect of its distinct political imaginary was produced and practiced are not easily perceptible in standard histories of the event, preoccupied for the most part by military maneuvers and the legislative quarrels and accomplishments at the Hôtel de Ville.

For such traces we must turn instead to a passage like this one from the memoirs of Louise Michel. It is April 1871. She has already described, in her words, "a black man as black as jet, with pointed teeth like those of a wild animal; he is very good, very intelligent, and very brave, a former *zouave pontifical* converted to the Commune":

One very night, I don't know how, it happened that we two were alone in the trench in front of the station; the former *zouave pontifical* and me, with two loaded rifles ... we were incredibly lucky that the station was not attacked that night. As we were performing our sentry duty, coming and going in the trench, he said to me when we met up:

- What effect does the life we are leading have on you?
- Well, I said, the effect of seeing before us a shore that we have to reach.
- For me, he replied, the effect is one of reading a book with pictures.

We continued walking back and forth in the trench under the silence of the Versaillais at Clamart.²

Here we can begin to make out the improbable and unscheduled makeup of Commune activities, practices that could draw together an African from the Papal Guards and former school-teacher Louise Michel, her old army trooper's *godillots* under her dress, the two alone performing sentry duty late at night. The Papal Army had fought on the side of the French in the Franco-Prussian War but disbanded

² Louise Michel, *La Commune: Histoire et souvenirs* [1898] (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), p. 170.

when the Prussians entered Paris; this fact helps explain the African's presence in the area at the time but it does not explain his conversion to the Commune. But beyond the striking visual distribution of these particular individuals in a narrative and in a trench, there is also the way the two can be heard reflecting upon how to understand their own presence in history and its workings *as it is occurring*. These are enigmatic and elliptical reflections to be sure, but we might interpret them something like this: Are we going somewhere new, or are we reading an old, illustrated book, an adventure story, perhaps, or a story of the French Revolution? Are we to reach a new world, or are we figures speaking from our ready-made place in a narrative? Are we new men, new women, or are we repositioned characters in the vividly tinted imagery of an old story? The experiences expressed by the two Communards are different and show how differently one's relationship to one's own political subjectivization might come to be lived. But they are not contradictory, and they give us a glimpse into the transformation of the experience of time under the Commune and its relation to the social, a relation that has everything to do with forms of historical memory taking on new shapes and figures or mobilizing old shapes and figures in a new context.

The prehistory to this scene can be found in the waves of dust and enthusiasm, the fever that took hold inside the popular reunions and club meetings across Paris during the final two years of the Empire. Commune veteran as well as its first and most influential historian, Prosper Olivier Lissagaray, never placed much stock in the popular reunions, viewing them as dens of Jacobin posturing and rhetoric, big talk and little action—the scene of words, not deeds. Perhaps for this reason all major historical accounts of the Commune have followed Lissagaray's lead in beginning and anchoring the story of the Commune on March 18, 1871 with a deed (or rather a failed one): with what Marx called Thiers' "burglarious" attempt to confiscate the cannons of Montmartre, cannons that belonged to the National Guard, and that had been paid for by local, neighborhood subscription. Working-class women fraternized with the soldiers, who refused the order to fire into the crowd. Frank Jellinek, Stewart Edwards, Henri Lefebvre, most recently Alain Badiou—virtually all histories or analyses of the Commune are built on the edifice of a prominent

chapter entitled "The 18th of March." Thus the Commune begins with bungling overreach on the part of the state and the reaction it provokes; its origins are spontaneous and circumstantial, growing out of the particular circumstances of the Franco-Prussian War, and they are motivated by strong sentiments of national defense on the part of Parisians. With this last point even Thiers, who would refer to the Commune as "misguided patriotism," or "patriotism gone awry," would agree.³

But if we begin with the state, we end with the state. Let us begin instead with the popular reunions at the end of the Empire, the various associations and committees they spawned, and the "buzzing hives" that were the revolutionary clubs of the Siege. Then we see a different picture. For it was the reunions and the clubs that created and instilled the idea—well before the fact—of a social commune. What developed in the meetings was the desire to substitute a communal organization, which is to say a direct cooperation of all energies and intelligences, for a government composed of traitors and incompetents. The police at the time, numerous Communards, as well as a minority strain among subsequent historians of the Commune, knew this well. "It is the clubs and the associations that have done all the harm ... I attribute all of the events which have just come to pass in Paris to the clubs and the reunions ... to the desire of those people to live better than their condition allows."⁴ In his dictionary of the Commune, anti-Communard Chevalier d'Alix defines "clubs" and public reunions as "the Collège de France of insurrection."⁵ Historian Robert Wolfe writes, "If one had to trace the origins of the Commune back to a single starting point, one could do worse than to choose June 19, 1868, the date of the first unauthorized public meeting in Paris under the Second Empire."⁶

³ Adolphe Thiers speaking before the Assemblée Nationale, cited in *La Revue blanche*, 1871: *Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 43.

⁴ A police official of the Government of National Defense in 1872, cited in Robert Wolfe, "The Origins of the Paris Commune: The Popular Organizations of 1868–71," PhD diss., Harvard University, July 1965, p. 162.

⁵ Chevalier d'Alix, *Dictionnaire de la Commune et des communeux* (La Rochelle: A. Thoreux, [May] 1871), p. 16.

⁶ Wolfe, "The Origins of the Paris Commune," p. 41. Other historians

But I would choose a different starting point, a few months later. The scene is the same: the evening meeting in the Vaux-Hall ballroom at Château-d'eau. By then Parisians had already taken possession of their right to gather and associate and had been meeting together for a few months. In the first reunions veterans of 1848, old and experienced orators, met together with young workers from the Paris section of the International Workers' Association and with refugees from London, Brussels, and Geneva. Those who spoke did so "with decorum, tact, often with some talent, and showed real knowledge of the questions they addressed."⁷ The topic, for several weeks, had been women's labor and ways of getting their salaries increased. Two months of such meetings had ensued: they were orderly, statistical exposés on women's salaries to which the press paid little attention and to which the government sometimes forgot to send its police spies. But one evening in the autumn a certain Louis Alfred Briosne, forty-six years old and a *feuillagiste* (artificial flower and leaf maker) by trade, took the podium amidst an atmosphere of fairly generalized boredom. Neither his less-than-average stature nor the fact that his body was ridden with the tuberculosis he would soon thereafter succumb to, prevented him from dropping a bomb into the room:

There arrived at the dais a short man leaning on the podium, as several people observed, as though he were about to swim out into the audience.

Up until then, orators had begun to speak with the sacramental formula: "Mesdames et Messieurs..." This speaker, in a clear and sufficiently vibrant voice cried out an appellation that had been deeply forgotten for a quarter century: "Citoyennes et citoyens!"

The room erupted in applause. The man who had been welcomed in this fashion did not, perhaps, go on to say anything more interesting than

who have emphasized the importance of the popular reunions and committees include Alain Dalotel, Alain Faure, and Jean-Claude Freiermuth, *Aux origines de la Commune* (Paris: Maspero, 1980); Jean Dautry and Lucien Scheler, *Le Comité Central Républicain des vingt arrondissements de Paris* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1960); and Martin Philip Johnson, *The Paradise of Association* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

⁷ Gustave Lefrançais, *Etude sur le mouvement communaliste à Paris en 1871* (Neuchâtel: G. Guillaume Fils, 1871), p. 46.

any of the others had—what does it matter? By throwing out his “citoyens,” he had evoked—whether purposely or not, who knows?—a whole world of memories and hopes. Each person present gave a start, shivered ... the effect was immense and its reverberation spread outdoors.⁸

Communard Gustave Lefrançais, whose account this is, links the resonance of the words immediately to their last moment of common usage a quarter of a century earlier—sacred words of the revolutionary vocabulary widespread in 1789 and again in 1848. “Citoyens” was among the appellations that date back to 1789 and that were kept alive thanks to secret societies and revolutionary traditions—“patriots,” another such word, had, for example, gone out of fashion with young socialists and was nowhere to be found in 1871. But the particular force of its use by Briosne in the Vaux-Hall meeting has less to do with a hearkening back to the past than it does with the way that “citoyen,” in this instance, does not connote membership in a national body but rather a cleavage therein, a social gap or division affirmed in the heart of the national citizenry, a separation of the *citoyen* from what at that precise moment becomes its antonym, the now ghostly departed *mesdames* and *messieurs*—the bourgeoisie, *les honnêtes gens*. And “connote” is the wrong word to use, for the words perform a forcible inscription of social division, an active, self-authorizing assertion of disidentification—from the state, from the nation, from all of the customs and phatic *politesses* that make up middle-class French society. The words *citoyen*, *citoyenne* no longer indicate national belonging—they are addressed to people who have separated themselves from the national collectivity. And because the words are an interpellation, a direct second-person address, they create that gap or division in a *now*, in the contemporary moment constituted by the speech act; they create a new temporality in the present and, essentially, an agenda—something that all the speeches presenting well-meaning statistical data about women’s labor could not have begun to create. They allow an understanding of the present, in its unfolding, as historical, as changing. Paradoxically, perhaps, in this instance, it is the unspoken words “Mesdames, messieurs”

8 Gustave Lefrançais, *Souvenirs d’un révolutionnaire* [1902] (Paris: La Fabrique, 2013), pp. 266–7.

which, when they are spoken and repeated, create the space/time of the nation and not *citoyen*. For the repetitive temporality created by the “sacramental formula” “Mesdames, messieurs” is the saturated time of the nation—a spatialized time, in fact, in keeping with Ernst Bloch’s observation that there is no time in national history, only space. “Thus, nationhood,” he writes, “drives time, indeed history *out of history*: it is space and organic fare, nothing else; it is that ‘true collective’ whose underground elements are supposed to swallow the uncomfortable class struggle of the present...”⁹ The name “citoyen,” on the other hand, may well be old and originate in another moment of the political past, but its iteration in this instance creates the now of a shared political subjectivization, “the uncomfortable class struggle of the present.” It interpellates listeners to be part of that present. *Citoyen*, *citoyenne* summons, then, a subject predicated on any number of disidentifications—from the state, the Empire, the police, and the world of the so-called “honnêtes gens.” The words are not addressed to the French national citizen. They conjure up an ideal of *la femme libre*, *l’homme libre*, a non-nationally circumscribed being, and are addressed to and responded to by such listeners accordingly.

What went on in the reunions and the clubs verged on a quasi-Brechtian merging of pedagogy and entertainment. An entry fee of a few centimes to pay for the lighting was charged. Club meetings provided instruction, though to what pedagogical end was open to debate. They were “schools for the people,”¹⁰ frequented, according to Communard Elie Reclus, by “citizens, who, for the most part, had never talked to each other until then”;¹¹ they were “schools of demoralization, disturbance and depravity,” in the words of another contemporary observer.¹² At the same time the nightly evening meetings had, in effect, replaced the theaters that had been shut down

9 Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 90.

10 Sébille, Club Folies-Belleville, January 30, 1869, cited in Dalotel et al., *Aux origines de la Commune*, p. 13.

11 Elie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris, au jour le jour*, 1871, 19 mars–28 mai (Paris: Schleicher frères, 1908), p. 46.

12 Ernest Merson, *Fermez les clubs!* (Paris, 1871), cited in Wolfe, “The Origins of the Paris Commune,” p. 163.

by the government since before the Siege, and some regular orators were known for their flamboyant theatricality. Shoemaker Napoléon Gaillard, according to Maxime du Camp, gave as many as forty-seven speeches between November 1868 and November 1869, often wearing a red Phrygian bonnet.¹³ Before September 4, certain topics were policed and subject to censor, and considerable suspense was generated by speakers who at any moment might venture into forbidden territory and cause the proceedings to be shut down amidst the din of roared opposition.

Often, though, government censorship of topics related to politics and religion had the paradoxical effect of enabling vaster, more imaginative speculation to take place. It was forbidden, for example, to denounce particular government hacks but discussions about how to bring about an end to all inheritance could proceed unchecked. Skirting the narrow parameters of what the Empire deemed political allowed a more thoroughgoing vision of social transformation to come into view. One could not speak against the emperor or his various functionaries but one could advocate for an end to private property, or as one speaker put it: "Individual ownership of land is incompatible with the new society."¹⁴ Hatred of capitalism, along with denunciation of bourgeois "vampires" or "cannibals," was a regular topic, and a particular favorite of speakers like Gaillard père. "The big question [in the clubs] is that of bread, which is to say, property: whatever subject appears to be addressed, it's really about that."¹⁵ In the public meetings, where anyone was free to speak but the public shouted down those they had had enough of, no one political faction or generation could dominate. After September 4, as the reunions transformed themselves into clubs with more distinct ideological positions, certain speakers became "regulars" associated with certain clubs. But there were always "orateurs de hasard," amateurs speaking for the first time, as well as "orateurs ambulants" like Gaillard fils, performing a kind of *colportage* of different discourses

13 Dalotel et al., *Aux origines de la Commune*, p. 96.

14 *Les Orateurs des réunions publiques de Paris en 1869. Compte rendu des séances publiques* (Paris: Imprimerie Town et Vossen, 1869), p. 38.

15 Elisée Reclus, letter to Pierre Faure, undated from 1869, *Correspondances*, vol. 3 (Paris: Librairie Schleicher, 1914), p. 63.

and working to disseminate strategies from club to club. The entire club presided over by Blanqui, the *Club de la Patrie en danger*, was *itself* ambulatory, meeting from week to week in different hastily scheduled venues scattered across the city.

From the first months of 1869, demands for the Commune could be heard in all of the reunions, and "vive la Commune" was the cry that opened and closed sessions in the more revolutionary clubs in the north of Paris: Batignolles, Charonne, Belleville, Villette.¹⁶ Accounts of club proceedings, which by now clubists were publishing themselves in order to combat bourgeois misrepresentation of their doings, reveal a kind of crescendo of feverish anticipation around "the burning question of the Commune."¹⁷ As a slogan, the Commune melted divergences between left factions, enabling solidarity, alliance, and a shared project:

We will have it, surely, our Commune, our grand democratic and social Commune ... the light will descend from the heights of Belleville and Ménilmontant, to dissipate the dark shadows of the Hôtel de Ville. We will sweep away the reaction like the janitor sweeps the apartment on Saturdays [prolonged laughter and applause. A great tumult at the back of the room as a citizen who was found dishonoring the inlaid parquet floor of the hall is violently thrown out].¹⁸

Ambulatory orators helped revolutionary clubs to federate with each other, in the now familiar structure shared by all of the embryonic organizations that preceded the Commune but which were in many ways indistinguishable from it. That structure, a kind of decentralized federation of local, independent worker-based committees organized by *arrondissement*, had been adopted by the Paris section of the International, some 50,000 members strong in the spring of 1870. It was also the structure of the National Guard, which had, by

16 Dalotel et al., *Aux origines de la Commune*, pp. 255–6. Meetings in 1869, for example, were devoted to the theme of "The Organization of the Social Commune," and "The Social Commune: Ways and Means of Execution."

17 Gustave de Molinari, *Les Clubs rouges pendant le siège de Paris* (Paris: Garnier, 1871), p. 217.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

that point, in effect "federated itself." Members of the International organized the early Vigilance Committees out of people chosen in the public reunions; these then chose their delegates to the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements, installed in a room on the Place de la Corderie lent to them by the International. All these embryos or x-rays of the Commune testify to the presence of a strong decentralized revolutionary structure, organized by *arrondissement* and tied to popular concerns like food and hatred of the clergy, with its "luxe oriental" and its exemption from fighting. "Let's strip them [priests and seminarians] to their chemises and march them to the ramparts!"¹⁹

By shifting our attention away from the Hôtel de Ville, both before March 26 and after, when the Commune government had more or less established its residency there, I am trying to make visible another social and political geography in the city which included the clubs that met throughout the city, as well as the Place de la Corderie, with its triumvirate of the International, the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements, and, after early March, the Central Committee of the National Guard. It was here, for example, at the Place de la Corderie, that the furniture-maker Jean-Louis Pindy came when he was released from prison on September 4, homeless, knowing he could find a bed. And it was here that Elisabeth Dmitrieff came directly when she landed from London on March 28, a special correspondent sent by Marx to report back about the Commune for the International. At the Place de la Corderie, more than at the Hôtel de Ville, the questions in the early months of 1871 are not national questions, properly speaking. There is just the larger struggle of the Revolution, in the form of the free union of autonomous collectives, against the state.

The Commune was both rallying cry and the thing itself. Attempting to differentiate the two or establish the moment when the one was transformed into the other may be beside the point. For Communard Arthur Arnould, this is because the Commune was less an uprising than the advent or affirmation of a politics:

19 Ibid., pp. 113, 70.

[After January 1871] Paris had no government—gone to Bordeaux, the army in disesteem and poorly armed, generals universally held in contempt, no police on the streets ... We had nothing but an anonymous power, representation by Monsieur Tout le Monde. At that moment, and this is a point on which I can't insist too much, because it's so important and it seems to have gone unnoticed, *the Commune already in fact existed*.²⁰

Arnould, who after the Commune's demise would try to survive his exile in Switzerland by selling chickens, wrote a theoretical analysis of the Commune with the same title Lenin would choose a few decades later: *The State and the Revolution*. He continues:

Paris had been left to itself, separated from the government in Bordeaux, in terms of physical distance as well as emotional distance. Paris was living its own life, following its own will ... It had learned absolute contempt for the only two governmental forms that had existed up until then in our country: the monarchy and the bourgeois, oligarchical Republic...

The Paris Commune was something MORE and something OTHER than an uprising. It was the advent of a principle, the affirmation of a politics. In a word, it was not only one more revolution, it was a new revolution, carrying in the folds of its flag a wholly original and characteristic program.²¹

And its flag was the flag of the Universal Republic.

How does republicanism change when one's republic is conceived as a universal one? On the second day after the Commune was proclaimed, all foreigners were admitted into its ranks, because "our flag is the flag of the Universal Republic."²² Leo Frankel, elected as member of the Commune, writes to Marx on March 30:

20 Arthur Arnould, *Histoire populaire et parlementaire de la Commune de Paris* (Brussels: Librairie socialiste de Henri Kistemaekers, 1878), p. 80. Arnould's emphasis.

21 Ibid., pp. 80, 92, 163.

22 *Journal Officiel de la république française sous la commune* [1871] (Paris: Editions Ressouvenances, 1995), p. 103.

I was elected with several other members of the International to the Commission of Labor and Exchange and this fact compels me to send you this note. My election was validated in today's meeting and it's unnecessary for me to add how overjoyed I was by this action, and that I appreciate it not from a personal point of view but uniquely and exclusively for its *international* character.²³

The phrase "universal republic" gained prominence during the Siege in the clubs, in the committee movements, and among members of the International, who used it interchangeably with *République des travailleurs*.²⁴ The phrase alluded to a set of desires, identifications and practices that could not be contained or defined by the territory of the state or circumscribed by the nation, and vividly differentiated its users in this way from parliamentary or liberal republicans who believed in the preservation of a strong, centralized state authority as guarantor of social order. The Universal Republic meant the dismantling of the Imperial bureaucracy, and first and foremost its standing army and its police. "It is not enough to emancipate each nation in particular from under the thumb of the king," wrote Elisée Reclus. "It must be liberated from the supremacy of other nations, its boundaries must be abolished, those limits and frontiers that make enemies out of sympathetic peoples ... Our rallying cry is no longer 'Long live the Republic' but 'Long live the Universal Republic'."²⁵

But the term did not originate with the Commune. Reiterated throughout the insurrection and the years preceding it, *universal republic* in fact owed its existence to a brief moment of internationalism during the 1789 revolution.²⁶ Its creator, Prussian-born

23 Frankel to Marx, March 30, 1871. Cited in Sylvie Braibant, *Elisabeth Dmitrieff, aristocrate et pétroleuse* (Paris: Editions Belfond, 1993), p. 122.

24 The Club de la Révolution, for example, meeting in Montmartre in December 1870, determined its membership according to commitment to three principles: "1. Political goal: establish the universal republic. 2. Social and economic goals: equivalence in function and collectivism. 3. Means: revolution and the Commune." De Molinari, *Les Clubs rouges pendant le siege de Paris*, p. 166.

25 Elisée Reclus [1851], cited in *Le Libéraire*, August 28–October 1, 1925.

26 See Sophie Wahnich, *L'Impossible citoyen* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997); see also Bilal Hashmi, "Worlding the Universal" (unpublished paper).

Anacharsis Cloots, supported the French Revolution along with Tom Paine on internationalist grounds; this did not, however, save Cloots from the guillotine. Yet far from implying a return to the principles of the bourgeois 1789 revolution, the slogan *universal republic*, when spoken by Communards, marks their break from the legacy of the French Revolution in the direction of a real working-class internationalism. They were to show the extent to which they had reworked the slogan for their own purposes in three important acts: with the burning of the guillotine on the Place Voltaire on April 10; with the May 16 destruction of the Vendôme Column, built to glorify Napoleonic imperialist conquests; and with the establishment on April 11 of the Women's Union.

When a group of mostly women hauled a guillotine under the statue of Voltaire and lit it ablaze, they were trying, it seems, to break down any equivalence or equation between revolution and the gallows. The destruction of the Vendôme Column, according to Communard Benoît Malon, was conducted as an indictment of wars between peoples and as a promotion of international fraternity. In part because the Column was to plague the remainder of the life of Gustave Courbet, who was held responsible for its destruction, its toppling is one of the Communards' most well-known acts, and will not concern us here. (What is less well-known, however, is the re-baptism they performed after they tore the column down. "The Place Vendôme is called from this moment onwards: Place Internationale."²⁷) Let us turn instead to the Union of Women and its founder, the twenty-year-old Russian Elisabeth Dmitrieff.

In an astoundingly compressed span of time, Elisabeth Dmitrieff went about establishing a kind of transversal or conduit between the two most significant political thinkers of the time, Marx and Chernyshevsky, and this in two ways: theoretically and in act. Dmitrieff spent the three months before the Commune in London, in near daily discussions with Marx in his study, on the topic of the traditional Russian rural organizations, the *obshina* and the *artel*, and the way these were being theorized by Russian populists, and

27 Georges Jeanneret, *Paris pendant la commune révolutionnaire de '71* [1872] (Paris: Editions d'histoire sociale, 1968), p. 140.

especially Chernyshevsky. Marx's study of the Russian language was at that point far enough along that he could get by in the original; he could read copies of the journal Dmitrieff co-edited, *La Cause du peuple* (Narodnoe Delo), copies that Dmitrieff had been sent from Geneva by the newly formed Russian section of the International to make sure that he knew about.

The trajectory that took Dmitrieff from Saint Petersburg to Geneva to her meeting with Marx to her activities in the Commune was almost single-handedly fueled by her reading as a young teenager of a novel by Chernyshevsky that had been written in four months while its author was incarcerated for crimes against the state in the Petropavlosk fortress. The novel or anti-novel, *What Is to Be Done?* (1863)—another title Lenin would borrow—gave Dmitrieff a script to follow. It inspired the white marriage that freed her from her family, gave her access to the inheritance she would use to fund *La Cause du peuple*, and enabled her journey to Geneva where her signature appears on the document listing the founding members of the Russian section of the International.

To return to our opening discussion of Louise Michel's memory about sentry duty, we might say that in her own way Elisabeth Dmitrieff was at once reading a book with pictures and trying to reach a new shore. Chernyshevsky's novel, read and re-read by Dmitrieff's generation of educated young Russians, recounts such a break for freedom on the part of Vera Pavlovna, who uses her emancipation to live communally and work with other like-minded young people transforming society through production cooperatives. The fictional Vera founds a women's sewing collective, transforming private enterprise into a production cooperative, and then a cooperative at the level of consumption as well, encompassing all aspects of daily life. Individual freedom defines one's participation in the collective, and Vera Pavlovna herself refuses to embody any kind of authority role: "She conformed to her own rules: never ordering, but counseling, explaining, offering her help, contributing to the implementation of the group's decisions."²⁸ Chernyshevsky's fictional sewing collective,

28 Nikolay Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), p. 178. For a sense of the effects of Chernyshevsky's novel on readers at that time, see Sonia Werner, "The Reality Effect and Real Effects of

a kind of urban *obshina*, went on to serve as a real-life model for countless similar initiatives throughout Russia. *What Is to Be Done?* swept through Russia like wildfire. Its major accomplishment was to provide a path to socialism that drew readers away from distant dreams to a direct encounter with everyday reality. Its message—and it was very much a book with a message—is that actions create dreams and not the reverse.

Marx's writings, virtually unknown in Russia at the time, were already familiar to Dmitrieff when she arrived in Geneva in 1869, intent on finding a way of bringing about a theoretical convergence between Marx's economic theories and Chernyshevsky's belief in the emancipatory potential of the traditional peasant commune. Geneva, where Bakunin was also in residence, and where numerous Commune survivors would later spend their years of exile, thus became the scene of the Russian revolutionaries' first contact with the international socialist movement; there Dmitrieff met other future Communards like Eugène Varlin and Benoît Malon, with whom she would work two years later in the streets of Paris. For Russians like Dmitrieff, Nicholas and Natalie Utin, and the others who wrote for *La Cause du peuple*, the fact that it was the Russian suppression of the Polish rebellion of 1863 that had helped bring the International to life was a major reason to support the organization: "The overwhelming significance of the International ... consists in this, that it serves as the expression of the movement that embraces all European countries and the United States in the name of the solidarity of all workers of all lands."²⁹

The theoretical project of the small and short-lived Russian section of the International in Geneva aimed to show that while the form of the struggle in Russia—the peasantry versus tsarism—was different than what Marx had addressed, it was nonetheless the same struggle. While embracing Marx, the writers for *La Cause* were oriented toward peasant issues; they wanted to show that just as the International was committed to the collectivization of the land so

Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*," in *Novel* 47:3 (2014).

29 *Narodnoe Delo*, nos. 4–6 (May 1869), cited in Woodford McClellan, *Revolutionary Exiles: The Russians in the First International and the Paris Commune* (London: Frank Cass, 1979), p. 58.

the workings of the peasant commune were not theoretically or practically incompatible with Marx and the west. The journal's program statement, later to be echoed in the text Benoît Malon and André Léo addressed to the French peasantry from inside a besieged Commune, reads as follows: "As the foundation of economic justice, we advance two fundamental theses: the land belongs to those who work it with their own hands: to the agricultural communes. Capital and all the tools of labor [belong to] the workers: to the workers' associations."³⁰

The result of this theoretical cross-fertilization was a kind of "revitalized commune." It is important to remember that Chernyshevsky, when compared to other populists in Russia, had already taken to a higher theoretical degree the possible conjunctures between traditional and modern structures. His theory of the pretermission in Russia of the capitalist stage of development—the idea, that is, that Russia may well go directly to socialism from its existing semi-feudalism—was predicated on the ancient communal structures, the *obshina*, being untethered from any notion of the "Russian national soul" or "Slavic spirit" dear to Slavophiles. "This communal spirit we are not at all disposed to consider some kind of secret quality possessed exclusively by the Slavic or Great Russian nature."³¹ Nor could these antique artisanal guilds be allowed to continue in the strict corporatism they had operated under since the Middle Ages. Most importantly, they must be stripped of their oppressive and patriarchal ways. Their revitalization and future potential lay in their being reworked through socialist designs like Fourier's *phalanstère*; only though a merger of sorts with such imaginings could the old structures serve as instruments for peasant emancipation.

For Marx, the meetings with Dmitrieff and his immersion in the writings of Chernyshevsky on the agricultural commune would have far-reaching effects that I discuss at some length in Chapter 3. His thinking turns toward the possibility of multiple paths to socialism—a turn that would only come to full fruition several years later in

30 *Narodnoe Delo*, no. 1 (September 1, 1868), cited in McClellan, *Revolutionary Exiles*, p. 15.

31 Chernyshevsky, cited in *Narodnoe Delo*, nos. 7–10 (November 1869), p. 137.

the form of his correspondence with another young Russian woman, Vera Zasulich.

Woodford McClellan, whose book on Russian revolutionaries in exile I have relied on for my account of Dmitrieff in Geneva, remarks in passing that the members of the Russian section of the International were never to achieve any practical realization of their theoretical endeavors. And yet Dmitrieff's organizational achievement during the Commune, the Women's Union, was nothing if not that: the convergence in action of the theories of Marx and Chernyshevsky. Engels may later have called Dmitrieff the "spiritual daughter of the International," and Dmitrieff may have seen herself as organizing for the International.³² Indeed, the Women's Union has come to be understood, in effect, as the first women's section of the International. But Dmitrieff had not yet stopped reading *What Is to Be Done?* Already in St. Petersburg at the age of sixteen, aware of the exorbitant rates property owners charged to peasants to grind their wheat, she had attempted to design and instigate a cooperative community mill on the principle of the *artel*. It was only in Paris, however, and under the Commune, that the fictional Vera Pavlovna's *atelier-phalanstère* achieved a real working existence in the form of the Women's Union.

Founded on April 11 at the height of the Commune, the *Women's Union for the Defense of Paris and Aid to the Wounded* grew rapidly, installing committees that met daily in almost all the *arrondissements* of Paris. It became the Commune's largest and most effective organization. Its provisional council was composed of Dmitrieff and seven women workers; its membership, though varied, was dominated by women in the garment trades: seamstresses, laundresses, dress-makers, drapery makers. In some ways, the Women's Union can be seen as the practical response to many of the questions and problems regarding women's labor that had been the discussion topic at the earliest popular reunions of 1868. And just as the reunion discussions

32 Dmitrieff, letter to Hermann Jung as conduit to Marx on April 24: "In general, the internationalist propagandizing I am doing here, in order to show that all countries, including Germany, find themselves on the eve of the social revolution, is a very pleasing proposition to women." Cited in Yvonne Singer-Lecocq, *Rouge Elisabeth* (Paris: Pascal Galodé, 2011), p. 130.

veered back and forth between far-reaching theoretical goals like the end of private property and more immediate concerns like finding coal or firewood, so the Union envisioned a full reorganization of women's labor and the end of gender-based economic inequality at the same time that, as its full name implies, it was geared toward the immediate combat situation and the need to serve ambulances, to make sandbags for—and to serve on—barricades. "We want work, but in order to keep the product. No more exploiters, no more masters. Work and well-being for all."³³

The Union showed no trace of interest in parliamentary or rights-based demands. In this its members were, like Louise Michel, Paule Minck and other women in the Commune, indifferent to the vote (a major goal in 1848) and to traditional forms of republican politics in general. Participation in public life, in other words, was for them in no way tied to the franchise. Of much greater concern was finding immediate paid labor for women.³⁴ The Union proposed to Frankel and the Labor Commission that they form sewing workshops, free productive associations in each *arrondissement* devoted to clothing the National Guard; the Commission, they advised, should encourage "the growth of genuine and homogenous groupings by presiding over their formation and developing them in the federal spirit, all the time leaving them free and autonomous."³⁵ These producer-owned cooperatives were intended, had there been time, to be taken beyond the city walls, "put in contact with similar associations in France and other countries, in order to facilitate the export and exchange of products."³⁶ Ultimately they were to function like an extension of the Commune itself, as part of an international federation of independent cooperatives.

³³ Elisabeth Dmitrieff, "Appel aux citoyennes de Paris," *Journal Officiel*, April 11, 1871, p. 225.

³⁴ See Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vergès, "'Aux citoyennes': Women, Politics and the Paris Commune of 1871," *History of European Ideas*, 13:6 (1991), pp. 711–32; Carolyn Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2004).

³⁵ Cited in Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune: 1871* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971), p. 266.

³⁶ General Statutes of the Women's Union, cited in Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, p. 86.

The scale of the Commune as an "audacious act of internationalism" can thus be measured not just by the number of Poles or Italians under its flag but by the conduits it enabled of theory and practice across national borders: the *obshina*, unmoored from its Slavophile roots, brought into the present and flourishing in a large European capital in the form of the Commune's *Union des Femmes*. The Commune's working existence that so impressed Marx was in this sense nothing more than a concerted practice of *importation*: of models and ideas, phrases and slogans, from distant lands and from distant times, to be reworked in the feverish atmosphere of the clubs and the Commune. It was a mode of being intensely in the present made possible by mobilizing figures and phrases from the past—first and foremost that of *commune* itself, its affective charge overwhelming any precise semantic content, a powerful mix of pre-capitalist and pre- or extra-national desires, equal part social revolution, local autonomy, and the memory of the insurrectional Commune that had made Paris the capital of revolution in 1792. *Commune*, at that point, was a name that exceeded everything it was supposed to designate. Like the *obshina*, the terms *citoyen*, *universal republic*, and *commune*, though borrowed from the national past, could be distilled through the internationalist aims and culture of the communal laboratory, and put to immediate use dissolving state bureaucracy.

The Universal Republic Versus Republican Universalism

On April 15, the Union of Women's General Assembly met and, "considering that Mme Elisabeth Dmitrieff has worked with a zeal and energy beyond her age," conferred upon her the title of "citizen of Paris, while waiting for the Universal Republic to give her the letters of naturalization necessary to make her a citizen of humanity."³⁷ The Women's Union had come into being with a call to *citoyennes* that began with a reminder to women of who the real enemy was: "Is it the foreigner who has come back to invade France?"

³⁷ Women's Union General Assembly, cited in Braibant, *Elisabeth Dmitrieff*, p. 108.

... No, these enemies, these assassins of the people and of liberty are French!"³⁸ That enemy, the Versaillais, was for its part aware of, and indeed obsessed by, the foreigners in the midst of the Commune.

The image of a Commune made up of Poles, Prussians, and Italians was a regular slur in anti-Communard discourse, in part generated by the recurrent assimilation of the Commune with the International. And, as is usually the case in the counting of immigrants, outsiders, or foreigners, their numbers were vastly inflated. "The Commune's flag," wrote P. de Saint-Victor, "has recruited the mercenaries and marauders of all of Europe."³⁹ The Chevalier d'Alix, whose anti-Communard dictionary I've already cited, defines *étranger* as "that which makes up the majority of the Parisian insurgents. They are counted at 30,000, all nationalities mixed together."⁴⁰ Similarly Hippolyte Taine, in a letter written in May 1871, refers to "100,000 insurgents at present, of which 50,000 are foreigners."⁴¹ At issue, of course, for these observers, is not Paris in its customary role as cosmopolitan center for visitors from all over the world; the problem lay, rather, with exactly what sort of visitors could now be found on its streets. As Marx put it quite vividly: "No longer was Paris the rendez-vous of British landlords, Irish absentees, American ex-slaveholders and shoddy men, Russian ex-serfowners and Wallachian boyards."⁴²

Is this excessive foreign element in Versaillais discourse a symptom or a tactic? Do the Versaillais actually perceive the Communards as foreigners, or are they rhetorically situating the evil outside the national boundaries by transforming the Communards into the familiar trope of the "outside agitator"? Any attempt to answer this question is complicated by the intricacies of conservative paranoia—in general, and at a moment when the International loomed large

38 Dmitrieff, "Appel aux Citoyennes de Paris," *Journal Officiel*, p. 225.

39 P. de Saint-Victor, "L'Orgie rouge," cited in Paul Lidsky, *Les Ecrivains contre la Commune* (Paris: Maspero, 1982), p. 66.

40 Chevalier d'Alix, *Dictionnaire de la Commune et des Communeux*, Paris, May 1871, p. 25.

41 Hippolyte Taine, letter of 20 May, 1871, cited in Lidsky, *Les Ecrivains contre la Commune*, p. 68.

42 Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 67.

in conservative imagination and was regularly accused of playing into the hands of the Prussians. And foreigners like Dmitrieff, Dombrowski, Frankel, and Wroblewski did play a highly visible role in the leadership of the Commune and particularly its military. It is also important to remember the broader context: in 1870 the French nation was less an established entity than it was a work-in-progress. In 1870, for example, only one out of two people in France had mastered the French language, and language is of course a major criterion in determining who is more French or less French than anyone else. Indeed, it was the massacre of the Communards that would serve to inaugurate not just the Third Republic but help to consolidate the French nation itself. "Othering" on the part of the Versaillais, their perception of or need to perceive the Communards as "less French" (and thus easier to kill) was in this sense part of the historical tendency of the dominant classes to exhibit class racism, considering workers as, in fact, foreign to the nation: "At the end of the 19th century and even at the beginning of the 20th, entire sectors of the population, beginning with the peasantry, and then essentially the mass of industrial workers, were excluded by the leading classes of the bourgeoisie and the nobility from the identity of we national citizens."⁴³

The Versaillais' attribution of occult foreign power to the International was made easier by the way in which that organization could be inserted into the already existing mythology surrounding another internationalist organization, the Free Masons—an organization that also strongly supported the Commune. Early gestures on the part of Communards and future Communards toward internationalism did in fact come for the most part from figures like Frankel who were members of the International. In February 1871, when it was decided to hang black flags and stay indoors when the Prussians entered Paris, Frankel proposed mixing red flags with the black, on which would be inscribed the names of German Internationals like Liebreich and Jacobi, all under the banner of the Universal Republic. On the eve of the war, Eugène Pottier, author of the *Internationale*, had just founded a syndicate of 500 members of decorative artists that

43 Norbert Elias, *La Société des individus* (Paris: Fayard, 1991), p. 269.

adhered to the International, signing the manifesto of the Parisian International, along with brothers from Germany and Spain, against, as Pottier called it in a poem, "the cellular regime of nationality."⁴⁴ When war was declared against Prussia in July 1870 members of the International had in fact, for the first time in a socialist milieu, adopted an anti-chauvinist position, addressing a message to workers everywhere: "Once more under the pretext of European equilibrium and national honor, the peace of the world is threatened by political ambitions; French, German and Spanish workers, we speak in one voice reproaching the war ... a war that is in the eyes of workers a criminal absurdity."⁴⁵ Members of the International organized many of the initial meetings of the clubs and reunions, where internationalism of a pronounced anti-colonialist flavor was frequently on the agenda for discussion. Isak Dinesen's father Wilhelm, a sympathetic observer in Paris in the spring of 1871, who reports finding himself as a foreigner exceedingly well and courteously treated, recounts a speech from one such meeting: "We complain today of being invaded and pillaged by Prussians, and we're right ... but we shouldn't forget that what is being done against us we did to others. We went into Crimea, China, Rome, Mexico, and we fought with people who asked for nothing but to live in peace with us."⁴⁶ An almost total absence of national chauvinism characterized discussions in the clubs. Colonial repressions were particularly condemned. Tolain, a member of the International and a jewelry worker, regularly addressed the question of Algeria: "The French have brought to this country not civilization but misery and servitude." Another speaker: "Africa will flourish only when it administers itself."⁴⁷ The socialism sanctioned by speakers had nothing national about it; there could be no confusing it with bourgeois parliamentarianism: "Socialism is the redemption of all

44 Eugène Pottier, "La Guerre," in *Chants révolutionnaires* (Paris: Comité Pottier, 1908), p. 35.

45 Manifesto of the Parisian Section of the International, published in *Le Reveil*, July 12, 1870.

46 Wilhelm Dinesen, *Paris sous la Commune*, trans. Denise Bernard-Folliot (Paris: Editions Michel de Maule, 2003), p. 106.

47 Tolain and Paulet, cited in Dalotel et al., *Aux origines de la Commune*, p. 253.

peoples, the salvation for all."⁴⁸ The war between France and Prussia was viewed by Eugène Varlin, for example, as "a ruinous game between princes."⁴⁹

For Benoît Malon, the Commune figured less as an event in French national history than as part of a vast, worldwide tableau that includes the Indian revolt against British capitalism, the North American freeing of the slaves, revolts in Ireland, Hungary, Poland, and the rise of liberal opinion in Russia signaling the glimmer of freedom for the serfs. The ferocity of the Commune's repression was, by the same token, in his view, a lesson the army had learned while abroad:

French military leaders have for forty years developed in French soldiers the ferocity needed to accomplish what the peoples' executioners call the reestablishment of order, which destines the beautiful and unhappy Arab race to the most repellent persecution and the most odious extermination. In fact, when they have been burning down Algerian villages for years, and massacring tribes, soldiers are apt to bloody the streets of our cities ... All the Versaillais generals went to that school.⁵⁰

Communards deported to New Caledonia were to experience directly the imperial context evoked by Malon; it was only then and there that many of them came to realize that Thiers and the Versaillais had in fact been fighting on two fronts in the spring of 1871: the Commune in the capital (and, briefly, in a few other French cities), and the extensive Kabylie uprising in eastern Algeria. It was in part because of the Algerian insurrection and in part because North Africa was considered too close for comfort that deported Communards were sent to New Caledonia, as far away as possible, rather than to Algeria as the deported insurgents of 1848 had been. In the memoir he wrote of his years of incarceration in New Caledonia, Communard Jean

48 Vertut, October 1869, cited in Dalotel et al., *Aux origines de la Commune*, p. 254.

49 Eugène Varlin, *Pratique militante et écrits d'un ouvrier communard* (Paris: Maspero, 1977), p. 127.

50 Benoît Malon, *La Troisième Defaite du prolétariat français* (Neuchâtel: G. Guillaume Fils, 1871), pp. 485-6.

Allemane recalls the arrival one evening of a convoy of Algerian prisoners: "The night approached; somber and silent, the defeated of Algeria and the defeated of the Commune sat side by side, thinking of those they loved, of the unraveling of their existence and the destruction of their dream of liberty."⁵¹

The Commune was not, as Engels was later to claim, synonymous with the International. But a thick strand of internationalism runs through the insurrection, colors the culture that preceded it and continues in the experience of the survivors, who variously lived through the Kanuck rebellion in New Caledonia, or struggled to survive in Geneva, Lausanne, London, or, like Eugène Pottier, in more unlikely exiles in Boston, Massachusetts, and New York City. "The thousands of exiles that the fall of the Commune dispersed across all the points of the civilized world," wrote one such exile in 1882, "were so many rings destined to link France to the great international socialist movement."⁵² The extent to which the forces of reaction after the Commune saw the International as synonymous with the Commune can be measured by the tenacity with which they sought to outlaw the organization and hunt down and extradite surviving Communards. As Jules Favre proclaimed in June 1871: "Like a vast Freemasonry, their society [the International] embraces all of Europe ... to hate them ... punish them is not enough. One must seek out the germ and destroy it."⁵³ The common assumption that what ruined the First International was the conflict between Marxists and anarchists is, in McClellan's opinion, only partly true: the real cause of the death of the International was the reaction that followed the Commune. This was nothing short of a continent-wide counter-revolution, one that extended at least into the 1880s and 1890s. Throughout Europe nations joined in colonial competition—an

enterprise crucial to the continuing consolidation of the "cellular regime of nationality." And yet as early as the amnesty, texts like the following one, by a "republican socialist," can be found attempting to harness the memory of the Commune, and even the idea of the Universal Republic, to the plow of the civilizing mission:

Only the colonies can save French genius ... If monarchists want to conquer so as to extinguish in the virgin, uncivilized races any aspiration to liberty ... we socialists also want colonies in order to save the races from the tyranny and Jesuitism in which they have been immersed ... Instead of catechism we will give them the alphabet of the rights of man. It is a grave task incumbent upon us to spread the republic across the earth. If we continue the disastrous abandonment of the colonies, we will destroy the first step of the ladder that leads to the Universal Republic. The Commune with its 50,000 deaths saved the Republic: Tonkin, Madagascar, Tunisia, Algeria made it larger ... France escorts a treasure across the world: the Republic.⁵⁴

Nothing could be further from the Universal Republic envisioned as a "voluntary association of all local initiative,"⁵⁵ "a free union of autonomous collectives," or a "confederation of free peoples" (Reclus) than the Republican universalism that was to triumph. The political development of a figure like Communard and geographer Elisée Reclus tracks the distance separating the Universal Republic from republican universalism. Reclus met Malon in June of 1868 and joined his Batignolles chapter of the International at that point. During the Franco-Prussian War he saw himself as working to consolidate the newly established Third Republic and thereby create an atmosphere conducive to the development of the universal social republic. He appeared then to be thinking almost modularly—of the republic as a transportable form a bit like the way Benedict Anderson

51 Jean Allemane, *Mémoires d'un communard* (Paris: Maspero, 1981), pp. 218–19.

52 M. Melliet, in *La Revue blanche*, 1871: *Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 119.

53 Jules Favre, June 6, 1871, cited in McClellan, *Revolutionary Exiles*, p. 180. The text of Favre's circular is reproduced in Georges Bourgin, "La lutte du gouvernement français contre la première Internationale," *International Review for Social History*, 4 (1939), pp. 50–56.

54 Louis Riel, "Socialisme et colonies" (1886), cited in Philippe Venault, ed., *Souvenirs amers: mémoires de François Camille Cron (1836–1902), déporté de la Commune en Nouvelle Calédonie* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1989), p. 349.

55 *Déclaration au peuple français*, April 19, 1871, in Stewart Edwards, ed., *The Communards of Paris, 1871* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 83.

has described the nation-form in *Imagined Communities*. We might describe his political goal during the war as the defense not so much of France, Frenchness, or the French soil but of the republican form.

But the experience of the Commune brought a striking change in Reclus's politics that, perhaps not surprisingly, led to a violent rejection of the Third Republic he had initially struggled to defend. The republic appeared to him while in exile and for the rest of his life as purely opportunistic, a hopeless mirage, an assembly made up of "Messieurs the gunmen."⁵⁶ For Reclus, who would later refer to himself as an anarchist communist, all this resulted in a substantial renunciation of French nationalism and a dis-identification from states generally, as well as a concerted attempt to formulate a theory that would somehow get around the necessity of working through existing states even if it be in order to destroy them. Whereas a certain nationalism or national identification had been conceivable to him in the 1860s as a force of liberation, after the Commune he viewed national identification as nothing more than an artificial fiction used to rally people against their neighbors: a fiction of service to kings and to capital only. His deep anti-militarism, in other words, did not in any way conflict with his thirst for war against the state. Anarchist Jean Grave once remarked that Reclus held a kind of hatred for the people of Paris, and it is striking that having been granted amnesty in 1879, he did not return to France from Switzerland until 1890, and even then did not stay for very long. "I love Paris very much," he wrote in 1882, "and it is precisely because I love it so much that I would like to find myself there again in conditions similar to those which I have known [in the early days of the Commune]."⁵⁷

Many other examples could be marshaled to show that a horror of the bourgeois, opportunistic republic marked the generation of survivors of the Commune. This is in fact what Lucien Descaves, the novelist who befriended Gustave Lefrançais and many others after

⁵⁶ Elisée Reclus, letter to Mme Elie Reclus, June 1872, in *Correspondances*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Schleicher, 1914), p. 109.

⁵⁷ Elisée Reclus, letter to Richard Heath, February 1882, in *Correspondances*, vol. 2, p. 242. See Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1988), for the best account of Reclus's intellectual and political trajectory.

they returned from exile or deportation, often alone and invariably poor, was to document in the prefaces he wrote to their works. It was from their stories that he would fashion his 1913 novel, *Philémon, vieux de la vieille*. The Universal Republic envisioned and to a certain extent lived during the Commune was not only very different from the Republic that came to be, it was conceived in opposition to the French Republic timidly birthed in 1870, and even more to the one that was stabilized on the dead bodies of the Communards. For it was the massacre of the Commune—the extraordinary attempt to eliminate, one by one and en bloc, one's class enemy—that in fact founded the Third Republic. Today, there is a certain fashionability, desperate in nature, in trying to resurrect the Commune and insert it into the national republican history by pointing to some of its social accomplishments—the *crèches*, for example, or the instituting of free, secular, mandatory public education—accomplishments later picked up and embraced in some form by the Third Republic, as a bid for integrating ("saving") the Commune for the national history and the national fiction. The Commune is thus assimilated into either a patriotic movement or a struggle for republican freedoms, and can then be seen as, in effect, "saving" the Republic. The attempt to reintegrate the event into national history has been aided by the unmooring of the Commune after 1989 from the starring role it played in the long successive chain of events, moving magically from one point to the next, that makes up official state-communist historiography. Freed from its role in that historiography, it has become available once more to play a part in the liberal Republican national story.

But surely it belongs to neither fiction exactly and instead to some other kind of history—one that Arlette Farge, in another context, has described as "untimely, ironic, irregular, disruptive."⁵⁸ It is important to recall the vehemence with which many Commune survivors combated the view that they had acted to "save the Republic." "The republic of our dreams was surely not the one we have. We

⁵⁸ Arlette Farge, cited in Eric Fournier, *La Commune n'est pas morte* (Paris: Libertalia, 1913), p. 142. Fournier's book offers a valuable study of the way the Commune's memory has been put to use in France.

wanted it democratic, social and universal and not plutocratic.”⁵⁹ As for Lefrançais, he is characteristically blunt: “The proletariat will never be truly emancipated unless it gets rid of the Republic—the last form, and not the least malevolent—of authoritarian governments.”⁶⁰

2. Communal Luxury

We will work cooperatively toward our regeneration, the birth of communal luxury, future splendors and the Universal Republic.

Federation of Artists Manifesto, April 1871

Alived experience of “equality in action,” the Commune was primarily a set of dismantling acts directed at the state bureaucracy and performed by ordinary men and women. Many of these dismantling acts were focused, not surprisingly, on that central bureaucracy: the schools. At the same time, artists and art workers undertook the liberation of artistic production from its control by the state. In this chapter I will consider the ideas that circulated in the Commune about education and art and the actions Communards performed in these two realms. I first consider their call for a “polytechnic” or “integral” education. Long a part of a wider working-class set of demands, the idea of an “integral” education that would overcome the division between head and hand lived on after the Commune and would have a forceful resurgence, as we will see, in

⁵⁹ Grousset, in *La Revue blanche*, 1871: *Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 123.

⁶⁰ Lefrançais, in *La Revue blanche*, 1871: *Enquête sur la Commune*, p. 105.