

Moments of Madness¹

Aristide R. Zolberg

I.

If politics is "the art of the possible," what are we to make of moments when human beings living in modern societies believe that "all is possible"? We know with assurance that such moments occur, if only because those who experience them are acutely conscious of their unusual state. Speaking with tongues, they urgently record their most intimate feelings. Furthermore, they are often aware of affinities across time and space with others in similar circumstances. Are they moments when politics bursts its bounds to invade all of life, or on the contrary, are they moments when political animals somehow transcend their fate? So much in the conventional paraphernalia of political science is founded on axiomatic instrumentalism that we do not know what to make of events in which the wall between the instrumental and the expressive collapses. Is this politics or prophecy? Is this politics or poetry?

We might more comfortably cast these pentecosts beyond the pale of our scholarly concerns were it not for their ineluctable reality and historical significance. Since we cannot ignore them, we tend to segregate them from our main concern, the universe of "normal" political events. As occasional pathologists, we make room in our discipline for the study of revolutions, and sometimes even include near- or quasi revolutions; more recently, taking our cue from sociology, we have also begun to study "collective behavior" more generally. It is possible, however, that this prejudgment as to what is normal and what is not hampers our understanding of politics, and that the meaning of moments when "all is possible" can be better apprehended if we seek instead to share the experience of participants in order to understand the place of these moments in the political life of a modern society.

*In addition to the sources cited below, I would like to acknowledge my debt to Vera Zolberg, Annie Kriegel, Nathan Leites, Clifford Geertz, Cherry Turkle, and the students in my seminar on "Politics and the Contemporary Arts" at the University of Chicago for their stimulating responses to the ideas contained in this paper. I have also benefited from the unpublished paper by Victor Turner, "Passages, Margins and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas," and generally from the works of Harold Rosenberg. An earlier version of the essay was presented at the September 1971, meetings of the American Political Science Association in Chicago. I am grateful to Carey McWilliams, panel chairman, for his encouragement. The subsequent comments of Lloyd Fallers, Roger Masters, Mark Kesselman, and Sidney Verba prompted several revisions.

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For this purpose, the most interesting case is France. In the Paris of May 1968, innumerable commentators, writing to celebrate or to deplore proffered a vast range of mutually exclusive explanations and predictions. But for all of them, the sensibility of May triggered off a remembrance of things past. By way of Raymond Aron, himself in touch with Tocqueville, readers of *Le Figaro* remembered February 1848; by way of Henri Lefebvre, French students remembered the Proclamation of the Commune in March 1871, as did those who read Edgar Morin in *Le Monde*; French workers listened to elder militants who spoke of the occupation of factories in June 1936; and most adults, whether or not they had been in the Resistance, relived August 1944, the liberation of Paris.

These connections across one hundred and twenty years establish a tangible set available for analysis. Although other modern societies have experienced moments of political enthusiasm when "all is possible," in France alone have these moments been so recurrently visible at the very center of society, and hence become so embedded in the political consciousness transmitted by the national culture. That is indeed what makes the French case such an inviting starting-point. Paradoxically, the considerations that lead to the selection of France may reflect such a unique constellation of factors as to make France no "case" at all. Unique or not, the French experience provides an opportunity to penetrate somewhat more easily the inherent strangeness of a political phenomenon shared to a greater or lesser extent by all modern societies.

II.

Edgar Morin and Raymond Aron, among the first to record and to analyze May 68, remain the most valuable commentators because they emerge brilliantly at opposite ends of the range of interpretations. Morin hailed the student uprising as the dawn of an age; Aron shivered in the dusk of civilization. That they were both immensely wrong matters little for our present purpose. What is more remarkable is that, when one reads between negatively and positively loaded lines, their perceptive observations of the spirit of May are strikingly similar. Although Aron wrote *La Révolution Introuvable* against Morin's *La Brèche*, Morin had already stated that it was a "quasi or peri-revolution."¹ Where Morin was carried away by "the great festival of youthful solidarity," the "permanent game" which was also a

1. Raymond Aron, *La Révolution Introuvable. Réflexions sur la Révolution de Mai* (Paris: Fayard, 1968), especially pp. 14, 31, 145; Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort, and Jean-Marc Coudray, *Mai 1968: la Brèche. Premières réflexions sur les événements* (Paris: Fayard, 1968), especially pp. 20-33. Throughout this paper, all translations from the original French are my own.

serious strategy, in which revolutionary incantations achieved a "genuine socialization," Aron, mixing compassion with contempt, perceived "youthful brotherhood in a semi-delinquent community," a moment in which "feelings were more important than words," a "psychodrama" which might have become "drama," a "tragi-comedy" which might have become "tragedy." Aron's forthright statement of his intention to "demystify" and "desacralize" perhaps constitutes the best confirmation of Morin's identification of the moment as strange and extraordinary. Both captured the exaltation; but the "ecstasy" of the one was "delirium" for the other.

"All is Possible!"—expressed in pamphlets, speeches, posters, or be-ins: ecstasy or delirium? Rather than arbitrate let us merely note that in this as in other moments, both words—or others like them—are used for the same phenomenon and that it is usually a matter of which side the observer is on. And rather than dwell on May 68, let us rapidly explore the earlier moments which it evoked. The nearest one, for Frenchmen, was the liberation of Paris. In that case, for understandable reasons, the record is one-sided. When Leclerc's men march through the streets after several days of uprising, Adrien Dansette records a moment of "communion."² Liberated Parisians and victorious warriors "live a dream more beautiful than dreams, a dream which they have not imagined." He cites the words of a diarist: "An eruption of volcanic happiness," of "absolute magic." To demonstrate that "the rhythms, habits, modes of thought and of feeling of daily life are engulfed in the intoxication of the present moment," Dansette cites an anecdote which demonstrates that "amidst the general exaltation, money is no longer a thing of value." De Gaulle expressed the same sentiments in his first radio address: "And why should we hide our emotion? And why should we hide what grips us? . . . Each of the moments we are living transcends our own lives, our poor lives."³

The atmosphere of the streets was congruent with the sensibility of Parisian intellectuals and of the *Résistance* generation more generally. According to Simone de Beauvoir, fear returned on the morrow of the liberation as German missiles fell on Paris and as the war continued,

But it was rapidly swept away by joy. Day and night with our friends, talking, drinking, strolling, laughing, we celebrated our liberation. And all those who celebrated it as we did, nearby or far away, became our friends. What an orgy of brotherhood! The darkness which had imprisoned France was bursting.⁴

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This victory erased our old defeats, it was our own and the future it

2. Adrien Dansette, *Histoire de la Libération de Paris* (Paris: Fayard, 1946), p. 365.

3. Quoted in Dansette, *ibid.*, p. 403.

4. Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force des Choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 13.

opened belonged to us. Those in power, they were members of the Resistance, men whom, more or less directly, we knew. Among those in charge of the press and of the radio, we counted numerous friends. Politics had become a family affair, and we intended to make it our business. "Politics is no longer dissociated from individuals," Camus wrote in *Combat* at the beginning of September. "It is a direct speech by man to other men." To speak to men, that was our role, for us writers.⁵

The moment of immense joy, when daily cares are transcended, when emotions are freely expressed, when the spirit moves men to talk and to write, when the carefully erected walls which compartmentalize society collapse, is also a moment of political harmony. As Simone de Beauvoir records it:

In this climate, all oppositions became shadowy. That Camus was hostile to the Communists, that was a subjective trait of little importance since, struggling to bring about the implementation of the C.N.R. [National Council of the Resistance] charter, his newspaper defended the same positions as they did. Sartre, albeit sympathizing with the Communist party, nevertheless approved *Combat's* position, so much so that he even once wrote its editorial. Gaullists, Communists, Catholics, Marxists, fraternized. A common thought was expressed in all the papers. Sartre granted an interview to *Carrefour*. Mauriac was writing in *Les Lettres Françaises*. We all intoned in chorus the song celebrating tomorrows.⁶

That the moment was fugitive—her next paragraph begins, "Soon, *Les Lettres Françaises* fell in to sectarianism . . ."—should not blind us to its radiance. Indeed, we must rid ourselves temporarily of our compulsive concerns with causes and consequences to empathize properly with the phenomenon under consideration which is itself characterized by a suspension of these concerns. We must do so in approaching the Popular Front, eight years before the liberation of Paris, without denying that France was profoundly divided at the time, that the Popular Front may have been a Comintern trap, and that even sympathetic historians have since pointed to grave mistakes in the Blum government's social and economic policies. Nevertheless, concluding their balanced appraisal of its achievements, L. Bodin and J. Touchard can state with assurance that

The balance sheet of the Popular Front cannot be based only on the number of laws voted or of decrees signed; the essential thing appears to be of another order. As there was a spirit of 1848, so

5. Ibid., p. 14.

6. Ibid., p. 18.

there was a spirit of 1936, which infused life into a whole ritual of rallies and parades, of slogans and songs, of gestures and flags.⁷

And they end the book with:

The Popular Front was something other than a mere electoral coalition, and it is undoubtedly difficult to bring it back to life, in our own day, otherwise than in a picture book.⁸

The keynote of the Popular Front was a sentiment of liberation: political, economic, and social—of minds and bodies. This was especially visible among the workers who, even as Léon Blum formed his government, launched an immense wave of sit-in strikes: “A few million workers were affected by the most spectacular movement in French social history,”⁹ replicated after the publication of Bodin and Touchard’s book in 1968. Although much was written at the time on the causes of this movement (A Trotskyite plot? A Stalinist stab-in-the-back? Bourgeois provocation?), observers from different sides agree on its spirit. Simone Weil, the mystical martyr of French labor, found “joy” in the factories where she herself had worked a few months earlier. She noted that the workers were not merely concerned with grievances:

After having always bowed, suffered everything, taken it all in silence for months and years, it is a matter of finally having the guts to stand up. To stand upright. To take one’s turn to speak. To feel like men, for a few days.¹⁰

The good-hearted happiness in the factories is confirmed by Bertrand de Jouvenel:

The beginnings of all revolutions demonstrate that Jean-Jacques Rousseau was right. Nothing puts man in a better mood than to escape the boredom of his routine and the laziness of his obligations. He laughs, he walks around, and you think that he is naturally good.

For three days I went from factory to factory. . . . I didn’t see a single case of brutality . . . of damage to a single machine. The “sit-down strike” is a protracted picnic.

An effort must be made to remember that we are witnessing a battle. Who is the enemy? Where is the enemy?

. . . Amidst this camp life, a sort of warmth arises, a human contact which is never useless between the one who commands and

7. L. Bodin and J. Touchard, *Front Populaire, 1936* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1961; “Kiosque”), p. 164.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

10. Quoted in Bodin and Touchard, *ibid.*, p. 112.

those who carry out his orders. But the boss in most cases stayed home.¹¹

Reviewing the evidence, Bodin and Touchard stress that the spirit of 1936 was not limited to the workers:

Brotherhood, solidarity, hope, the great illusion of happiness and of peace: all these feelings experienced with confused intensity by the hundreds of thousands men and women who brought to power the Popular Front are to be found in the literature—and also in the films—of 1936.¹²

Bodin and Touchard connected 1936 with 1848. But the Commune, whose memory was celebrated in the first great manifestation of the Popular Front on May 24, 1936, and whose hundredth anniversary was not celebrated in the appropriate spirit in 1971 perhaps because that had already been done three years earlier, stands between those two dates. To what extent did Henri Lefèbvre transform the Paris of 1871 into a cause of the Paris of May '68? A parenthetical question, of some interest here because Lefèbvre's critique of daily life in advanced industrial societies and his advocacy of the "festival" as an appropriate revolutionary remedy were much better known in France than the writings of Marcuse.¹³ He undoubtedly influenced the "situationists" (the nearest French thing to Yippies or to Kabouters) when he taught at Strasbourg, and Cohn-Bendit in Nanterre, providing a logic for the activities of cultural revolutionaries' manipulating the prank as a terrorist weapon. In any case, *La Proclamation de la Commune*, presented as a "completion of Marx," is a critical book for our purpose.¹⁴

Without mincing words, Lefèbvre states that "the question of style dominates all others" in the historiography of the event and asserts that "the style particular to the Commune was that of the Festival." He writes,

The Paris Commune? It was first of all an immense, a grandiose festival, a festival which the people of Paris offered to themselves and offered to the world. Festival of spring in the City, festival of the disinherited and of the proletarians, revolutionary festival and festival of the Revolution, total festival, the greatest of modern times, it unfolds first in magnificence and joy.¹⁵

The "style" is confirmed by Jacques Rougerie, a much less ideologically committed historian, who gives us, among other eyewitnesses to the

11. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 167-68.

13. See especially *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968, "Idées").

14. Henri Lefèbvre, *La Proclamation de la Commune. 26 mars 1871* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 11.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

exaltation of Paris in the days after the municipal election of March 26, Jules Vallès:

What a day! The warm and clear sun which gilds the maws of cannons, the scent of flowers, the flutter of flags, the murmur of this revolution which flows by, tranquil and beautiful as a blue river, the light tremors, the lights, the brass bands, the bronze glimmers, the explosions of hope, the perfume of honor, there is enough to intoxicate with pride and joy the victorious army of republicans. . . . Embrace me, comrade, who shares my grey hair! And you, little one, playing marbles behind the barricade, come to me as well! March 18 saved you, urchin! You might have grown up like us, in the fog, trampled in mud, rolled in blood, died of shame, suffered the unmentionable pain of those without honor! It's over! . . . Child of the desperate, you shall be a free man! I have my money's worth of happiness. . . . It seems to be no longer mine, this heart torn by so many ugly wounds, and it seems that the very soul of the crowd now fills and expands my chest. Oh! If only death could get me, if only a bullet could kill me in this radiance of resurrection.¹⁶

Reviewing the overall evidence concerning the character of the Commune, Rougerie acknowledges that participants honored violence against enemies as a fundamental virtue but adds, "I must immediately counterpose—was it a virtue?—*good nature*." He points out that these insurgents "who spoke such a violently terrorist language were the least terrifying men in the world, and this undoubtedly cost the Commune a great deal. Very few went from their frightening words to acts (except in the exceptional circumstances of the Bloody Week). The guillotine was burned; and all together fewer than one hundred hostages were massacred. He concludes, "The Commune, it was first of all the festival, not the barbaric and criminal orgy so comfortably described by the 'witnesses' on the Versailles side."¹⁷

Although he criticizes Lefèvre for the use to which he put his findings, Rougerie credits him for "restituting to the men of '71 this genuine an-archizing virtue which was theirs, which was until now poorly perceived (or else knowingly hidden), as was the case yesterday for the *sans-culottes*."¹⁸ His own analysis of original data and documents demonstrates that, before its degeneration into sectarian quarrels, the Commune was genuinely united on a "Declaration to the French People" (April 19) and that this constituted "a *program*, reasonably constructed and ultimately coherent even if it does not resolve all questions after so many

16. Quoted from *Le Cri du Peuple*, March 29, 1871, in Jacques Rougerie, *Paris Libre 1871* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971, "Politique,") pp. 146-47.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

ambiguities and contradictions, in which one has a premonition that the genuine revolution will be 'the antithesis of the State.' " Even Marx, he points out, agreed.¹⁹ Furthermore, analyzing the Commune's policies, Rougerie concludes that its ideology was an original one, not to be seen through the eyes of sectarians who later fought for possession of the Internationale. The Commune was Socialist, of a Socialism "which still resembles in many traits the experience attempted in 1848. It was not merely a matter of giving work to those who were unemployed, even if that was an urgent task. Everything rests on the cooperative and free association of workers." These were not the "degraded and petty businessmen's cooperatives" of the Second Empire, but growing cooperatives which would irresistibly, they thought, take over the administration of things. That socialism was to be accomplished "*Thanks to the Commune*," which was not a weak non-state, but "the absolute right for the communal group to create its political organ as a means to bring about the liberation of labor."²⁰

In the light of independent confirmation by Rougerie of the overall character of the Commune, some of Lefèbvre's conclusions are not so farfetched. He writes, among other things:

1. The insurrection of March 18 and the great days of the Commune that followed constituted an unlimited opening toward the future and the possible, without care for the obstacles and the impossibilities which barred the way. A fundamental spontaneity . . . sets aside secular layers of sediment: the State, bureaucracy, institutions, dead culture. . . . In this movement prompted by the negative, and therefore creative, elements of existing society—the proletariat—, social action wills itself and makes itself free, disengaged of constraints. It transforms itself in one leap into a community, a communion in whose midst work, joy, pleasure, the achievement of needs—and first of all social needs and the need for sociability—will never be separated. In the wake of economic 'progress,' man will free himself of economics. Politics and political society will disappear by merging into civil society. The political function, as a specialized function, will no longer exist. Daily life will be transformed into a perpetual festival. The daily struggle for bread and work will no longer make sense.²¹

Therefore, Lefèbvre concludes, the Marxist thesis of the end of human prehistory was no mere utopia. "For a few days, this utopia, this so-called myth, was actualized and entered into life."²²

19. Ibid., p. 157.

20. Ibid., pp. 186-87.

21. Lefèbvre, *La Proclamation*, op. cit., p. 389.

22. Ibid., p. 390.

III.

If, as Lefebvre insists repeatedly, the Commune was the greatest festival "of the century and of modern times," what are we to make of the February Revolution of 1848? The ambiguity of the moment is captured in all the writings surrounding that event. It is not merely that men wrote for or against, as with all other revolutions, but rather that the most brilliant contemporary analysts were both for and against. This fundamental ambivalence has persisted down to the present as in the work of the late Georges Duveau who writes within a few pages of "the lyrical illusion" and of "the miracle of 48."²³ Duveau, like all others, is a prisoner of history and experiences the greatest difficulty in perceiving February 1848 without being overwhelmed by its sequels; nevertheless, he does conclude that although there was some initial violence, "in spite of all frictions, one experiences on the morrow of the proclamation of the republic, an extraordinary impression of freedom, of happiness, of fulfillment."²⁴

Among the many talented writers who personally lived the Paris of February, Flaubert and Tocqueville are unsurpassed witnesses because, both having reached a negative evaluation of what was a central event in their lives, they struggled relentlessly to record its truth. Although the statesman was as antiromantic as the novelist, and although each wielded irony and sarcasm as the weapons of reason, each provides us with a glimpse of the irresistible exaltation of the moment.

Flaubert traveled to Paris in order to participate in the demonstrations announced by the opposition newspapers and was eventually drafted into the Second Republic's National Guard. In *L'Education Sentimentale* (published in 1869) the revolution erupts as Frédéric Moreau, the provincial bourgeois youth "subject to all weaknesses,"²⁵ "in order to better violate in his soul Mme Arnoux," his elusive romantic love, brings a fancy prostitute "to lodgings prepared for the other."²⁶ The revolution begins as he possesses her. Then, suddenly awakened by the sound of shots, Frédéric wanders through a long chapter in which his personal life and history mingle. When are we seeing through Frédéric's naive eyes, when through the bitter wisdom of the novelist? No matter, for the time being.

Paris is a torrent of words: "Men possessed by a frenzied eloquence harangued the crowd on street corners."²⁷ Flaubert repeats this observation

23. Georges Duveau, *1848* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965; "Idées"), p. 61 and p. 69.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

25. Gustave Flaubert, *L'Education Sentimentale* (Paris: Editions Garnier Freres, 1964), p. 300.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

throughout, often giving us glimpses of what the torrent contains. It is a sometimes incoherent amalgam of possible and impossible aspirations to change the world. Quite independently of Marx and, as we shall see, of Tocqueville, Flaubert points to the theatrical quality of it all:

Frédéric, caught between two deep masses, did not move, indeed fascinated and having a marvelous time. The falling wounded, the stretched out dead, did not look like real wounded, like real dead. He felt as if he were watching a spectacle.²⁸

What an exalting spectacle it is! Showing his awareness of how close it comes to horror by interspersing his narrative with pejorative words and images, Flaubert nevertheless records the joy, the playfulness, and the harmony of the crowd. In the palace, after the crowd throws the throne out the window, "a frenzied joy burst out, as if, instead of the throne, a future and unlimited happiness had appeared. . . ."²⁹ It is a time for games: "Since they were victorious, shouldn't they have a good time?"³⁰ The contents of the palace become toys. Improvising like children, rather than following a script like actors, the people play "dress up" in a way that verges on obscenity. Outside, Frédéric (who is taken in by the spirit of the crowd) and Hussonet (who is not) meet Dussardier, a genuine revolutionary. "Ah! What happiness, my poor old buddies!" The People is triumphant! Workers and bourgeois are embracing! Ah! If you knew what I've seen! What wonderful people! How beautiful!"³¹

Dussardier will be wounded while repressing the popular insurrection of June; while recovering, he is tortured by the idea that he fought against justice; and he will be killed resisting the coup d'état. By then, Frédéric, absorbed in his sentimental pursuits, will have become indifferent to politics. But in February, Frédéric was caught up in "the magnetism of the enthusiastic crowd. He inhaled voluptuously the thundery air, full of the scent of powder; and yet he shivered in an exhalation of immense love, of supreme and universal tenderness, as if the heart of all of mankind beat in his chest."³² Has Flaubert suspended ironic disbelief? Perhaps, as when he describes the festive atmosphere of the city. Everyone is in the streets. Like Saul Bellow observing turned-on New York through Mr. Sammler's one good eye, Flaubert takes change in dress as an indication of departure from ordinary times. In the Paris of 1848, "negligence of dress attenuated differences of social ranks." And he goes on: "Hatreds were hidden, hopes were displayed, the crowd was full of softness. The pride of a conquered right

28. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 292-93.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 294.

burst out on faces. There was gaiety as in a carnival; it looked like a bivouac. Nothing was as much fun as the way Paris looked in the first days."³³

If Flaubert ever departs from irony, it is not for long. Joy fostered political unity. It is not only Frédéric, caught up by the moment of "universal madness,"³⁴ who joins the Republic, but everyone else as well. First of all, Frédéric's mistress, the prostitute. But Flaubert immediately adds that she was merely doing "as Monsignor the Archbishop had already done, and as were to do with marvelously hurried zeal the Magistracy, the Council of State, the Institute, the Marshals of France, Changarnier, M. de Falloux, all the Bonapartists, all the legitimists, and a considerable number of Orleanists."³⁵ Among them was Alexis de Tocqueville.

As a member of the constitutional opposition under the July Monarchy, Tocqueville had warned his friends against actions that might lead to a revolution they might not be able to control. Was the revolution which did occur a mere parody, as for Marx? Tocqueville, in his *Souvenirs*, is much less one-sided: "Our French, especially in Paris, easily mix memories of literature and of theater into their most serious demonstrations."³⁶ Thus, the *spectacle* aspect is not fortuitous; it is not merely a phenomenon in the eye of the beholder, it is an aspect of action; art becomes a determinant of political life. This process, Tocqueville continues, "often lends support to the belief that the sentiments they are displaying are false, while they are in reality merely awkwardly adorned." In 1848, "the imitation was so visible that the terrifying originality of the events was hidden by it."³⁷

Tocqueville wanders through Paris the day after Flaubert's Frédéric. The monarchy has fallen. The city is peaceful as if "on a Sunday morning."³⁸ He meets some soldiers strolling about without arms. Writing from hindsight in the winter of 1850-51, he observes: "The defeat which these men had just experienced had left in their soul a very vivid and very lasting impression of shame and of anger; we've seen that since. But nothing of it showed at the time; among these youths all other feelings seemed to be absorbed by the pleasure of finding themselves free. They walked without care, stepping lightly."³⁹ The soldiers were going home. But the streets must not have remained empty all day because, continuing his walk throughout the afternoon, Tocqueville says he must record two dominant impressions: First, "the uniquely and exclusively popular character of the revolution which had

33. Ibid., p. 295.

34. Ibid., p. 300.

35. Ibid., p. 294.

36. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Souvenirs d'Alexis de Tocqueville* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942; "Mémoires du Passé pour servir au temps présent"), p. 63.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., p. 78.

39. Ibid.

just occurred," and specifies that he means that the revolution "gave overwhelming power to the people properly speaking, that is to say, to the classes that work with their hands, over all others."⁴⁰ We get a sense of the *visibility* of their presence in Paris for the first time. This gives a concrete specificity to Tocqueville's second impression which is "the paucity of passionate hatred, and even, to tell the truth, of vivid passions of any sort displayed in this first moment by the lower people who had suddenly become the masters of Paris."⁴¹ Peace and harmony were very prevalent; Tocqueville notes the absence of disorder in spite of (or because of?) the invisibility of the police. And he records an impression of unity:

It was for the first time in sixty years that priests, the old aristocracy, and the people were meeting in a common sentiment, a sentiment of grievance, in truth, and not of affection; but that is already a great deal where common hatreds almost always provide the foundation of friendships. The genuine and only losers of the day were the bourgeois, but even those had little to fear.⁴²

Remember Rougerie's contrast between the violent language of the *Communeux* and their good-natured behavior? Tocqueville notes that the languor of the people was in contrast

to the bombastic energy of the language and the terrifying memories which the language brought to life. The truth is that never had a greater change in the government, much more, in the condition of a nation, been the work of citizens possessed of so little emotion.⁴³

Historical works and especially plays had made the Terror fashionable; "the names and examples of illustrious wicked men were cited all the time, but nobody had the energy nor even the sincere desire to imitate them."⁴⁴

Early in his account, Tocqueville hints at the "terrifying originality" underlying the spectacle. What was new was that

This time, it was not merely a matter of insuring the triumph of a party; there was an aspiration to found a social science, a philosophy, I could almost say a religion suitable to be learned and followed by all men. There was the really new part of the old scene.⁴⁵

That newness is to be discovered in the torrent of words. There was little disorderly conduct, but

an extraordinary agitation and unheard of disorder in the ideas of the people. As early as February 25, a thousand strange systems

40. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

issued impetuously from the minds of innovators and spread through the troubled mind of the crowd. Everything was still standing except the monarchy and parliament, and yet it appeared as if society itself had crumbled into dust under the shock of revolution, and as if a contest had been launched for the design of the edifice to be erected in its place. Every man submitted his plan; this one put it in the newspapers; that one on the posters which soon covered the walls; and this other cast it to the winds in speech. . . .⁴⁶

Uniting the "thousand strange systems" was one word: "socialism."

Tocqueville was no Frédéric Moreau. But from the depth of his winter of discontent in Sorrento, consigning his most intimate thoughts to the privacy of his memoirs, he must explain, at least to himself, how even he joined the Revolution, submitting himself to the demotic arbitration of universal suffrage. It pains him to do so, he tells us, because even if one wishes to be sincere, "one is too close to oneself to see clearly. . . . The innumerable tiny paths known poorly even to those who walk on them prevent them from discerning the highways followed by the will to reach the most important conclusions."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, relentlessly treading the paths leading away from the conscious self, he reaches the truth. And so the confession begins:

I will therefore say that, when I came to peer attentively into the deepest reaches of my own heart, I discovered there, with some surprise, and a certain relief, a sort of joy mixed with all the sadness and all the fears which the revolution was bringing to life. This terrifying event made me suffer on behalf of my country, but it was clear that I did not suffer on my own behalf; it seemed to me, on the contrary, that I was breathing more freely than before the catastrophe.⁴⁸

Even for Tocqueville, the moment was irresistibly liberating. Out of the destruction of the old political world,

There issued indeed, it is true, a disordered and confused society, but one in which cleverness became less necessary and less prized than disinterestedness and courage; in which character was more important than the ability to speak well or to manipulate men, but especially in which there was no longer any room for intellectual uncertainty: here lies the country's salvation, there its downfall. No more mistakes to be made about the road to follow; we would walk on it in broad daylight, sustained and encouraged by the crowd.⁴⁹

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

And therefore Tocqueville went to Normandy, seeking a mandate from the people.

IV.

Ecstasy or delirium, the thing happened and it was unmistakably political. The recurrence of these moments over one hundred and twenty years, recognizably the same in spite of variations, gives the phenomenon a persuasive concreteness each event may not possess individually. The evidence contained in the purposely heterogeneous testimony gathered in this essay is remarkably consistent. Whatever the attitudes of the writers at the time of writing, whatever role they played in the events, whatever their mode of writing, they record intense moments of festive joy, when an immense outpouring of speech, sometimes verging on violence, coexists with an extraordinarily peaceful disposition. Minds and bodies are liberated; human beings feel that they are in direct touch with one another as well as with their inner selves. The streets of the city, its objects, and even the weather take on harmonious qualities. Falsehood, ugliness, and evil give way to beauty, goodness, and truth. Factions and parties appear unreal while personal networks appear strong as steel. The private merges into the public; government becomes a family matter, a familial affair. Simultaneously, there is a disposition to encounter the *déjà vu*; through the medium of collective memories recorded in sophisticated or demotic culture, in historical works or in folklore, human beings connect the moment with others. Liberated from the constraints of time, place, and circumstance, from history, men choose their parts from the available repertory or forge new ones in an act of creation. Dreams become possibilities.

The connections among the elements that contribute to the fugitive apparition of this exalted sensibility become somewhat more apparent when we examine the circumstances in which the Parisian moments occurred. Two of them, 1871 and 1944, came after periods of severe physical and mental deprivation. The liberation of Paris after four years of Nazi occupation marked not only the end of an absence of political freedom, but also, as Simone de Beauvoir points out, the end of humiliation. That it did not mean the immediate end of scarcity of food, clothing, and shelter was not known at the time; in fact, in the joy of liberation, these things were unimportant. Mind prevailed over matter and scarcity was abolished by a change of values through an act of the human will. That is the process which links 1944 with 1871. Paris rejoiced in the proclamation of the republic on September 4, 1870; but afterwards, the city experienced an unusually harsh winter compounded by the Prussian siege and during which relations between Paris and the national government steadily deteriorated. The Parisians felt abandoned, humiliated, and betrayed; they were being punished for their

history. After several abortive attempts, the democratic and socialist victory in the municipal elections of March triggered an explosive springtime of freedom in which scarcity was again transcended into abundance. These elements were also present in 1848, which came not only after several years of increasingly arbitrary and rigid rule, but also after a famine and a cholera epidemic. Although the Popular Front followed the Great Depression and arose in the face of an impending Fascist threat, the specific combination of material and political deprivation was not clearly present; it was of course even less to be found in 1968. The occasional absence of the combination altogether as well as the fact that "moments" do not always occur when it is clearly present suggests that we should seek other commonalities. Some of them become visible only *after* the fact.

On the very first day of the revolution of 1848, a week before the provisional government unanimously decreed universal suffrage, the people was born to political life. Indeed, the speed with which the decision concerning universal suffrage was taken, at a time when popular participation belonged to the realm of utopia, and realized—very imperfectly—only in the nowhere that was America, confirms the sudden visibility of hitherto invisible men recorded by Tocqueville. Visibility, birth, entrance of human beings hitherto excluded from society: a cataclysmic phenomenon repeated in each of the moments considered.⁵⁰ In 1848, it was the people as a whole; but it was also specific categories of people. In spite of Tocqueville's initial belief, "those who work with their hands" did not become all-powerful in 1848. They irrupted into society again in 1871, reasserting their rights as political citizens, but remained deprived of the economic benefits of that membership, even after they forced the door again in 1936, exalted once more by the amazing spectacle of their strength. What they failed to achieve in 1936 was at the center of their aspirations thirty-two years later when the factories were again turned into joyous bivouacs in the name of participation.

Barely noted by historians is the fact that those who entered society in 1848 also included women. Anticipating some of our own contemporary stereotypes, Flaubert gives us Mademoiselle Vatnaz, *La Vatnaz*, "one of these unmarried women of Paris . . . who dream . . . of everything they lack. Therefore, like many others, she hailed in the Revolution the coming of revenge;—and she carried on frantic socialist propaganda."⁵¹ This woman, who believes the Fourierist gospel that "the liberation of proletarians will be possible only by means of the liberation of women" is no mere caricature; her presence in *L'Education Sentimentale* is historically correct. Flaubert's sarcasm notwithstanding, he was probably in touch with that aspect of the

50. I am indebted to the Turner paper cited *supra* for the focus on "entrance" of the "marginals" and the relation of this process to *Communitas*.

51. Flaubert, *L'Education Sentimentale*, op. cit., p. 299.

Revolution through his friend George Sand. "The illustrious Madame Sand" herself appears in Tocqueville's *Souvenirs*, seated next to him at dinner. "I was gravely prejudiced against her," he confesses, "because I hate women who write, especially those who disguise the weaknesses, of their sex by erecting them into a system . . .; but in spite of that, I liked her."⁵² Surprised to find in her "something of the natural manner of great minds," he remembers speaking with her "for a whole hour of public affairs," adding, as if to explain this unlikely statement, "Besides, she was at that time a sort of politician." Although they did not talk about women—he only tells us how well informed she was about workers—her very presence contributes to the present point. Just as workers entered more than once, so did women: recent historiography has set the record straight about the *pétroleuses* of the Commune; the Popular Front government was the first one to include women; the liberation gave women voting rights and, even more significantly, saw a since unequaled number of women elected to public office at the municipal level.

The prominence of students in May 1968 requires little elaboration. Edgar Morin hinted at the very process under discussion when he stated that "the great festival of youthful solidarity, the great syncretic game of revolution were, at the same time, on an individual plane, an entrance examination into society (which, at the moment and for most people, seemed preferable and much superior to school examinations), and, on a collective plane, the will to assert themselves in and against society."⁵³ But can we view students as an excluded group in the same sense as the people, the workers, the women? Their situation in society evokes privilege rather than deprivation, especially in France. It may be that the particular student aspect masks a more general aspect which connects 1968 with the other moments in the series. In each of them, observers noted the prominence of youth. It is only in our own time that many of them are students; but even in 1968, young workers were especially visible among those who occupied factories.

An emphasis on biological age may itself hide more than it reveals. Most likely, the phenomenon under consideration involves the sudden entrance of a generation into public life. The rhythm of such events is irregular because the formation of generations is the result of a combination of demographic and political factors. In particular, it may involve the shared experiences of growing up in times when political life is suspended, as was the case between 1940 and 1944, or between 1851 and 1870. In those cases, there is a connection between the formation of a generation, exclusion, and deprivation. But a generation can also share the experience of growing up in a particular ideological camp at a time when the camp does not have access to

52. Tocqueville, *Souvenirs*, op. cit., pp. 134-35.

53. Morin et al., *La Brèche*, op. cit., p. 21.

power, as with the French Left in the decades preceding 1936 or 1968. Or, more problematically, it may involve coming of age during a period when the game of politics is unusually routinized and boring.

Boredom is perhaps the best thread to guide us through the labyrinth. Youth is unusually sensitive to its prevalence in a particular age; they share this flair with others who are especially attuned to sensibility, chroniclers and artists. Together they constitute the intolerant vanguard which may trigger off the mechanisms that transform the world into an attractive place. Shortly before May 1968, Pierre Vianson-Ponté repeated on the front page of *Le Monde* the grievance Lamartine had hurled at the July Monarchy: *La France s'ennuie!* Jean-Luc Godard had already expressed the same message surrealistically in *Week End*, released in late 1967. After the fact, Raymond Aron agreed that the dullness of routinized Gaullism was among the causes of May. A generation earlier, for the vast majority of West Europeans, the consequence of the wartime deprivations and humiliations noted earlier was boredom rather than tragedy. Through the works of Sartre and Camus, this concrete experience was amplified into an interpretation of the human condition. Engagement through participation in the Resistance was one way out of boredom and into a better life, and it was the spirit of those who refused to be bored which transformed Paris in August 1944, as it had brought joy into the factories in 1936. Lefèbvre's work on the Commune further contributes to our perception of the connections between physical deprivation, exclusion, the absence of freedom, and the rebellion against dullness which ensued. But whether or not we accept Lefèbvre's view that the boredom of daily life is the form which alienation takes in contemporary societies, we should not stop with 1871 because it was 1848 which was the first revolution against boredom.

Of that there is hardly any doubt. Tocqueville makes the point twice, in very different ways. First, at the very beginning of his *Souvenirs*, he writes concerning the July Monarchy:

In this political world . . . what was most missing, especially toward the end, was political life itself. It could hardly come to life or be sustained within the legal sphere delineated by the Constitution; the old aristocracy had been defeated, the people excluded. Since all affairs were treated among the members of a single class, in its interest, in its spirit, it was impossible to find a battlefield where great parties could wage war. This singular homogeneity of position, of interest, and consequently of the views that prevailed in what M. Guizot called the legal country, removed from parliamentary debates all originality, all reality, hence all genuine passion. I spent ten years of my life in the company of very great minds, which constantly busied themselves without being able to warm up and

who used all their perspicacity to discover subjects on which there could be deep disagreement, without being able to find any.⁵⁴

And in case the message is not clear, he writes in the next paragraphs that at the level of the political class, "there reigned nothing but languor, impotence, immobility, boredom" and that "the nation was bored listening to them."

Almost unwittingly, Tocqueville provides us with a second assertion concerning the importance of boredom. Crediting Lamartine, the poet who became a member of the Provisional Government and who yearned to be the George Washington of France, with "having contributed more than anyone to the success of the February revolution," Tocqueville charges that the poet was unwilling later to sacrifice himself to save the country. Stressing his lack of character, he writes:

I don't know whether I ever encountered, in this world of selfish ambitions, in the midst of which I have lived, a mind more empty of the thought of the public good than his. I have seen in that world many men make trouble in the country in order to make themselves great; that is the run-of-the-mill perversity; but he is the only man, I believe, who always seemed to me ready to turn the world upside down to divert himself.⁵⁵

Unlike Lamartine, Tocqueville was unwilling to launch a revolution against the boredom he too found unbearable. Once others had done so, however, did not Tocqueville also feel an irresistible elation? "I discovered . . . with some surprise . . . a sort of joy. . . . I was breathing more freely than before the catastrophe."

V.

If 1848 was, at least in part, a revolution against boredom, then we might ask why Lefebvre chose instead the Commune as his subject. He says, remember, that the spirit of the Commune demonstrates that the Marxist thesis of the end of human prehistory was no mere utopia because "for a few days, this utopia, this so-called myth, was actualized and entered into life." *Marx's Utopia?* The utopia that was fugitively actualized in 1871 and in each subsequent moment of joy was the utopia of 1848. It was not Marx's, but that of the socialists upon whom he heaped his scorn. The thread we have followed leads us to the most underrated prophet of modern times and through him to an understanding of some important connections between politics and art in the past century.

It required intellectual courage for the late Georges Duveau to argue, in the France of 1954, that Marx's thunderings against the utopian socialists

54. Tocqueville, *Souvenirs*, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

55. Ibid., p. 112.

"are not always justified, because it is possible to fail in the face of immediate events while being right in the long run. The utopists of '48 were not mistaken about the direction of history, but about its speed. More presbyopics than dreamers."⁵⁶ Fourier, in particular, "anticipated Freud; his vision of human nature is richer, more modern than that of the well-thinking men of his time."⁵⁷ And long before they became once more respectable, Duveau predicted the ultimate triumph of the utopian socialists over Proudhon and Marx because "urban man runs the risk of wilting and must renew himself in contact with nature." More recently, Frank Manuel summarized Fourier's teachings as follows:

Fourier's "passionate series" centered around psychological differences. The bringing together of eight-hundred-odd recognizable psychological types under one roof was a precondition for happiness in a phalanstery; otherwise the variety of relationships necessary for total self-fulfillment in the State of Harmony would be lacking. Since work without love was a psychological burden, a pain to be eradicated from utopia, Fourier developed the mechanism for making labor "attractive," a free expression of the whole self, never divorced from erotic inclinations.⁵⁸

Having earlier pointed to the *boredom* inevitably engendered by the unchanging state of previous utopias, Manuel concludes: "Fourier widened the dimensions of utopia beyond anything that had been dreamed of before, and in retrospect he emerges as the greatest utopian after More."⁵⁹

Fourier died eleven years before 1848, but his genius was widely recognized for decades afterwards. Here is a tribute first published in 1880:

[W]e find in Fourier a criticism of the existing conditions of society, genuinely French and witty, but not upon that account any the less thorough. . . . Fourier is not only a critic; his imperturbably serene nature makes him a satirist, and assuredly one of the greatest satirists of all time. . . . Still more masterly in his criticism of the bourgeois form of the relations between the sexes. . . . But Fourier is at his greatest in his conception of the history of society.⁶⁰

The voice is that of Engels, praising Fourier only better to damn him: "To

56. Georges Duveau, *Sociologie de l'Utopie et autres "Essais"* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), p. 31. The work, published posthumously, is a collection of essays published separately in the early 1950s.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

58. Frank Manuel, "Toward a Psychological History of Utopias," *Daedalus* 94, no. 2 (Spring 1965): 307.

59. *Ibid.*, 308.

60. Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in Lewis S. Feuer, ed., *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1959), pp. 76-77.

make a science of socialism it had first to be placed upon a real basis."⁶¹ Although this is not the place to undertake an analysis of the views expressed by Marx and Engels throughout their writings concerning the utopians, the quotation is sufficient to reveal the *ambivalence* that we should find. This is not surprising since, in spite of his condemnation of the utopian-inspired movements which competed with the ones he supported, Marx partly shared the sensibility of his enemies. If Fourier sought a way to end boredom, Marx's genius, as Duveau put, "was to have understood that democracy gave life a whimpering, fastidious, schoolroom tone: history is drama."⁶²

But the condemnation of the utopians contained in the *Communist Manifesto*, written at the height of their influence and published amidst signs of the impending doom of the revolution their spirit inspired, is most severe. The *Manifesto* charges that "historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones. . . ."⁶³ It speaks further of "such fantastic pictures of future society, painted at a time when the proletariat is still in a very undeveloped state," of "this fantastic standing apart from the contest," of "their fanatical and superstitious belief in the miraculous effects of their social science."⁶⁴ What were Marx and Engels getting at? Perhaps that Fourier and the others were poets and painters, seeking to promote salvation by altering the *vision* human beings had of society. And this condemnation of "revolution as art" evokes Flaubert's parallel scorn for the opposite phenomenon. In the crucial chapter discussed earlier, Pellerin has contributed to the revolution by means of a painting: "It represented the Republic, or Progress, or Civilization, in the shape of Jesus Christ driving a locomotive, which traveled through a virgin forest." In case we don't get it right away, Flaubert speaks through Frédéric, who exclaims: "What garbage!"⁶⁵

Conclusion

In the course of seeking to achieve some understanding of a disturbing feature of the political life of modern societies, we have come to focus on France around 1848, when some political thinkers and many acute participant observers perceived a tension between the growth of instrumentalism as a dominant aspect of institutionalized political processes and the persistent yearning of an expanding citizenry for a more dramatic political process in which fulfillment could be achieved through the act of

61. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

62. Duveau, *Sociologie de l'Utopie*, op. cit., p. 33.

63. Feuer, *Marx and Engels*, op. cit., p. 37.

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

65. Flaubert, *L'Education Sentimentale*, op. cit., p. 300.

participation itself. We have also recorded, albeit sketchily, some evidence which indicates that the yearning is by no means utopian, in the sense of a longing for the imaginary or the impossible, but rather genuinely Utopian, in the sense of an actualization of the project modern Utopians had conceived. In short, that project, repeatedly achieved at least in part, consists in the immediate transformation of society through a drastic change of the conceptions human beings have of that society and of themselves. It is the politics of poets and prophets rather than of princes and priests.

As a first step, the present essay raises more questions than it answers. Some are perhaps not answerable at all; nevertheless, they suggest directions for further exploration.

1. Are the moments of madness recorded here merely another French disease? At one level, their occurrence can be viewed as a variant of Crozier's analysis of the crisis as the main adaptive mechanism of French bureaucratic culture.⁶⁶ From the point of view of the study of French politics, the present essay suggests the possibility of analyzing the historical origins of one pattern of French political culture. It may be that, rather than history being a projection of the psychological stresses of individuals, historical events become encoded into culture as patterns of socialization.

Were it to be demonstrated, by way of comparative analysis, that the phenomenon under consideration was peculiarly French, it would become necessary to account for this peculiar feature of French political development. One possibility is that, although France is often regarded by social scientists as "backward" from the point of view of modernization generally or as having experienced a premature broadening of participation in relation to institutionalization, France was in fact precocious in at least one respect. There, more than anywhere else, political authority was rationalized very early in the form of a centralized bureaucratic state. Moments of enthusiasm, during which authority can be made to disappear and the community rules itself—in a genuine state of anarchy—are the congruent, but obverse, process. But that possibility leads to a further thought: Could the French experience not be anticipatory? As other societies, in which the growth of political rationality has been mitigated or inhibited by other factors, become more modern in this particular respect, they may be in the process of becoming more French in their responses as well. In that sense, an analysis of France may enlighten others about themselves.

2. The tension between the two kinds of political processes noted above evokes and is part of the more general tension between instrumental and expressive aspects of life in contemporary societies. It is once again in France during the middle third of the nineteenth century that one aspect of this

66. Michel Crozier, *Le phénomène bureaucratique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1963), particularly pp. 359-61.

tension, the relationship between politics and art, first became manifest. Although little has been said here of artists, even a cursory glance at literature and the plastic arts suggests that Paris was at that time a once-only place where political and artistic radicals not only shared many elements of a common Utopian sensibility, but also acted together. For many of them, politics and art were not merely complementary pursuits; they were different versions of the same attempt to transform the world. How come Paris? To what extent the roots lay in Rousseau, and to what extent Rousseau himself amplified a cultural trend related to the early bureaucratization of both political and religious authority in France, would itself warrant investigation. In any case, because Paris was one of the political centers of the West, and without a doubt the artistic center, the coming together of the two vanguards there was an historical event of vital importance in the relationships between political and artistic pursuits in the West as a whole for the next century. That politics and art were soon torn asunder is of equal significance.

Egbert's monumental survey notwithstanding, a thoroughly satisfactory analysis of these relationships does not exist.⁶⁷ However, some guidance is available. Duveau believed that the emergence of the doctrine of "art for art's sake" was closely related to the failure of 1848, just as that failure also provided the foundations for scientific socialism.⁶⁸ Indeed, for a long time afterwards, Socialists became ever more concerned with organization until, in the Bolshevik version, it became an end in itself. On the artistic side, Flaubert ends *L'Education Sentimentale* with a conversation between Frédéric and Deslauriers: "And they summarized their life. They blew it both, the one who had dreamed of love, the one who had dreamed of power."⁶⁹ The only thing left, then, is the writer and his novel. Although Poggioli dates the separation from the Commune rather than from 1848, his central proposition is also that afterwards, political radicals and the artistic avant-garde became engaged in mutually exclusive projects.⁷⁰ The artists achieved utopia in their bohemia rather than on the barricades. The immense liberation of human expression accomplished through the birth of the modern truly destroyed the old world

67. Donald Drew Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts: Western Europe* (New York: Knopf, 1970).

68. Duveau, 1848, op. cit., p. 221. He attributes the idea about art to Jean Cassou, whose work I have not studied at this time. "Art for art's sake" originated before 1848; it might be more accurate to say that 1848 contributed to the founding of what Harold Rosenberg has called "the tradition of the new" (see note 71, below).

69. Flaubert, *L'Education Sentimentale*, op. cit., p. 426. Jean-Paul Sartre's new work on Flaubert undoubtedly deals with the present subject but I have not yet been able to study it.

70. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 94ff.

or, rather, in the words of Harold Rosenberg, revealed "what is already destroyed. Art kills only the dead."⁷¹

Except fleetingly, what was torn asunder has never been reunited. Although artists have continued to associate themselves with a variety of revolutionary movements, they do not survive success. At their worst, the rulers of contemporary societies kill art by imposing upon artists their own instrumental ways: Art must serve *their* revolution. The artistic avant-garde, Poggioli argued, can survive only in liberal societies; but the artists are necessarily alienated from the very societies which make their survival possible. Writing in the post-World War II world, he believed that through this process, the avant-garde contributed to those societies a unique form of cultural experimentation.

Has this, too, become a thing of the past? Egbert firmly believes so, and entitles the last section of his book, "The End of Traditional Social Alienation in the Arts and of the Traditional Conception of the Avant-Garde."⁷² That there is a malaise, stemming from the incorporation of many products of avant-garde art into the liberal societies of the West as entertainment, is obvious. But Egbert's elegy is perhaps premature. In the last half-century, beginning with Dada, Western artists themselves have rebelled against the paradoxical boredom of the avant-garde. Some reached the dead end of solipsism; others sought to discover yet a new world. So, lifting the proscenium arch or freeing themselves of the constraints of plastic media, they sometimes escape from the now-luxurious bohemian ghetto into the political world, where they embrace, in a great moment of enthusiasm, the expectant rebels against boredom. Ecstasy or delirium? Together, as children engaged in a magnificent prank, they momentarily restore magic to the world.

3. What are the consequences of political action based on the belief that "all is possible"? Moments of madness have had a very bad press in the social sciences. What followed the Parisian experiences of 1848 and of 1871 probably contributed significantly to the diffidence of contemporary social theory, which was then in the process of being born, toward participation of the sort discussed in this essay. That this Parisian spirit was reborn in Berlin immediately after World War I, when once again there was a fleeting conjunction of political radicalism and artistic innovation, contributed to the further transformation of diffidence into pessimism. What we remember most is that moments of political enthusiasm are followed by bourgeois repression or by charismatic authoritarianism, sometimes by horror but always by the restoration of boredom. Even those who record the joy of living in a good place at a good time almost always take it back. It is as if the old adage, *Post*

71. Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), p. 76; see also the surrounding discussion of "Revolution and the Concept of Beauty."

72. Egbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 741-45.

coitum omnia animal triste, had been made into a rule of historiography. It has by now become something of a self-fulfilling prophecy: Backlash of some sort is expected, and perhaps the guilty disposition of those who let themselves go helps bring it about.

Although the present essay has not dealt systematically with this question, it has suggested that the prevailing negative view, which focuses on obstacles and reactions, distorts the truth. It neglects the lasting political accomplishments that are perhaps made possible only by the suspension of disbelief in the impossible which is characteristic of moments of madness. As a general proposition, it can be asserted that the Utopian project is a feasible strategy of social and political change, and perhaps even a necessary one. It brings about significant transformations in three distinct ways. First of all, the "torrent of words" involves a sort of intensive learning experience whereby new ideas, formulated initially in coteries, sects, etc., emerge as widely shared beliefs among much larger publics. This may be the manner in which certain forms of cultural change that are relevant to politics occur in the highly institutionalized cultures of modern, literate, societies. Secondly, these new beliefs expressed in new language are anchored in new networks of relationships which are rapidly constituted during such periods of intense activity. From the social structural point of view, stepped-up participation is like a flood tide which loosens up much of the soil but leaves alluvial deposits in its wake. Thirdly, from the point of view of policy, including the creation of new political institutions and the launching of new programs, although the dreams transformed into realities seldom evolve unilinearly afterwards, the instant formulations become irreversible goals which are often institutionalized in the not-very-distant future. The moments do not collapse the distance between the present and the future, as those who experience them yearn to do. In that sense, moments of Parisian madness and others like them are always failures. But they drastically shorten the distance, and in that sense they are successful miracles. Perhaps they are necessary for the political transformation of societies, especially after the foundations of modernity have been established.

Presentation of appropriate evidence must await a longer work. But since the third point, in particular, is likely to arouse much skepticism among political scientists, some illustration is appropriate. In 1848, for example, universal male suffrage was established in France within a few days, and much more thoroughly than in Europe's Utopia, the United States of America. Although much of the literature emphasizes reversals and setbacks, within France, and the advantages of gradualism elsewhere, what has been insufficiently stressed in studies of the political development of Western Europe is that France's accomplishment set an irreversible standard of political democracy for the rest of the world and that, for all its gaps and imbalances, as a result of that irreversible fact of political life, France alone

among Latin countries in Europe became a leading liberal democracy in the nineteenth century. The ideal of a universal right to secular education left behind by the Commune was realized in less than a quarter of a century. Whatever else the Popular Front accomplished, it firmly established the right of the working class to leisure. As for the "all is possible" of 1944, one historian's assessment is that afterwards, "in the space of two years, a series of decisions are taken which constitute the most impressive whole ever realized in France since the Revolution. . . ."73

4. Because the emphasis here has been on macro-analysis, the phenomenon under consideration has not been viewed from the point of view of the aggregate experiences of individuals. Yet, it is through drastic changes in the experiences of individuals, already socialized into the existing society, that the transformational processes noted above occur. How does this happen? Beneath the macro-events lies a multitude of micro-events experienced by the participants, whether actually or vicariously. At any one time, only a minority of unusual persons are capable of resolving through their own devices the dialectic tension between the self and the world through which human beings manage to exercise some control over their fate. In societies where the *rite de passage* has never been fully institutionalized, or where it has become routinized and boring, is it farfetched to believe that those imbued with extraordinary sensibility provoke moments of exaltation, when the meek can more easily enter the kingdom?

73. Jacques Julliard, *La IV^e République* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1971; "Naissance et mort"), p. 32. He goes on to give details.