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Revolution and Terror, or how Louis XVI was turned into a pig

Abstract

In this paper, we will analyze the relationship between Revolution and Terror by focusing on the example of the Jacobin Terror in 1793. After reviewing the classical interpretations of Hannah Arendt and C. Lefort, the problem of Terror is approached from a phenomenological analysis of the Body Politic, its incarnation in the body of the monarch and the threat of its disincorporation. We are particularly interested in the designation of the King and Queen as absolute enemies, through caricatures that represent them as dangerous or vile animals. Using Michelet and Quinet's critique of the "Jacobin Inquisition," the ambivalent meaning of regicide is finally understood as transfer of sovereignty and matrix of Terror.

Keywords:

body politic, disembodiment, regicide, revolution, terror

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According to Hegel, there exists an internal and necessary link between the fundamental principle of the French Revolution and its accomplishment as “fury of destruction” in the revolutionary Terror. Is such an intertwining of Revolution and Terror inevitable? Are all revolts, as soon as they take the form of revolution, condemned to detour toward one version or another of Terror? And if this should be the case, what consequences should be drawn regarding the very possibility of a politics of emancipation? These are by no means academic questions best left exclusively to historians. We know that the French Revolution constituted a model for ulterior revolutionary tentatives, particularly for the Russian Revolution; and a relationship can doubtlessly be said to exist between this reference to Terror and the disasters into which the revolutions of the twentieth century sank. Those who continue to justify the Jacobin Terror today justify in equal measure the more bloody Terrors to which the names of Stalin and Mao are attached. Those who condemn it are most often led to privilege 1789 as a model for the peaceful transition from one regime to another which preserves its forms of state domination: this can be said for the liberal interpretations of Tocquevillian inspiration which erase the breach of the revolutionary event, emphasizing the essential continuity of the historic process.

Is it possible to overcome this antinomy? To produce a critique of the Terror *in the name of the Revolution*? To recognize the fundamental importance of the revolutionary event, its capacity to inaugurate a new beginning, all the while in dissociating it from its “terrorist” derivation? This is the position taken by Hannah Arendt in *On Revolution*. For Arendt, the Terror of 1793 is not a necessary phase of the revolutionary project, but the sign of its failure, of the incapacity of the agents of the French Revolution to fulfil the primordial task of all revolution: to assure the “foundation of freedom,” to institute a stable political order in the form of a Republic. This task, accomplished in the American Revolution, escaped the grasp of the French, who let themselves be led astray from their goal under the pressure of the social question. In ceding to the “passion for pity,” to their Rousseauian compassion for the miserable masses, they would effectively have abandoned their project to found a Republic in order to safeguard, by all means possible, the “happiness of the People.” What leads the Revolution into the impasse of the Terror is this “capitulation of Liberty before Necessity”—a necessity which is initially that of the suffering body, of “life” in the biological sense of the term—at the moment when it sides with a politic led by the heart, to the tyranny of Virtue, which tasks itself with unmasking hypocrisy. Arendt, however, does not uphold today’s dominant liberal doxa: indeed, she champions the “popular societies”—republican clubs and sans-culottes groups (*sections sans-culottes*)—where she believes herself to have localized the defenders of a “federative” politics founded on the multiplicity of power centres. She envisages these “elementary republics” as “zones of freedom,”

which are also “*spaces of appearances*” in the political sphere (Arendt 1973: 275). This notion underlines the phenomenological basis of her analysis. For Arendt, political action is the highest mode of the *appearance of the world* (*apparaître du monde*): the only sphere in which a free community is able to install itself without being alienated from labour. This is what ultimately leads her to insist upon the conflict that opposed the popular Parisian societies and the Jacobins in the spring of 1794. In forcing the disarmament and submission of the various “sections,” in arresting and executing their leaders, the Committee of Public Safety (*Comité de Salut Public*), directed the Terror against the most radical forces of the Revolution. Arendt justifiably sees in this event a precursor to the conflict which will oppose throughout the twentieth century the upholders of one-party communism and the autonomous revolutionary organs (the Soviets of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the Workers’ Councils of the Hungarian and Polish revolutions of 1956...) that she considers the ultimate heirs to the “lost treasure” of the modern revolutionary tradition.

If, in equally declining the apology for the Terror and the liberal doxa, Arendt manages to dissociate herself from traditional interpretations, her analysis nonetheless contains several difficulties. The connection she attempts to draw between the Revolution’s “politics of pity” and its “terrorist” derivation contains many weaknesses. In any case, the analysis is elaborated in such a way as to completely dissociate the target of Equality from that of Liberty, the social question from the task of the foundation of the revolution. Indeed, she affirms that “all tentatives for the resolution of the social question by political means lead to Terror,” and that it is “almost impossible to avoid the Terror when revolution sparks in a country in which the masses are miserable.” As “it is Terror that leads revolutions to their failure,” Arendt confirms the inevitable failure of *all* revolution, with the unique (and very problematic) exception of the American Revolution. These limits in her analysis originate in her philosophy: in a phenomenology that privileges action in the visible world by dissociating it as thoroughly as possible from the sphere of labour, of the body, of life, submitted to an obscure biological necessity characterized by its repetitive and cyclic temporality. Where the law of the body holds hegemony, no *novum* can possibly appear. She likewise rejects the possibility of founding praxis, as Henry attempts, from within the very life of individuals, in their “pathetic” corporeality. How can a living incarnated praxis come to implicate itself in the event of a revolution? This would have to presuppose that political action could support a certain relationship with the body, not only with the physical body of living individuals, but also with a certain *image of the body*, with these representations of a collective Body where a society represents itself and attempts to reflect the mutations that interact upon it.

It is toward this perspective that the work of Lefort orientates itself, doubtless under the influence of Merleau-Ponty. The characteristic

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of democratic revolution, for Lefort, is a dynamic of social *disincorporation*, which originates out of the key moment of the French Revolution—the regicide. “When the body of the king is destroyed, when the head of the Body Politic falls,” “in the same blow will the corporeality of society dissolve.” Whereas society manifests its division, its essential indetermination, power ceases to be incorporated, to be identified with a body, and appears now as an “empty space,” a focus of incessant questioning (Lefort 1981: 172). In accentuating the act of putting the king to death, Lefort, invites us to question the relation between regicide and Terror. He affirms without hesitation that “Terror is revolutionary in that it forbids the occupation of the place (of power): in this sense, it has a democratic character”; by sending to the guillotine all those who proclaim to reincarnate the Great Body, to revive in one form or another the monarchic embodiment of power, the Terror directly associates itself with the process of disincorporation (Lefort 1986: 75–109). This should by no means be understood as indicating that the dynamic of democratic revolution must *necessarily* pass through a certain phase of Terror. Lefort’s analysis does not lend itself to a justification of the “terrorist” politics of the Jacobins: rather, he finds in it, from its beginnings, “the image of a society in harmony with itself, released from its divisions, graspable only through the exercise of purification, and, an always superior amount, of extermination”; an image (or phantasm) that announces the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century. This aim becomes all the more apparent in Robespierre’s ultimate tentative, not long before his fall, to consolidate the system of Terror by grafting onto it a form of ideology, the “Cult of the Supreme Being” for which he acts as High Priest, and in the construction of a new figure of the Enemy, which becomes “untraceable” and even more threatening. By generalizing, in Prairial’s decrees, the category of the “suspect,” destined for the guillotine, through its extension to all those found “indifferent” and to the revolutionaries themselves, the Committee of Public Safety thus tends toward the intensification of the Terror, to rendering it limitless, unstoppable. When old allies, such as Danton, or the most radical of the revolutionaries (Chaumette, Hébert), are denounced as “traitors,” as “foreign agents” and sent to the scaffold, when all the demarcations are blurred between self and other, between friend and enemy, revolution and counter-revolution, the Terror is required as the last possibility capable of upholding differentiation, of giving a face and a name to this faceless enemy, to trace in blood the line of *absolute division*. Without ever identifying the Jacobin Terror with the totalitarian terrors of our epoch, Lefort suggests, all the same, that from Robespierre to Stalin, a certain lineage can be sketched. And it is here that he ends his analysis. The task is thus left to us to understand the enigmatic relationship between the Revolution, the Terror and the process of disincorporation that underscores the dawn of modern democracy. We will heed Lefort’s lesson here: one of the essential aspects

of revolutionary Terror is the manner in which an enemy is fixated upon, which evolves significantly throughout the revolutionary process. At first, it is a question of combating the *real enemies*, who oppose themselves to the Revolution (the Royalists, the Coalition Armies, the Vendean insurgents...). However, in radicalizing itself, the Terror focuses increasingly upon an *internal* enemy, a threat that incessantly reappears, as Saint-Just proclaims, “in the entrails of the Republic.” One is no longer dealing with concrete adversaries, but, rather, with a figure of evil that it is less a matter of combating than of annihilating. In Jacobin discourse, this enemy is effectively expelled from mankind, presented as a “monster” unfit to live—the adversaries to the Revolution are treated as “wild beasts,” “destructive insects” and “venomous reptiles”(Gueniffey 2000)—or as a “cancer,” a “gangrenous limb” in urgent need of amputation,¹ or further still, as repugnant filth, as trash. It is in this manner that the Committee of Public Safety approves a request demanding that they “in one fell swoop purge the prisons and clear the ground of these scraps, of these discards of mankind.”² The transition is made from a real enemy to an *absolute enemy*,³ justifying a policy of extermination. Admittedly, this bestialization, this demonization of the enemy, is not the invention of the actors of the Terror: since the Middle Ages they characterize the *strategies of persecution* that are unleashed in turn upon the heretics, the Jews, the lepers, then the “witches,” sending them by the tens of thousands to the stake. But the persecution and extermination of these different figures of the enemy thus fall under a politics of the Body, under the theologico-political representation of the Church or the Kingdom as a “Mystical Body” from which it is crucial to cleave infected limbs or foreign elements. One is able to understand why the enemy would be designated as a gangrene, a parasite, an *internal foreign body* whose very existence puts the unity of the Great Body in peril. Yet, it is precisely this organic representation of society that the dynamic of democratic revolution sends into crisis. If it is true that such a dynamic implies a process of disincorporation of the Body Politic, how is it that the revolutionaries of

¹ As the Jacobin leader, Billaud-Varenne, declares in his *Principes régénérateurs du système social* (1795): “All that is not intimately united with the national cause [...] is a dangerous cancer that must be cut out. It is the prompt and indispensable amputation of a gangrenous limb in order to save the patient” (Billaud-Varenne 1992: 117).

² Terms presented by A. Herman in the name of the Comité de Sûreté Générale (June 1794) (Gueniffey 2000: 281).

³ A concept that I adopt from Carl Schmitt’s *Theory of the Partisan*, wherein, this “passage from real enemy to absolute enemy” marks the transition from the classical forms of political combat to a conception of politics that sees itself as a war of extermination.

1793 should have been able to continue to designate their enemies under the same terms as those used by the inquisitors or the witch hunters: as repugnant or monstrous bodies, elements of a diabolical Anti-Body? It is as if they remained prisoners to these same figurations of the political Body from which they should have been trying to escape...

As Marx reminds us, the “traditions of dead generations” continue to weigh upon the thoughts and actions of the living: to this “resurrection of the dead,” those of the French Revolution make no exception. This persistence of bodily imagery and old patterns of persecution must lead us, however, to interrogate the actual effectiveness of the revolutionary event, of this radical rupture with the past that the revolutionaries so desired to effectuate. With the founding act of regicide, do we really witness the dawn of a disincorporated society, finally delivered from the ancient spell that bound it to a sovereign Body? It is doubtlessly necessary to rectify Lefort upon this point, to recognize that the process of disincorporation was just as quickly countered by an opposite tendency toward *reincorporation*, which tries to reconstitute a corporal figuration of power. The reverence for the body of the king would have only disappeared in order to vacate room for a new cult dedicated to the sovereign Body, that of the Nation or the People. If this should be the case, is it necessary to conclude that such a rupture would take place purely in appearance? That the Revolution boils down to a simple transition between two images of the Body, two versions of sovereignty, two modes of state domination? In order to respond, we are obliged to take a closer look at the different representations of the Body Politic which re-emerge with the French Revolution. These cannot be reduced to “imagined” fictions, or simple metaphors: they should not be regarded as *symbols* (merely analogous representations exterior to the subject they illustrate), but as *schemes* of figuration by which a community constitutes and presents itself. In the majority of human societies, these bodily figurations force the individuals to be submitted to the sovereign power, represented as the “head” or the “soul” of the Great Body for which the subjects act only as simple limbs. La Boétie admirably describes this phenomenon in *Contr’Un* or *Discours de la servitude volontaire*: if individuals agree to renounce their liberty by submitting to the sovereignty of the One, they therefore identify and alienate themselves within its Body, letting themselves be incorporated with the offer of their own flesh:⁴ to the point of sacrificing oneself, consenting to give one’s life “for the king” or “for the motherland.” The contribution of a phenomenological analysis

⁴ “From where did he take so many eyes to spy you with, if it was not you who gave them to him? How has he so many hands to strike upon you if he did not take them from you? [...] How is it that he has no power upon you, except through you?” (La Boétie 1978: 115).

of incorporation consists precisely in redirecting these figurations of the collective Body to their hidden matrix, to the individual body in the flesh. This approach finds its point of departure in the individual ego, in the immanence of its life, in order to understand the constitution of collective entities, a method I call *ego-analysis*. By deconstructing these transcendent entities, by revealing their original foundations, the living flesh of the singular individuals and their corporeal community, *ego-analysis* therefore has a directly political signification.

In his *Discours des Etats de France* (1588), the jurist Guy Coquille declares that “the King is the head and the People of the three orders are the limbs; and all together are the political and mystical Body of which the union is indivisible and inseparable. And not one part is able to suffer without the entirety also suffering and feeling this pain.” Thus is announced the French version of the classic doctrine of *Corpus Mysticum Reipublicae*, shifting the theological conception of the Church, with Christ at the head, into the political sphere. This hence implies a doubling of the body of the king, by which the body of flesh distinguishes itself from the invisible mystical Body. From this theologico-political pattern emerges the fundamental characteristics of monarchic power: its *oneness*, the *perpetuity* of its immortal Body (“the King never dies”) and its *infallibility* (“the King is incapable of evil”) the foundation of its power to act as lawmaker (“what the King desires, so too desires the Law”). This, however, is not the place to evoke the formation of such a doctrine.⁵ Let us simply note that the French version, which attempts to concentrate all power within the One-Body of the monarch, differs from that characteristic of the English monarchy: which no doubt allows us to better understand certain “absolutist” aspects in the Jacobin conception of the Body. It is possible, in effect, that this metaphysic of the sovereign Body should manage to break free from its theological pattern and its monarchic incarnation, and that it should be able to endure in new forms while still conserving its fundamental structure.

According to different versions, we are offered, in any case, a remarkable solution to a major aporia in the Body Politic. If this corporal construction finds its origin in the constitution of the individual body, it distinguishes itself with regard to a decisive point. As we have learned from Husserl, the singular body of flesh originally constitutes and unifies itself through the phenomenon of the tactile chiasm, of a self-touching-touch (*se-toucher-touchant*) reiterated incessantly, where my flesh becomes a body whilst remaining flesh. When I transfer myself—my being-in-flesh (*être-chair*), my *Leiblichkeit*—upon the body of another in order to make it another body of flesh, a carnal community is constituted

⁵ We leave all such elaboration to E. Kantorowicz in his masterpiece, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Kantorowicz 1957).

between him and me, which repeats the constitution of the originary community that unifies the poles of my flesh. The capital difference resides in the fact that the quasi-chiasm which offers flesh to the body of another is not reversible, as it is in the case of the primordial chiasm in which my flesh interlaces with itself: touching the hand of the other, I will never feel it being touched by my own; never will I conjoin the body of the other in its flesh. Thus I have constructed, as Husserl writes, an “impassable abyss” between the body of the other and my own. The “body” of our community, of all human communities, will only ever be but a *quasi-body*, deprived of corporal consistence, of this original presence that my flesh offers to myself, giving itself as basis to my body. It is for this reason that the various modes of the collective Body inevitably tend to disincarnate, to reduce to abstract figurations, incapable of maintaining identification with their subjects. Deprived of flesh, of immanent life, the Great Body finds itself constantly in threat of losing its bodily form, of decomposing, of disincorporating. Far from being the privilege of democratic revolutions, the tendency toward disincorporation thus accompanies every manifestation of the collective Body from its beginning, with each having to tailor its own procedure in order to resist this threat. Hence, the Christian rite of the Eucharist permits the Body of the Church to reincarnate itself, to once more become One, through having its faithful absorb the flesh of the sacrificed god. Likewise, it is to this same *lack of incarnation* that the classic doctrine of the two bodies of the king responds by offering flesh and life to the mystical Body, by giving it to sight and touch through the physical body of the monarch, sanctified, transfigured, constantly exhibited in the emblems and ceremonies of the royal religion. The portrait of the king could be described as a “sacramental body” where, in a way analogous to that of the Eucharistic mystery, the unity of his physical and symbolic bodies intertwine (Marin 1988). Such is the function of this “mystery of the monarchic incarnation,” of which Michelet speaks, of the cult of the King-Christ invested through the anointment of the crowning ritual, capable of healing by touch the wounds of scrofulous people, and by his very existence holding power over the illnesses and divisions of the Body Politic.⁶

It is precisely this unity between the two bodies that shatters in 1789, when the delegates of the *États Généraux* assume the role of National Constituent Assembly, designated as the “one and indivisible” representation of the Nation. “The deputy, declares one of the Constituents, must consider himself under two aspects, as a member of the body of the Assembly that deliberates, and as a member of the body

⁶ Cf. the ritual of “the royal touch” said to give the kings of France and England the power to miraculously heal tuberculosis (Bloch 1990).

of the Nation in the name of which he speaks.”⁷ Thus the new power is able to conserve the double body figuration along with the essential aspects of monarchic sovereignty. This transfer of sovereignty coincides with a bodily transfer which upholds the traditional determinations of the mystical Body, its unity, its power to pronounce law, and its perpetuity, assured for the future by the means of electoral “regeneration.” One is therefore witness to a simple *passation*, to the transfer of the organopolitical scheme upon a new pole of incorporation, leaving the structure of this scheme intact. One would be wrong however to underestimate the severity of this rupture: for the first time since Antiquity, a purely secular legitimacy substitutes for the religious foundation of sovereignty. A new configuration appears, where the Body Politic no longer incarnates itself in man, or in a caste, but in an impersonal power, renewed periodically by popular vote. In such a way that the place of power now manifests as an *empty place* (*place vide*) that no man would be capable of filling in a natural and permanent manner. It fell to Sieyès to draw up the outlines of this new political field: he describes it as a sphere in which the citizens, all at equal distance from the centre, form the circumference, while its empty centre symbolizes the sovereignty of the law.⁸ It is necessary to stress yet again that this transfer of sovereignty is by no means performed peacefully: with the crisis of the monarchic State, a new public space of liberty and action emerges, that of the “clubs” and “popular societies,” of the sans-culottes groups, born in the revolutionary process. Everything develops as if the disincorporation of the Body Politic had liberated the flesh of the community, an an-archic flesh, scattered across countless poles, which actively resist all attempt at reincorporation. These are the “elementary republics” that Arendt spoke of, this democracy of the multitudes which continues to radicalize the revolutionary process right up to the fall of the monarchy and the proclamation of the Republic, engendering a profound transformation in the image of the sovereign Body.

When the 1789 Revolution stripped the king of his sacred dignity to give him the status of “premier state official,” the transfer of sovereignty went hand in hand with a *desacralization* of the royal body, leaving it only its profanity. Certain engravings show, for example, the king wandering the Champs-de-Mars during the preparations for Federation celebrations, or casually walking around Paris, sporting a tricolour cockade: with the look of an ordinary citizen, deprived of the stylization and distance that characterized his traditional representations. During this period, Louis

⁷ J. A. Cerutti (Baecque 1993: 124). Regarding this transfer of sovereignty, cf. the analyses of M. Gauchet (Gauchet 1989: 23–28).

⁸ “I conceive the law at the centre of a giant globe; all the citizens, without exception, are at the same distance, remaining upon the circumference and only occupying a place of equality; all depends upon the law” (Sieyès 1982: 88).

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XVI is spared the increasing rejection inspired by the monarchy, and manages to preserve the respect and love of the French. On the other hand, a hateful campaign is very quickly unleashed against the queen Marie-Antoinette, caricatured in the style of a wild beast (the wolf-queen, the “tigress thirsty for French blood”), repugnant (the tarantula-queen) or monstrous (the harpy-queen), and accused in numerous pamphlets of attempting to murder Louis XVI by intoxicating or poisoning him, of being a debauched and lesbian “Messaline,” of committing incest with her brother, the emperor of Austria, with one of the king’s brothers, and even with her own son (this last accusation is taken up again at the time of her trial).⁹ Untrammelled and transgressive sexuality, incest, poisoning, vampirism, animal metamorphoses: we can recognize here the features that the inquisitors and the judges once attributed to the supposed witches who they condemned to the stake. From the depths of time, emerges the figure of the witch-queen, the hotbed of devouring sexual pleasure (*jouissance*), seen as a horrifying menace, upon whom all the hate from which the king still remains sheltered is projected.

This situation suddenly changes in 1791 with the flight of the royal family, perceived by public opinion as high treason, reaching its climax with their arrest at Varennes. A surprising mutation affects the figuration of the body of the king. In a matter of weeks, several thousand caricatures appear in which the king is presented as a hypocrite (the two-faced Janus-king), a ravenous Gargantua (“the ogre Capet” readying himself to devour all of France), and, most frequently, as a pig or as hybrid monster, half man, half swine. Today we are too accustomed to political caricatures to feel the full impact of these attacks upon a personage revered for centuries as the image of God himself. The edifying imagery of the “citizen-king” gives way here to another figuration, where he is no longer considered a member of the national community, but rather is foreign to the nation and humanity. His is a Monstrous Body by virtue of his deformity, his bestiality, of which the caricatures privilege the lowest functions (swallowing, vomiting, defecating...), appearing both grotesque and menacing, excluded from the nation and on the verge of causing its destruction, in the image of a pig, represented in an engraving, adorned with the royal insignia and devouring a cake decorated with fleurs-de-lis. His is a trash-body of excrement (*Corps-déchet excrémental*), as suggested by a stamp which portrays him as crawling along through the scum of the “royal sewer” whilst being defecated upon. And finally, a fragmented body, through the shattering of the reflection that composed the imaginary unity of the mystical Body: in this manner he is represented on a stamp

⁹ One can find several examples of this type of literature in C. Thomas’ *The Wicked Queen* (Thomas 1999), and in L. Hunt’s *Le roman familial de la Révolution française* (Hunt 1995: 107–139).

as an enraged madman, using his sceptre to smash a mirror into fragments in which his shattered face is reflected in such a way that, as the legend specifies, “each shard multiplies his madness.”¹⁰ These representations all originate in the same phantasm, depicting the body of the king as an *abject body*, a heterogeneous element that threatens the unity of the Body of the Nation, and which must be eliminated. Which is exactly what will happen in January 1793, as a result of the trial in which the Convention sends the pig-king to the guillotine. It is not the first time that a king of France has been made the target of such attacks. After the assassination of their leader, the Duke of Guise, in 1588, the most fanatical of the Catholics set themselves upon Henri III, whom they accused of being a libertine and a sodomite, a heretic, a sorcerer who sacrificed children in his devil worship, and even an “incarnated devil.” Here also, caricatures and pamphlets portray him as a beast, a monster, or a pig: and this hateful campaign would also result in the death of the king, assassinated the following year by the monk Jacques Clément. As in the case of Louis XVI, we are dealing with an extreme form of desacralization which sends the royal body from sacred sovereignty to the most radical abjection. This phenomenon only arises in times of crisis, when the fascinated identification of the subjects alienated within the Great Body is interrupted. No rebellion is possible without this dis-identification; no revolution takes place without this reversal which rejects the body of the monarch or the dictator to the place of trash, of putrid waste.

We are now able to better understand the double movement of disincorporation-reincorporation that is accomplished in the process of the Revolution. The disincorporation of the Body Politic is evident in the fact that the body of the king, obliged to be its visible incarnation, is violently cleaved from the national community; he is no longer able to be represented in any way but as disfigured, as a fragmented body, as bestialized, as vile trash. It is, however, only a *partial* disincorporation, attaching itself to an inverse gesture; for, in ejecting this trash which haunts and destroys it from the inside, the sovereign Body reconstitutes its threatened unity. A “regenerated” Body thus takes the place of the fallen royal body. The Convention even envisaged erecting a gigantic statue: “an image of the mighty People, of the People of France,” this colossus would have stood upon the debris of the statues of the kings. Such representations *make sense*, they reveal that the decomposition of the monarchic Body coincides paradoxically with a gesture of reincarnation, which is indissociable from the dawn of a new sovereign Body. This gesture, without doubt, also indicates the presence of a haunting obsession: that these pathetic re-

¹⁰ These engravings are reproduced and commented in A. Duprat’s *Le roi décapité* (Duprat 1992). Also relevant is the same author’s *Les rois de papier* (Duprat 2002), which compares the caricatures of Henri III and Louis XVI.

mains upon which the republican giant tramples should one day breathe anew. As much a symbol of victory, the monumental erection of the Body of the Republic is a call to arms against an enemy defeated, yet forever being reborn.

It is not only these physical figurations—republican gatherings, images and statues—that witness this project of reincorporation, but the very discourse of the revolutionaries, for example in the writings of the Jacobin leader Billaud-Varenne. Nothing more classic, in appearance, than his conception of the Body when he reaffirms the unity of the sovereign principle—“the Body Politic, like the human body, becomes a monster if it has several heads”—and the hierarchy of its organs—“you are the hands of the Body Politic for which the Convention is the head and we are the eyes,” as he writes to the Supervisory Committees (*Comités de Surveillance*). Nonetheless, there remains a difference in one essential feature: in the classic doctrine, the longevity of the *Corpus Mysticum* was guaranteed by the hereditary succession of the monarchs who were its incarnation; just as the continuity and legitimacy of the State today, in our representative democracies, is assured by the periodic ritual of election. For Billaud-Varenne, the immortal Body of the Republic was only able to perpetuate itself through the Terror, by constantly regenerating itself through the elimination of the gangrene that gnawed at it: “the only plan capable of assuring the indestructible duration of the Republic is to attack, with the same blow, that which leads astray the spirit and the heart; it is the political gangrene that must be pulled out by the roots, right down to its slightest ramifications” (Billaud-Varenne 1992: 81). This amputation is the necessary condition for regeneration. The same can be said in comparing the Revolution to the sorceress Medea: “who, to bestow youth upon the old Jason, was required to dismember his tattered body before recasting it anew”: thus, “destruction and death have opened by their bloodied hands the doors to reproduction and life” (1992: 116). What confers its “indestructible” sovereignty on the Republic is thus its capacity to designate the Enemy, namely (which for Billaud amounts to the same thing...) the enforced expulsion of these heterogeneous elements that “like the heads of the Hydra are forever reborn.”

At this point, this incessant and interminable combat runs into a major difficulty: when the Terror begins to radicalize, condemning even revolutionaries as “suspects,” it becomes increasingly difficult to circumscribe the enemy, to distinguish the sick limbs from the healthy. This panicked confusion which blurs the demarcation between friend and enemy, proper and foreign, cancer and body, profoundly influences the Jacobin figuration of the Body. Let us note the justifications of Billaud-Varenne before the Convention regarding the proclamation of the Terror: “It is time to give once more a robust health to the Body Politic to the detriment of the gangrenous limbs” (Baecque 1993). He continues by adding that, “everywhere the members want to act without the direction

of the head.” We see the image of a fragmented body, struggling against itself, where all that escapes the authority of the Centre “becomes exuberant, parasitic, without unity,” where the head is forced to combat the “dangerous coalition” of its limbs. On this head without body, or head struggling against its own body, is superimposed the inverse image of a headless body, the deformed body of the defeated monarchy which continues to threaten the Republic—for “the head of the monster may be slain, but the body lives on with its defected forms.” One has the impression of witnessing the confrontation of two mystical Bodies, where the Body of the Republic appears to be dealing with another body, or rather with the *scraps* of this rival body that haunts and destroys it from the inside. It is the impossibility Billaud finds of representing this body, both singular and double, struggling against the Other inside itself, which destabilizes his conception of the Body Politic, rendering it infigurable. Yet this opposition between the head of the State—namely the Convention and the Committee of Public Safety—and its body has a further significance. This rebel body with its “sick organs,” it is also the people, that Billaud considers an unstable multitude. That is what leads him to call for a Master capable of reassembling and mobilizing the popular “flock”: “With a leader, the people are capable of the greatest efforts; should they lose him, within an instant they are no more than a flock that the slightest thing could suddenly scare and disperse” (Billaud-Varenne 1989: 22). A surprising statement, in which is unveiled the hidden face of the Jacobin Terror: behind the cult of the Sovereign People resides a bottomless scorn for the actual people, to whom are denied all consistency, all capacity to unite and to act of their own accord without submitting to a Master. This effectively corresponds to the political practice of the Jacobins, who, after allying themselves to the popular movements in order to seize power, then do all in their power to break them, by executing their most radical leaders and shutting down the sans-culottes groups.

For Billaud and the Jacobins, everything happens as if the transfer of sovereignty had in part failed, as if the foundation of the Republic had let a threatening residue of the Ancient Regime subsist in the very core of the new Body Politic. The radical re-foundation that is targeted thus clashes with a negative internal object. Through ego-analysis we can understand the genesis of this filthy Thing (*Chose*), this putrid trash, whose persistence necessitates the Terror. We understand, indeed, that our body of flesh remains “incompletely constituted”; that the tactile chiasm fails to entirely incarnate each carnal pole; that its auto-incarnation leaves an irreducible residue. I propose to call this part of my flesh that is not recognized as *mine*, that I consider as a foreign Thing, the *remainder* (Rogozinski 2010). It presents itself as an element simultaneously immanent in and transcendent of the ego-flesh, included in the body and yet heterogeneous. A major characteristic of the remainder is that it condenses the ambivalent signification of the proper and the foreign, the sacred and the

abject. Signs that are unstable and reversible: when its ambivalence is broken, it tends to oscillate from one pole to the other, to transfigure itself into an object of love, or inversely, to disfigure itself into an object of disgust and hate. If it is true that the transcendental matrix of collective entities is based in the individual body of flesh, we can recognize that these phenomena deploy themselves at the inter-subjective level. When they reject or exclude it, when they attempt to absorb or, inversely, destroy it, all the human communities have to deal, in one way or another, with this intimate strangeness that I have called the remainder. In the classical figuration of the *Corpus Mysticum*, the body of the monarch appeared as a heterogeneous element of a sacred nature, quasi-divine, a transfigured remainder of the Great Body. In a sense, the monarch was already excluded, separated by his “majesty” from the rest of the community—to which he belongs without really belonging, simultaneously immanent and exterior to this Body. With the revolutionary crisis, with the disincorporation of the mystical Body, its remainder is disfigured, its affective value is inverted and it is left to occupy the place of abjection. It is in this manner, as Michelet writes, that “the king, this god, this idol, becomes an object of horror” (Laffont 1988: 75).

A new figure of the enemy appears, that of the Absolute Enemy, who is fought not for any specific motive, but for the crime he commits by his very existence, for “royalty is an eternal crime.” As such an enemy is always guilty, *whatever he does*; his real acts have no importance. Rather, his qualities or the merit of his actions plead in his disfavour, as they help him to dissimulate his true nature. It is therefore unsurprising that Saint-Just insists upon the “duplicity” of the king, his “appearance of goodness” that serves to mask his “hidden malignancy”: such a cleaving exists between the reality of his actions and his evil essence that the Enemy is only ever able to be a hypocrite. Some authors have tried to explain this hatred for hypocrisy that characterizes Jacobin discourse by invoking the Jacobins’ “despotic moralism,” their confusion of apparent legality of action and their hidden moral intention.¹¹ Doubtlessly, this also arises from their representation of the Body: for the duplicity attributed to Louis XVI takes root in the figuration of the *double body* of the Sovereign, to which the Jacobins remain faithful. Just as the classical doctrine distinguished the king’s mortal body from the mystical Body which “can do no evil,” the Jacobins, behind the concrete acts of Louis Capet, denounce his maleficent essence which *can do nothing but evil*. From Bossuet to Saint-Just, the same program is supported, through an inversion of sense that transforms the mystical Body into a diabolical Anti-Body.

¹¹ This is the position of Kant, exposed in *Religion* in 1793 and *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*. It is also that of Camus and Arendt.

The question is often asked as to whether the Terror was the necessary sequel to the regicide. I see it rather as a consequence of the Jacobin conception of regicide, which is envisaged as the elimination of a “monster” unworthy of living. It is this conception of the Absolute Enemy, whose very existence is a threat to the Body of the Republic, that the Jacobins’ gesture will extend from the king to all “suspects.” When they set themselves upon the Girondins, Danton, the Hebertists and *Enragés*, they always denounce them as an *exterior* threat (the “conspiracy of foreigners”) which breaks through to the *interior*, to the “entrails of the Republic.” It is this paradoxical status—the both internal and external position of the remainder—that Saint-Just attributes to Louis XVI in designating him as a “foreign enemy,” and nevertheless, as a “*foreigner amongst us*”: intimately present to the people that will reject and kill him, and to whom he belongs, despite it all, as flesh of their flesh. Does this signify that the Revolution was inevitably leading to the Terror? I think not. One must take care not to consider the Revolution as a “whole,” and thus underestimate the political conflicts that divide it: for example, the decisive political conflict surrounding the debates at the Convention on the king’s trial in the autumn of 1792, which engage two very different conceptions of the sovereign Body. While Robespierre and Saint-Just rejected the organization of a trial and demanded the immediate execution of the “tyrant,” the moderate republicans—the Girondins—and in particular Condorcet were calling for the crimes attributed to Louis XVI to be “judged and punished as crimes of the same type committed by any other individual.”¹² They considered the “former king” a citizen equal to all others, for they took as a given the democratic disincorporation and the desacralization of the royal person there implied. From this perspective, all links between the physical person of the king and the Body of the Nation had already been broken in an irreversible manner.

The position of the Jacobins was quite different. Through affirming that the king is not a citizen, that there is no need to put him on trial because he is “already guilty” for the sole fact that he is king, Saint-Just considers him an *exception*, withheld from common law: a heterogeneous element at the heart of the social body, just as was the case under the monarchy by divine right. From this perspective, the status of his exception is completely inverted; the fallen monarch passes to the other pole of the remainder, from glorious to the accursed share of the Great Body. It would be incorrect therefore to credit the Jacobins with the most decisive rupture: it is in fact the adverse position, that of Condorcet, that radically breaks with the monarchic figuration of the Body, while Saint-Just and the Jacobins merely perpetuate it in an inverted form. The democratic

¹² The most significant texts on this debate can be found in M. Walzer’s remarkable study, *Regicide and Revolution* (Walzer 1974).

radicality of the Girondins, nevertheless, is accompanied by a conservative political position, a deep-seated mistrust of the masses, of the “savage democracy” of the sans-culottes, whereas their Jacobin rivals relied on them in order to seize power. The question of the sovereign Body, of its disincorporation and its reincorporation, is undoubtedly at the core of the conflict. For the Girondins, the transfer of sovereignty had already essentially been accomplished and the king’s trial would only further ratify the inevitable disincorporation of the monarchic Body. For the Jacobins, this transfer remains imperfect or impossible as long as the king is allowed to live, and only regicide will make the foundation of a Republic possible. Just as Catholic theologians claim that the Body of Christ is truly present in the Host, these revolutionaries still believe in the physical presence of the *Corpus Mysticum* in the body of the king, in a union so intimate that the body of the dethroned king would continue to incarnate the Great Body, even until he is placed upon the scaffold. For them, his execution takes on the meaning of a sacred ceremony—a “religious celebration,” as Marat declared—in which the whole Body Politic, in order to be reborn, is obliged to die with its mystic Head¹³.

The meaning of regicide is thus ambivalent: if we conceive of it, with Condorcet and the Gironde, as a legal procedure, that of a high official being found guilty of treason, it has nothing to do with the Terror. If, however, we consider it, as did Saint-Just and the Jacobins, as an exceptional procedure in which the Body of the Republic regenerates and reincorporates itself through the elimination of its Enemy, the regicide is therefore the inaugural act of the Terror and Louis XVI the first representative of the Evil Enemy that will tirelessly be hunted into extermination. Obsessed with purging the Body of the Nation of this infiltrating foreign body, the Jacobins will extend without any limit the criteria for exception, for the outlawing of the Enemy. With the metamorphosis of the real enemy into the Absolute Enemy, the logic of war is substituted for the logic of politics, a war which becomes unlimited, interminable, a war of extermination. As this ungraspable Enemy constantly reappears under new guises, he must be tirelessly unmasked and destroyed. The republican historian, Quinet, understood this perfectly in seeing in the Terror of 1793 the “inevitable legacy of the history of France,” the sign that the Jacobins remained prisoners to the monarchic conception of power. If the Girondins “wanted to achieve freedom through freedom (and) rejected all the heritage of the old France,” the Jacobins on the other hand “bowed down before the old tradition. They employed the political system of the old France in order to destroy it, and thus exposed

¹³ “All that breathes must at last die and be reborn, proclaimed a Jacobin deputy, at moment when the tyrant’s head falls. The generation of a mighty people depends on your actions. Yes, it is you that will allow the French people to take a new existence.”

themselves to its recreation.” In proclaiming the Terror, “the revolutionaries feared the Revolution”: they restored “the former cult among the French of absolute authority; the more they returned to the old forms, the more they believed themselves innovators.” With sharp lucidity, Quinet suggests that this heritage of absolute monarchy invests itself in the pervading image of the body; that the regicide, far from being an end to monarchic sovereignty, induced its very return as a ghostly form, that of a *phantom limb*: “The French were given the same sensation as that felt by an amputee; he continues to feel his missing limb with each movement. France could feel the monarchy in everything, long after it had been cut away. Therefore [...] the political soul of the former regime seemed to live once more through them” and “they set to mutually exterminating each other in order to strike at this ghost of the re-emerging monarchy that could be felt in the depths of the soul” (Quinet 2009: 458, 480, *passim*).¹⁴ To this dazzling intuition of Quinet, I have nothing to further add. I have only attempted to give further support to his thesis through a phenomenological analysis of incorporation. By returning the figurations of the collective Body to their immanent condition, ego-analysis allows us to understand how the Revolution came to reconstitute the mystical Body of the King, to reincorporate it, to reproduce it in its inverted form, through a process of disincorporation that shatters this figure, destabilizes and transforms it into a torn, monstrous, and infigurable body. However we now know that this mode of disincorporation/reincorporation is not the only possible alternative, that the democratic revolution does not necessarily lead to terror; that it is possible, as the struggle of Condorcet and the Girondins bears witness, to accept democratic disincorporation and desacralization of power without also setting in motion the reconstitution of a new sovereign Body: that it is possible to invent a new form of political thought and action without ceding to the phantasm of searching for a hidden Enemy: by trying to leave empty the place of power, so that the Republic would be founded, not on terror, but on the sovereignty of the law. The Girondins, however, left the “social question” unsolved. They turned away from the popular revolutionary societies, leaving them to form alliances with their Jacobin adversaries, without perceiving that the space of freedom that they had opened also had a role to play in the foundation of a democratic Republic. This missed opportunity for the supporters of a desacralized politics and a democracy of the masses, this possible conjunction that never happened (neither in 1793, nor 1917, nor

¹⁴ It is Lefort who rediscovered Quinet and underlined the importance of his analysis of the French Revolution. Concerning all the questions discussed in this text, I would like to refer to Eric Santner’s beautiful book, *The Royal Remains—The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty*, Chicago UP, 2011 (which I discovered only after having written my own text).

Revolution and Terror, or how Louis XVI was turned into a pig

in any other revolutionary uprising), remains a major stake for the revolutions of our era, their “lost treasure,” and perhaps their horizon of hope.

Translated from the French by Nicholas Newth

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