Chapter 1
The Transformation of Social Space

I

Attempts to discuss Rimbaud in terms of the events of 1871 have for the most part been limited to frenzied interrogations by literary historians and biographers anxious to ascertain his precise physical whereabouts during the months of March to May 1871.[1] Was Rimbaud an active participant in the insurrection? Which informants are to be believed? Even to pose the question in this form reveals the anxiety of the empiricist working in the service of reductivism—a reductivism that most likely has political (recuperative) motivations. Would Rimbaud's absence, definitively proved, from the scene of the crime, in turn definitively silence the social and political repercussions of his work? Would an eyewitness account of his presence on the barricades give a political interpretation of his poetry more validity?

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

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

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

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

> L'hiver, nous irons dans un petit wagon rose
> Avec des coussins bleus.
> Nous serons bien. Un nid de baisers fous repose
> Dans chaque coin moelleux.
>
> [In winter we shall travel in a little pink railway carriage
> With blue cushions.
> We'll be comfortable. A nest of mad kisses lies in wait
> In each soft corner.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III

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

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

Engels evaluates the ''serious political mistake'' by calculating a rate of exchange between bank and hostages. Not surprisingly, his analysis is situated soundly in the realm of political economy. In the early 1960s the Situationists—a group whose project lay at the intersection of the revolutionary workers' movement and the artistic ''avant-garde''—proposed another sort of analysis, one that altered the sphere of political economy by bringing transformations on the level of everyday life from the peripheries of its analysis to the center. To the extent that the Situationist critique of everyday life was inseparable from the project of intervening into, transforming lived experience, the activities of the group can be seen to fall under the dual banner of Engels's ''making conscious the unconscious tendencies of the Commune'' and Rimbaud's ''Changer la Vie.'' In the failure of the Commune—its failure, that is, in the classical terms of the workers' movement, to produce what later, more ''successful'' revolutions produced, namely, a state bureaucracy—in that failure the Situationists saw its success. To view the Commune from the perspective of the transformation of everyday life would demand, then, that we juxtapose the Communards' political failure or mistake—leaving intact the Bank of France—with one of their more ''monumental'' achievements: the demolition of the Vendôme Column, built by Napoléon to glorify the victories of the Grand Army. On the one hand, a reticence, a refusal to act; on the other, violence and destruction as complete reappropriation: the creation, through destruction, of a positive social void, the refusal of the dominant organization of social space and the supposed neutrality of monuments. The failure of the Communards in the ''mature'' realm of military and politico-economic efficacy is balanced by their accomplishments in the Imaginary or preconscious space that lies outside specific and directly representable class functions—the space that could be said to constitute the realm of political desire rather than need.

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

> Les blancs débarquent. Le canon! Il faut se soummettre au baptême, s'habiller, travailler.
>
> J'ai reçu au coeur le coup de grâce. Ah! je ne l'avais pas prévu!
>
> [The whites are landing. The cannon! We will have to submit to baptism, get dressed, and work.
>
> I have received in my heart the stroke of mercy. Ah! I had not foreseen it!]

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

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

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

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

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

> Quand irons-nous, par delà les grèves et les monts, saluer la naissance du travail nouveau, la sagesse nouvelle, la fuite des tyrans et des démons, la fin de la superstition, adorer—les premiers!—Noël sur la terre!
>
> [When will we journey beyond the beaches and the mountains, to hail the birth of new work, new wisdom, the flight of tyrants and demons, the end of superstition; to adore—the first!—Christmas on earth!]

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

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

If workers are those who are not allowed to transform the space/time allotted them, then the lesson of the Commune can be found in its recognition that revolution consists not in changing the juridical form that allots space/time (for example, allowing a party to appropriate bureaucratic organization) but rather in completely transforming the nature of space/time. It is here that Marx's "Transform the World" and Rimbaud's "Changer la Vie" become, as the Surrealists proclaimed, the same slogan. The working existence of the Commune constituted a critique pronounced against geographic zoning whereby diverse forms of socioeconomic power are installed: a breakdown of a privileged place or places in favor of a permanent exchange between distinct places–thus, the importance of the *quartier*. Lefebvre's work is especially important in emphasizing the disintegration of the practical, material foundations and habits that organized daily life during the hardships of the siege of Paris in the fall and winter of 1870.[10] In the midst of this disintegration sprang up new networks and systems of communication solidifying small groups: local neighborhood associations, women's clubs, legions of the National Guard, and, above all, the social life of the *quartier*—groups whose often avowedly revolutionary aspirations were allowed to develop freely in part because the government lacked both the means and the authority to police the city. The local *arrondissement* gained a considerable degree of autonomy, and the heavily populated popular districts had come close to being self-governing. The siege allowed new ambiences, new manners of encountering or of meeting with one another to develop that are both the product and the instrument of transformed behavior.

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

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

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

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

> Ainsi, toujours vers l'azur noir
> Où tremble la mer des topazes,
> Fonctionneront dans ton soir
> Les Lys, ces clystères d'extases!
>
> [Thus, continually toward the dark azure
> Where the sea of topazes shimmers,
> Will function in your evening
> Lilies, those enemas of ecstasy!]

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

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

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

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

IV

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

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

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

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

But such an omniscient theoretical viewpoint gives way to easy proofs that the Commune was objectively doomed to failure and could not have been fulfilled. This viewpoint, as the Situationists point out, forgets that for those who really lived it, the fulfillment was *already there*. And as Mallarmé said of Rimbaud, "I think that prolonging the hope for a work of maturity would harm, in this case, the exact interpretation of a unique adventure in the history of art."[19] It is in this sense that Marx should be understood when he says that the most important social measure of the Commune was its own *working existence*.

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

1. The one notable exception is Steve Murphy, in his ''Rimbaud et la Commune?'' In Alain Borer (ed.), *Rimbaud Multiple. Colloque de Cérisy* (Gourdon: Bedou & Touzot, 1985), 50-65. I came across Murphy's very valuable and erudite research as I was completing this book; although our arguments and findings frequently overlap, Murphy's goal, as I take it, to enhance explications of particular poems by Rimbaud, is more circumscribed than mine.

2. Roland Barthes, ''Nautilus et Bateau ivre,'' *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), 91.

3. Alfred Delvau, *Dictionnaire de la langue verte* (Paris: Marpon & Flammarion, 1883), 87.

4. Gustave-Paul Cluseret, *Mémoires du général Cluseret*, vol. II (Paris: Jules Levy, 1887); citations taken from 274-87.

5. Louis Rossel, *Mémoires, procès et correspondance* (Paris: J. J. Pauvert, 1960), 276.

6. Catulle Mendès, *Les 73 journées de la Commune* (Paris: E. Lachaud, 1871), 311.

7. Auguste Blanqui, *Instructions pour une prise d'armes* (Paris: Editions de la tête de feuilles, 1972), 61.

8. Friedrich Engels, introduction to Karl Marx and V. I. Lenin, *The Civil War in France: The Paris Commune* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 18.

9. Pierre Gascar, *Rimbaud et la Commune* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 66.

10. See Henri Lefebvre, *La Proclamation de la Commune* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).

11. See, especially, Louis Barron, *Sous le drapeau rouge* (Paris: Albert Savine), 83-87, for one of the best descriptions by an active Communard of the sense of daily life under the Commune.

12. For a description of *détournement*, see especially Guy-Ernest Debord and Gil J. Wolman, ''Mode d'emploi du détournement,'' *Les lèvres nues*, no. 8 (May 1956); reprinted in Gil Wolman, *Résumé des chapitre précédents* (Paris: Editions Spiess, 1981), 46-53; English version in Ken Knabb (ed. and trans.), *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, Calif.: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 8-14.

13. *Bulletin Communal*, May 6, 1871, cited in Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (Devon: Newton Abbot, 1972), 284.

14. Gascar, *Rimbaud et la Commune*, 9.

15. Stewart Edwards (ed.), *The Communards of Paris, 1871*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), 9-10.

16. Félix Fénéon, ''Arthur Rimbaud: *Les Illuminations*,'' in Joan Halperin (ed.), *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, vol. II (Geneva: Massot, 1970), 572.

17. Leo Bersani, ''Rimbaud's Simplicity,'' in *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 247.

18. Edwards (ed.), *The Communards of Paris, 1871*, 10.

19. Stephane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 518.