

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

Chapter 2 The Right to Laziness

The origin of the Commune dates back in effect to the time of Genesis, to the day when Cain killed his brother. It is envy that lies behind all those demands stuttered by the indolent [des paresseux] whose tools make them ashamed, and who in hatred of work prefer the chances of combat to the security of daily work.

Maxime du Camp

"Ideology" is perhaps the fact that each person does what he or she is "supposed to do." . . . Ideology is just the other name for work.

Jacques Rancière

I

In his essay "Le Chant des sirènes," Maurice Blanchot places Rimbaud's *Une Saison en enfer* within a curious constellation of texts, in the community of narratives he calls *récits*: the tale of Ulysses and the Sirens, for example, *Moby-Dick*, Nerval's *Aurélia*, *Nadja*. The constituent elements of the genre, or rather antigenre, *récits* are, at least initially, relatively straightforward; the *récit* is the narrative of a single episode: "something has happened, something which someone has experienced who tells about it afterwards."¹ I say antigenre because Blanchot defines the *récit* in opposition to the novel; the distinction he proposes

between the two kinds of narrative is primarily a temporal one: the *récit* recounts the exceptional event, while the propelling force of the novel is everyday, mundane time. The novel's space is "the world of the usual sort of truth," and its concerns are those of verisimilitude. The *récit*, on the other hand, takes off where verisimilitude stops.

The *récit* for Blanchot functions as a kind of transhistorical antigenre that flowers in opposition to the dominant generic compromise formation of any given historical moment. By designating *Une Saison* a *récit* Blanchot invites an examination of its oppositional stance to the dominant generic project of its historical moment: the novelistic one, what in English is variously called the novel of education or acculturation, in French the *roman de formation*, and the more vast bourgeois cultural project of which the novel of apprenticeship forms perhaps something of a subset—that of biography or autobiography. The novel of formation shares with autobiography a very general project: the recounting of the formation of a personality.

The novel of acculturation, which interests me here not as a collection of specifically designated texts but rather as the exemplary bourgeois cultural project whose outlines we can begin to determine, leads a character through a variety of encounters and experiences and brings him or her out the other end a changed and generally morally [re]formed figure. Georg Lukács, in his chapter on *Wilhelm Meister* in *The Theory of the Novel*, describes the goal or telos of the genre as "the reconciliation of the problematic individual, guided by his lived experience of the ideal, with concrete social reality."² The alienated youth is reintegrated and accommodated to a generally conservative moral and social order through a process involving trial and error, exposure to the wisdom and experience of others, the acquiring of independent judgment, and the ensuing recognition of the individual's role in the objective social world.

In their writings on the bourgeois novel, Lukács and Jean-Paul Sartre join together in underlining two elements essential to the genre of the novel of acculturation. The first of these is an almost atmospheric emanation of *calm*, which Lukács locates in the social optimism of the beginnings of the genre and in the relativization of the central character into a universal and ideal bourgeois subjectivity (bourgeois as universal). Sartre, writing about the late nineteenth century—his exemplary author is Maupassant—locates the same calm in the novel's retrospective narration, in the great distance from which the narrator looks back on the turbulent events of his youth. The novel of youth, in other words, is ventriloquized out of the mouths of the aged, narrators freed from the exigencies of desire who consider the escapades of their youth both lucidly and indulgently:

His heart is calm like the night. He tells his story with detachment. If it has caused him suffering, he has made honey from this suffering. He looks back upon it and considers it as it really was, that is, *sub specie*

aeternitatis. There was difficulty to be sure, but this difficulty ended long ago. . . . Thus the adventure was a brief disturbance which is over with. It is told from the viewpoint of experience and wisdom; it is listened to from the viewpoint of order.³

Neither the author nor the reader of these novels, says Sartre, is running any risks: the event, the turbulence, is past, catalogued, understood, and recounted by a stabilized bourgeoisie at the end of the century who have lived through 1848 and the Commune and who are confident that "nothing else will happen."

We can now begin to gauge the chasm dividing Rimbaud from this project of bourgeois acculturation, of constructing the bourgeois subject, of even recounting a life. To do so we must return to Blanchot's category of the *récit*. The event, in the late nineteenth-century novel, is, for Sartre, passed, catalogued, and understood. The event for Blanchot, however, is essentially to come:

Yet if we regard the *récit* as the true telling of an exceptional event that has taken place and that someone is trying to report, then we have not even come close to sensing the true nature of the *récit*. The *récit* is not the narration of an event, but that event itself, the approach to that event, the place where that event is made to happen—an event that is yet to come and through whose power of attraction the *récit* can hope to come into being too. (109)

If we agree, at least for the moment, with Blanchot's designation of *Une Saison* as *récit*, we can say that it bears a distinctly different relation to the event than one of cataloguing or understanding; it materializes as a thought taken up with, vitally engaged with exterior forces, a problem-thought rather than a narrated, completed thought. "My fate," Rimbaud writes, "depends on this book." The genre of the "novel of youth" is formed out of the interplay between the transformational energies it derives from the energy of youth, and the formal limitations imposed by the necessity that youth must come to an end.⁴ Rimbaud, on the other hand, proposes the impossible: a narrative that consists of pure transformational energy, pure transition or *suradolescence*; a voice that speaks from the place of youth rather than ventriloquizes it; the movement of a thought conjugated *with and in view of* (not after) the event; and the impossible notion that youth might not have to come to an end. Rimbaud's narrative, formally marked by the upheaval of its multifaceted transformations, is not calm.

The second and, for our purposes, more important element that both Lukács and Sartre deem essential to the novel of acculturation is the centrality of the role of *métier* in the narrative construction of the bourgeois subject:

It follows . . . given by the theme itself, of effective action in social reality, that the organization of the outside world into professions,

classes, ranks, etc., is of decisive importance for this particular type of personality as the substratum of its social activity. (Lukács, 133)

The reconciliation of the aspirations of the subject to the objective limitations imposed on him or her by an alienated world is charted through the subject's gradual accession into the world of work. The individual learns to internalize the jarring shocks of encountering the objective limitations set by the social world ("I learned from my mistakes"): this process of internalization is called apprenticeship.⁵ Along the way the individual makes errors; learning to internalize these errors leads not only to a comprehension of and reconciliation with the world—it provides the very motor energy of the plot. The gentleman who has arrived at the moment of his life when the mistakes of his life can be imparted as moral lessons is, according to Sartre, "always a professional by experience, a doctor, soldier, artist . . . neither the general nor the doctor impart their memories in a raw state: they are experiences that have been distilled, and we are warned as soon as they begin to speak that their story has a moral" (134). That moral is both the result and the proscription of the choice and acquisition of a *métier*.

The regime of work, then, is inseparable from the development of form, to which corresponds the formation of the subject.⁶ Rimbaud's narrator, in the "Mauvais Sang" section of *Une Saison en enfer*, categorically refuses the choice of *métier*:

J'ai horreur de tous les métiers. Maîtres et ouvriers, tous paysans, ignobles. La main à plume vaut la main à charrue. — Quel siècle à mains! — Je n'aurai jamais ma main. Après, la domesticité mène trop loin. L'honnêteté de la mendicité me navre. Les criminels dégoûtent comme les châtrés: moi, je suis intact, et ça m'est égal.

[I have a horror of all trades. Bosses and workers, all of them peasants, and common. The hand that holds the pen is as good as the one that holds the plow. (What a century for hands!) I'll never learn to use my hands. Then, domesticity leads too far. The propriety of beggary shames me. Criminals are as disgusting as castrates; I'm intact, and I don't care.]

Lest we take *métiers* in the opening sentence of this passage to mean "trades" as opposed to the more bourgeois "professions," the rest of the paragraph makes clear that the narrator refuses the very structure of work, the social division of labor itself that in the nineteenth century is beginning to be pushed to the limits of overspecialization. He is refusing the narrow horizon resulting from being imprisoned in one's trade—the *idiotisme*, both in the sense of the idiocy and the idiom, of the *métier*: seeing only the problems and preoccupations of one's spe-

cialty, whether one's role be that of boss or worker: "Bosses and workers, all of them peasants, and common."

"Quel siècle à mains!" *Manus*, in Latin, indicates the fist, power, that which wields the weapon or the tool, strength, authority, the "authorial" authority of the writer, even the conjugal authority of the man over the woman who gives him hers. "I'll never learn to use my hands. Then, domesticity leads too far." The narrator places himself outside a set of power relations that includes conjugal domesticity as much as it does the division of labor, even that most primitive of hierarchies that privileges intellectual over manual work, professions of initiative, intelligence, and command—those "proper" to the bourgeoisie—over those requiring physical effort, obedience, and the execution of orders. In Rimbaud the other of the proletariat is not so much the capitalist, the person of property, as the intellectual or artist, the man of words: "The hand that holds the pen is as good as the one that holds the plow."

Writing is an activity of the hand as much as is plowing: the importance lies in the relation of the hand to a tool, even if the tool is as light as a pen. "Je n'aurai jamais ma main," which Paul Schmidt translates convincingly as "I'll never learn to use my hands," announces the will to resist participation in a society where workers' activities—those of artists or farmers—are projected outside of and against them, in a work process in which the previous social labor, which has produced the tools, the pens, the plows, the language with which work is done, appears as a dead structure automatizing labor and worker at once. It is not work that forms the worker but only his or her expropriation—apprenticeship is "realized" only when work has become a power completely alien to the worker. "Je n'aurai jamais ma main": Rimbaud here indicates the will to resist that compromise solution of finding the contradictions of the objective structure to be complex and alienated but nonetheless *manipulable*. The poet, in fact, is identified with the instrumentally manipulated and dominated; if we understand *ma main* as in the French expression *de la main de quelqu'un*, then "I will never have my signature," my oeuvre: a body of artistic work that exists as an alienated or detached object. To have a *métier*, a trade, a specialty—even an antisocial *métier* like beggar or criminal (both professionals who "live by their hands"; in French, *tendre la main* means "to beg")—is to lose one's hand as an integral part of one's body: to experience it as extraneous, detachable, in service to the rest of the body as synecdoche for the social body, executing the wishes of another. To give birth to myself, to become my own work: by placing myself outside the regime of work I can remain intact. "Criminals are as disgusting as castrates; I'm intact, and I don't care." Intact, which is to say, not castrated.⁷

The native infirmity of the worker is castration, the expropriation of the body by the institution of wage labor: the economic obligation of people who cannot otherwise survive to sell the only commodity they possess, their labor power, their "hand," on the labor market. Mutilation is a *consequence* of war (as in "Le

Dormeur du Val"); it is, however, as Rimbaud makes clear, a *condition*, a presupposition of the state apparatus and the organization of work. In the "Nuit de l'enfer" section of *Une Saison*, the space of hell—which is at one and the same time the Christian concept of eternal damnation ("hell; the old one, the one whose doors the son of man opened") and the increasing standardization of everyday life under late nineteenth-century capitalism—is characterized by mutilation: "But I am still alive! Suppose damnation is eternal! A man who wants to mutilate himself is certainly damned, isn't he?" "Ah! To return to life! To stare at our deformities."

The "Mauvais Sang" section of the poem, which, it seems clear from the letters, provided the genesis for the entire narrative, opens with the construction of an "oppositional" ancestry:

J'ai de mes ancêtres gaulois l'oeil bleu blanc, la cervelle étroite, et la maladresse dans la lutte. Je trouve mon habillement aussi barbare que le leur. Mais je ne beurre pas ma chevelure.

Les Gaulois étaient les écorcheurs de bêtes, les brûleurs d'herbes les plus ineptes de leur temps.

D'eux, j'ai: l'idolâtrie et l'amour du sacrilège;—oh! tous les vices, colère, luxure, — magnifique, la luxure;—surtout mensonge et paresse.

[From my ancestors the Gauls I have white-blue eyes, a narrow brain, and awkwardness in competition. I think my clothes are as barbaric as theirs. But I don't butter my hair.

The Gauls were the most inept hide-flayers and hay-burners of their time.

From them I inherit: idolatry and love of sacrilege—oh, all sorts of vice: anger, lust—terrific, lust—above all, lying and laziness.]

We must look closely here at the first of what will be a lengthy series of identifications or *devenir-autres* on the part of the narrator. A lineage or racial ancestry is established, at least initially, through the legacy of specifically antibourgeois moral qualities bequeathed by the barbarian ancestors: clumsiness, inattention to dress, ineptitude or incompetence, idolatry, anger, lust, and, above all, dishonesty and laziness. Later we will see more clearly how this racial identification, among others, functions strategically in the narrative as a rewriting of autobiography: an apparently subjective and individual narrative is little by little generalized to the point of forming a collective, world-historical subject. It has never been sufficiently emphasized that the narrator's "identifications" throughout the poem are always *group* identifications and not individual, psychological, or sentimental ones. In Rimbaud the minimal real unity is not the word or the individual subject or the concept, but rather the *arrangement*, the process of arranging or configuring elements. *Une Saison en enfer* is about the production of collec-

tive utterances that are the products of such arrangements: the voices and experiences of populations—here barbarian hordes—multiplicities, territories, migrations. Thus the acquisition in this passage of what appear initially to be psychological or rather moral characterological traits by the narrator-heir is of importance only within the larger social framework, which places those qualities in dynamic opposition to bourgeois values. Hence, for example, the embrace of lying, which undercuts, of course, the confessional or autobiographical validity of the narrative. (A similar purpose is served in the opening dedication of the whole work to the figure of Satan, "you who value in a writer all lack of descriptive or didactic flair." This opening should be relieved once and for all of any cheap "Satanic" or demonic interpretation. For if it is, what emerges is a formal refusal analogous to the narrator's refusal of work in "Mauvais Sang": Rimbaud's prose work will contain none of the didactic or moralizing posture of the nineteenth-century prose described by Sartre.)

"Above all, lying and laziness." How are we to understand this *éloge* to laziness, which amounts to a placing of the entire poem under its aegis? Certainly it is the antibourgeois value par excellence, the contrary to the justifying myth (industry and utility) of that unproductive and laborious class. But Rimbaud's relationship to laziness is a long and complex one that we can only begin to examine here. Laziness is frequently thematized, in more or less overt ways, throughout the poetry, beginning perhaps with the figure of the *bohème* in "Ma Bohème" and "Sensation" ("Et j'irai loin, bien loin comme un bohémien") and the conscious opposition of sexual and archaic drives to the reality and performance principles of Nina's work world in "Les Réparties de Nina." "Nina" is perhaps the first of the poems where the sharp division between spaces of lived time and the possibility of desire are placed over against the compartmentalized clock time of the adult, work world. In later works like "Vagabonds," this opposition is highlighted by pairing *oisif* and *luxure*, as in the preceding description of the Gauls. The intact body, the body unmarked by work, is the body that experiences intense sensation; *paresse* is linked throughout Rimbaud's work to intensity of physical sensation and, at the same time, to a kind of weightlessness affiliated with pure speed. By a striking paradox, laziness, remaining outside the work order, is not standing still but moving fast, too fast.

Fredric Jameson has written about Rimbaud's unparalleled production of the "adolescent body"; he reads this production in the poetry in terms of a lived experience of "fermentation": the perseverance of identity through metamorphosis.⁸ The choice of fermentation is governed in Jameson's argument by the need to construct a physiological, individual, or subjective homology to the objective historical change in mode of production—the transition from the market stage of capitalism to the monopoly stage—marked by Rimbaud's work. Jameson's underlining of the specificity of the adolescent body in Rimbaud is a powerful perception; however, grounding it in the phenomenological experience

of fermentation, with all its connotations of ripeness and maturity, is incongruous and textually unconvincing. Is not a full, sensory approximation of the *male* adolescent body more readily apparent in the almost reptilian combination of absolute torpor and absolute speed with which that body emerges in Rimbaud's text? Thus, on the one hand, the famous *sommeil* of Rimbaud, the languorous "wine of indolence" of "Les Chercheuses de poux," of "Délire II": "I lay about idle, consumed by an oppressive fever: I envied the bliss of animals—caterpillars, who portray the innocence of Limbo; moles, the slumber of virginity!" "He'll never work; he wants to live like a sleepwalker" ("Délire I"); "The best thing is a drunken sleep, stretched out on some strip of shore" ("Mauvais Sang"). And, on the other, a gesture that is most like a darting, sudden reptilian precipitation; a brusque, usually oral aggression or rapid discharge of emotion—emotion, not sentiment but affect that takes a projectile form. This gesture is most prevalent in Rimbaud's early, erotic thematics—look, for instance, at the early prose work "Les Déserts de l'amour" or the poem "Tête de Faune," or recall the ending to "A la Musique" in which the leisurely contemplation of the girls' bodies is suddenly disrupted: "Et mes désirs brutaux s'accrochent à leurs lèvres"—but it is apparent in other contexts as well, in the violent way, for instance, in which Rimbaud allows the category of the social to disrupt the sleepy genre of pastoral in "Le Dormeur du Val" by suddenly blasting two bullet holes into the middle of the tableau.

What distinguishes the adolescent body, then, as it is figured in Rimbaud's work, is a particular corporeal relation to speed: the body is both too slow and too fast. Periods of apparent lulls are broken by violent, spasmodically unbridled explosions, but even this is something of an optical illusion: the heavy torpor or seeming somnambulance of the body qualified by *paresse* hides a body that is in fact moving too fast. In his memoirs of the Commune, poet and songwriter Louis Barron detects a similar atmosphere prevailing in mid-May in the streets of Paris: "There is in Paris that excess of torpor and excess of exuberance that precedes catastrophe."⁹ Laziness for Rimbaud is a kind of absolute motion, absolute speed that escapes from the pull of gravity. (One thinks, in the context of Rimbaud's relation to speed, of the almost unbelievable rapidity of diction, the semantic *acceleration* of the *Illuminations*; and, in a related context, of Delahaye's description of Rimbaud reading his poetry aloud: "that convulsive haste he had when he recited verse.")¹⁰ Laziness hides an activity not subordinated to certain necessities, an activity that is not the everyday action of subsistence or industry ("Action isn't life; it's merely a way of ruining a kind of strength, a means of destroying nerves. Morality is water on the brain"; "Délire II"). Immobility in Rimbaud can in some cases be composed of pure speed: the sudden darting of desert reptiles on whom lies the fatigue of centuries. The adolescent body is both too slow and too fast to submit to the regime of work: "Work makes life blossom," writes Rimbaud later in "Mauvais Sang," "an old idea,

not mine; my life doesn't weigh enough, it drifts off and floats far beyond action, that third pole of the world [*ce cher point du monde*]." In later sections of *Une Saison en enfer* we will hear diatribes against the sluggishness of work and against the engulfing of the understanding of the civil world by the canons of knowledge used in the physical sciences: "Careful, mind. Don't rush madly after salvation. Train yourself! Ah, science never goes fast enough for us!" ("L'Impossible"). Or:

—Qu'y puis-je? Je connais le travail; et la science est trop lente. Que la prière galope et que la lumière gronde . . . je le vois bien. C'est trop simple, et il fait trop chaud; on se passera de moi. J'ai mon devoir; j'en serai fier à la façon de plusieurs, en le mettant de côté.

[What more can I do? Labor I know, and science is too slow. That praying gallops and that light roars; I'm well aware of it. It's too simple, and the weather's too hot; you can all do without me. I have my duty; but I will be proud, as others have been, to set it aside.]

Non! non! à présent je me révolte contre la mort! Le travail paraît trop léger à mon orgueil: ma trahison au monde serait un supplice trop court. Au dernier moment, j'attaquerais à droite, à gauche.

[No! No! Now I rise up against death! Labor seems too easy for pride like mine: to betray me to the world would be too slight a punishment. At the last moment I would attack, to the right, to the left.]

The adolescent body, at once too slow and too fast, acts out the forces that perturb bourgeois society's reasoned march of progress. For that progress is disrupted by two phenomena: it can be slowed down by the superstitious and the lazy, and it can be thrown offtrack by the impatient, violent rush of insurrection.

II

Rimbaud's own lived experience of resistance to work is well known to any who have read his letters. A few days after returning from his first flight to Paris he writes to Izambard: "I am out of place [*dépaysé*], sick, furious, dull, upset; I hoped to lie in the sun, I hoped for infinite walks, rests, trips, adventures, wanderings [*des bohémienneries*]" (August 25, 1870). To Izambard again three months later: "I returned to Charleville the day after leaving you. My mother received me, and I'm here . . . completely lazy [*oisif*]." And the following year, after the three famous instances of "vagabondage"—twice to Paris and once to Belgium—he is back in Charleville, under the strict and watchful eye of his mother:

More than a year ago I left ordinary life behind for the one you know about. Locked up forever in that indescribable Ardennes country, seeing

nobody, burdened with wretched work, incompetent, mysterious, obstinate, answering questions or crude, mean addresses with silence. . . . She [his mother] wanted to force me to work—forever, in Charleville (Ardenne!). Find a job by such and such a day, she said, or get out.—I refused that life without giving any reasons: it would have been pathetic. (August 28, 1871)

Poetic work, as well, is problematic. To Verlaine he writes in 1872, "Work is as far away from me as my fingernail from my eye." And two years later in London, when Rimbaud appears to be engaged in a frantic search for a position as an instructor of languages, his mother and sister come to London and wait for him to find a position: "There *are* positions," his sister complains. "If he had wanted one, he would have had one and we would have already left. If he had wanted, we could have already been gone today."¹¹

Psychobiographical data like Rimbaud's flights from Charleville, his "vagabondage," have been used most frequently to support any of the various mythic constructions of Rimbaud as *poète maudit*. Designed largely to promote a vulgarized notion of the experience of exile and expatriation, such interpretations rely on the simple and traditional model of the poet as "outsider" and "genius"—outsider even within his own community. The banal imagery invoked by such models is all too familiar: the fixed gap between isolated and misunderstood, but clairvoyant, prodigy and the inauthentic society. Rimbaud's running away from home at sixteen becomes the proof of the irrepressible and singular nature of his genius, his uniquely "poet's" need to distance himself from the petty tyrannies of the provinces and his mother. Nothing, in fact, shows Rimbaud's uniqueness or originality less.¹² Between the years 1830 and 1896, convictions for vagrancy (vagabondage) increased sevenfold in France; in 1889, 600,000 children—one-eleventh of the educable population—had fled school.¹³ In most cases vagabondage corresponded to the ritualization of the entry into the work force at the end of school—that abrupt passage into a new age, itinerant, group of friends: with the onset of work came the moment of rupture. Particularly widespread was the phenomenon of youthful vagabondage: youths "of a bohemian and lazy character, vicious or incorrigible, unable or unwilling to stay and work for bosses in the countryside,"¹⁴ who fled rural life to come to the cities. Charles Portales, author of a book on the phenomenon, wrote in 1854 that "soon laziness and debauchery will propel . . . into the cities thousands of corrupt young men who will threaten propriety."¹⁵ By the middle of the century, vagabondage as a social problem was being analyzed and discussed in print by an assortment of educators, prison supervisors, and social reformers. While some of these writers showed at least an initial sensitivity, speaking, for example, of "the extreme difficulty presented by the question of vagabondage . . . since the prob-

lem touches on the primordial rights of human liberty,"¹⁶ most resorted to a particularly lurid brand of rhetoric:

Outside of the society that it frightens and repels, lives a class of individuals for whom there is no family, no regular work, no fixed domicile.

That class is the class of vagabonds.¹⁷

The Belgian inspector general of prisons, Edouard Ducpetiaux, writing in a tone that typifies the pamphlets of the period, warns against vagabondage as the male equivalent to prostitution; what looks like aimless wandering, he alerts his readers, is in fact a greased path to the gallows:

Ordinarily vagabondage means the first step taken in a career that leads to prison and sometimes to the gallows: vagabondage is for the apprentice what prostitution is for the young woman worker. A sort of proclamation of independence, it is the first act of defiance against the social order.¹⁸

Vagabondage is a pure creation of penal law, a word of repression; it has no existence apart from a legally constituted infraction. A vagabond is a vagabond because he or she is arrested. What is particularly disquieting about vagabondage is its ambiguous status: technically, vagabonds have not violated any laws (except the laws against vagabondage), they have not committed any crimes. But their "way of life" places them in a state that supposes the *eventual* violation of laws: vagabonds are always virtual, anticipatory. One writer describes the ambiguity in this way: you can't say to a vagabond, as you might to a criminal who has committed a crime, "Don't do it again"; instead, you would have to say, "Change your way of life, take up the habits of work, etc."¹⁹ Their existence in "virtuality" or "potentiality" of misdeed makes them more threatening, as Maupas-sant's 1887 story "Le Vagabond" makes clear, than the more predictable criminal. Vagabonds are victims of dangerous heredity and carriers of the fatal germ of *dégénérescence*; "contagious," in both the medical and social sense of the term, they are the incarnation of a social illness that strikes not so much an individual as a family, a generation, a lineage.²⁰ Their problem, like Rimbaud's, is "bad blood." The vagueness of the vagabond's "potential" for evil is, after the Commune, given a precise identity, a face. Vagabonds are now potential political insurgents:

It is easy to understand what the support of such people [vagabonds] must be for the enemies of the established order, those who are pushed by various motives of ambition, desire, anger, and who want to rise up against the established order. These will always find in vagabonds men of action, always ready to do anything, those who, for a cigar or a glass of eau-de-vie, would set fire to all of Paris.

Vagabonds are the most dangerous enemies of society . . . they live among us as savage animals would . . . deplorable from the point of view of society; for the vagabond, having nothing to lose in moments of social upheaval, desires such moments and helps out in the hopes of gaining something . . . vagabondage being not only a fact, but a state, a sort of moral infirmity.²¹

Methods of treating the problem ranged from the preacherly ("Men must be taught, not only by laws and by speeches, but also by example, that nothing is more beautiful than work")²² to the severely repressive. Concerning Rimbaud's being sent back to Charleville after his arrest in Paris, the official police document reads: "Came from Charleroi to Paris with a ticket for Saint-Quentin and without a domicile or means of supporting himself."²³ In fact, the French penal code of 1810 (article 270) defines the vagabond not only as someone without a home but specifically as someone without a *métier*: "Vagabonds or people without a place [*gens sans aveu*—the expression in the Middle Ages referred to people who were not tied to a lord, and who thus had no protection under the law] are those who have neither an assured domicile nor means of existence, and who generally have no trade [*métier*] or profession." Rimbaud profited from an 1832 revision of the penal code that established a legal distinction between adults and adolescents; while adults were liable to six months in prison, youths sixteen or younger were, depending on the circumstances, sent back to their parents or placed under police surveillance until the age of twenty-one, if they had not, by that age, obtained a place in the armed services.

Later in the century the French government would learn to apply to vagabondage—"that nervous mania of locomotion and laziness that appears to be one of the ways in which the free life of the savage is preserved"²⁴—a more effective, if homeopathic, treatment. From vagabondage would come organized wandering in the form of geographic exploration and colonial expedition, a solution that had been advocated for some time by writers on the topic:

One day when I was sitting in the correctional chamber of the Court of Appeals in Rouen, we had to judge a young man who had been found guilty of vagabondage, and who already had been convicted four times for the same crime.

"Why are you appealing?" the President asked him. "In the first place you were only condemned to six months in prison, which is the penalty you just saw being given men for their first offense."

"Why am I appealing?" responded the guilty man. "I am appealing so that you will send me to the colonies. There perhaps I could do something better than what I am doing in France."²⁵

As for transportation, if the state would only grant the transport and establishment of vagabonds on Algerian soil . . .²⁶

Let another asylum be opened for them, and, in the same way that Rome had a law decreeing that rebel beggars be sent to the colonies, let a new law open up those magnificent domains that France possesses beyond the seas for her vagabonds.²⁷

III

In the *Voyant* letters written at the time of the Commune, it is clear that the *élan* propelling Rimbaud toward a structural identification with the workers in Paris arises at the precise moment when "work," as such, has definitively stopped:

Je serai un travailleur: c'est l'idée qui me retient quand les colères folles me poussent vers la bataille de Paris,—où tant de travailleurs meurent pourtant encore tandis que je vous écris! Travailler maintenant, jamais, jamais; je suis en grève.

[I will be a worker: that's what holds me back when a wild fury drives me toward the battle in Paris, where so many workers are still dying while I am writing to you! Work, now? Never, never. I'm on strike. (To Izambard, May 13, 1871)]

"Workers" in this identificatory structure are not those whose time/space is rigidly defined and allotted by a dominant class; they are people who have become aware of their position in a structure of oppression. Rimbaud's identification is with a group-subject whose joint activity is not work but in this case combat. "I will be a worker": it is only at some future moment when the project of new social relations, a radical transformation in the structure of work, has been achieved that Rimbaud will be a worker; now, however, he refuses work. But the refusal of work is not an absence of activity, nor, obviously, is it leisure since leisure reinforces the work model by existing only with reference to work; it is a qualitatively different activity, often very frenetic, and above all combative. The strategic refusal of work presupposes a collective subject as well—the *nous* of the final sections of *Une Saison*, the *horribles travailleurs* whose future existence is affirmed in the letter to Demeny (May 15, 1871): "Other horrible workers will come; they will begin at the horizons where the other has fallen!"

"Mauvais Sang" develops the strategy of nonwork:

Mais! qui a fait ma langue perfide tellement, qu'elle ait guidé et sauvegardé jusqu'ici ma paresse? Sans me servir pour vivre même de mon corps, et plus oisif que le crapaud, j'ai vécu partout.

[But who has made my tongue so treacherous, that until now it has counseled and kept me in idleness? I have not used even my body to get along. More idle than a toad, I have lived everywhere.]

The intact body is the body "safeguarded" from work and from the hierarchy of

its organs inflicted by the work model: the mind that commands, the hand that executes. Laziness, the refusal to make use of the body or turn it into a tool, is here linked to a kind of radical mobility. I have lived everywhere. I have lived many lives. (Later, "J'ai connu tous les fils de famille" — the sexual sense of the verb is clear.) This is not the proverbial mobility of the industrial worker under capitalism, who migrates to the urban capitals from the countryside, "free" to move about because "free" to sell his or her labor. This is the impossible liberty of having exempted oneself from the organization of work in a society that appropriates the very body of the worker.

A pamphlet written about five years after *Une Saison en enfer*, a text that is in many ways its double in the field of political theory, sheds light on Rimbaud's celebration of laziness as ideological refusal: Paul Lafargue's *Le Droit à la paresse* (1880). Born in Cuba of mixed ancestry (Jewish, Cuban mulatto, French, Caribbean Indian), Lafargue came to France to study medicine but became involved in left-wing politics. At first a follower of Proudhon, he became friends with Marx and his family in London and later married Marx's daughter Laura. He participated actively in the Commune and took exile in London at the same time as Rimbaud, Verlaine, Vermerch, Pottier, Clément, and many other ex-Communards.²⁸ He resettled in Paris in 1880 and became a leading propagandist for the Parti ouvrier français. Militantly anticlerical, he was a strong supporter of women's rights. His colonial background helped him become a leading critic and uncannily prescient analyst of imperialism; he was, as well, one of the pioneering figures in the new fields of anthropology and ethnology.

Le Droit à la paresse was written as a parodic refutation of the document that elevated the "right to work" to the status of a revolutionary principle, the 1848 *Droit au travail*. It was to have an enormous effect in France and elsewhere; of all nineteenth-century political pamphlets it was second only to *The Communist Manifesto* in the number of languages into which it was translated. The pamphlet sets out to prove, at a time when labor was being virtually deified, that all individual and social miseries in capitalist society are born of the working classes' conditioned passion and demand for work. Like Rimbaud, Lafargue stages highly dramatic imaginary dialogues and tableaux; his hyperbolic, parodic, and colorful prose in and of itself shows a proto-Brechtian suspension of the opposition between entertainment and instruction. His subtitles ("A nouvel air, chanson nouvelle") recall the *nouvelle harmonie*, the veritable crescendo of "the new" that we find in Rimbaud's "Départ," "Génie," and the conclusion to *Une Saison*. Much time is spent detailing the grotesque physicality and degradation of both worker and bourgeois resulting from the inscription on their bodies of the division of labor—that great sale of human labor that makes merchandise of people and an immense boutique of society. ("For sale," writes Rimbaud in "Solde," "bodies without price, outside any race, any world, any sex, any lineage!") The bourgeoisie, for example, obliged to devote themselves to overcon-

sumption as their definitive activity or *métier*, strikingly resemble the Charleville music listeners in "A la Musique"; traces of Lafargue's medical training can be seen in the precise anatomical vocabulary he uses to depict the bourgeoisie "squatting" (*accroupie*, that favorite word of Rimbaud's) in their *absolute* laziness:

With this occupation [*à ce métier*], the organism decays rapidly, hair falls out, teeth loosen, the abdomen loses its shape, the stomach is ruined, respiration is hampered, all movement grows heavy, the joints stiffen, the phalanges become twisted.²⁹

By proclaiming the right to laziness Lafargue is not turning his back on the tradition of utopian socialism—even if his pamphlet was greeted more favorably in anarchist than in socialist circles.³⁰ He is, however, "deconstructing" the most definitive and time-honored semantic opposition of that tradition—the opposition, dating back to the 1789 Revolution and at first a solely economic one, between "one who works and produces" (*travailleur*) and "one who produces nothing and is a social parasite" (*oisif*).³¹ By the 1830s, the term *travailleurs*, in the collective plural, had taken on strong moral as well as economic value within revolutionary vocabulary, defined antonymically to the pejorative connotations of *oisif* (and its synonyms, *capitaliste*, *exploiteur*, *bourgeois*). With the problem of the "right to work" dominating the June insurrection, the revolution of 1848 definitively consecrates the opposition; the revolutionary content of the term *travailleur* develops throughout the Second Empire, and what had once expressed a solely economic relationship by the time of the Commune takes on its full social and political resonance. By depicting the *absolute* laziness of the bourgeoisie, Lafargue operates within the traditional socialist opposition. His emphasis, however, on workers claiming what the bourgeoisie reserved for itself (leisure, pleasure, intellectual life), on workers *abandoning* the world of work, gives the pamphlet its shock value. Lafargue suggests a revolutionary praxis whereby the true threat to existing order comes not from some untainted working class but from a challenge to the boundaries between labor and leisure, producer and consumer, worker and bourgeois, worker and intellectual.

My concern in articulating Rimbaud's and Lafargue's "attack" on labor is to document a moment or strategy in an oppositional culture that itself cannot be detected as long as one approaches cultural production uniquely from the perspective of the relentless "it couldn't have been otherwise" logic of the commodity. Studies of the nineteenth-century commodification of leisure, of the rise of the department store or the opulent life of the demimonde under the Second Empire, have little to say about such specific oppositional strategies that were operative at the same time. It is crucial in this context, therefore, not to mistake laziness for leisure. Laziness, for Rimbaud and Lafargue, constitutes a kind of third term outside the programmed dyad of labor and leisure.

The interest of Lafargue lies particularly in his refusal to participate in the construction of the "good worker," that image type central to pre-Commune moralizing discourse directed at workers by right-wing philanthropists, moralists, and factory managers. In the decade following the Commune, it is the left that takes over the task of constructing the "good worker"—largely in reaction to inflammatory right-wing diatribes against the prostitutes, *pétroleuses*, drunkards, and vagabonds who set Paris aflame. Many left-wing histories of the Commune written in the 1870s are immediately concerned with depicting the Commune as model worker: a good family man who never touched eau-de-vie and who wanted nothing more than to devote himself fifteen hours a day to his *métier*.

Lafargue begins his pamphlet by quoting Thiers as the representative mouthpiece of bourgeois utility. He allows Thiers to establish the basic opposition between work and pleasure that will structure his own text:

I want to make the clergy's influence all powerful, because I am counting on it to propagate that good philosophy that teaches man that he is here below to suffer, and not that other philosophy that tells man the opposite: take pleasure [*jouis*]. (119)

Rimbaud sums up the alliance between bourgeois rationalization and Christian asceticism even more succinctly in *Une Saison*: "Monsieur Prudhomme was born with Christ" ("L'Impossible"). The value judgments that found the distinction between classes, which privilege intellectual over manual work, have their roots in the primacy of mind over matter, intellectual and moral life over the life of the body, that is the founding premise of the Christian tradition. The new and dominant bourgeois ideology of scientific knowledge as a nonbelief is nothing more than the last refuge of belief, of religiosity. "Nothing is vanity; on toward knowledge!" cries the modern Ecclesiastes, which is *Everyone* ("L'Eclair"). "Science doesn't deny God, it does better, it makes Him unnecessary."³² In Lafargue and Rimbaud, capitalist morality and Christian morality unite in making anathema the body of the worker.

Lafargue's strategy, like Rimbaud's in "Mauvais Sang," is to begin his historical narrative by establishing an "alternative" history; like Rimbaud he will call his alternative narrative a "barbarian" or "pagan" history. (The original title for *Une Saison en enfer* was *Livre païen* or *Livre nègre*.) He begins his narrative with the historical moment when the bourgeoisie, locked in struggle against the nobility, "had happily taken up the pagan tradition once more and glorified the flesh and the passions" (119). Now, of course, gorged with pleasures and with goods, the bourgeoisie preaches abstinence; formerly, its inferior, combative posture allowed for an "adoption" of the pagan tradition.

Like Rimbaud in "Mauvais Sang" ("Pagan blood returns!" and, "Since I cannot express myself except in pagan terms, I would rather keep quiet"), La-

fargue uses the notion of a pagan tradition as a hinge between the celebration of the body (*jouissance*, *paresse*) in the past—the European antecedents—and "New World" alternatives to Western bourgeois ideology: the indifference or outright hostility of peasants and tribespeople to participation in the market economy as wage laborers. Complaining that work in capitalist society is the cause of all intellectual degeneration and all organic deformation, Lafargue conjures up a "precolonial" tableau picturing the native that "the missionaries of trade and the traders of religion have not yet corrupted with Christianity, syphilis, and the dogma of work" (121). Rimbaud's trio of oppression in "Mauvais Sang" is, if we recall, almost identical: "The white men are landing! The cannon! Now we must be baptized, get dressed, and go to work." Just as older civilizations and the beginnings of Christianity "corrupt the barbarians of the old world," so aging Christianity and modern capitalist society corrupt the inhabitants of the New World, manipulating the same rhetoric used to justify class warfare in Europe to condemn the seemingly irrational resistance of tribespeople new to the modern wage-labor situation to be drawn into a marketing mentality in which people are seen as commodities. Lafargue then undertakes a vaguely ethnographic survey, quoting in passing F. LePlay's *Les Ouvriers Européens* (1864); he admires Le Play's talent for observation while rejecting all of his sociological conclusions. The passage he selects praises the seminomadic *paresse* of the *bachkirs* (shepherds from the Asian side of the Urals):

The propensity of the *bachkirs* for laziness, the leisures of nomadic life, the habits of meditation these give rise to even in the least gifted individuals often lend these people a distinction of manners, a fineness of intelligence and of judgment rarely seen at the same social level of a more developed civilization. (122)

Lafargue forms his "pagan" constellation out of the European bourgeoisie at the moment of its struggle against the nobility, the precolonial native, aborigines from Oceania, the Goths and other barbarian tribes, the Eskimo, Indian tribes in Brazil, and the *bachkirs*. On the other side of the spectrum he provides examples of races who "love to work, races for whom work is an organic necessity": Auvergnats, Scots, and Chinese. Within capitalist society he specifies the classes that love work for work's sake: "landowning peasants and the petite bourgeoisie, the former stooped over their lands, the latter entombed in their shops, moving around like moles in their underground world" (213). (It is striking to note that Rimbaud's class background unites exactly these two: his mother was a landowning peasant, his father, petit bourgeois.)

If Rimbaud's and Lafargue's alternative or oppositional constellations are roughly the same, so are the forces each chooses to castigate within the filiation of the oppressive bourgeois order. In fact, the opposition between what I am calling a "constellation" on the one hand, which might be defined as an oppositional

rapport based on a kind of acentered, nonhierarchical mobility and alliance, and the familial relation of "filiation" on the other plays a crucial role in both texts. A familial or filial rhetoric dominates those passages in both texts that deal with the oppressive, official history: "I recall the history of France, the oldest daughter of the Church" ("Mauvais Sang"); "Bourgeois men of letters . . . have sung loathsome songs in honor of the god Progress, the oldest son of Work" (Lafargue, 126). The thematics of the orphan, which are prevalent throughout Rimbaud's early poetry (for example, "Les Etrennes des Orphelins," "Ma Bohème," "Rêvé pour l'hiver," "Les Effarés," or the opening of the early prose work, "Les Déserts de l'amour": "These writings are of a young, a very young man, whose life evolved in no particular place; without a mother, without a country") and, if we are to believe Delahaye, in his conversation ("What work, everything to be demolished, to be erased in my head! Oh! how happy the abandoned child, brought up any which way, reaching adulthood without any idea inculcated by teachers or by a family: new, clear-headed, without principles, without ideas,—since everything they teach us is false—and free, free from everything"),³³ reach their high point in the figure of the poet-speaker of "Mauvais Sang"—dispossessed, without a family, without even a proper language or material form. "If only I had a link to some point in the history of France! But instead, nothing"; "I don't remember much beyond this land, and Christianity. I will see myself forever in its past. But always alone, without a family; what language, in fact, did I used to speak?" And:

"Weakness or strength: you exist, that is strength. . . . You don't know where you are going or why you are going; go in everywhere, answer everyone. No one will kill you, any more than if you were a corpse."
In the morning my eyes were so vacant and my face so dead that the people I met *may not even have seen me*.

Is it surprising, then, to find Rimbaud, an adolescent, and Lafargue, a Creole, both of whose political imaginations were irrevocably marked by participating in the event of the Commune, joined together at the precise historical moment of the acceleration of capital into what would become its imperialist heyday, both articulating the refusal—the very same as that of "primitive" societies—to allow work and production to engulf them?

But are we really seeing anything here distinct from the standard oppositional discourse adopted en masse by nineteenth-century bourgeois intellectuals and writers—Mallarmé and Flaubert being the best examples—to the hegemonic discourse and workings of their own class? In the face of the creeping domination of the world, including the world of art, by a market economy, the midcentury artistic avant-garde institutes a radical disjunction between the world of poetry and the perceived vulgarity of socioeconomic existence: the realm of utility. Flaubert's dialectical negation takes the form of an enshrined, privatized notion of the

Beautiful: an aesthetic realm freed from the contamination of mediocre, "common," extraliterary considerations. Mallarmé, as is well known, is preoccupied with asserting language's autonomy and self-sufficiency. A poetic language of "evocation" must be rescued from drowning in the base and dominant language of "precision": the rationalist, analytic discourse of science, technology, and material production. Mallarmé's fetishization of the poetic text—the thing which appears without a producer, which appears, according to Mallarmé's famous dictum, with "the elocutory disappearance of the poet"—in fact ends up promoting the reification it sought to resist. Thus the canonical avant-garde stance—what was then called art for art's sake and what has evolved via the formalists into the aestheticism and empty formalism of many strains in our own contemporary criticism—can be seen as a transformation of the old aristocratic doctrine that manual work, work related to concerns of practicality or utility, is the attribute of inferiority.³⁴

How different, then, the embrace of inferiority by Rimbaud: "I am well aware that I have always been of an inferior race"; and, "Priests, professors, and doctors, you are mistaken in delivering me into the hands of the law. I have never been one of you; I have never been a Christian; I belong to the race that sang on the scaffold" ("Mauvais Sang"). The narrator's desires or investments are, quite simply, those of the "inferior race." That "race" shows up in the margins of official French history in the form of the undifferentiated horde of serfs "who owe their existence to the Declaration of the Rights of Man," recruited to fight in the Crusades:

Je me rappelle l'histoire de la France, fille aînée de l'Eglise. J'aurais fait, manant, le voyage de terre sainte; j'ai dans la tête des routes dans les plaines souabes, des vues de Byzance, des remparts de Solyme; le culte de Marie, l'attendrissement sur le crucifié s'éveillent en moi parmi mille féeries profanes.—Je suis assis, lépreux, sur les pots cassés et les orties, au pied d'un mur rongé par le soleil.—Plus tard, reître, j'aurais bivouqué sous les nuits d'Allemagne.

Ah! encore: je danse le sabbat dans une rouge clairière, avec des vieilles et des enfants.

[I remember the history of France, the Eldest Daughter of the Church. I would have gone, a village serf, crusading to the Holy Land; my head is full of roads in the Swabian plains, of the sight of Byzantium, of the ramparts of Jerusalem; the cult of Mary, the pitiful thought of Christ crucified, turns in my head with a thousand profane enchantments—I sit, a leper among broken pots and nettles, at the foot of a wall eaten away by the sun.—And later, a wandering mercenary, I would have bivouacked under German nights.

Ah! one more thing: I dance the Sabbath in a scarlet clearing, with old women and children.]

This passage is striking for several reasons, not the least of which is the spatial, geographic presentation of world history we begin to find here—a kind of slide-show projection of side-by-side world-historical scenes with no apparent transition or continuity—that will become so overwhelmingly prevalent in the *Illuminations*. That Rimbaud should produce a historical narrative of discrete, disjointed tableaux at the point in the poem when he is seeking to disassociate himself from the history of official France and of the Church is not surprising; as Gramsci points out, the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. And Rimbaud's history is resolutely subaltern: "I never see myself in the councils of Christ, nor in the councils of the Lords [*Seigneurs*], Christ's representatives."

The subaltern figures of the village serf, the leper, the reiter, the witch are implicitly opposed to the canonical ghost trio of "priests, professors, doctors" who appeared earlier in the poem. A *manant*, in the Middle Ages, was the inhabitant of a village subjugated to seigneurial justice, a rude, uneducated man, the opposite of a gentleman: a *paysan* (a word that has the same etymology as *pagan*, from the Latin *paganus*, villager). A reiter in the Middle Ages was a German warrior; in the nineteenth century the term came to mean "mercenary." The marginality of the leper and the witch needs no comment; it is, however, striking that it should be at this moment that the verb tense underlines a particular relation: "I would have gone, a village serf," and "a wandering mercenary, I would have bivouacked," but "I sit, a leper," and "I dance the Sabbath." Hugo Friedrich, in *The Structure of Modern Poetry*, speaks of Rimbaud's use of what he calls "absolute metaphor," one that is no longer a mere figure of comparison but instead creates an identity.³⁵ (Théodore de Banville was perhaps the first to notice this propensity in Rimbaud when he complained about the opening of "Le Bateau ivre." The poem would be clearer, more successful, he advised, if Rimbaud were to replace the audacious "I" of the first line with a more digestible formula like "I am like a boat that . . ." The true program of such language is, like that of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, to verge *beyond* representation, to function as a machine to produce, not reproduce, the real. Thus Rimbaud's affinity with the slogan, with invective, with any language that, like the peculiar status of the vagabond, is latent or "virtual"—on the verge of passing over into action—and his affinity as well with the performative, libidinal politics of the Situationists, Deleuze, Guattari, and others of the post-May 1968 generation.) Here the present tense of the "I" as leper is given the weight of one of Friedrich's "absolute metaphors"; it is important first as an underlining of the theme of mutilation, the body in Rimbaud being at all times at issue. But it also serves to clarify the peculiar dimensions of Rimbaudian subjectivity. There is no I-Rimbaud who suddenly hallucinates an identity with various marginal characters; instead there is something like a Rimbaud-subject who passes through a series of affective states and who identifies the proper names of history—and later geog-

raphy—to these states. *Une Saison en enfer* lasts for much longer than a season, and its expanse is not limited to hell: a whole parade of universal history, races, cultures, populations will be played out on the body of the speaker. This kind of relation is certainly not the static, familial one of identification, based on relations of resemblance or generation, the "I take myself for . . ." or the "I take after Uncle Todd," the composite, metaphorical figures of Freudian condensation; it is instead the essentially nonrepresentative "crowd" process—"I dance the Sabbath . . . with old women and children"—the becoming-other of "Je est un autre."

Thus the transition from the ending of the fourth section of "Mauvais Sang," "De profundus, Dominé, suis-je bête!" to the middle of the next section: "Je suis une bête, un nègre" (my emphasis): the rhetorical exclamation "materializes" into a *devenir-bête*, a *devenir-nègre*. This is the longest and most celebrated metamorphosis in "Mauvais Sang": the poet's becoming African at the precise moment of the arrival of Christianity and the colonialists ("The white men are landing! The cannon! Now we must be baptized, get dressed, and go to work"). The last term in this trio alerts us to the fact that it is in terms of *métier* or the work order that Rimbaud establishes the opposition between the bad faith of the Western, European bourgeois—the *faux nègres* who are singled out and identified by their professional titles—and the "true kingdom of the children of Ham":

Oui, j'ai les yeux fermés à votre lumière. Je suis une bête, un nègre. Mais je puis être sauvé. Vous êtes de faux nègres, vous, maniaques, féroces, avares. Marchand, tu es nègre; magistrat, tu es nègre; général, tu es nègre; empereur, vieille démangeaison, tu es nègre. . . . Le plus malin est de quitter ce continent, où la folie rôde pour pourvoir d'otages ces misérables. J'entre au vrai royaume des enfants de Cham.

[Yes, my eyes are closed to your light. I am a fool, a nigger. But I can be saved. You are fake niggers; maniacs, savages, misers, all of you. Businessman, you're a nigger; judge, you're a nigger; general, you're a nigger; emperor, old scratch-head, you're a nigger. . . . The best thing is to quit this continent where madness prowls, out to supply hostages for these wretches. I enter the true kingdom of the children of Ham.]

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Mille Plateaux* have provided a useful distinction between the "work regime" and another model of motor activity they call *action libre*.³⁶ Work, in their account, is a motor cause that must overcome resistances, operate on the exterior, be consumed or spent in its effect, and which must be renewed from one instant to another. *Action libre*, on the other hand, has no resistance to overcome; just as much a motor cause, it operates only on the mobile body itself, is not consumed in its effect, and is continuous between two instances. The work model is characterized by relative speed and the importance

of gravity—the force exerted by the weight of a unified body. “Absolute” speed and the way in which parts of the body escape from gravitational pull in order to occupy a nonstratified, nonpunctual space characterize “free action.” “Work makes life blossom,” writes Rimbaud. “An old idea, not mine; my life doesn’t weigh enough, it drifts off and floats far beyond action.” And in an earlier Commune poem, “Qu’est-ce que pour nous, mon coeur,” the spectacular physics of the whirlwind—a word that both literally and figuratively means agitation: the group in rapid movement or that which propels a rapid, irresistible movement—is opposed to that of work:

Qui remuerait les tourbillons de feu furieux,
Que nous et ceux que nous nous imaginons frères?
A nous! Romanesques amis: ça va vous plaire.
Jamais nous ne travaillerons, ô flots de feu!
[Who will stir up whirlwinds of furious fire
If we do not, and those whom we call brothers?
Join us, Romantic friends! Forget all others!
And never will we work, O waves of fire!]

“Free action,” a kind of whirlwind, free expenditure, holds sway in the brief moment before the arrival of the whites:

Connais-je encore la nature? me connais-je?—*Plus de mots. J’ensevelis les morts dans mon ventre. Cris, tambour, danse, danse, danse, danse!*
Je ne vois même pas l’heure où, les blancs débarquant, je tomberai au néant.
Faim, soif, cris, danse, danse, danse, danse!

[Do I understand nature? Do I understand myself? *No more words.* I shroud dead men in my stomach. Shouts, drums, dance, dance, dance, dance! I can’t even imagine the hour when the white men land, and I will fall into nothingness.

Thirst and hunger, shouts, dance, dance, dance, dance!]

The articulated language of the dance, in a kind of fast forward of the process of colonial domination, will be replaced in the next scene by the parodic, staccato recitation of catechism lessons (“I am reborn in reason. The world is good. I will bless life. I will love my brothers . . . God is my strength and I praise God”), and finally, in the concluding moments of “Mauvais Sang,” by the slow, torturous movement of a slave caravan:

Assez! voici la punition.—*En marche!*
Ah! les poumons brûlent, les tempes grondent! La nuit roule dans mes yeux, par ce soleil! Le coeur . . . les membres . . .

Où va-t-on? au combat? Je suis faible! les autres avancent. Les outils, les armes . . . le temps! . . .

Feu! feu sur moi! Là, où je me rends.—Lâches!—je me tue! Je me jette aux pieds des chevaux!

Ah! . . .

—Je m’y habituerai.

Ce serait la vie française, le sentier de l’honneur!

[Stop it! This is your punishment . . . ! *Forward march!*

Ah! my lungs burn, my temples roar! Night rolls in my eyes, beneath the sun! My heart . . . my arms and legs . . .

Where are we going? To battle? I am weak! the others go on ahead . . . tools, weapons . . . give me time!

Fire! Fire at me! Here! or I’ll give myself up!—Cowards!—I’ll kill myself! I’ll throw myself beneath the horses’ hooves!

Ah! . . .

—I’ll get used to it.

That would be the French way, the path of honor.]

Once again, power relations are inscribed on the body as the regulated movement of the march overcomes the whirlwind, nomadic language of the dance. Space is stratified in a single direction: “the French way, the path of honor.” Tactile and auditory sensations, speed and movement succumb to the natural gravity of the state apparatus, one of whose principal affairs is to fix, to make sedentary, to regulate work, and create a work force.

The dance of the blacks before the arrival of the colonialists, like the *paresse* and inactivity of the Gauls, consists of movements whose material and variations have not been controlled by or submitted to the spatiotemporal framework of the state. Lafargue, outlining the results of overproduction in “advanced” countries—the necessity of capital to find new markets in undeveloped, unterritorialized lands—uses the verb *lézarder*, recalling the reptilian, adolescent body in Rimbaud, to describe the free action of noncolonized space:

Capital abounds like merchandise. The financiers no longer know where to put it; and so they go into happy nations where people lounge [*lézardent*] in the sun smoking cigarettes, to build their railroads, set up factories, and bring in the malediction of work. (132)

Political anthropologists like Pierre Clastres in *Society against the State* (1977) have argued that primitive societies do not, in our sense, work, even if their activities are extremely constrained and regulated. An earlier, more powerful version of Clastres’s argument can be found in the striking first pages of what many maintain is the first African novel, René Maran’s *Batouala* (1921). The novel

opens with the main character, a tribal leader in a colony within French Equatorial Africa, struggling to get out of bed in the morning:

And didn't it take an immense effort for him just to stand up? He was the first to admit that making that decision could appear to be of the utmost simplicity to white men. As for him, he found it infinitely more difficult than one might believe. Ordinarily, waking up and work go hand in hand. Certainly work didn't frighten him excessively. Robust, stout-limbed, of excellent stride, he knew no rival when it came to throwing a spear or an assagai, hunting or fighting.

So work couldn't frighten him. Only, in the language of the white men, this word took on a surprising sense, signifying fatigue without immediate tangible result, worries, grief, pain, bad health, the pursuit of chimerical designs.

Aha! white men. So what did they come looking for, so far from their home, in black lands. How much better for them, all of them, to go back to their lands and to never leave them again.

Life is short. Work is only pleasing to those who never understand life. Idleness [*la fainéantise*] cannot degrade anyone. In this it differs profoundly from sloth [*paresse*].

In any case, whether you agreed with him or not, he firmly believed, and would not have given in until proved wrong, that to do nothing was, in all good nature and simplicity, to avail oneself of everything that surrounded you.³⁷

For Clastres, work is the imperative of a state apparatus, and primitive societies are societies without a state: "Two axioms seem to have guided the advance of Western civilization from the outset: the first maintains that true societies unfold in the protective shadow of the state; the second states a categorical imperative: man must work."³⁸ The work model is the invention of the state in that people will only work or produce more than their needs require them when forced to. What are disparagingly called "subsistence economies," societies where one works to satisfy one's needs and not to produce a surplus, are to be seen, according to Clastres, as operating according to a refusal of a useless excess of activity ("There were days when all men of action seemed to him like the toys of some grotesque raving. He would laugh, horribly, on and on"; "Délire I"). Work, then, appears only with the constitution of a surplus; work begins, properly speaking, as overwork, it originates as alienated labor. Where there is no state apparatus or overproduction, there is no work model.

After the Commune—the moment in the history of Western society that comes closest to a dismantling of the state apparatus—the late nineteenth century is figured in Rimbaud's poetry as the epoch of the triumph of the work model, the moment when all activities are translated into possible or virtual work. "It's the vision of numbers," writes Rimbaud in "Mauvais Sang" in a succinct encapsu-

lation of all of Weberian rationalization: the organization of people's productive capacities and nature's resources into markets, their rationalization according to cost accounting, their unity broken into smaller and smaller quantifiable subcomponents—the gearing of a society to accumulation for its own sake. The vision of numbers: the stage reached when everything, as Henri Lefebvre has put it, is calculated because everything is numbered—money, miles, degrees, minutes, calories.³⁹ It is also the moment, as Rimbaud makes clear in poems like "Le Bateau ivre" and "Démocratie," when even the most distant and exotic lands are beginning to be opened up to European commercial interests.

Rimbaud's peculiar achievement in *Une Saison en enfer* is to have articulated the strategic position and pathos of the adolescent body approaching and entering what "the vision of numbers" designates as adulthood. "Quick! Are there any other lives?" "It seemed to me that everyone should have had several *other* lives as well" ("Délire II"). "Je veux travailler libre," writes Rimbaud to Demyen in 1871, three months after the Commune: his strategy of resistance, even flight—from *métier*, from "formation," but no less from morals, values, nations, religions, and private certitudes—should in no way be confused with a quasi-Mallarmean denegation of the social, that canonical avant-garde doctrine according to which self-realization can only be attained outside the functioning of the social. Rimbaud's flight is at all times a profoundly social investment; it opens at every step onto a sociohistorical field. The gradual disassembling of the vertical, religious scaffolding of *Une Saison en enfer* in its final sections is both the event and the possibility of the event—the utopian possibility, that is, of transformed work relations, the resolutely social and nonnostalgic vision of "Noël sur la terre." In this sense we could say that the *récit* in its entirety ends on the note of "Je serai un travailleur": I *will be* a worker—but only at the moment when work, as we know it, has come to an end.

Notes

1. Maurice Blanchot, "The Song of the Sirens," in *The Gaze of Orpheus*, trans. Lydia Davis (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1981), 109.
2. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anya Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 132.
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?* trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Braziller, 1965), 134.
4. Franco Moretti, "The Novel of Youth" (lecture delivered at the University of California at Santa Cruz, May 1985). See also his study of the *bildungsroman*, *The Way of the World* (London: Verso, 1987).
5. See Max Weber for the role of apprenticeship, or "the calling," in the rationalization of economic life: "Labor must . . . be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling. But such an attitude is by no means a product of nature. It cannot be evoked by low wages or high ones alone, but can only be the product of a long and arduous process of education." *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribners, 1958), 62.

6. "Formation," a term assuring the link between the psychological and the professional, takes precedence over "Instruction" as a goal in mid-nineteenth-century French schooling; the adolescent's purely technical education is downplayed in favor of "apprenticeship": preparation in view of social position as well as technique. See Jean-Claude Monier, "L'Apprentissage de sa condition," in Jean Borail (ed.), *Les Sauvages dans la cité* (Paris, 1985), 161-69.
7. It is here, in this urgent need to reassume the body, to eradicate or prevent its expropriation, to take back one's words—"Burn them, *I insist*, and I think you will respect my wish like that of a dead man, burn *all the poems I was stupid enough to give you*" (Rimbaud to Demyen, June 1871)—to recompose oneself, that Rimbaud's connection to Artaud can most convincingly be determined. Compare, for example, Rimbaud's "I became a fabulous opera"—opera, from the Italian meaning *oeuvre*—"I became a fabulous work," with Artaud's "Moi, Antonin Artaud, je suis mon père, ma mère," etc. See my "Artaud and Van Gogh: Reading in the Imaginary," *Enclitic 7* (Fall 1984): 116-25.
8. Fredric Jameson, "Rimbaud and the Spatial Text," in Tak-Wai Wong and M. A. Abbas (eds.), *Re-writing Literary History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1984), 66-93. This is an extremely suggestive essay with which I am mostly in agreement; my quarrel lies with the importance Jameson grants the motif of "fermentation."
9. Louis Barron, *Sous le drapeau rouge* (Paris: Albert Savine, 1889), 165.
10. Ernest Delahaye, cited in Henri Matarasso and Pierre Petitfils, *Vie d'Arthur Rimbaud* (Paris: Hachette, 1962), 86.
11. Vitalie Rimbaud, *Journal*, in Arthur Rimbaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Rolland de Renéville and Jules Mouquet (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 582.
12. In the discussion of vagabondage that follows, I am less concerned with allegorizing the social position of the vagabond and the aesthetic position of Rimbaud than with calling attention to the material conditions of Rimbaud's gesture. I want to show how the mythification of the artist works: on the one hand (in traditional accounts), Rimbaud runs away *because he is a poet*, but the fact that this gesture marks his participation in a social collectivity is ignored and deemed irrelevant to his development *as a poet*.
13. Philippe Meyer, "Le Territoire de l'aveu," in Jacques Berque (ed.), *Nomades et vagabonds* (Paris: 10/18, 1975), 72, 76.
14. C. Rollet, *Enfance abandonnée, vicieux, insoumis, vagabond* (Clermont-Ferrand: Mont-Louis, 1899), 8.
15. Charles Portales, *Des Mendiants et des vagabonds* (Nîmes: Baldy & Roger, 1854), 5.
16. Louis Rivière, *Un Siècle de lutte contre le vagabondage* (Paris: Bureaux de la revue politique et parlementaire, 1899), 5.
17. Théodore Homberg, *Etudes sur le vagabondage* (Paris: Forestier, 1880), ix.
18. Cited in Meyer, "Le Territoire de l'aveu," 69.
19. Homberg, *Etudes sur le vagabondage*, 9.
20. See Jean-Claude Beaune, "Images du mauvais pauvre. Anti-travail et anti-éducation: la figure du vagabond au XIX siècle," in Jean Borail (ed.), *Les Sauvages dans la cité*, 184-201.
21. Homberg, *Etudes sur le vagabondage*, 24-25, 243-48.
22. Portales, *Des Mendiants*, 8.
23. Cited in Pierre Petitfils, *Rimbaud* (Paris: Juillard, 1982), 70.
24. Published in the newspaper, "La Providence," in Meyer, "Le Territoire de l'aveu," in Berque (ed.), 74.
25. Homberg, *Etudes sur le vagabondage*, vii-viii.
26. Homberg, *Etudes sur le vagabondage*, 250.
27. Portales, *Des Mendiants*, 10-11.
28. It was in London, in the intimate circle of Communist exiles, that the paths of Lafargue and Rimbaud intersected. Vermersch, Vallès, Lissagaray, and others formed a "Cercle d'études sociales"

dedicated to counteracting Versailles anti-Commune propaganda with its own publications about the Commune. Rimbaud and Verlaine were part of this group, which Lafargue frequented as well. Although there is no documented evidence of Rimbaud and Lafargue actually meeting, they traveled in the same small circle. In November 1872, for instance, Paul and Laura Lafargue attended a lecture by Vermersch on Gautier; Rimbaud and Verlaine were also present. See Steve Murphy, "Rimbaud et la Commune?" In Alain Borer (ed.), *Rimbaud Multiple. Colloque de Cérisy* (Gourdon: Bedou & Touzot, 1985), 53-55, and Olga Meier (ed.), *The Daughters of Karl Marx: Family Correspondence 1866-1898*, trans. Faith Evans, intro. Sheila Rowbotham (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1982), 113.

29. Paul Lafargue, *Le Droit à la paresse*, (Paris: Maspero, 1965), 136.
30. Lafargue was apparently engaged in translating Engels's *Socialism Utopian and Scientific* at the same time (early 1880) that he was writing the pamphlet. While proclaiming himself a "scientific socialist," he maintained that socialist convictions were awakened not only by "the entrails of reality" but by a "far off memory" of a communist epoch preceding the era of private property, by "a memory of that golden age, of that earthly paradise which religions speak to us about." See his *Idéalisme et matérialisme dans la conception de l'histoire* (Paris: de Lille, 1901), 43. Compare Rimbaud's utopian opening to *Une Saison*: "Long ago, if I remember well, my life was a feast where all hearts opened, where all wines flowed."
31. For a diachronic study of the term *travailleur*, see Jean Dubois, *Le Vocabulaire politique et social en France de 1869 à 1872* (Paris: Larousse, 1962), 37-40. While the term had a thickness of revolutionary connotation during the Commune this was not always to be the case. The diffusion of a specifically Marxist vocabulary in the next few decades made prevalent the term *classe ouvrière*; writers whose political activities and memories linked them to the Commune and who continued to use the term *travailleur* were frequently criticized in the late nineteenth century for "sloppy thinking." In fact such a usage proved their link—like that of Rimbaud—to a precise historical period.
32. Paul Lafargue, cited in J. Tchernoff, *Le Parti républicain au coup d'état et sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Pedone, 1901), 354.
33. Cited in Petitfils, *Rimbaud*, 57.
34. For a study of the modes of opposition or "counterdiscourses" of bourgeois writers and intellectuals to the increasing standardization of culture in a rapidly industrializing France, see Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984). Rimbaud, symptomatically, is relegated to a footnote in this book; he is, as Terdiman rightly puts it, "beyond the limits of counter-discursive protocol."
35. Hugo Friedrich, *The Structure of Modern Poetry*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 51.
36. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 494-96, for a discussion of the work model vs. *action libre*.
37. René Maran, *Batouala* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1965), 20-21.
38. Pierre Clastres, *Society against the State*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Urizen Press, 1977), 163. It is crucial to point out that Clastres is forced to admit, almost inadvertently, that his basic argument—"Primitive societies are societies without a state; a state is necessary to impose work: there is no 'work' in primitive societies"—pertains to only one half of the population of primitive societies: the men. Consider this description of the Tupi-Guarani tribe in South America: "The economic life of those Indians was primarily based on agriculture, secondarily on hunting, fishing, and gathering. The same garden plot was used from four to six consecutive years, after which it was abandoned, owing either to the depletion of the soil, or, more likely, to an invasion of the cultivated space by a parasitic vegetation that was difficult to eliminate. The biggest part of the work, performed by the men, consisted of clearing the necessary area by the slash and burn technique, using stone axes. This job, accomplished at the end of the rainy season, would keep the men busy for a month or