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# Performance, Politics, and Historiography in and out of Time

## American Responses to the Paris Commune

### Prologue

Despite its fleeting duration—seventy-two days from March to May 1871—the Paris Commune set several revolutionary precedents: democratic government by working people, equal pay for equal work regardless of rank or gender, access to education independent of class or religion, support for mothers and children regardless of marital status, and the recognition of productive immigrants as citizens.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to the *Dictionnaire Grand Robert*, *commune* entered French ca. 1300 CE as a bourgeois municipality outside feudal jurisdiction. Its modern usage as a government of elected citizens dates from 1792 but had become relatively neutral by the mid-nineteenth century before its revolutionary legacy was reactivated by opponents of Louis Bonaparte and the conservative republic that replaced him. *Commune* thus predates *Communism*, first mooted by French utopians in the 1830s.

It inspired art, music, literature, and performances that included playful as well as purposeful occupations of public space. The Commune collapsed on 28 May, after the army had been dispatched from the former royal seat at Versailles—where the conservative republicans under Adolphe Thiers had retreated after defeat by Otto von Bismarck in the Franco-Prussian War—to subdue the Communards in a “bloody week.”<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding their defeat, the Commune was commemorated by French activists in exile and, later in Paris, Britons, Americans, and Germans did so too in the International Working People’s Association (IWPA). Even Russians as different as Lenin and his anarchist antagonist Peter Kropotkin held them in high esteem. In the United States, under conditions that suppressed solidarity among working people in the name of individual advancement but in the interests of landed and industrial capital, the IWPA staged annual celebrations in Chicago, New York, and other cities, with dramatic performances as well as parades and picnics; on one occasion in 1879 they assembled in Chicago in such numbers that even the pro-police *Chicago Tribune* counted 40,000.<sup>3</sup> Even after the IWPA was stymied by the trial and execution of its leaders in 1887, commemorations continued intermittently until they were banned by Attorney General Mitchell Palmer in 1919, two years after Lenin had celebrated the Bolshevik Revolution’s endurance, lasting beyond the Commune’s seventy-two days, allegedly by dancing in the snow at the Winter Palace.<sup>4</sup> American echoes of the Commune have been muffled by the national obsession with individual freedom at the expense of the public good, but in 2021, a hundred and fifty years later, we can trace reactions to the Commune from 1871 to the twenty first century, reactions that respond to social upheaval with performance and political action, including acts of solidarity that bridge the gaps between times and places.

These commemorations—from the IWPA parades that claimed Chicago’s lakefront every March from 1872 to 1887 and intermittently thereafter, to the performance of *The Days of the Commune* on New York streets from March to May 2012, which rehearsed *The Days of the Commune* (1949) by Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) on sites claimed by the Occupy Movement in 2011—should be seen as *both in and out of time* because they acknowledge the untimeliness of reclaiming ostensibly failed revolutions while also articulating hope for the struggles to come. This hope is born of, and borne by, the understanding of historical failure and of

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<sup>2</sup> Louis Bonaparte started the war but the conservative republic under Thiers brokered France’s surrender. This is settled history, shared by leftists in France such as Jacques Rougerie and, in the us, by those such as Mitchell Abidor, in introduction to *The Communards: The Story of the Paris Commune of 1871* (New York: Erythros Press, 2010), as well as by more cautious us historians e.g. David Shafer.

<sup>3</sup> For the IWPA numbers, see Loren Kruger, “Cold Chicago: Uncivil Modernity, Urban Form, and Performance in the Upstart City,” *The Drama Review* 53, no. 3 (2009): 14. Helen Cox Richardson, in *How the South Won the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), shows how us oligarchs—industrial capitalists in the North, large landowners in the South and West—encouraged white men to aspire to individual advancement so as to undermine solidarity among working people.

<sup>4</sup> Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London: Verso, 2015), 4.

risky but potentially transformative action in an as yet undetermined future. My sense of the relationships between historical understanding and hope animating social transformation draws on Antonio Gramsci's juxtaposition of "optimism through will" (*per la volontà*) which persists despite the realistic assessment of risks embedded in "pessimism through intelligence," a critical assessment that influenced Ernst Bloch.<sup>5</sup> Born a decade before Brecht and living two decades longer (1885–1977), Bloch also fled Nazi Germany for US exile but returned to support socialist aspirations in the German Democratic Republic (GDR; East Germany) from his seat at Leipzig University. After criticizing the GDR for betraying those aspirations in 1961, the year of the Berlin Wall, he left for West Germany, all the while defending the principle of hope in dark times. In 1962 his essay collection *Verfremdungen* honored Brecht's term for the critical estrangement of conduct needed to understand and change the world and offered his own concept of *Ungleichzeitlichkeit* (non-synchronicity) to register the multiple temporalities affecting conduct. Bloch argues that hope is not "wishful thinking," which he quotes in English, but rather critical foresight that anticipates disappointment without which it "would not be hope" but over-confidence.<sup>6</sup> *Hope as principle*—as Bloch's *Prinzip Hoffnung* should be translated—points to a way beyond disappointed revolution by approaching obstacles with "the consciousness of danger" and of failure.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.

Our experience of politics and time plays out between continuity and change, timeliness and untimeliness, recollection and oblivion. These contrasting terms mark tensions in the theory and practice of historiography, tensions that are political in the broad sense, contesting present actions in the public sphere as well as contradictions in the multiple temporalities that fold over and under one another. In order to track the acts of oblivion and recollection in American commemorations and assess the politics of time that links Brecht's history play to our twenty first century, we should in addition to Bloch, pay attention to thinkers who influenced Brecht, such as Marx and Nietzsche, as well as to current historiography

<sup>5</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Lettere del carcere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1971), 115; *Letters from Prison*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 300 (trans. mod. LK); Ernst Bloch, "‘Etwas fehlt’ . . . über die Widersprüche der utopischen Sehnsucht," in *Gespräche mit Ernst Bloch*, eds. Rainer Traub and Harald Wieser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 75; "Something Is Missing: On the Contradictions of Utopian Longing" trans. Jack Zipes, in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Bloch, "Kann die Hoffnung enttäuscht werden?," in *Verfremdungen I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962), 21; "Can Hope Be Disappointed?," trans. Andrew Joron, in *Literary Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 339. For the extended argument, see Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), esp. vol. 1; *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Bloch, "Etwas fehlt," 75; "Something Is Missing," 17.

that sheds light along the way. I thus offer five theses whose productive friction opens up a field within which one can scrutinize perform a concnce, politics, and time in the Paris Commune and its legacies.

1. The dramatic appeal of the *clean break* hides the tension between *continuity* and *change* or between *gradual evolution* and a *sudden event* that ruptures the *longue durée* (long span) of history. The English phrase “the Fall of the Wall,” for example, misses the Cold War legacies captured precisely if ambivalently by the German word *Wende*. Whereas *Wende* can be translated as *turning point*, it tracks the tricky experience of the twists, turns, and impasses that characterized the years before and after the unification of East and West Germany in 1990.<sup>8</sup> As Alain Badiou argues, the event can only be retroactively discerned *as* an event by the historian’s “interpreting intervention.”<sup>9</sup> The event—his example is the French Revolution of 1789—comes into view as part of its historical situation, which defines the conditions of its emergence, *and* as it ruptures that situation. It is at once singular and the infinite sum of contributing causes (bourgeois revolt against decaying monarchy, intellectual rebellion against absolute power, popular rage over unmet needs, etc.).

The challenge of discerning the Paris Commune shapes debates about ends, beginnings, and dates. The “Commune of 1871” acknowledges as precedent the Commune of 1792 but also marks differences; the 1871 delegates were working people, artisans, and industrial workers alongside intellectuals. Additionally, they took the egalitarian principle further than in 1792 to insist that all city employees receive what Marx called a “workman’s wage.”<sup>10</sup> For Marx the Commune began on 18 March, when the Paris National Guard stopped government troops from seizing cannons paid for by citizen subscription.<sup>11</sup> Although women had been active in 1789, 1871 brought forth not only French leaders like Louise Michel but also internationalists like Elisabeth Dmitrieff.<sup>12</sup> Michel and her contemporary, Engels, put forward 28 March, the formal declaration that was issued after the election

<sup>8</sup> Kathrin Mahler Walther argues in “Wir müssen den 9. Oktober feiern,” *Die Zeit*, October 3, 2020, <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2019-10/deutsche-wiedervereinigung-jubilaum-friedliche-revolution-ddr-brd>, that the day represents the colonization of East Germany by the West rather than the unification of sovereign states. In contrast, on October 9, 1989, East Germans at the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig realized that the state would not launch the violent attack that it had threatened against the demonstrators, who felt free at last to claim their citizenship rights.

<sup>9</sup> Alain Badiou, *L'Être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 202; *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 180. *L'Être et l'événement* appeared before the “turn” but was translated only a generation later; this delay in translation highlights the multiple temporalities of historiography.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, *On the Paris Commune* [1871] (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 75; corroborated in Jacques Rougerie, *La Commune de 1871*, 5th ed. (Paris: Presses universitaires, 2014), 66–68.

<sup>11</sup> Marx, *On the Paris Commune*, 68; Jacques Rougerie, *Paris Libre 1871*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 100–108.

<sup>12</sup> Rey’s introduction to *Petit dictionnaire des femmes de la Commune* summarizes the achievements of Michel, Dmitrieff, and other women. See Claudine Rey, Annie Gayat, and Sylvie Pepino, *Petit dictionnaire des femmes de la Commune de Paris 1871: Les oubliées de l’histoire* (Paris: Le bruit des autres, 2013), 7–19.

of working people to the Central Committee.<sup>13</sup> By naming that date 7 *Germinal*, year 79, Michel linked this Commune with the Revolutionary calendar that ran 1792–1805; current historians do not go that far but also see the election on this date as the definitive rupture with Versailles.<sup>14</sup>

ii. The tension between *timely* and *untimely* is political because it reveals conflicts about timing—timely action to right wrongs as against untimely interference with established order—even if the distinction eludes clear definition. In *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche stages a conflict between the pulse of life and the dead weight of history, playing *timely* and *untimely* against each other. The key essay *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, rendered best as *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of Historiography for Life*—not, as is the usual title, *The Use and Abuse of History*—distinguishes between *Geschichte* (history as *Geschehen*—occurrence—“as it really was [wie es eigentlich gewesen ist]”) and *historiography*, the persuasive narrative that transforms data into evidence, happenstance into history.<sup>15</sup> Disdainful of the reverence for heroes in *monumental* history, and the preservation of relics in *antiquarian* history, Nietzsche favors historiography that performs a timely intervention in present conflicts rather than a chronology that claims to be impartially *out of time*.<sup>16</sup> Taking his cue from Friedrich Schiller, Nietzsche praises the dramatist who can “weave a whole out of the isolated fragment” and thus forge a plot that is recognized as true, as against an illusion of objectivity sustained by passively absorbing data or, as English historian E. H. Carr puts it, submitting to the “fetishism of facts.”<sup>17</sup>

The fissure between absorption in time, one’s own past or a past that still resonates for us, and critical distance from either or both, may spark a charge that leaps across the gap between timely and untimely acts. US commemorations of the Commune may have ended with the Red Scare in 1919 but a century later, pointedly untimely animations have revived its legacy. The reenactment in May 2011 to mark the 125th anniversary of the 1886 protest at Haymarket Square, and the subsequent trial in Chicago, extended the resonance of the Commune by honoring Albert Parsons, August Spies, and others in the IWWA who had led Commune commemorations in the years leading up to the Haymarket event. Their assembly on 4 May 1886 was intended to protest police violence against workers, native and migrant alike, but a bomb thrown by an unknown hand killed

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Engels, introduction [1891] to Marx, *On the Paris Commune*, 33; Louise Michel, *La Commune* [1898] (Paris: Stock, 1971), 192.

<sup>14</sup> Michel, *La Commune*, 192; Rougerie, *Paris Libre*, ii; Laure Godineau, *La Commune de Paris par ceux qui l’ont vécue* (Paris: Parigramme, 2010), 116.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1981), 110; *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 20.

<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, 107–114; *Advantage and Disadvantage*, 19–22.

<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, 140/35; Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Random House, 1961), 15.

a policeman and provoked retaliation; the trial of the Haymarket Eight led to the deaths of five defendants, including Parsons and Spies, despite their absence from the site as well as petitions for clemency by many at home and abroad. The 2011 commemoration went beyond reenactment to draw the attention of participants at the site to twenty first century migration and police violence.<sup>18</sup>

III. *Ana-chronology—the logic of untimeliness* as against a mere assortment of anachronisms—allows us to be *companions in time* with historical actors or conversely *out of time* with people in our midst. German offers a productive contrast between *Zeitgenossenschaft* (companionship in time), as in “Shakespeare and his contemporary Marlowe,” and *gegenwärtig* (present or current); English *contemporary* may blur “in their time” and “in our time” but this confusion can generate light, as in Jan Kott’s *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, or pose productive questions about how, as Brecht has it, “old plays” might be reanimated for our time; he advocates cultivating critical distance as well as new kinds of enjoyment “suited to ourselves” (*uns gemässen*) and our time.<sup>19</sup> This *pleasure to our measure* rearranges Nietzsche’s *unzeitgemäss*—untimely or out of time’s measure—to fit new forms of entertainment and instruction, and calls to mind the sense of contemporaries floated by Roland Barthes as those who, without personal contact, “index living-together [*indiquer vivre-ensemble*].”<sup>20</sup> Barthes’s contemporaneity invites *thinking together*, whether directly (Bloch observing Brecht), or indirectly (as when Barthes reflects on Brecht after the latter’s death).

The Paris Commune prompted responses both chronological and ana-chronological. The first, by those who *lived* the event, were chronologically contemporary, including memoirs by participants like Michel, Eugène Pottier, and essays by members of the International, including Parsons and Spies as well as Marx.<sup>21</sup> The second, non-synchronous set includes Lenin’s pamphlet “On the Commune” (1911) and Brecht’s *Days of the Commune* (1949), which drew on Marx, Lenin, and Nordahl Grieg’s play *Nederlaget* (*The Defeat*, 1937). The “public rehearsal” (director Zoe Beloff’s phrase) of Brecht’s play was not the first American staging—the play had appeared in 1971 in Cambridge MA to commemorate the centenary of the Commune—but the New York performance in 2012 recalled the Occupy movement of 2011 as well as the Commune of 1871, and looked forward to “Communes

<sup>18</sup> Loren Kruger, “What Time is This Place? Continuity, Conflict, and the Right to the City: Lessons from Haymarket Square,” in *Performance and the Politics of Space: Theatre and Topology*, eds. Erika Fischer-Lichte and Benjamin Wihstutz (London: Routledge, 2013), 46–65.

<sup>19</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Werke: Grosse kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, eds. Werner Hecht et al., vol. 23, *Schriften 3, 1942–1956* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 290 (hereafter BFA); *Brecht on Theatre*, eds. Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Tom Kuhn (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 256.

<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble: Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1976–1977)* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 36; *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>21</sup> For Parson’s and Spies’s comments on the Commune, see Philip Sheldon Foner, ed., *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs* (New York: Monad, 1969); and Loren Kruger, “Literary? Public? Proletarian: *Öffentlichkeit* and *Erfahrung* among the Haymarket Martyrs,” *Telos*, no. 159 (2012): 65–77, <https://doi.org/10.3817/0612159065>.

yet to come.”<sup>22</sup> The ana-chronological lens that brings these untimely recollections into focus shows them to be timely again, in that they allow for companionship in time across multiple temporalities including anticipated future action at the conjunction of hope and danger.

iv. *Recollecting* history for present purposes requires not only the capacity, recalling Nietzsche, to “weave a whole out of the isolated fragment” but also acts of *forgetting*, which as Nietzsche suggests, needs “force” (*Kraft*) to “shatter and dissolve” the weight of the past.<sup>23</sup> This emphasis on force, which anticipates Nietzsche’s “strong personality” who can endure (*er-tragen*) and thus carry history (*die Geschichte tragen*),<sup>24</sup> is complicated by an afterthought—that “occasionally” the vital impulse that arises from “oblivion” (*Vergessenheit*) demands instead the “annihilation” (*Vernichtung*) of oblivion so as to redress past injustice.<sup>25</sup> This paradox spotlights the strategic character of both forgetting and recollection. As Nietzsche’s contemporary Ernest Renan argued in *What Is a Nation?* national identification renders into oblivion (*oubli*) the violence that created the nation by seizing it from others.<sup>26</sup> A generation earlier, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1851), Marx highlighted the twin dangers for people (*Menschen*) attempting to “make their own history” and the politics of their time: *too much history or not enough*.<sup>27</sup> With too much, “the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” and blinds actors to new conditions that shape present conflicts. With too little, actors fail to see the short-comings of earlier revolutions and “anxiously conjure old specters [*Geister*]” and “disguises,” so that their action plays the “first time as tragedy, the second time as farce”<sup>28</sup> rather than meeting the challenge of new realities.

Against the fake grandeur of Louis Bonaparte’s would-be empire, the Commune was for Marx a brief but incandescent people’s democracy; the Commune’s legacy lay not in attempts to apply “ready-made utopias,” nor in a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” but in lived social experiments that did not mean instant transformation

<sup>22</sup> Beloff’s comments were made in her introduction to the screening of her video at the University of Chicago, May 17, 2013. Other adaptations of the Commune’s narrative include Arthur Adamov’s *Le Printemps 71* (1962), Luigi Nono’s opera *Al gran sole carico d’amore* (1975), and Peter Watkins’s *La Commune (Paris 1871)* as televised docudrama (2000), prompted by new ideas about communism after the Soviet Union’s collapse.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, 140, 118; *Advantage and Disadvantage*, 35, 22; subsequent citations from these editions.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, 132/30.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, 119/22.

<sup>26</sup> Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* [1882] (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1996), 227; “What Is a Nation?,” trans. Michael Thom, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 11.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx, “Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte,” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe: MEGA*, vol. 1, bk. 11, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1985), 97, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783050076058>; *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, 96; *Advantage and Disadvantage*, 4.

but rather “long struggles.”<sup>29</sup> Recollections of the Commune in 1971, the centennial year that prompted tributes in France, or more recently in the Occupy Movements of 2011, the 140th anniversary of the Commune, work though “long struggles” not only in dramatic acts of recovery but also in historiography whose connecting threads pull recollection out of oblivion. As Badiou argues in *Le réveil de l'histoire*, the “rebirth” or, better translated, the *reawakening of history*, has prompted current insurgents to draw from the history of previous revolts including the Commune. By challenging notions of the end of history touted by American pundit Francis Fukuyama in 1990 in a manner that resembles English schoolmaster Thomas Arnold in 1841, twenty first century insurgents challenge those who imply that the “end of history” means the end of movements to change it.<sup>30</sup> They reanimate the practice of history in the service of life to avoid the pitfalls of the past while seeking to realize the *not yet*, which, as Bloch notes, should be left open in anticipation of struggle.

v. *Politics of time entails politics of place.* Recognizing the difficulty of discerning events, and their part in persuasive history, is the first step in any attempt to link the Paris Commune to multiple recollections in distinct times *and places*. Bringing *continuity* and *change*, terms of time, into contact with *discernment*, a figure in space, recalls the question posed by urbanist Kevin Lynch in *What Time Is This Place?*, prompting reflection on many events layered in one place and on the iteration of a particular commemorative event in different places. *Plot* has a spatial as well as a temporal meaning; plotting the politics of time in performance demands not only chronological measurement but also archeological investigation and thus also a politics of place.

While many writers have excavated layers of time in Communal places from Montmartre to Père Lachaise Cemetery, few discuss US commemorations of the Paris Commune.<sup>31</sup> Philip Katz highlights key sites in *From Appomattox to Montmartre*, briefly noting the IWPA’s efforts to harness the Commune to a new American revolution, and lists nineteenth century plays and *tableaux vivants* in theaters and museums, but he focuses on elite disdain for the Commune; Paul Avrigh offers a more sympathetic but still brief account of one of the IWPA’s yearly

<sup>29</sup> Marx, *On the Paris Commune*, 76. Marx does not call the Commune government the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” a term that he introduced in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875), but Engels used this slogan at the end of his introduction to Marx’s *On the Paris Commune*, 34.

<sup>30</sup> Badiou links the “awakening of history” (*l'éveil de l'histoire*) in the historical riot—exemplified by the French Revolution—with its “reawakening” in “spontaneous riots” (*émeutes immédiates*) against a capitalist rationalization of inequality in twenty first century Europe. See Alain Badiou, *Le réveil de l'histoire* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Lignes, 2011), 27; *The Rebirth of History*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2012), 41. Arnold declared that the modern moment (the English liberal state ca. 1840) bore “marks of the fullness of time, as if there would be no future history beyond it”; quoted in Carr, *What Is History*, 151–152, emphasis added to show the tactical forgetfulness that links the liberal Arnold with the neoliberal Fukuyama.

<sup>31</sup> For the French, see Henri Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965) as well as Rougerie, Godineau, and Ross; for the American, Paul Avrigh, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton University Press, 1984); Philip M. Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre: Americans and the Paris Commune* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Kruger, “Cold Chicago,” “What Time Is This Place?”



commemorations.<sup>32</sup> Both omit contacts between the IWPA and Commune exiles such as Pottier, author of *L'Internationale*, and the IWPA's dramatic and social displays of solidarity.<sup>33</sup>

## 2.

As noted above, in “What Time Is This Place? Continuity, Conflict, and the Right to the City,” I have explored links between the Commune of 1871 and the Haymarket of 1886, and between these precedents and a present-day performance in Chicago. Building on this history, I will focus here on the New York company's *Days of the Commune* and their ana-chronological recollection of Occupy Wall Street.

*Days of the Commune* may appear to be an odd vehicle for resistance, as it depicts the failure of a revolution and has had an ambiguous relationship to state power. Brecht planned to open the Berliner Ensemble's first season in 1949 with the play but the premiere in East Berlin was canceled; a censored version was staged at the Berliner Ensemble only in 1964, and the state's manipulation of Brecht's play was satirized in 1966 by West German Günter Grass.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, *The Days of the Commune* and Brecht's theater practice overall construct a sturdy frame for linking the Commune of 1871 and the Occupy Movement of 2011. The diverse cast of characters, including fictional commoners as well as known historical actors, challenges Great Man history to highlight the principles of egalitarian governance and social action shared by Communards and Occupiers alike. Implicitly comparing the army of 1871 and the police in 2011, the New York project acknowledged the risk that experiments in radical democracy might be suppressed by state violence but illuminated these experiments by showing conflicts between competing modes of political and artistic action, and between historiography and strategy.

Although neither Zoe Beloff, who directed the “public rehearsal” in New York in 2012, nor Mitchell Abidor, who provided historical coordinates from his edition of Commune documents, mentioned the history of American responses to

<sup>32</sup> Katz, *Appomattox to Montmartre*, 164–166, 202–206; Avrich, *Haymarket Tragedy*, 43–46.

<sup>33</sup> Eugène Pottier, *Ouvrier, Poète, Communard*, ed. Pierre Brochon (Paris: Maspero, 1966), 111–119.

<sup>34</sup> In the following, I cite Brecht's *Die Tage der Commune* in the definitive edition, *BFA*, vol. 8, and the English translation in Brecht's *Plays*, vol. 8, trans. Tom Kuhn and David Constantine (London: Methuen, 2013) but I also refer to important video recordings: Manfred Wekwerth and Joachim Tenschert's Berliner Ensemble adaptation (1966), which I saw during its brief appearance in January 2021 at <https://www.berliner-ensemble.de/>, and the 2012 adaptation by Beloff and cast, available at: [http://daysofthecommune.com/pages/video\\_final.html](http://daysofthecommune.com/pages/video_final.html). The original play proved too controversial for the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED), possibly, according to Joachim Preuß (*Theater im ost-/westpolitischen Umfeld: Nahtstelle Berlin 1945–1961* [München: Iudicium, 2004], 777), because Brecht depicted the Commune as a collective uprising without an orthodox Communist leader, despite his citation of Lenin, Marx, and others in the *International* (see notes by Brecht; *Days of the Commune*, 233). Brecht's substitution of his adaptation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* in 1949, his ambivalent reaction to the strike of East German workers in 1953, his death in 1956, and the Wall's erection in 1961 prompted Grass to stage *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising* in West Berlin (1966) in ironic response, in the same year as Wekwerth and Tenschert's staging of *Die Tage der Commune* aired on GDR state television.

the Commune, their collocation of Brecht's play and Occupy Wall Street recalled multiple temporalities of living and thinking with the Commune, the political legacy of egalitarian governance, the social legacy of solidarity with working and unwaged people burdened by debt, and the cultural legacy of performance in acts of reclamation as well as revolt, in particular the reclamation of public places such as parks that have been privatized in cities around the world. Occupy Wall Street emerged into public view with the assembly on 17 September 2011, a decade after the attack on the World Trade Center, in Zuccotti Park, a privately-owned parcel of land near Wall Street, but activists noted precedents elsewhere such as Cairo's Tahrir Square, occupied in January 2011. In New York, the *Bloombergville* erected at Broadway and Park Avenue in June protested then-mayor Michael Bloomberg's austerity budget as the Hoovervilles had protested President Hoover's stingy response to the Great Depression (from the 1929 crash to his ouster in 1932).<sup>35</sup>

The acts of renaming Zuccotti Park as Liberty Plaza and occupying streets in the financial district highlighted the politics of time and place, the history of inequality in the US, and the expropriation of capital by the wealthiest 1% abetted by speculation that provoked crashes in 1929, 1989, and 2008, to name but a few. While only one of the collections of eye-witness accounts of and commentary on the Occupy movement uses *Commune* to describe the movement's decision-making assembly, the late anarchist anthropologist David Graeber saw the Occupiers as heirs to historical uprisings like protests against the Red Scare, aka the Palmer raids, as well as heralds of the future.<sup>36</sup> Like the Communards, the Occupiers "did not disappear" after their brief spell in the limelight ended with police reoccupation. Rather, this setback prompted action on the "politics of mutual aid, solidarity and care" and evaluations of long-term non-violent resistance; groups incubated in the movement, such as the Debt Collective, "laid the groundwork for long term resistance to finance capital."<sup>37</sup> This resistance grew in 2021 with rent strikes and the occupation of empty houses by people whose precarity was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, impossible debts, and the unwillingness of the rich to contribute to public wellbeing.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Writers for the 99%, *Occupy Wall Street: The Inside Story of an Action that Changed America* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 205–206. The publisher highlights the link between the Haymarket and Commune in the nineteenth century and Occupy Movements in the twenty first.

<sup>36</sup> An unsigned section title in Kate Khatib et al., *We Are Many: Reflections on Movement Strategy from Occupation to Liberation* (Oakland: AK Press, 2012), 88; David Graeber, afterword to *We Are the Many*, 426.

<sup>37</sup> Graeber, afterword in Khatib et al., 427, 426, 427. A partial list of organizations concludes *Occupy Wall Street*, 213–217; for work inspired by David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011), see Astra Taylor, *Can't Pay, Won't Pay: The Case for Economic Disobedience and Debt Abolition* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020).

<sup>38</sup> See Gene Sharp's *Dictionary of Power and Struggle: Language of Civil Resistance in Conflicts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) and the research led by Erica Chenoweth, *Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), whose analysis of twentieth and twenty first century movements demonstrates the greater efficacy of non-violent as against violent resistance to authoritarian or would-be authoritarian regimes.

Inspired by the resonance between the Commune and the Occupy movement, Beloff assembled a company for a public rehearsal of *Days of the Commune*. On weekends from 3 March to 27 May 2012, the company staged one scene a day at different locations. This strategy enabled gatherings to be held without the city permits that would be required for planned assembly near sensitive sites, such as the recently cleared Zuccotti Park or the Federal Reserve Bank.<sup>39</sup> Beloff cast a changing roster of actors from South and North America and Europe, some professional performers, some thespian aspirants, some from other fields such as health care or music, whose participation depended on their everyday schedules rather than any attachment to individual roles. In keeping with Brecht's notes on lay theater (*Laientheater*)—theater by non-professionals or working people (*amateur* implies the leisure class)—which suggest that lay performers can more flexibly test new forms of conduct (*Verhalten*) than professionals beholden to institutional norms, this practice suggested that informal rehearsal allowed more room for critical engagement.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, even if Brecht's list of characters omitted women like Michel and Dmitrieff, the New York rehearsal highlighted their agency with women playing roles that Brecht wrote for men. Flexible casting prompted collaborative direction and improvisation that could respond to any confrontation on site with mental and physical agility, and thus push to the limits the fusion of rehearsal, experimentation, and testing encapsulated in *Probe*, rehearsal that is also a search for models of just action.<sup>41</sup>

While Beloff did not directly cite Brecht's argument that good lay theater redefines artistic quality as well as social conduct, her experiment followed Brecht by tailoring "pleasure to our measure," repurposing historical style to represent current conflicts. Costume designer Emily Munro's variations on plebeian dress were, like Beloff's sketches of Commune tableaux, inspired by the red, white, blue, and occasionally yellow of period lithographs.<sup>42</sup> Some performers in New York wore custom-made costumes sporting primary colors, others street clothes featuring black, brown, white, or other neutral shades; this juxtaposition of past and present avoided historicist disguise of the sort that Marx dismissed as a retreat. Actors signaled fictional roles by announcing the character's name in red on a cardboard lanyard hanging from their necks, and historical roles by wearing a white card crown bearing a sketch in black ink based on a known portrait with

<sup>39</sup> Beloff made this point when introducing the video at the University of Chicago, May 17, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Brecht, *BFA*, 22:592; *Brecht on Theatre*, 210.

<sup>41</sup> Bloch, *Prinzip Hoffnung*, 1:483; *Principle of Hope*, 1:416, does not cite Brecht but his *Probe* alludes to Brecht's use of *Versuch* (experimentation) as well as *Probe* (rehearsal).

<sup>42</sup> For Brecht's phrase, see *BFA*, 23:290; *Brecht on Theatre*, 256, trans. mod. L.K. For period prints celebrating the Commune, see Godineau, *La Commune*, 32, 57, 70, 126, 145, 160, and for those against: 107, 135, 150.

the name printed below.<sup>43</sup> Using experimental citation rather than antiquarian mimicry, this mode of impersonation deployed estrangement to represent competing Communard positions, and to attract audiences to their depiction of historical conflicts in the present context, even if people watched only a few scenes.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to wearing ana-chronological motley, the company cut and reassembled Brecht's text and moved songs around to foreground links between the 1871 Commune and New York in 2012. Each scene began with a "mic check," shouted in unison to focus attention, followed by Beloff's announcement of the date and location of the action. Brecht begins scene one at a "little café" in Montmartre near a "National Guard recruiting station" in January 1871 as citizens are protesting the government's plans to capitulate to Prussian demands.<sup>45</sup> The first scene in New York (3 March 2012) began instead outside City Hall with the song *Resolution*, which ends Brecht's fourth scene. *Resolution* comments on the Commune's statement, which Brecht dates to 19 March 1871, calling for tyranny to be upended in the name of solidarity:

Realizing that it is our weakness  
That enables you to pass your laws  
We resolve in future to abandon weakness  
And henceforth to justify our cause

The New York version then skips to verses that highlight topical inequities like housing:

Realizing that you keep us homeless  
Whilst all around us houses stand unused  
We have now resolved to put an end to trusts  
From now every worker will be housed.<sup>46</sup>

Juxtaposing Communal solidarity with contemporary struggles for basic needs, this song framed the drama as a historic struggle with present-day ramifications. Sung in the *Sprechstimme* (talking voice) favored by Brecht's composer Hanns

<sup>43</sup> For Beloff's sketches, see <http://daysofthecomune.com/pages/installation.html>, and for costumes in the performance: [http://daysofthecomune.com/pages/video\\_final.html](http://daysofthecomune.com/pages/video_final.html).

<sup>44</sup> On the history and politics of translating Brecht, see Loren Kruger, "Brecht, Our Contemporary? (Un)timely Translation and the Politics of Transmission," *Theatre Journal* 68, no. 2 (2016): 299–309. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2016.0068>.

<sup>45</sup> Brecht, *BFA*, 8:245; *Days of the Commune*, 55.

<sup>46</sup> The first verse: *In Erwägung unsrer Schwäche machtet / Ihr Gesetze, die uns Knechten solln / In Erwägung, daß wir nicht Knecht sein wolln*—and the third—*In Erwägung, daß da Häuser stehn / Während ihr uns ohne Bleibe laßt / Haben wir beschlossen, dort einzuziehen / Weil es uns in unsern Löchern nicht mehr paßt* (Brecht, *BFA*, 8:269). Produced by Abidor with German speakers in the cast, the New York translation of this song is more compelling than the published one; see *Days of the Commune*, 79.

Eisler, it set up the opening speech, where women protest Thiers's attempt to bribe Parisians with bread to accept surrender. This scene then led to the protests at City Hall (*Hotel de Ville*)—originally Brecht's third scene—to reinforce collaborative agency on the street with New York City Hall in the background, before proceeding to Brecht's first scene, in which fictional workers and National Guards confront a fat cat in a fur coat, a scene that would without this frame begin the play with a private discussion rather than public debate.

The company made other changes to highlight the historical significance of the Commune as well as its relevance today. Sc. 3 in New York (20 March 2012) was set not on 19 March but on 27 *February* 1871, which does not figure in the published play but was historically the day after Thiers arranged a draft treaty with Bismarck.<sup>47</sup> The scene as performed still showed the cannon, but focused on the Paris Guard's movements before the declaration of the Commune in March, and warnings of the army advancing on Paris, using the song that Brecht had much later—at the end of sc. 11, just before Easter 1871, at which point Communards were still debating how to meet the threat from Versailles.

All of us or no-one. Nothing—or the lot  
 One man cannot make things better . . .  
 All of us or no-one. Nothing—or the lot.<sup>48</sup>

Moved earlier in the play, this song signaled in advance the end of the Commune, while the refrain *All of us or no one. Nothing—or the lot* reinforced the importance of the solidarity that inspired the Occupiers and continues to move successor movements like the Debt Collective. The next verse reminded the beaten (*Geschlagener*) and the lost (*Verlorener*) that collectives acting in solidarity can achieve freedom despite the odds.<sup>49</sup>

*All of us* returned at several points in this production to set up key scenes. Singing in English, the company opened the first Commune delegate meeting (sc. 7a; 28 March 1871 / 29 April 2012) framed by banners calling for freedom of speech and for laws mandating equality, which would, in words attributed to Internationalist Eugène Varlin—create “a republic that will give back to the workers the *means of production* (*Arbeitszeug*) and so realize political freedom through social equality.”<sup>50</sup> The song also framed the meeting on April 2 (Brecht's sc. 8), after a dawn attack from Versailles, between Charles Beslay, the oldest

<sup>47</sup> Abidor, *The Communards*, 8.

<sup>48</sup> The verse in German—*Sklave, wer wird dich befreien? / Die in tiefster Tiefe stehen / Werden, Kamerad, dich sehen / Und sie werden hörn dein Schreien: / Sklaven werden dich befreien*—is followed by the refrain: *Keiner oder alle. Alles oder nichts. / Einer kann sich da nicht retten. / Gewehre oder Ketten / Keiner oder alle. Alles oder nichts* (Brecht, *BFA*, 8:307).

<sup>49</sup> Brecht, *BFA*, 8:307.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Arbeitszeug* (Brecht, *BFA*, 8:283); and “tool” in *Days of the Commune*, 93.

delegate—a veteran of the 1830 revolution—and the Governor of the Bank of France. At this crucial meeting, the Bank's Governor deflected Beslay's request for funds to pay the National Guard and government workers after scheming to send money to Versailles.<sup>51</sup> Abidor, who was likely responsible for expanding the resonance of *Arbeitszeug* from “tools” in the published text to “means of production” in the performance to signal the revolutionary potential of labor *power*, sang the refrain in German, perhaps as a nod to Marx and Engels who argued, following witnesses like Michel, that the Commune's failure to nationalize the Bank, even more than the reluctance to attack Versailles, was the fatal omission that doomed the revolution.<sup>52</sup> This translation added an extra dimension to his subsequent presentation of Beslay's polite but ineffectual request for money to sustain the Commune. The solidarity refrain—*All of us or no-one*—returned to frame the final sequence in New York, with Abidor and German-speaking Marie Weigl leading the chorus. Weigl held a red flag in a stance that recalled Helene Weigel in Brecht's *Mother* (Berliner Ensemble 1951) where her character led a May Day march that ended in violent police retaliation.

Beloff's staging of *Days of the Commune* in springtime, which became all the more verdant as the plot darkened, sharpened the contrast between defeat and hope, even as the revised version accelerated the Commune's collapse. Where Brecht had distinct scenes—sc. 11 (at City Hall), the original location of the song *All of us*, sc. 12 (set in April), and sc. 13 (Place Pigalle, in May)—the New York performance had scene 11 plot the end of the Commune in five closely sequenced parts, from 11a on 20 May 1871 / 12 May 2012, to sc. 11e in Bloody Week (23 May 1871 / 26 May 2012). This concentration foregrounded not only the approach of the end but also debates about causes and consequences, which highlighted the difficult and necessary task of crafting solidarity, in contrast to the orthodox Leninist defense of violent revolution led by a Party, which Manfred Wekwerth pushed in the Berliner Ensemble staging.<sup>53</sup> The cast list for his 1964 staging omitted the corresponding historical characters, making it difficult to follow the debates. Educated viewers might still read the casting of Brecht's son-in-law, Ekkehard Schall,

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<sup>51</sup> Michel, *La Commune*, 199; corroborated by Rougerie, *La Commune*, 68.

<sup>52</sup> On the Commune's failure to nationalize the Bank of France, see Michel, 176–179, and Engels, introduction to Marx, *On the Commune*, 30.

<sup>53</sup> Joachim Tenschert co-directed this production but Wekwerth, as a member of the ruling SED and later its Central Committee, was likely responsible for the orthodox Marxist-Leninist line on the Commune. Barnett notes that Wekwerth added orthodox commentary diminishing the Commune as an untimely rehearsal of revolution; David Barnett, *History of the Berliner Ensemble* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 181–183, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781107446540>. The video added a speech that does not appear in Brecht or the historical record, in which Langevin thanks German Socialist August Bebel on behalf of the “European proletariat,” followed by a standing ovation; this slant unbalances Brecht's more realistic defense of the play's “Marxist *points of view*” (emphasis added) and his mediation between “irony against the West” and “against the East” in a 1949 letter to translator Eric Bentley; Brecht, *BFA*, 29:561.

as firebrand Raoul Rigault to mean that Wekwerth's version endorsed Rigault's "terror against terror," which would have launched a reprisal against Versailles.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast, the New York company enhanced Brecht's candid dramatization of Communal conflict. Their sequence of vignettes under scene 11 started with Charles Delescluze (Jay Dobkin) opening a debate about the best defense against the army, which had already entered Paris by mid-May. Like Beslay, Delescluze drew on experiences of the 1830 and 1848 revolutions as well as the Jacobin preference for street barricades rather than military attacks, even though he had to concede that barricades could not halt the movement of troops on the boulevards that Louis Bonaparte had built in the 1850s. Against Delescluze, there were calls for reprisals by an unnamed woman (Weigl), speaking on behalf of hundreds, demanding an all-out assault on Versailles. These were seconded by fiery delegates played by seasoned actors shouting down quieter voices calling for restraint. The proponents of reprisals included Varlin—whose forceful portrayal by Joy Kelly drew attention to Brecht's omission of the women who were present, such as Michel.<sup>55</sup> Greg Mehrten as Rigault argued for terror against the enemy, which had killed Commune prisoners, but also updated Brecht as an ana-chronological critique of the *Wall Street Journal* for exploiting freedom of speech to spread anti-labor propaganda.

Although sc. 11b (21 May 1871 / 19 May 2012) copied the first part of Brecht's sc. 12 at the Place Pigalle barricades, the company signaled the Commune's international legacy with a song that Brecht did not write but which he would have known: Eisler's multilingual *Lied der Einheitsfront / Song of the United Front*, whose English verse goes:

And just because he's human / he doesn't like a pistol to his head  
He wants no servants under him / and no boss over his head  
Then left right left / then left right left / to the worker we must go  
March on to the workers' united front, for you are a worker too.<sup>56</sup>

Like *All of us—or no-one*, this song emphasized solidarity, setting the scene—a scene in which people of all ages built barricades on the night of 21–22 May, when 130,000 troops infiltrated Paris.<sup>57</sup> Set on this night, sc. 11c returned to Brecht's sc. 11a, the conversation between Commune delegate Pierre Langevin

<sup>54</sup> Brecht, *BFA*, 8:306; *Days of the Commune*, 115.

<sup>55</sup> Michel, *La Commune*, 285.

<sup>56</sup> For the *Song of the United [aka Popular] Front*, see *Songs of the Spanish Civil War [1962]* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2014), sung in Spanish, English, German and French—in that order—by Brecht's associate Ernst Busch, who was in Spain with the International Brigades in 1936. Beloff's company changed Busch's refrain 'go left two three' to the more idiomatic "go left right left."

<sup>57</sup> Rougerie, *La Commune*, 115.

and teacher Geneviève Gericault, the latter regretting the Commune's failure to march on Versailles and other disappointments, the more poignant for being staged here *after* Langevin and Geneviève's debate in the emptied City Hall.<sup>58</sup> Although Langevin, played by Abidor, appeared in New York as a fictional character identified with a red name-tag, Brecht based the character on actual worker-delegate Camille-Pierre Langevin, who functioned as a crucial link between well-known historical actors and the many commoners whose names have been forgotten.<sup>59</sup> In New York, the dialogue between historical and fictional characters began with another song with worldwide resonance, *L'Internationale*, whose author is said to have composed this anthem to the "wretched of the earth" on the Paris barricades in May but fled to the US after the Commune collapsed.<sup>60</sup> The scene ended as New York police sirens unexpectedly sounded behind Abidor, who argued, as Langevin did, that the liberal freedoms encapsulated in the slogans behind him—freedom of assembly, speech and the press—failed to help the majority secure resources to aid their fundamental right to live, since they did not own the means of production or the capital, locked in banks. Although Abidor spoke Brecht's lines, this speech recalled not only Marx but also the Occupy members that critiqued the expropriation of the people's money by the 1% and the debt and other constraints inflicted on the 99%, despite their nominal freedom to choose their employment.<sup>61</sup>

At the end of this sequence, sc. 11e (roughly Brecht's sc. 13) opened with an extended preface from Beloff about the state of siege (*Notzustand*) on 23 May, the neighborhood defense being swamped by blood, and the urge to sing silenced by slaughter. Whereas previous scenes had featured actors sometimes reading a recently revised script in a manner that highlighted the processes of rehearsal and estrangement, this climax elicited acting that drew the audience into the dénouement, as actors in the neighborhood defense fell to simulated gunfire, even if the scene could not capture a massacre in which 10,000 citizens died in a city of a million.<sup>62</sup> After this moment of pathos, however, the last scene (28 May 1871 / 26 May 2012) hit a sober note. Brecht's dialogue opens with Thiers and his associates viewing the carnage "from the walls of Versailles"—and ends with Thiers's final words "mesdames, messieurs . . . France is yours."<sup>63</sup> Actors representing Thiers and allies stood on the ramparts—marked by a *Versailles* sign in Bourbon blue and gold rather than Commune red—of Fort Hamilton in Queens, with a view of Manhattan, and cheered the gunfire as though it were a fireworks display, but this

<sup>58</sup> For the published dialogue, see Brecht, *BFA*, 8:300; *Days of the Commune*, 110.

<sup>59</sup> Gerhard Fischer, *The Paris Commune on the Stage: Vallès, Grieg, Brecht, Adamov* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1981), 87.

<sup>60</sup> For *L'Internationale*, see Pottier, *Ouvrier, Poète, Communard*, 101; for his response to US exile, 105–127.

<sup>61</sup> See Graeber, *Debt*; Khatib et al., *We Are Many*; and Writers for the 99%, *Occupy Wall Street*.

<sup>62</sup> Rougerie, *La Commune*, 118.

<sup>63</sup> Brecht, *BFA*, 8:316, 317; *Brecht on Theatre*, 126.



scene ended before Brecht's with "and Paris will soon be completely at peace"—with Petro Gonzalez as Thiers injecting sarcasm to capture Brecht's *Pazifizierung* (pacification). The field emptied out to allow the actors to fetch their Commu-nard signs and return for one more rendition of *All of us—or no-one*, hinting at "Communes yet to come."

This prospect of Communes yet to come could not be sure to undo the violent suppression of the 1871 experiment. Nor can drama alone counter the threat of violence against current civil resistance to abusive state power or to the structural marginalization of the majority from accessing wellbeing, in part by laws favoring the 1% or by ideologies of "free enterprise" that blame the excluded instead of those that deprive them of public goods. Although this company, their contemporaries in the Occupy Movement (such as Astra Taylor), and others who analyze and advocate civil resistance (such as Graeber, Gene Sharp, and Erica Chenoweth), do not cite Bloch, his *hope as principle* offers a guide for writing and staging history in anticipation of changes, and thus offers a resonant coda rather than emphatic conclusions that Brecht, like Bloch, would have seen as premature. Both inherited Marx's skeptical regard for ready-made utopias and Nietzsche's critique of passive historiography. In an as yet untranslated essay, Bloch argued that "hope is not willful optimism" (*sträflicher Optimismus*), which would deny the difficulties of the present and future, but rather critical preparation for the potentials as well as pitfalls of the not yet, the unfinished struggle that "points to utopia" with sober understanding of persistent contradictions and disappointments.<sup>64</sup> Bloch's reading of Brecht's staging of struggle is sharpened by the *Probe*, the rehearsal that is also a test, but it also requires endurance and hard, undramatic work behind the scenes.<sup>65</sup>

Bloch's idea that "hope" is a principle that should govern recollection of the past, and anticipation of the future, might seem untimely in a "world in tumult," as Carr described the post-World-War II era (and, indeed, we could also apply that idea to the present moment in 2021).<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, Bloch argues that hope, as opposed to (over)confidence (*Zuversicht*), "would not be hope" if it did not acknowledge the risk of "disappointment" while looking forward to the not yet achieved.<sup>67</sup> Echoing Marx and Engels's *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, and perhaps also Max Weber (whose conception of de-enchanting (*Entzauberung*) the world in order to pave the way for progress illuminates ways forward even in disappointment or disenchantment (the common mistranslation of *Entzauberung*), Bloch casts "sober eyes" on the struggle for a social transformation that has not yet

<sup>64</sup> For "willful optimism," see Bloch, "Jules Verne statt Karl Marx?," in Traub and Wieser, *Gespräche mit Ernst Bloch*, 154 (trans. LK); for "points to utopia," *Prinzip Hoffnung*, 1:360; *Principle of Hope*, 1:309.

<sup>65</sup> Bloch, *Prinzip Hoffnung*, 1:483; *Principle of Hope*, 1:416.

<sup>66</sup> Carr, *What Is History*, 209.

<sup>67</sup> Bloch, *Verfremdungen*, 213; *Literary Essays*, 340.

been accomplished or even named.<sup>68</sup> Bloch's skeptical regard—combining critique and attentiveness—shows that, contrary to Arnold, Fukuyama, and kin, there is no end to history, no fullness of time. Carr argues that “the belief that we have come from somewhere is closely linked to the belief that we are going somewhere,” but Bloch dispels the whiff of metaphysics that might linger in “belief,” to stress instead not only the stakes but also the risks of pursuing what is “yet to come.”<sup>69</sup>

Understanding historiography as an ongoing reckoning with our experience of politics, in and out of time, as well as with potential setbacks, resists the singularity of an irrevocable break with the past that Walter Benjamin saw in the experience of time directed towards “a consciousness of the present which explodes the continuum of history.”<sup>70</sup> Rather than “making the meaning of the past depend on some super-rational power,” whether God or Party or Benjamin's Angel, history “can be written only by those who find a sense of direction in history.”<sup>71</sup> Seeking the “not yet” has animated responses to the Paris Commune of 1871, and helps to explain why an experiment that lasted seventy-two days a hundred and fifty years ago continues to engage the quest—even in the unlikely context of the United States—for Communes yet to come.

■

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<sup>68</sup> Max Weber, “Wissenschaft als Beruf,” in *Gesamtausgabe*, eds. Horst Beier et al., vol. 1/17 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 87; *Science as Vocation*, trans. Michael John (London: Unwin, 1989), 3. Although the standard translation of the *Manifesto* has “sober senses” (Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 39), the original has *Augen* (eyes) (*Manifest*, 23), the sense organs associated with critical reason. For the links between Weber's *Entzauberung* or “de-enchantment” and “dis-illusion,” the first English translation of Brecht's *Verfremdung*, see Kruger, “Brecht, Our Contemporary?,” 308–309.

<sup>69</sup> Carr, *What Is History*, 152.

<sup>70</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Eduard Fuchs, der Sammler und der Historiker,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2: *Aufsätze, Essays, Vorträge* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 468; “Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian,” trans. Knut Tarnowski, in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), 227. Although Benjamin's view of dialectical materialism as a means of revelation through “exploding the continuum” may have provoked Bloch's skeptical response to messianic history, Benjamin's concept *Dialektik im Stillstand* (dialectic at rest, rather than “at a standstill”) and his emphasis on the present's demands on history show nonetheless that he, like Bloch, learnt from Marx as well as Nietzsche, even if his Angel faces backward to catastrophe rather than forward to hope, to follow the dialectic between “has been” and “not yet” which may yet open a way to transforming the world.

<sup>71</sup> Carr, *What Is History*, 176.

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## Abstract

### Performance, Politics, and Historiography in and out of Time: American Responses to the Paris Commune

American echoes of the Paris Commune have been muffled by the nation's obsession with freedom at the expense of solidarity, but performative responses to social upheaval, including drama, parades, and protests, have tested the boundaries of public space and multiple temporalities from 1871 to 2021. This article notes traces of the Commune in the writings and performances of nineteenth century American anarchists but analyzes this legacy primarily in the 2012 performance of Brecht's *The Days of the Commune* (1949) at New York sites claimed by the Occupy Movement in 2011. It also uses the argument of Brecht's contemporary Ernst Bloch for cultural action grounded in an understanding of historical disappointment to anticipate setbacks while maintaining hope for future revolution. The paper delineates five theses on the politics of time: 1) the dramatic appeal of the *clean break* hides the tension between *gradual evolution* and a *sudden event* that ruptures the long span of history (Badiou); 2) historiography, the narrative that turns data into evidence, challenges the illusion of objectivity and thus a simple split between *timely* intervention and *untimely* interference with the established order (Nietzsche); 3) *ana-chronology*, the logic of untimeliness reads contemporaneity as *companionship* between events and agents across different times and places (Barthes); 4) *recollecting* history requires acts of *forgetting*, which shatter the constraints of the past to meet demands of the present (Renan, Nietzsche); 5) the politics

of time entails the *politics of place* and thus requires the analysis of multiple temporalities layered on one site as well as political acts and performance in distinct places.

### Keywords

anachronism and ana-chronology, Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Bloch, Paris Commune, contemporaneity, Haymarket, Occupy Movement, performance

### Abstrakt

#### Performans, polityka i historiografia: Amerykańskie reakcje na Komunę Paryską

Chociaż amerykańskie echa Komuny Paryskiej zostały stłumione przez narodową obsesję na punkcie wolności kosztem solidarności, to dramaty, manifestacje czy protesty, jako performatywne reakcje na społeczne niepokoje, testują granice przestrzeni publicznej i wielorakość/mnogość czasowości od 1871 do 2021 roku. Autorka tropi ślady Komuny przede wszystkim w *Dniach Komuny* Brechta (1949) wystawionych w 2012 na nowojorskich ulicach zajętych w 2011 przez ruch Occupy. Wykorzystuje koncepcję współczesnego Brechtowi Ernsta Blocha zakładającą, że zrozumienie historycznych rozczarowań jako podstawa działania kulturowego pozwala antycypować niepowodzenia, zachowując jednocześnie nadzieję na przyszłą rewolucję. Autorka formułuje pięć tez dotyczących polityki czasu: 1) dramaturgiczna atrakcyjność całkowitej przerwy skrywa napięcie między stopniową ewolucją a nagłym wydarzeniem, które rozrywa długą perspektywę historii (Badiou); 2) historiografia, czyli narracja, która przekształca dane w poszlaki, podważa iluzję obiektywności, a tym samym rozróżnienie między przeprowadzoną w porę interwencją a niewczesną ingerencją w ustalony porządek (Nietzsche); 3) ana-chronologia, logika niewczesności, odczytuje współczesność jako współlistnienie wydarzeń i podmiotów w różnych czasach i miejscach (Barthes); 4) przypomnianie historii wymaga aktów zapominania, które rozsadzają ograniczenia przeszłości, by sprostać wymaganiom terażniejszości (Renan, Nietzsche); 5) polityka czasu zawiera również politykę miejsca, a zatem wymaga zarówno analizy wielu czasowości splecionych w jednym miejscu, jak i aktów politycznych oraz działań w różnych miejscach.

### Słowa kluczowe

anachronizm i ana-chronologia, Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Bloch, Komuna Paryska, współczesność, Haymarket, ruch Occupy, performans

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