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LIVING WITH DIVISION

**An analysis of the modern self and of contemporary democracy
according to Marcel Gauchet**



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Abstract

The following is an attempt to shed light on the continued role played by Otherness in a post-transcendental world as understood by French philosopher, Marcel Gauchet. Despite the end of religion as the organizational principle of society, he argues, are maintained two important forms of division. On the one hand, we will analyze how civil society is divided from political power and on the other how the modern individual is thought to be composed of a conscious and an unconscious element all the while attempting to draw parallels between the two levels of analysis.

Résumé

L'exposé qui suit est une analyse du rôle que joue l'Altérité dans un monde post-transcendental tel que l'entend le philosophe français, Marcel Gauchet. Malgré la fin de la religion comme schème organisateur du social, dit-il, deux formes importantes de division subsistent. Par conséquent, il sera question d'une part de la division entre la société civile et le pouvoir politique, et d'autre part, de celle que l'on retrouve au sein du sujet moderne entre la conscience et l'inconscience. Finalement, nous tenterons de mettre en évidence le parallélisme qui existe entre les deux niveaux d'analyse.

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INTRODUCTION

GOD IS DEAD... Long live God? When Frederick Nietzsche prophesied the demise of God in 1882¹, he meant that no longer was the Judeo-Christian God worthy of playing a central role in the organization of human affairs. Mankind had outgrown its maker and so, political power would no longer rely on a distinct, non-human superior world for its legitimacy. Humanity was essentially left to its own means in the organization of its collective and individual existence. Unlimited freedom and unbridled creativity were to be the results of life beyond transcendence. But has modern democracy been able to eliminate the need for Otherness? Moreover, has modern living-together proved to be as straightforward and liberating as was thought during the great democratic revolutions that swept Europe for over two centuries? In answering these profound questions, one contemporary thinkers stands out as both novel and pertinent: Marcel Gauchet.

Part of an intellectual lineage comprised of Claude Lefort and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gauchet has been attempting to shed light on the paradoxical nature of modern democracies for many years. As a modern, he feels neither nostalgic for a mythical past where social order was guaranteed by an explicit reference to a distinct and non-human world. Nor does he believe, however that humanity can do without a form of Otherness to organize its existence. But in modernity, this form of Otherness is not

¹ Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy: Modern Philosophy Volume 7, Garden City, NY, Image Books, 1963, p.167.

external to society nor is it of divine inspiration. In fact, the era of transcendence, that is of Otherness taking on the specific and well-defined form of a God or of Ancestors, is, according to our author, forever revolved. Consequently, he has convincingly shown through his many books and countless interviews and articles, that the end of transcendence has not lead to the possibility of living (either at the individual or collective level) without division. According to Gauchet, democracies are not founded by rational agents entering into a contract thus agreeing to give themselves a political power capable of creating a unified social body. The modern agent is neither entirely rational, nor is democratic society capable of being wholly fabricated by human hands. On the one hand, the progressive banishment of all transcendence from the human realm, has left us with a problematical form of Otherness lodged within the individual. On the other, the initial form of political power emerging from the progressive banishment of transcendence from the human scene, has proven to be complex, sometimes brutal and certainly untenable. Therefore, it is my hypothesis that according to Gauchet, the rethinking of our modern existence must take into account the resilience of Otherness as an organizational principle. Through the analysis of two crucial modern moments, namely the French Revolution and the birth of the asylum, I will demonstrate how Otherness was first denied and eventually accepted in both the political and personal spheres. I will therefore draw out the parallelism which exists between the micro and macro levels to then expound upon contemporary problems.

In order to test the primary hypothesis (which states that Otherness still plays a crucial role in modernity despite the end of transcendence), I will demonstrate its opposite: that the attempts to **suppress** Otherness have failed both at the macro and micro levels. Subsequently, chapters one and two will consist in proving a secondary hypothesis, namely that there is a passage from Republicanism to democracy in France, the latter representing the acceptance of Otherness and the former its rejection. This passage, we will argue, is not one which is willed by any actor or group but results from the inability of creating a tenable political regime while rejecting division. In a similar fashion, chapters three and four will deal with parallel developments at the subjective level. The object of this chapter will be the demonstration of another secondary hypothesis namely, that there is a passage,- resulting once again from the untenability of existence without division,- from a conception of a rational Cartesian subject to a conception of the human agent as divided within himself between a conscious and an unconscious element thus proving once again the importance of Otherness as an organizational principle. The fifth and final chapter will be an attempt to identify certain difficulties resulting from living with division. We may now proceed to the presentation of the more specific details of each of the five chapters.

In the first chapter, we will explain that for all modern Western societies, the end of transcendence leads to a series of questions and difficulties as to the tenability of the social link. Humanity is therefore faced with a new challenge that is, how to

institute a "government by man stemming entirely from man".² The initial attempts to found such a political system coincide with the belief in the possibility of creating a power which could simply flow from the coming together of all agents as postulated by the social contract theorists. Political power, it is envisioned, is nothing more than society in action. During the revolutionary period and for decades to come, the Republicans will be unable to lay the foundation of a representative government, (that is one that could give recognition to the division found in the social body) because of the adherence to this idea of power as undifferentiated from society.

The situation will be all the more complicated in France by the fact that the monarchical heritage will weigh heavily on the representation of power available to the Republicans. The latter will be utterly unable to break away from this vision of power inherited from the national French monarchy, whereby the Prince is seen as giving existence to the social body. Therefore, even after the fall of this power, its goal will remain that of creating the social order and of making it exist. We will see that as a consequence, dividing this power so that it reflects the different conflictual elements of society will appear illogical according to this representation of power. Moreover, we will demonstrate how the Human Rights Declaration, intended to be a limit to political power through the establishment of a modern form of liberty, will actually be used as a

² Gauchet, Marcel, "Benjamin Constant: l'illusion lucide du libéralisme" in Benjamin Constant: De la liberté chez les Modernes, Paris, Hachette, 1980, p.22. ("...un gouvernement des hommes procédant de la seule volonté des hommes.") (All translated citations will be ours unless otherwise stipulated.)

foundational element of the social order thus ironically disallowing the respect of human rights. We will also explain why, according to Gauchet, this conception of power is untenable by referring to the more theoretical dimensions of his work.

This first chapter will also consist in laying out some of the theoretical underpinnings of Gauchet's historical analysis. We will need to explain how power cannot simply create society because, in a post-transcendental world, no one agent can know what Gauchet and Lefort call, the "Law". The origins of society, that is the Law can never be fully known by any human agent. We shall therefore never clearly know from whence we came but will always attempt to explain it nonetheless. Political power attempts to articulate the Law but it is precisely because it cannot know the origin so as to master the course of events, that it cannot create an unified social body. There will always be other agents or groups to contest the particular interpretation of the Law given by the standing power. This means that there is an "initial division"³ between political power and the Law (for power cannot know the origin) which generates a division between the former and civil society (given the fact that power cannot organize, create and unify in a transparent manner according to a perfect knowledge of the Law) and this in turn generates conflict among social actors as each claims to have a superior understanding of the Law. And, ironically, as we will see, it is through these divisions that society exists as a whole. We will need to explore how the French Republicans, are

³ In Gauchet, Marcel and Claude Lefort, "Sur la démocratie: le politique et l'institution du social", Textures, 1971, p.7 , the authors refer to this as "la division originaire".

unable to give recognition to these forms of division until the XIXth century. At that time, class conflict is finally given symbolic recognition allowing for the institution of a representative government. The acceptance of Otherness will therefore be the object of our second chapter.

The second chapter will consist in demonstrating that the inability of living without division, thereby explaining the failure of French Republicanism, will lead to the emergence of modern democracy. We will explain that democracy does not entail a new representation of society but does indeed institute a new practice. We will also describe how the inability of thinking in terms of a separation of political power and civil society, thus incapacitating the notion of representative government, is rectified in practice when conflict between the working class and the bourgeoisie is given institutional recognition in the XIXth century. We will also show how class conflict is instituted from the ruins of the battle between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, a struggle that allows for the creation of what Gauchet calls a "symbolic framework of conflict."⁴ This event leads to the passage of republicanism to democracy, that is to a break away from that age-old conception of power as responsible for the cohesion of the social body. Lastly we will describe the role of equality as the mechanism through which society is forever destined to exist in conflict with itself, as no one actor or group can rise above the rest of the social body to actually know the Law and therefore attain and maintain power on a permanent basis.

⁴ Gauchet, Marcel, "Tocqueville, l'Amérique et nous", Libre, No. 7, 1980, p.63. ("un cadre symbolique de conflit")

It is the conflictual nature of society due to the equality of its members, that enables modern society to exist as a historical community able to create and recreate itself into the unknown future.

In the third chapter we will begin with our analysis of the role of Otherness at the micro level. We will wish to demonstrate how the republican notion of society as emerging from the coming together of free, equal and rational individuals renders it necessary to attempt to reduce all forms of Otherness including that most stubborn form, insanity. Insanity had always been considered as that which was absolute Otherness. Prior to modernity, it is thought to be willed by God and for that reason it occupies a legitimate place in the social whole. Yet despite the evident inclusion of insanity within human circles during this pre-modern period, Gauchet argues that the insane were symbolically excluded. It is only with Republicanism, when equality among all individuals is explicitly postulated, that the insane become included into the human family. The asylum will be the vehicle that will render this possible by attempting to cure insanity, that is eliminate Otherness from the human experience. But this vision of power as capable of eliminating Otherness fails, just as it had failed in the political arena. We soon realize that insanity is not as curable and human not as manipulable as imagined. It is precisely as we postulate the ability of man to become transparent to himself, to reduce all forms of Otherness including insanity, that we realize that something within man is ungraspable and unexplainable. It is at this point, that a new representation of man as a divided subject is able to emerge.

In our fourth chapter, we will deal with the vision of the subject as defined primarily by an internal scission between a conscious and an unconscious element. The break with the traditional vision of insanity as absolute Otherness marks the beginning of the modern representation of the individual as defined primarily by an internal division within his psyche. We will baptize this new form of Otherness within the "unconscious" and define it as that part of the individual which is both properly human yet outside of his direct reach. Moderns become aware that there is absolutely no escaping the human condition and that despite the banishment of transcendence, there remains the persistence of Otherness within himself. The evacuation of the transcendent reference point, which leads to the necessity of accepting the irrational into the human family, means that insanity can no longer be referred back to a mystical evil. It now belongs here on earth, in the very heart of mankind. In fact, Gauchet argues in L'Inconscient cérébral that it is through scientific inquiry about the human body that researchers discover the existence of an unconscious element. Through the discovery of what will be coined the cerebral unconscious, we lay down the conditions for rethinking the Cartesian subject. Therefore, man can no longer be understood as a being capable of entirely rational participation in the terms of a republican social order. We will show how Freud is a thinker who moves beyond the Cartesian notion of the individual to recognize the divided nature of the agent. Insofar as he recognizes this fact, Freud can be loosely associated with the democratic moment. But we will also see how Gauchet suggests we think beyond the Freudian conception of man.

After having shown that Otherness continues to play a central role in modernity, we will proceed in our fifth chapter, to the presentation of various difficulties stemming from the necessity of living with division both at the individual and collective levels.

Gauchet suggests we take into account the aspects of life which transcend our direct human control in the study of political affairs. But does he believe modernity to be about the exercise of our rational capabilities despite the irrationality within? Perhaps he is suggesting that Otherness, although a crucial part of human existence, must not undermine our capacity of rational coexistence? Is it for that reason that Gauchet suggests the renewal of ethical conduct which would take into account Otherness without however giving up on our ability to create a meaningful and (rational?) living-together? In our fifth chapter, it is our intention to think along side the author in order to see the conclusions that can be drawn from our investigation into the nature of social and psychic division. By taking this less travelled road and by refraining from offering a definite answer to these fundamental questions, this author opens new paths of exploration into the nature of modern democracy.

Chapter One

Republicanism: the non-recognition of division

Introduction

The end of transcendence as the organizational principle of society marks a turning point in the history of humanity. Typically, modernity is believed to be the result of a liberation of human kind from the shackles of Christianity, that is as having built itself entirely against religion. Gauchet, in his usual fashion, offers us a slightly more subtle analysis as he defends the hypothesis that the modern conception of the world is in fact ushered into being by Christianity rather than born of its radical opposition. Consequently there is both rupture with the past at the overt level yet continuity with it at the covert one. And it is precisely the elements of continuity with the past that help us understand the particular difficulties faced by the French Revolutionaries in 1789.

In structural terms, the French Revolution will be an attempt to mimic the monarchical power it wishes to replace through revolutionary activity. The participants in this important historical event will subsequently borrow from this logic the conception of the social body as existing by virtue of a single unifying principle. To the Prince as

embodiment of the Nation, they will substitute an Assembly composed of warring factions all the while trying to maintain a united view of power as it had existed under the national monarchy. In so doing, they will adhere to a logic that brings about incoherence in a world that rejects God as the final legitimizing principle. Consequently, modern "inventions" such as the Human Rights Declaration and the mechanism of the separation of political power, meant as tools to recognize the presence of division, will be subordinated to a logic of the unity of power leading to many negative consequences. This chapter will therefore consist identifying these elements of continuity between the Christian model, the national monarchy and the French Revolution to demonstrate that the inability of recognizing division during this crucial period of French history stems from this adulterous and secret love affair with the past. But in order to fully grasp the importance of recognizing division, we must first understand why all societies exist by virtue of a relationship to Otherness. This will elucidate the underlying principles organizing the pre-modern and the moderns worlds as well as explain the presence of division in all social formations. So before delving into the specifics of the French case, it is crucial to make a brief detour to the more theoretical dimensions of Gauchet's analysis.

Society as inherently divided⁵

Marcel Gauchet and Claude Lefort in a co-written article⁶ explain what they call the enigmatic quality of the division of society. All societies, whether modern or pre-modern exhibit the tendency to define themselves according to a relationship to Otherness. In other words, a social organization can never fully contain within itself its own foundational principle. This is so because according to Gauchet and Lefort, society is always irremediably and necessarily divided from its origin. This concept, the authors have baptized "la division originaire", refers to the existence of a fundamental division between the present and the origin, that is with the Law. The elimination of this division which would result in the ability of knowing oneself in full transparency, presupposes the superhuman capacity of having assisted the birth of a given community to know both the details of its coming into the world and the course it should subsequently follow in light of that knowledge of the origin. Knowing the origin is impossible as is explained here:

⁵ Interpretation of the theoretical dimensions of Gauchet's work inspired from the following three articles: Lefort, Claude and Marcel Gauchet, "Sur la démocratie: le politique et l'institution du social", op. cit., p.7-71; Gauchet, Marcel, "L'expérience totalitaire et la pensée de la politique", Esprit, 7-8 juillet-août 1976, p.3-28; and Gauchet, Marcel, "La logique du politique", Critique 329, octobre 1974, p.907-926.

⁶ Lefort, Claude and Marcel Gauchet, op. cit.

“Prétendre, en l’occurrence, se faire le contemporain de l’avènement de la communauté à la politique revient à postdater cet avènement par rapport à un état plus primitif qui le précéderait...L’aporie est celle que rencontre la pensée qui s’installe imaginairement au lieu du survol, qui croit ici pouvoir s’abstraire du temps historique pour se tenir au dessus de lui et se donner le spectacle de son déroulement total.”⁷

Society is therefore divided by virtue of this inability of ever fully knowing its origins and humans are destined to forever discuss the conditions of their coming into the world. But the way in which given societies have entertained this relationship with the place of Law has varied throughout the history of humanity. In fact, it was not until modern times that the conditions come to exist for the deployment of this dynamic⁸ for prior to that, the division was not believed to be questionable by humans.

According to Gauchet and Lefort, an unconscious "Decision" is made as to the type of rapport political power can entertain with the place of Law. For example, the Law can be seen as absolutely inaccessible to all humans. In that case, all are equal in their inability of having any interpretative power of the Law. These are the primitive religious societies which prevent the emergence of political power as the Law is thought to remain

⁷ Lefort, Claude and Marcel Gauchet, op. cit.,p.12.

⁸ It is important to note, however, that modern forms of political organization such as democracy, do not need to know themselves in full transparency in order to function. Gauchet explains about democracy: "Reste qu’en tant que processus social, elle s’est engendrée et continue de se déployer comme un processus largement inconscient de lui-même. Comme un processus destiné à demeurer inconscient? C’est une autre affaire..." in "Tocqueville, l’Amérique et nous", op. cit., p.68.

out of reach of any of the agents.⁹ Political power can only emerge when the Law progressively becomes interpretable by human agents. Power then becomes the mechanism by which the visible world is interpreted or organized by virtue of a superior non-human and invisible realm.¹⁰ Modernity is precisely the result of a historical process by which the visible world progressively gains its independence from that which is invisible. But for our purposes, it is important to understand the Christian model and its ambiguous relationship with the Law which will eventually lead to the independence of the visible world.

Christianity and the place of Law

The novelty of Jesus' arrival on the human scene does not go unnoticed by Marcel Gauchet for it represents an unusual depiction of the divine which will make Christianity "the religion that ended religion"¹¹. Whereas divinity had usually meant an overcoming the handicap of being human, Christ is actually the incarnation of God in a human being. Subsequently he can be considered as a mediator between God and

⁹ Gauchet explains: "Notre manière de vivre, nos règles, nos usages, ce que nous savons, c'est à d'autres que nous le devons, ce sont des êtres d'une autre nature que nous, des Ancêtres, des Héros, des Dieux, qui les ont établis ou instaurés." in Le Désenchantement du monde. Une histoire politique de la religion, Paris, Gallimard, 1985, p.13.

¹⁰ Discussion of the emergence of the State (that is of the passage from a primitive religious society to a form of society where the Law can be interpreted by humans) can be found in Ibid., p.26-46.

¹¹ Ibid., p.27.

Man. The idea of God becoming Flesh announces a series of ambiguities by first attesting to the existence of two distinct and interdependent realms, one divine and one human. Secondly it will grant the human realm with a new found dignity which will eventually lead to its autonomy from the invisible and divine world. Gauchet explains the significance of the person of Jesus:

"Mais c'est du même coup la sphère terrestre acquérant consistance autonome, devenant ontologiquement complète par elle-même, à sa façon - prenant en tout cas assez de dignité, si inférieure que doit rester sa réalité spéciale, pour que le Verbe s'y fasse chair. De par leur union mystique en Christ, l'humain et le divin se disjoignent et se différencient définitivement, comme se défait en son principe l'intrication hiérarchique du séjour terrestre et du règne céleste."¹²

From this newly gained status, is born the idea that the world must be changed and organized so that it meets the divine plan. In other words, the role of the Christian will be to actively participate in the events of this world in order to appropriately serve God. Because Christianity is a religion of Incarnation, it grants legitimacy to earthly things, so that even those whose lives are entirely devoted to serving God, (such as priests and monks), will need to interact with the world in order to fulfil God's will. Gauchet explains:

"...pas de sécession complète vis-à-vis de la condition commune; c'est solidairement, de concert avec des pareils et des pairs que l'athlète du salut doit mener son élévation individuelle vers Dieu...C'est dans le cadre de cette vie que doit se dérouler la quête de l'autre vie."¹³

¹² Ibid., p.97.

¹³ Ibid., p.110-111.

Salvation will henceforth require a participation in this world making of earthly duties legitimate spiritual goals. Subsequently, the Church emerges as an important actor that will play a crucial, yet equivocal role as a **second** mediator.

The ambiguous role of the Church stems from the impossibility of it actually fulfilling its desire of being a genuine mediator between God and man. This mediation, this perfect interpretation of the Law occurred once and for all in the person of Jesus and cannot be repeated by mere humans. But since God had communicated with humanity through His Son, humans must make efforts to interpret His message. Is opened at this juncture, the necessity of interpreting the Law. As the Church explicitly sets itself up as this interpreter-mediator between the spiritual and the earthly realms, it also implicitly introduces the possibility of questioning its authority, for only Jesus himself could legitimately manage this role. Gauchet explains:

"Mais c'est que pour les chrétiens, la médiation a une fois pour toutes *eu lieu*, en la personne du Verbe incarné. Elle a été *événement*; jamais à partir de là elle ne pourra plus avoir consistance véritable de *structure*. Tout au plus pourra-t-on prétendre s'élever jusqu'au rang d'image du Christ. Mais sans jamais pouvoir s'installer *effectivement* en cette intersection axiale où l'humain et le divin se résument et se conjoignent dans un seul être."¹⁴

So it is because of this internal contradiction in the role the Church sets up for itself, that this power will be put into question thus allowing for the emergence of a fully autonomous earthly power in the person of the national monarch.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.104.

Modernity: from national monarchies to Republicanism

We have seen that Christian thought contained, in its very logic, the radical questioning of the capability of acting as mediator between the invisible and the visible world. National monarchs will emerge by exploiting the ambiguity found in the Church's very presence thus making this apparently novel form of political organization, the actual unfolding of the potentialities already distinguishable in Christianity. As Gauchet explains: "...les monarchies nationales sont amenées à exploiter le possible d'une politique de l'autonomie terrestre, hors médiation, contenu de naissance dans la religion de la médiation."¹⁵ In other words, they will seek to become the leaders of an autonomous visible world thus giving birth to the modern era. It is precisely in reaction against the Church's ambition of occupying the leadership of both the visible and invisible world, that the monarchs will act. It is because the monarchs believe themselves to be more appropriate servants of God for the visible realm, that they will question the authority of the Church. Consequently the national monarch will take over the leadership of the earthly realm. It is because of God's absence here on earth that He assigns a "replacement" in the person of the monarch, a phenomena translated by the concept of divine right. The division which had occurred between God and man now exists in a particular form between the Prince and the community he embodies. From a dynamic whereby the King's role is to submit the greatest part of the territory to its power, occurs a shift towards a definition of power as that which is responsible for the

¹⁵ Ibid., p.118.

existence of the collective whole. Will become imperative the national monarch's role as detainer of the "raison d'être" of the social body. It is from the postulation of the autonomy of the visible world that the exercise of power changes function in this way. Whereas God had given consistency to the visible world by allowing the community to recognize itself as one, the Prince now fulfils this role. In that light, both the Church and the King as incarnations of the divine will change in their roles. There occurs a redefinition of the King's role, the passage from one notion to the other can be explained as follows:

"D'une logique de l'extension territoriale, on passe à une logique de la circonscription administrative. Le dessein d'accroissement du pouvoir consistait dans l'englobement de masses toujours plus larges, jusqu'à l'unité finale de l'empire-monde; il devient celui d'une pénétration et d'une compréhension toujours plus profonde de la collectivité toujours plus idéalement délimitée qu'il domine. C'est l'assujettissement de la communauté humaine en sa totalité à son principe d'ordre extérieur par la médiation de l'empereur qui fournissait sa perspective à l'entreprise conquérante; c'est l'adéquation interne d'un corps politique doté de sa raison d'être en lui-même qui se met à légitimer l'action administrative du souverain. Telle peut se résumer l'opération, ramenée à sa pureté de substitution d'un schème à un autre."¹⁶

From the idea of an autonomous earthly sphere, occurs the idea of a political power containing within itself the principle of the existence of the community. Power not only rules over a predetermined collective body, but is responsible for its existence and cohesion. But Gauchet goes on to note an interesting paradox resulting from these changes. Despite the autonomy of the visible world, will resurface more ancient conceptions such as the notion of perpetuity of the collective body as protected from erosion through recourse to an earthly yet invisible principle. In fact, it is precisely

¹⁶ ibid., p.118.

because the world is autonomous that there will occur a very interesting development. The temporal power will need to ensure its permanency throughout time. Perpetuity which was formally guaranteed by the presence of an Eternal Being, will now be ensured through a recourse to the Nation.

The idea of the Nation as embodied in the person of the national monarch, can be understood in terms of the notion of the King's two bodies. The argument goes as follows: although the King has a perishable body, he also has an invisible perpetual one that can never (or so it was thought) be eliminated. Furthermore, the King acts as the head of the Nation thereby guaranteeing the longevity of the Kingdom. This concept grants the human sphere the perpetuity that had been guaranteed by an explicit reference to an Eternal Being. It is through the notion of the Nation that the eternal is recaptured. Gauchet explains:

"Si les hommes naissent et meurent, les corps associatifs qu'ils forment ensemble, eux, demeurent, indépendamment du flux de leurs membres. Invisibles, immortels, dotés d'une quasi-présence à eux-mêmes par leur continuité indéfinie, ces corps collectifs acquièrent en vérité consistance de personnes transcendantes dont les purs esprits de l'autre monde, seuls, peuvent fournir une idée. Le roi qui «ne meurt jamais», malgré la succession des rois de chair et de sang, et le Royaume qui toujours dure, deviennent, bien que réalités purement terrestres, et au-delà de leur matérialité tangible, de mystiques entités à hauteur céleste."¹⁷

With the concept of the Nation, that is of something that outlives any given generation, we assist to the reinjection of invisibility in the visible world. And argues Gauchet, it is this form of non-divine Otherness, that acts as the organizational principle.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.119-120.

Subsequently these elements of continuity with the Christian mode, will make their way into the mental universe of the revolutionaries. The French Republicans will essentially wish to annihilate the monarchical power in order to found an entirely new society. They will continue to be animated by very similar images of power inherited from the previous era and it is precisely the weight of this past on the present that contributes to the particular difficulties faced by the agents of 1789.

The Christian heritage makes it so there persists the idea of a society containing within itself its own foundational principle embodied in one "person". The social contract theories such as Hobbes' Leviathan on which French Republicanism is founded, is not without its linkages to the monarchical notion of power. Explains Gauchet about these theories:

"La pensée de la toute-réunion à soi d'un corps collectif née de la seule volonté de ses membres ne fait que pousser à la limite ce que l'action d'un pouvoir voué à représenter la suffisance terrestre suggère contre ce qui en lui continue de participer de la vieille légitimation par le dehors."¹⁸

However, the embodiment of the constitutional principle in one human agent, which easily allows for the unity of power and action, does not translate quite as smoothly when transposed to an Assembly of human agents. The leaders of the Revolution will imagine the possibility of ensuring the cohesion of the social order just as the Prince had done, despite obvious divisions amongst themselves. These divisions between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries for example, give expression to divisions amongst social elements. The social elements will be believed to be manipulable so that

¹⁸ Gauchet, Marcel, La Révolution des droits de l'homme, Paris, Gallimard, p.30.

one Assembly can come to represent one Nation. This Nation will be composed of free and equal individuals and it is their reunion that will result in the creation of the political power. Subsequently, Republicanism is founded on the conscious desire to bring about the equality of all individuals, on the one hand and the unconscious faith in man's capability of fabricating the social realm on the other. It is in that light that the 1789 Human Rights Declaration, the analysis of which Gauchet dedicates La Révolution des droits de l'homme, takes all of its importance. According to our author, the debates surrounding the writing of these seventeen articles point to both the difficulty of rebuilding a society based on the individual and the particular challenge faced by the men of 1789.

The Human Rights Declaration

Gauchet analyses in great detail the debates that transpired during the tumultuous period following the French Revolution. On the one hand these discussions deal with the challenge faced by all modern societies of instituting a legitimate regime with the individual agent as the primary building block. On the other hand, Gauchet explains that the French face the added difficulty given their monarchical heritage which weighed heavily on their representation of power for decades following the Revolution. Our author argues that it is precisely the French past that explains why the Declaration of Human Rights plays such a fundamental role in their nation-building. But before explaining both of these aspects of the debates, we first need to explain the factors that permitted the birth of the atomized individual.

The individual, free of any organic links to others existed long before a charter gave him formal recognition. The change occurred when the national monarch occupied the leadership of the visible realm and thus became responsible for the existence of the social body. In fact, the monarch's power in the earthly sphere disintegrated all other forms of relationships between and among agents. Gauchet describes the phenomena in the following terms:

Quand, en revanche, l'autonomie de la société civile devient pensable, c'en est fait dans la réalité de l'existence indépendante des unités qui la compose. L'entrée dans la modernité politique, en effet, c'est l'appropriation monopolistique par l'État de l'institution de lien de société et l'irrésistible dessaisie des anciens îlots de socialité de leur dimension publique."¹⁹

But whereas the power of the monarch as superior to all and responsible for the collectivity, had served the cause of the atomization of individuals and the disintegration of the preexisting social fabric, the French Revolution explicitly identifies the individual as the basic unit of society. By pushing to its logical limit the principle contained in the national monarchies, the Republicans will wish to found a new order based only on the individual. But as Gauchet argues, this conception is problematical for it raises the question all modern societies face, that is how to ensure the cohesion of the social body.

¹⁹ Gauchet, Marcel, Le désenchantement du monde, op. cit., p.285.

In general terms, the question being posed by the men of the French Revolution is whether or not the mere coming together of free and equal individuals is sufficient to ensure the cohesion of the whole. Do we, in other words, require a higher instance to incite reciprocal civic action necessary for the social order? If so, does the presence of such an instance represent a violation of individual rights and freedoms?

Gauchet asks this question in the following manner:

"La viabilité de l'établissement collectif est-elle suffisamment assurée au sein de l'immanence du tout aux parties qu'instaure la logique de l'individu? Ou bien exige-t-elle en outre, malgré l'abolition de la prééminence hiérarchique de l'ordre global sur les volontés singulières la sauvegarde d'une certaine transcendance du tout, génératrice d'obligation pour les individus?"²⁰

It is in this rebuilding of a legitimate order that a Declaration of Human Rights is crucial. Gauchet argues that once the novelty of republicanism is fully deployed, that is once the individual is identified as the basic unit on which to rebuild society, is raised the question of the role a Human Rights Declaration can play in modern societies. In fact, this document can fulfil two very important purposes. First off, it can be used to enshrine the individual agent as the source of all political power so as to found a new order. We are reminded here of the social contract theorists who believe that it is through the joining of all individuals by the act of signing a symbolic contract with one another that society is formed. Secondly, a human rights declaration, in a very paradoxical manner, can also be used to limit the power said to result from the merger of these individuals in order to protect the agent from this power (therefore essentially against themselves!). Hobbes' Leviathan as that sovereign and almighty power capable of almost everything, comes to

²⁰ Gauchet, Marcel, La Révolution des droits de l'homme, *op.cit.*, p.91.

mind as an example for this second use of a declaration. In modern societies, a balancing act occurs between these dual roles of a charter. The French case is particular inasmuch as their preoccupation will be the founding of a legitimate and solid power. We will see how the competition with the monarch's power plays an important role in terms of the use made of this document.

We have seen thus far that the revolutionaries, according to Gauchet, entertained images of political power in much the same terms as their predecessor, the national monarch. They will however push to its logical limit the idea of an autonomous earthly power by wishing to replace a personalized form of power with an anonymous form. In doing so, however an obvious difficulty will arise, for in their introduction of an anonymous power, they will lose what had allowed the Prince to rule with such unity of action, namely God's final stamp of approval. Although the divine had merely chosen his replacement in the earthly realm and would not mingle with the Prince's area of jurisdiction, He nonetheless was useful as a final reference point conferring to the Prince a form of unquestionable authority. The situation of competition with a far more solid and attractive power, explains the usage made of the Declaration as a document that could legitimize the new-born power:

"Cette situation de rivalité entre le pouvoir en place et le pouvoir à établir est proprement la matrice du processus révolutionnaire. La volonté de compromis s'y retourne en une dynamique de la radicalité fondatrice dont la Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen sera le premier vecteur."²¹

²¹ Ibid., p.X.

On the one hand, the necessity of rebuilding society on the basis of the individual from which to create a political power, yet on the other, the practical necessity of making this power as legitimate as that of the overthrown King. The marriage of these two elements will be somewhat problematical and will explain why the Revolutionaries will try to fill the King's shoes as the embodiment of the Nation.

The Nation, we have explained, has been identified as that which exists in the Prince's second, symbolic body, that is the body not prey to disappearance from the earthly realm but rather the one which guarantees the perpetuity of the collective whole. The revolution is of course the displacement of regal power as the unifying fact in favour of the Assembly. Gauchet explains referring to the Revolutionaries: "Ils détachent la Nation du Roi pour aussitôt s'installer vis-à-vis d'elle dans la position qu'occupait le Roi."²² However the transition from one form of political organization to the other is not without dire consequences. For as the new secular "King", the Assembly will be composed of various and warring factions. It is the modern condition, as no one actor can know the absolute truth (as truth can only exist when there is a God to guarantee it) to have conflicts and a variety of interpretations regarding all social and political phenomena. Many French Republicans, will therefore be animated by a phantasmagorical dream of creating an undivided social body and, ironically, the political power that stems directly from the inalienable rights of individuals, may have to violate those very rights in order to meet its objectives of a unified power coinciding with a

²² Ibid., p.26.

unified social body. The basic rights and freedoms granted by the declaration will not serve as a limitation of the State's power with regards to individuals. The Declaration will rather be an expression of the desire to make all individuals coincide with a unified vision of society as an artificially constituted body. And it is from the non-recognition of all social division that there emerges a novel and potent form of dominion over the collective space. The ultimate conclusion to this drama is, of course, the creation of le Comité du Salut Public which, in 1793 will become a kind of dictatorship. This type of quasi-despotism results from the invocation of unity despite the obvious divisions found in the social body. The violent removal from the scene of all enemies becomes a necessity according to this logic in order to preserve the image of a unified collective. Furthermore, it is precisely the representation of absolute freedom from any transcending principle that gives birth to the mastery of individuals unknown to man prior to that time. The cohesion of the social body is no longer ensured by an explicit reference to God who had guaranteed and assigned each agent's place in the whole. Nor does it result from the presence of a God-chosen Prince. Since only man exists, all power must come from him. Power's goal therefore becomes the creation, organization and control of the social body. Consequently, the Assembly will be unable to institute a division of power that would give recognition to the various factions of society.

The search for a third power

By drawing attention to another aspect of the debates that took place in 1789 Gauchet is endeavouring to illustrate the fact that given the logic of unity which haunts the Republicans, they will be unable to create a form of government that would entail opposing political bodies. Consequently, between 1789 and 1793, many attempts are made to check the Assembly so as to disallow its despotic potential. However all these attempts are bound to fail. The respective roles of the executive and the legislative is a frequent topic of debate immediately following the Revolution. For example, should the King have power to veto the Laws of the Assembly? However, these debates consistently lead to the same negative answer. The Assembly was to be the only effective power and be granted undivided authority. For that reason, Gauchet argues that Rousseau is the pertinent thinker of the French Revolution. Speaking of Rousseau, Gauchet states:

"Qu'on l'ait beaucoup ou peu lu avant la Révolution est de faible importance: il est l'auteur de la situation. Il est le penseur exactement approprié à ce que le génie des circonstances enjoint de penser: l'ajustement d'une prépondérance absolue de la souveraineté législative comprise dans la plénitude de son expression, c'est-à-dire comme perfection de la volonté collective découlant de la composition des pures volontés individuelles, avec la survivance d'un exécutif de forme monarchique."²³

It is because the revolutionaries are competing with a formally strong power in the form of the monarch, that they enlist to this vision of power as proposed by Rousseau and subsequently emasculate the executive branch. So during this first phase of the

²³ Gauchet, Marcel, La Révolution des pouvoirs. La souveraineté, le peuple et la représentation (1789-1899), Paris, Gallimard, 1995, p.57.

Revolution, if there is talk of separating the powers, it is only to better contain the executive branch. In fact, the separation of power is encouraged only as a means of better ensuring unity of action.²⁴ It is following the fall of Robespierre that the need for a third power, that is a power that would keep both the legislative and the executive in awe of the constitution, is discussed with the aim of actually implementing the necessary institutional changes.

Whether called supreme tribunal²⁵, censure power or constitutional jury, there emerges the idea that a power, external to both the Assembly and the Executive is required to protect the human rights of the citizens from the political power. A body must exist to examine the actions of the government and to denounce abuses of power when or if they occur.

"Censurat ou tribunal, il faut un pouvoir spécial qui, sans rien faire, ni se mêler aux autres pouvoirs, soit le gardien de cette puissance populaire à la fois inaliénable et déléguée."²⁶

"C'est très exactement le besoin d'échapper à ce cercle infernal de la démocratie représentative promettant tout le pouvoir au peuple pour le remettre entièrement à ses représentants que traduit le recours à une institution supposée concrétiser l'assujettissement des représentants au voeu des représentés".²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., p.59

²⁵ Ibid., p.74.

²⁶ Ibid., p.90.

²⁷ Ibid., p.119.

The idea of a third power involves a direct challenge to the view held by many that the representatives of the people are its "substitutes", a conception that disallows direct participation by the masses. Yet appealing to the masses has always represented a danger for the Assembly given the constant threat of counter-revolution. Therefore just as when discussing the Human Rights Declaration, there recurs the suggestion in 1791 that a body is required to "enlighten" public opinion demonstrating, once again the stubborn refusal of accepting division. It also suggests that the marriage of liberty and order is always a difficult one in modern society. In that light, the opinions already being expressed through clubs and individual papers is seen as something problematical rather than something to be accepted and channelled. The debate suggests an evolution of the original notion of representative government even though it will take many more years before division is explicitly accepted. For although all agree that an institution to judge the legislative power is required, it is the sense of nostalgia for the well-ordered whole guaranteed by the vision of society as one that will win out. Their inability to fundamentally challenge their own notion of representation, explains, according to Gauchet the fact that the implementation of such a third power will prove arduous. After the fall of Robespierre while the Constituents are attempting to regain their legitimacy, they will propose to reactivate the 1793 Constitution, thought to be a symbol of democracy in action. Yet all the solutions proposed to reactivate this

document by infusing it with a division of power shows the persistence of the idea of unity.²⁸ Gauchet refers to this as a change of philosophical approach all the while maintaining it.²⁹

"Les tenants du système de contrepoids restent pris en fait dans cette philosophie de l'action unique dont ils dénoncent les dangers et dont ils s'emploient à conjurer les effets: s'ils différencient les organes, c'est pour leur faire accomplir la même chose".³⁰

After ten years of debate, a constitutional jury, that is a third power aimed at conserving the constitution and thus ensuring the continuity of the social body, is introduced.³¹ But this corrective tool will only push further to the limit the troublesome idea that "it is through representation that the people exists as a political body".³² All is done to avoid the recourse to the direct election of the ruling body pointing to the fact that the notion of representation as substitution is still alive and well in the minds of the social actors. As soon as the institution is finally in place, Bonaparte will appear on the scene and will replace this notion of representation with an anachronistic version of power. To the modern version of anonymous power, he will supersede a form of personalized monarchical power. Sieyès, as one of the prominent actors in the revolutionary debates, is one of the many thinkers trapped in the logic of substitution.

²⁸ Ibid., p.136.

²⁹ Ibid., p.136.

³⁰ Ibid., p.163.

³¹ Ibid., p.213.

³² Ibid., p.215 ("C'est par la représentation que le peuple existe comme corps politique.")

That is, he is a stubborn believer in the idea that the representatives **are** the people.

This idea obviously disallows the possibility of the existence of a distance between those being represented and the representatives. And as there can be no distance, there can be no relation between the two. Bonaparte will change that. He will manage to take over the reigns of power and truly institute a differentiation between the people and the source of power. Gauchet explains:

"C'est avec Bonaparte que resurgit la représentation-ressemblance [when the representative of the people is a monarchical-type figure] dont tout l'organisation de sa pensée éloignait un Sieyès. Aux antipodes de la représentation-substitution [when there is fusion of the representative and those being represented] où Sieyès reste enfermé, Bonaparte ramène la représentation-relation, [when a recognizable distance exists between the representatives and the represented] à base de circulation réfléchie entre des pôles distincts, ou d'un rapport restitutif entre la base et le sommet, même s'il le fait sur un mode fondamentalement équivoque"³³.

It will be by regressing back to the monarchical principle that the solution to the problem of representation, sought by all previous thinkers will be found. But with Bonaparte, it is a new situation that emerges. The constitutional jury will soon be abandoned to be replaced by a Senate. This institution will also be a failure. Given the fact that power has changed its face with Bonaparte, the solution of a third power is no longer pertinent. It is, as they say, too little to late. The recognition of division and inclusion of the masses in the political process will not occur until the XIXth century in France.

³³ Gauchet, Marcel, Révolution des pouvoirs, op. cit., p.230.

The instability that shook France for decades following the events of 1789 was the result of the incapacity of giving institutional recognition to both the division between political power and civil society and that between social actors. Subsequently, a representative government could not be instituted nor could basic civil and individual rights be guaranteed. With their insistence on creating a unified power that would stem from the reunion of free and equal individuals and that would be capable of coinciding with the will of the social body, came the necessity of attempting to eliminate all forms of conflict among members of society. Despite the omnipresence of conflict, the Assembly was driven to seek out the general will which it would then impose on its members. For although power was to be nothing more than the meeting of rational agents, it was in fact, (and always is) exercised by a few. The incapacity of recognizing this reality meant that the relationship between the governed and the governing was never clearly defined. As a result, a revolution fought in the name of freedom and equality for all, annihilated the very possibility of fulfilling these promises.

CHAPTER TWO

Democracy: Accepting division

Democracy, according to Gauchet is the unconscious acceptance of division both between civil society and power as well as in and amongst social agents. It is, in other words, the reneging on the dream of creating a unified social body. We will explain that it is from the failure of Republicanism that there emerges a democratic order. For it is in the XIXth century, that a working class party is given institutional recognition in such a way so as to disallow forever the dream of creating a social body devoid of discord. We will also want to demonstrate in what follows, how the transition from Republicanism to democracy involves the institution of a representative government and as such how it is an important stepping stone in the evolution towards a contemporary form of democracy. Ironically, it is through the insertion of incessant conflict about the nature of the best regime, that the French political system will eventually become a stable one. However, we will need to describe the three phases of democracy identified by Gauchet in order to grasp the full range of consequences resulting from living with division in modernity. Lastly, we will expand upon the idea that from the intrinsic equality of all members of the community, is created a situation whereby conflict is bound to continue into the unknown future. The future will henceforth become a form of non-divine Otherness as we will explain.

From Republicanism to democracy: the unconscious transition

Gauchet has explained that contemporary democracy is both the result of a historical process and of practical experience accumulated after years of living in a post-transcendental world.³⁴ The emergence of democracy from Republicanism, that is the passage from the conscious desire of creating a unified society, to the relinquishing of that dream, occurs not from a shift away from the social contract theories that had guided the practice of the Republicans. In fact, the Hobbesian, Lockean and Rousseauist models are still of theoretical pertinence for today's thinkers despite their obvious disjunction with contemporary democratic practices. (Gauchet even goes as far as to say that in the last two centuries nothing new has been said in terms of democratic theory.³⁵) On the contrary, the change results from the experience gained as to the impossibility of fulfilling the Republican dream. From the insolvency of Republicanism new practices appears thus indicating that democracy is not a conscious creation of moderns. In other words, democracy is not the manufactured product of democratic parties guided by more enlightened theories. Gauchet points out:

³⁴ Gauchet, Marcel, Révolution des pouvoirs, *op. cit.*, p.21-22.

³⁵ "Deux siècles de mouvement historique n'ont pas ajouté un seul principe de base, une seule règle fondamentale à ceux et celles que l'on connaît depuis le XVIII^e siècle." in Le désenchantement du monde, *op.cit.*, p.282. We are prone to believe that these comments made by Gauchet may be aimed at Claude Lefort author of L'invention démocratique, Paris, Fayard, 1981.

"De sorte qu'on peut soutenir que la démocratie s'est faite indépendamment des efforts de partis démocratiques pour la promouvoir, si l'on entend par là des partis qui auraient été en mesure d'en discerner et d'en vouloir la nouveauté véritable."³⁶

The change is not willed by any actor or group but occurs in the way in which the collective sphere is organized - that is democracy emerges when conflict becomes the organizational principle of the social sphere. Accepting conflict essentially means that no one group or class can dictate its version of reality to the whole of the community:

"La société démocratique est société qui repose sur une secrète renonciation à l'unité, sur une sourde légitimation de l'affrontement de ses membres, sur un abandon tacite de l'espoir d'unanimité politique. Contre tout son discours explicite, elle est société qui charge invisiblement de sens son déchirement intérieur."³⁷

In other words, democracy is that regime (which beyond the jargon about unity and solidarity), allows conflict pertaining to the definition of the Law, to be deployed among actors. It is interesting to note how the new practices that would introduce soundness into the regime, had their roots in the instability of the revolutionary period.

The acceptance of division in France emerges from the revolutionary period itself. The revolution of 1789 represents the radical questioning of the very foundation of the political and social system. Republicans endeavour to create a new order on the basis of such principles as freedom and equality for all. Emerges at the opposite end of the ring, a conservative, counter-revolutionary force whose aim it is to restore the prior, now-defunct order. The attempts by the counter-revolutionaries to return to a social order

³⁶ Gauchet, Marcel, "Tocqueville, l'Amérique et nous", op. cit., p.67.

³⁷ Gauchet, Marcel, "L'expérience totalitaire", op. cit., p.16.

where the hierarchical ordering of individuals ensured stability, make it so the political regime is constantly called into question by these agents. And in the end, Republicans and Conservatives both want nothing more than the elimination of the other force in order to institute their own version of the "good" society. Subsequently and because both groups are profoundly anti-democratic in spirit, conflict becomes the main trait of the political system during this period. In fact, Gauchet explains the importance of counter-revolutionary forces in the advent of democracy in France:

"Ce que nous connaissons en effet aujourd'hui comme démocratie s'est façonné pour une part essentielle grâce à l'opposition à la démocratie et en fonction d'elle. Du fait de la présence dans la société d'un parti de la sorte en tous points hostile à la souveraineté du peuple, s'est aménagé d'emblée un espace de débat social radical, engageant l'essence même de l'ordre collectif, et à l'intérieur duquel a pu venir ensuite se couler et s'exprimer, au-delà du conflit d'idées quant au système politique, le conflit des intérêts interne à la société."³⁸

From this original form of discord, appears what Gauchet calls a "symbolic framework of conflict"³⁹. Consequently, conflict *per se* becomes the permanent mode of functioning of the French regime thereby allowing for other forms of conflict to melt into this basic mould. Incidentally, in the XIXth century, conflict between workers and capitalists becomes the dominant form of clash among social actors. This will give way to the first phase of democracy in France.

³⁸ Gauchet, Marcel, "Tocqueville, l'Amérique et nous", op. cit., p.62.

³⁹ Ibid., p.63.

Gauchet refers to the first phase of democracy as the "victory of the principle of plurality".⁴⁰ He defines it in the following manner:

"De concert avec la division partisane se trouve consacrée la différence représentative, l'existence d'une scène à part où la division politique du pays est faite pour être projetée et figurée, tandis que l'opinion garde la liberté de se manifester en dehors de la sphère de la décision politique."⁴¹

In France it is through the creation of a working class party that is finally abdicated the dream of creating a unified society. It is as of approximately 1848, explains Gauchet, that workers begin questioning the validity of the liberal democratic order through their request of inclusion as voting members of society. If all are free and equal, they argue, why are they unable to participate in the choice of elected officials? Around 1880 a party to voice the concerns of workers in the public arena is finally given recognition.⁴² The wish of creating a unified social body, that had frustrated all attempts to launch a representative government, becomes impossible after the institutionalization of the presence of a force aimed at questioning the very principles on which the system is built. To the abstract bourgeois notions of equality and freedom, the working class oppose their own versions of those basic tenants. From the moment warring classes each send to power their own representatives, is dissolved the rocky marriage between power and civil society because power can no longer pretend to speak in the name of a unified social body. It can always be questioned by the opposing class as illegitimate and

⁴⁰ Gauchet, Marcel, La Révolution des pouvoirs, op.cit., p.27.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.28.

⁴² Gauchet, Marcel, Le désenchantement du monde, op. cit., p.281

unrepresentative. Representation points out the fact that civil society is autonomous from power since the representatives of opposing interests clearly emerge from this sphere. As writes our author:

“Le mécanisme de la représentation, loin dès lors de conspirer à établir une coïncidence de la collectivité avec elle-même, équivaut à l'inverse à une affirmation en acte de la distance qui sépare le lieu où s'enracinent et se forment les conflits (la société) et le lieu où il s'exhibent et se répercutent (l'État).”⁴³

Is founded, through the creation of a working class party, a mechanism through which power is incessantly being questioned. The resulting open competition for power typical of democracies, is the ongoing debate as to the nature of the best society, in other words, as to the definition of the Law. Democracy, then is anything but the result of a social contract but rather the unrelenting fight for the recognition of each party's definition of the Law. From this situation of never-ending conflict, we would believe the Apocalypse to be quite near. And such was the case during this second phase of democracy identified by Gauchet. However, the threat to the social body is not that it will be destroyed through incessant fighting. On the contrary the danger is that one of the warring parties will succeed in taking over the reigns of power in order to institute its vision of society on the whole.

The institutionalization of a conflict in modern democracies meant the introduction of a radical and irreparable cleavage. This disunity fed the fear of the complete destruction of the community and as such gave way to violent reactions against the

⁴³ Gauchet, Marcel, "Tocqueville, l'Amérique et nous", *op. cit.*, p.65.

divided nature of society. This reaction we know today as totalitarianism or what Gauchet also refers to as the second moment in the development of modern democracies. Totalitarianism represents an attempt to resolve all internal conflict by fabricating a social body in perfect immanency. Totalitarianism is a system which gives itself the power to rule the social body by virtue of perfect knowledge about it. In other words, a totalitarian power believes itself to be capable of knowing the Law and of ruling by virtue of this God-like status. It is a reaction against the prevalence of division and an attempt to recapture the sense of wholeness lost in the transition from pre-modern to modern forms of social organization. Gauchet describes the totalitarian phenomena as:

"...une volonté forcenée de retour à la cohésion explicite de la communauté humaine dont l'idéal institué domine l'histoire des origines à nos jours, y compris depuis l'avènement de l'État et des classes, et cela principalement au travers de la religion, de la conformité de la société à un plan pré-établi..."⁴⁴

However strenuous the efforts of a totalitarian power to make a unified social body devoid of conflict, division is always only denied and not suppressed.

Gauchet distinguishes the totalitarian project with the totalitarian dream. For it is in fact possible to believe in a power capable of eliminating division but history has proven that this power is untenable when put into practice. It is precisely while announcing the end of division that the totalitarian power actually creates a very radical division between itself and civil society. The more it claims to speak in the name of the social body, the more it becomes obvious to all social agents that this is not the case. As Gauchet states: "Sous le signe de l'Un se recompose un espace social conflictuel.

⁴⁴ Gauchet, Marcel, "Tocqueville, l'Amérique et nous", op.cit., p.69.

L'antagonisme des hommes n'est pas anéanti. Il n'est qu'interdit."⁴⁵ According to Gauchet totalitarianism is an untenable regime. For that reason, although shadowing democracy during this second phase, totalitarianism and its threat has now, as per our author, been eradicated. We have therefore evolved towards a most pacific phase of democracy.

The third and probably the more controversial phase of democracy, is baptized by Gauchet, "the victorious consolidation".⁴⁶ By this he means that we have acquired the ability of assuming the responsibility for division without having recourse to totalitarian power. He argues that contemporary democrats have learned from the totalitarian fiasco. In fact, the welfare state has been the mechanism through which the worst consequences of division have been lessened. With its redistributive role, the State includes and pacifies all factions of society. The discord between workers and capitalists no longer represents a threat to the social order in modern democracies. In fact, conflict generates a sense of belonging to the whole. For as members of a community question the foundation of their society, they are unknowingly participating in its history. In other words, the community being criticized and improved according to the standards of a given class, is the **same** community for all. As the author elaborates:

⁴⁵ Gauchet, Marcel, "L'expérience totalitaire", op. cit., p.14.

⁴⁶ Gauchet, Marcel, La Révolution des pouvoirs, op. cit., p.32.

“Mais dans cette même mesure où les individus s'affrontent sur les raisons d'être et les finalités de leur société, ils s'affirment comme membres d'une même communauté. S'il s'agit d'instaurer une autre société, c'est bel et bien à partir de cette société-ci qui fournit un enjeu commun aux adversaires. Si la lutte des classes sépare, elle installe aussi un même entre les partis antagonistes. Par le conflit social, les individus et les groupes se posent comme ennemis *au sein* d'un même monde. La lutte des hommes est productrice *d'appartenance* et restauratrice d'une dimension de communauté.”⁴⁷

The enemies belong to the same social body and democracy is precisely the Unconscious decision to renounce to the dream of eliminating this radical Other, that is this class whose version of reality is foreign to our own. Furthermore, this debate as to the best form of society, occurs in and among individuals without having been planned to occur at all. And since all members of society are postulated as being intrinsically equal, no one group can have the final say as to the definition of social norms. It is due to the stipulated equality of all members of the community that such conflict occurs and is bound to continue endlessly even though conflict will not always primarily defined by class.

Equality, democracy and the Law

Modernity, because it openly promulgates the principle of equality, leads to a complete redefinition of the social link on the basis of individual agents. This change was however prepared under the national monarchies, but only with Republicanism is it explicitly postulated. The democratic order will complete the exploitation of this novel concept. This results in a radical change in the course of human history. Although

⁴⁷ Gauchet, Marcel, "L'expérience totalitaire", *op. cit.*, p.24-25.

democracy is the exploitation of the distinction between the visible and the invisible world brought about by Christianity, it also represents something of a revolutionary change. Gauchet describes the novelty brought about by the process of equalization:

"La démocratie est en son fond redéfinition totale de l'ordre social sur la base de ce matériau entièrement neuf que sont les hommes indépendants. Elle est commencement radical d'une histoire, en fonction de prémisses et d'assises absolument autres. Elle a beau procéder d'un travail séculaire dont l'observateur décèle les signes dans le passé et reconstitue le cours, elle est discontinuité décisive, réinstitution de la communauté humaine sur un fondement inédit, impliquant une redéfinition en règle de la vie sociale jusqu'en ses plus minces détails."⁴⁸

How can we define equality? For Gauchet, it is the process through which all members of the community are recognized as having the same essence. Or to say it in another manner, "...la tendance à la réduction de l'altérité dans l'espace humain..."⁴⁹

This means essentially that it is neither equality before the law nor is it economic equality. Gauchet does not adhere to either the liberal or the marxist definition of equality. In fact, he borrows his conception from Alexis de Tocqueville who defines the equality between a master and a servant in the following terms:

"En vain la richesse et la pauvreté, le commandement et l'obéissance mettent accidentellement de grandes distances entre deux hommes, l'opinion publique, qui se fonde sur l'ordre ordinaire des choses, les rapproche du commun niveau et crée entre eux une sorte d'égalité imaginaire, en dépit de l'inégalité réelle de leurs conditions... Au fond de leur âme, le maître et le serviteur n'aperçoivent plus entre eux de dissemblance profonde, et ils n'espèrent ni ne redoutent d'en rencontrer jamais. Ils sont donc sans mépris et sans colère, et ils ne se trouvent ni humbles ni fiers en se regardant."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Gauchet, Marcel, "Tocqueville, l'Amérique et nous", op.cit., p.80.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.83.

⁵⁰ Tocqueville, Alexis de, De la démocratie en Amérique II, Paris, Gallimard, 1961, (1835), p.253.

Equality, in other words is the necessity of including all that was previously seen as Otherness, into the human circle. It is the postulation of the sameness of all humans rather than their differentiation into classes. Social class, of course, remains. Yet it becomes impossible to see the members of another class as essentially and profoundly different. And whereas religious societies had hierarchized individuals defining some members as naturally more able as rulers given their native superiority, democracy and before that republicanism, with its promulgation of the idea of equality of all humans, makes it so, all are inevitably capable of ruling.

A society which postulates the intrinsic equality of its members is destined to be a society where conflict as to the definition of the Law, reigns. The competition for power becomes necessary since the interpretation of the Law by any faction of society will henceforth be recognized as having inherent legitimacy. This is not to say, of course that the struggle for workers to be recognized as equals was straightforward and easy. However, Gauchet does argue that the bourgeoisie, while frustrating the aspirations of workers every step of the way, did not have to eventually give in to the demands of workers even though it had the power to refuse.⁵¹ It can be said that the creation of the welfare state is a reflection of the importance given by moderns to the idea of equality. It is because of this intrinsic equality of all members of society, that conflict as to the most pertinent definition of the Law occurs. Moreover, equality and the resulting conflict is what eliminates the dream of a unified social order given the fact that as an equal, this

⁵¹ Gauchet, Marcel, "L'expérience totalitaire", *op. cit.*, p.15-16.

Other cannot be eliminated. We can therefore say, that democracy, with its unconscious acceptance of division is not the definition and application of a chosen vision of society in the present, (as believed by Republicans). It is rather a social and political system turned towards the unknown future in a constant quest for reinvention.

The future as a non-religious form of Otherness

The incessant conflict that assails the democratic order disallows the possibility of applying to the present reality, a given model of the "good" society. Democracy, by its acceptance of conflict and subsequent change this brings about, represents in essence, the turning away from the Republican dream of creating a transparent social order in full possession of its foundational principle. Democracy means that no one actor or group can impose a vision of society on the whole in the name of any set of ideas. Gauchet argues that the notion of immediate presence to oneself identified in national monarchies and Republicanism, share in common the need to define civil society according to a set of overriding ideas such as the Nation or the Republic. We have seen that these notions involve the reinjection of invisible notions into the autonomous visible realm so as to ensure the perpetuity of the collectivity. Such societies are still subjugated to the invisible realm despite the fact that it is no longer of divine influence. Gauchet describes how Republicanism still participates in this conception of power that has not been wholly secularized:

"...cette vision d'un soi social intégralement présent à lui-même s'appuie fondamentalement en effet sur un support extrinsèque. Elle présuppose une représentation traditionnelle du devoir-être collectif - elle doit beaucoup au cadre du volontarisme absolutiste à l'intérieur duquel elle a germé, et elle n'existerait pas sans la reconduction de quelques-uns de ses caractères essentiels. À commencer par la présupposition cardinale qu'il faut qu'une société veuille être pour être,..."⁵²

A society still seeking a conscious determination of itself has not yet divorced itself from the possibility of controlling and determining the present in the name of a transcending factor. And as we will see, a society that reneges on the dream of creating a transparent whole is one that necessarily envisions time as infinite. The unknown future therefore becomes a non-divine form of Otherness.

Democratic society is one which projects itself into the unknown future. As such this future becomes a form of Otherness but of a very different kind than its predecessors. This form of Otherness is non-divine precisely because the division which exists is not between our human order and a superior, unreachable divine one. On the contrary, the division occurs between our present collective self and the community of tomorrow. Gauchet explains the difference between these two forms of Otherness:

⁵² Gauchet, Marcel, Le désenchantement du monde, op.cit., p.251.

“Formellement, la fonction reste la même: c’est toujours d’institution de l’identité collective au travers de la séparation d’avec un pôle invisible de devoir-être qu’il s’agit, de lecture de soi depuis le dehors de soi. Cela n’autorise pas à conclure qu’on se trouve devant un nouveau visage de la religion éternelle devenue simplement une religion de l’avenir. Car en fait de dehors de soi, l’avenir en fournit un d’une ambiguïté très remarquable, en lequel l’autre et le même s’allient inextricablement. Le non-soi y est en même temps virtuellement soi, la transcendance perpétuelle ne s’y sépare pas de l’immanence potentielle.”⁵³

It is a form of Otherness yet the division between ourselves now and ourselves in the future, contains a new element that radically distinguishes the future from religious forms of Otherness, namely the necessity of using our creative potential.

Divine forms of Otherness had not required the creativity of its agents. The objective was the seeking out and application of a given order willed by the divine. Far from being the mere mimic of the supposed will of the gods, the future as a form of Otherness requires our participation, if not to say our active creativity. Indeed if modernity is characterized by the unleashing of human potentiality and creativity, the future as a form of Otherness rather than undermining human capacity, actually requires its full deployment in the here and now so as to ensure the future. Since the future is open, undetermined by the divine, we must act now in order to make our own future. Gauchet describes this requirement of democratic societies:

⁵³ ibid., p.256.

"Elle (la différence temporelle) devient, quand l'invisible législateur prend couleur d'avenir l'élément même d'une reconnaissance du caractère générateur de l'activité humaine, et l'axe d'une permanente ressaisie identificatoire du collectif en son changement même (demain sera foncièrement différent d'aujourd'hui, nous y serons cependant toujours nous-mêmes et c'est nous qui l'auront fait)."⁵⁴

As such, a society that does not attempt to control the future, but leaves the conflictual nature of social relations determine the community of tomorrow, is a society which has completely evacuated religion from its mist. However, this openness towards the future stemming from the acceptance of division in democratic regimes did go hand and hand with a foreboding phenomena. In fact, Gauchet argues that the age of ideology is the intermediate moment between the old and the new ways of relating to the future.

The age of ideology represents for Gauchet the desire of controlling the unknown future. Ideologies correspond to those many "isms" littering the XIXth and XXth centuries including liberalism, conservatism, socialism and even totalitarianism.

Gauchet describes ideologies in the following manner:

"L'avenir, mais à condition de le savoir et d'en maîtriser le cours. Telle nous paraît être la formule générale qui permet de parler de l'idéologie en ses diverses variantes, comme d'une formation historique précisément située: un discours qui rompt avec l'explication religieuse des choses au travers de l'orientation vers le futur à laquelle il subordonne l'intelligibilité de l'action humaine, mais qui en reconduit néanmoins l'économie en quelque manière au travers de l'effort pour s'assurer de l'avenir, en nommer la direction avec certitude et subordonner sa production aux oeuvres d'une volonté pleinement consciente..."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.256.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.257.

Gauchet is therefore suggesting that we have gone beyond the age of ideology in such a way that a set of well defined ideas about political reality no longer guides political action. We once again arrive at that very controversial point in his analysis which states that we have forever eradicated the possibility of a totalitarian upsurge. He essentially argues that democracies have reached a stage of development whereby the threat of totalitarianism has been eliminated through the creation of both democratic institutions as well as a strong democratic culture. Even more contentious is his claim that democracy with its openness towards the future and its evacuation of ideology, is the normal regime.⁵⁶ However, with the rebirth of classical liberalism in all Western democracies, it is difficult to maintain the view that ideologies no longer guide political action and that conflict can no longer lead to the desire to completely eradicate it. This highly contentious view of contemporary democracy will be addressed in our fifth and final chapter.

To conclude then, we can say that Gauchet believes democracy to represent the end of history⁵⁷. It is that system where conflict is left to prevail, and as such it represents a more realistic way of dealing with modern difficulties. Furthermore, it is the

⁵⁶ Gauchet, Marcel, Le désenchantement du monde, op.cit., p.267. "...c'est de l'entrée dans un régime normal qu'il s'agit, où l'avenir restera sans visage."

⁵⁷ The term "end of history" was popularized by Francis Fukuyama in La fin de l'histoire et le dernier homme, Paris, Flammarion, 1992.

normal regime. Democracy corresponds to a society where individuals are recognized as intrinsically equal and therefore able to enjoy a space of individual freedom whereby this individuality can be expressed. Whereas pre-modern forms of freedom involved the integration of agents into the whole, modernity allows its citizens to enjoy what Isaiah Berlin has called, a "negative space of liberty".⁵⁸ The welfare state is present to ensure the inclusion of all individuals within the social sphere. Yet the role of political power is to allow division amongst free and equal individuals to remain without attempting to remedy it all the while minimizing its excesses.

⁵⁸ "En ce sens, la liberté politique n'est que l'espace à l'intérieur duquel un homme peut agir sans que d'autres n'en l'empêchent." in Isaiah Berlin's "Deux conceptions de la liberté", Éloge de la liberté, Paris, Calmann-Levy, p.171.

CHAPTER THREE

Republicanism and the dream of making man

After having completed our analysis of the passage from Republicanism to democracy, we can now proceed to the presentation of the similar road travelled in modernity at the micro, individual level. And as Gauchet points out, the two levels of analysis, the macro and the micro are interdependent, each shedding light on the other.⁵⁹ Therefore, in order to begin proving our second sub-hypothesis which states that there is a passage from the Cartesian model of the individual to a vision of the subject as divided between a conscious and an unconscious element, we will want to demonstrate how the Republican conception of the individual agent stems from notions traceable to the period of national monarchies just as their notion of political power had borrowed heavily from that same source. In particular, we will explain how Otherness is interpreted, in a world where God is alive and well as opposed to how it comes to be conceived under national monarchies and ultimately under Republican rule. We will wish to show how the Republican project is founded on the dream of creating a rational citizen capable of actively participating in the social contract. Under the influence of the

⁵⁹ "...je crois qu'en profondeur le devenir des formes collectives et le devenir des formes personnelles s'éclairent l'un par l'autre - ils composent les deux faces d'une même « histoire du sujet »." Gauchet, Marcel, "Le mal démocratique", *Esprit*, octobre 1993, p.68.

Republican notion of power, the asylum will represent the creation of an institution where doctors will attempt to bring back into the human family those unable to participate in the foundation of the social order due to their lack of reason. The aim of this chapter is, of course, to introduce our fourth chapter by pointing out that it is from the insolvency of the Republican project that is born a new vision of man as a divided being, that is as containing within himself, Otherness.

From pre-modern Christian societies to national monarchies

We have seen in Chapter one, how the arrival of Jesus on the human scene brings with it an ambiguity that would eventually have a profound impact on all of Western thought. In fact, Jesus as a divine being taking on a human form, confers in so doing, legitimacy to the visible sphere. It is this ambiguous situation that the national monarchs will exploit by becoming leaders of the visible sphere. However, the period prior to the national monarchies is one where the visible and the invisible realms are interlinked, the former being inferior to the latter. In this framework of hierarchical organization, Otherness, be it insanity or evil, is thought to be traceable to the superior, non-human world. Subsequently, both insanity and evil are to be understood as forms of absolute Otherness, that is as something which is not properly of human essence. In the case of insanity, for example, demonic or divine possession are popular

explanations for the phenomena. Consequently, given the fact that Otherness stems from a non-human realm, neither insanity nor evil are perceived as being the responsibility of the individual agent. To quote our author:

"...tout le temps où prévaut une compréhension hiérarchisée des ordres de réalité, cette responsabilisation spécifiquement chrétienne ... est balancée par une certaine exonération des personnes."⁶⁰

We are therefore at a stage where insanity is conceptualized as a form of absolute Otherness. In such a world, power over agents and the concordant notion of the Law, take on a specific form which will be crucial in our eventually comprehension of the use of power in the asylum.

In a society organized by a transcendental being, the Law is by "nature outside of the individuals"⁶¹ as it is referred back to this divine being. Obedience to such a transcendental Law is therefore the mere act of submitting one's will to a higher power.⁶² The Law, is a form of Otherness that the agent has to obey without question. The role of political power then, is to ensure the observance of this Law and to punish any detractors. Power is overtly and immediately coercive by virtue of laws put in place in accordance to the Law which is out of the reach of any and every human agent. The social order in this case is not created by man but simply exists as an organized whole

⁶⁰ Gauchet, Marcel, Le désenchantement du monde, *op.cit.*, p.240.

⁶¹ Gauchet, Marcel and Gladys Swain, La Pratique de l'esprit humain. L'institution asilaire et la révolution démocratique, Paris, Gallimard, 1980, p.114 ("...la Loi est par nature, hors des individus.")

⁶² Ibid., p.114.

with each part having its place by virtue of the will of a supreme being. Power in such societies is thereby limited to assigning to each agent his respective place in the social order. As a result of the whole being willed by God, we can say that insanity, as a form of Otherness, also has its legitimate place even though it is not considered as properly human.

With the rule of the national monarchs, the visible world is rendered autonomous thus making it impossible to refer insanity or evil back to a mystical, transcendental source. Evil, as a form of Otherness, becomes associated henceforth, with personal choice:

"Le mal cesse d'être d'abord une propriété du réel et ensuite un acte personnel pour devenir tout entier - tendancieusement du moins - imputable en son principe, au choix individuel."⁶³

This essentially means that the agent is fully responsible for his own moral existence and choices. The agent is now free from the clutches of the invisible world and he can henceforth define himself in perfect and unbridled freedom. Is born in this period, the notion that will remain dominant during the Republican era, that is that of the individual as a being in full possession of himself and as having the capacity of choosing himself in full transparency. Gauchet describes:

Voilà pour la première phase: la réduction de l'autre dans l'ordre de la moralité, en deux temps, qui engendre l'idée classique d'un sujet cause de lui-même par sa volonté et sa liberté."⁶⁴

It is this Cartesian subject who will be the concern of Republicans.

⁶³ Gauchet, Marcel, Le désenchantement du monde, *op.cit.*, p.241.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.243.

Republicanism - making the perfect citizen

The Republican project with its representation of the social order as the merging of free and rational agents leads to the postulation of two new radical and interdependent principles. On the one hand, the project is founded on the conscious desire to bring about the equality of individuals. On the other, it is based on the unconscious faith in man's capability of making the perfect citizen. The State thereby gives itself the powers it needs to organize, unify and create both society and the individuals that will form it. In fact this power to make society and individuals becomes limitless. Mankind for the first time explicitly postulates an autonomous political power yet it is precisely this representation of absolute autonomy which gives birth to a mastery of individuals unknown to man prior to that time. Gauchet explains the irony of this situation:

"En théorie et en pratique, c'est la société qui produit le pouvoir. Et cependant, par delà constitutions et règles et au travers d'elles, c'est comme jamais dans l'histoire le pouvoir qui produit concrètement et symboliquement la société. Voilà le point qui nous importe, car central, dans l'élaboration du modèle politique dont nous cherchons les racines: l'importation à l'intérieur même du champ social, de par la révolution démocratique, d'un point de vue de pouvoir depuis lequel la société apparaît toute à gérer, à organiser, à constituer."⁶⁵

The power transferred to the State following the Revolution aims not merely at ensuring the obedience to the laws as traditional power had done. Rather, it is based on an entirely new logic: since only man exists, all power must come from him. Power can therefore create a unified, transparent social order by virtue of absolute knowledge it is

⁶⁵ Gauchet, Marcel and Gladys Swain, op.cit., p.104.

able to gain about itself. Subsequently power must inevitably control all aspects of human social life. It is no longer limited by a fixed version of reality as it had been in a world organized by a transcendental being. Power's goal is to take charge of society, organize and control it in its most minute and specific details. Human agents are therefore seen as material to be moulded to fit the created social whole. And for the first time in history we see emerging a new dichotomy between masters and servants that is, a dichotomy between those who participate in *making* society because they *know* what this order entails and those who are to take their places in this artificially-created order without questioning.⁶⁶ A new form of domination emerges and its cruelty lies in the fact that it will attempt to reach what had always been sacred, that is the very heart and soul of individuals.

The fantasy of having the ability to create oneself is an important trait of the French Republican ideal. And although this ideal was never fully deployed in the political sphere, it did serve as a source of inspiration for psychiatric practices. In fact, the asylum represents the only place where the Republican notion of power is put into active practice. This logic of power stipulates that with nothing existing outside of its control, the social order is not only the creator of laws, it IS the Law. The Law, which is nothing more than society's wish for order, must coincide and be identical to society. It no longer exists as a command that must be obeyed by an individual subject. It must coincide with that subject and in so doing permit his very existence as a member of that

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.113.

order. The individual becomes autonomous and self-sufficient by internalizing the social norm. Gauchet explains that the Law in modernity is the "condition de possibilité d'un sujet humain,...le pivot autour duquel se construit et par lequel advient le sujet."⁶⁷ In other words, if we cannot coincide with the prescribed social norms, we are excluded from being a subject in the modern sense. A defective subject, (for example the insane who has lost his self-mastery) will be penetrated by power to be appropriately programmed in order to reinstate himself within the social order. We will conceptualize a capability of reaching within the heart of man in order to change and program him according to the designs of society. It is precisely because many thinkers in revolutionary France are animated by this latent fantasy of producing a unified whole, ("une société UNE") that they must therefore give themselves the right to enter into the individual in order to make all parts coincide with society's vision.⁶⁸ The main objective of modern society then becomes that of changing man in order to create the appropriate society. That this project of manipulating man for social ends is only possible in a world defined primarily by its "disenchantment", is clear. With these thoughts in mind, we are now ready to situate the birth of the asylum as that project which best captures the desire to manipulate, change and make that man whom, by virtue of his condition is asocial.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.115.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.122-126.

The birth of the asylum

In la Pratique de l'esprit humain, co-written with Gladys Swain in 1980, Gauchet notes that a significant modification in the way of conceiving the insane occurs in and around the 1800's through the work of Doctor Pinel's Traité médico-philosophique sur l'aliénation mentale. Pinel's thesis will subsequently be pushed to its logical limit by his disciple Esquirol in Des Passions considérées comme causes, symptômes et moyens curatifs de l'aliénation mentale. To fully grasp the importance of the change both doctors introduce, we must begin with the teacher's contributions. Pinel, in his medical treatise presents an entirely new idea about the insane that only could emerge in the post-revolutionary fervour. From the postulate that all are equal, stems a new conception of insanity that can be summarized as follows: since nothing exists outside the human realm then all of man's habits and states are properly human. We can therefore, according to Pinel necessarily **communicate** with the insane since he is all too human. Gauchet points to the importance of this event:

"... une découverte toute pratique, celle de la communication possible avec le fou, ou plus exactement avec le «sujet» maintenu au milieu de sa folie. Il n'y a pas de folie complète, pas d'absorption totale, pas d'enfermement du fou dans sa folie, il y a toujours un écart intime du fou d'avec sa folie..."⁶⁹

By virtue of his humanity, he who is insane is still somewhat accessible to others. By communicating with him, we can cure him and bring him back into the human family; in other words, the Otherness we witness in him can be reduced since nothing exists

⁶⁹ Gauchet, Marcel, "Le mal démocratique", op.cit., p.73.

outside of man. It is this novel idea that will modify the institution in which the insane had been trapped since the seventeenth century and give birth to what will become the modern asylum.

In 1656 under Louis XIV occurs in France what is known as "le grand renferment". This decree allows public authorities to place the insane in institutions rather than letting them wander the streets as was the common practice throughout the Middle Ages. According to Gauchet, this gesture represents the unconscious recognition of the insane as sharing a degree of "sameness" with the sane. Locking up the insane, away from the eyes of others, occurs precisely because we **begin** to recognize that absolute Otherness can no longer exist in a world free from transcendence.⁷⁰ It is the fear of this sameness that leads to the locking up of the insane and perhaps explains the cruel and unjust mistreatment often administered to them in those primitive mental institutions. Gauchet and Swain maintain that the very gesture of imprisoning the insane contained its opposite, that is his liberation. No demonic or divine possession, no absolute Otherness but sameness: this is the postulate that leads Pinel to pose that famous gesture of liberating the insane from their chains. Insanity cannot be perceived as curable during the classical period since this sameness is

⁷⁰ The reader will note that this hypothesis is diametrically opposed to that presented by Michel Foucault in his famous work entitled, L'histoire de la folie à l'âge classique, Paris, Gallimard, 1972. In fact, Gauchet and Swain admittedly wish to overturn the foucauldian version of history. The insane were not excluded from the social arena by virtue of a dominant idea of rationality born in the 16th century as believed Foucault.

somewhat rejected. The asylum, with its vocation to cure the irrational can only emerge from the possibility of communicating with him. As the authors explain further:

"... l'asile sort de cette révolution du concevable qui a rendu la folie accessible par le dedans et ramené le fou dans l'ordre des êtres sur lesquels on a l'intime prise qui naît de la communication."⁷¹

We can now explore the concrete mission (that is the reduction of alterity in the insane) of the asylum and its link with the republican project.

The theory of curability of the insane through communication certainly could not remain unproven. It therefore leads to the creation of an institution whose role it is to take charge of those pointing towards Otherness. Thus is born the asylum. It is important to note that in 1802, the faith in the curability of the insane is shared and willingly accepted by the public.⁷² Given the republican ideal of equality and the necessity of including all humans into the social order, there originally exists a denial of the incurability of insanity. Man's faith in the power to bring every individual back into the human family is limitless during those first years of institution-building. For that project to succeed, however, we need to postulate human nature as perfectly malleable. Since man and not God makes man, then he has the power of acting on his own nature in order to build and reshape it. The absence of anything outside the human realm makes the project of changing man possible. The asylum will be such an experiment. Pinel's technique of curing the insane by acting on their inner selves (known as moral

⁷¹ Gauchet, Marcel and Gladys Swain, *op.cit.*, p.69.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.45.

treatment), is precisely the ability to penetrate, program and change rather than merely teach the subject a new set of behavioural patterns. It is interesting to note, however that once the theory is put into practice, the original treatment prescribed by the doctor subtly yet significantly changes its characteristic to perfectly coincide with the political republican project.

When Pinel postulates the curability of insanity he does so on the grounds that, through personal and individual dialogue with the patient we can take charge of that individual's soul and change him for the better. Pinel soon realizes, however, that not all individuals respond to the treatment. There occurs "un transfert du ressort de la cure morale de l'élément de la relation personnelle à celui de l'inscription-immersion au sein d'un ordre communautaire".⁷³ Still maintaining the fantasy that man is perfectly malleable, a shift occurs in the definition of the moral treatment which will make of the asylum a political playground rather than a mere medical experiment. The authors explain that:

"L'asile a été, en vérité, un laboratoire politique, le théâtre d'expérimentation d'une illusion de puissance que nos sociétés portent dans leurs flancs comme leur rêve le plus nécessaire et à laquelle le problème du traitement de la folie a offert une occasion unique de se déployer. C'est dans l'asile, plutôt que dans l'école ou dans la prison, que les dessein d'une machine à produire l'homme, d'une institution conçue pour se saisir entièrement des êtres et les reformer de part en part grâce à leur absorption au sein d'un environnement calculé et d'un collectif réglé, a connu son expression la plus complète et la plus pure."⁷⁴

⁷³ Ibid., p.96.

⁷⁴ Gauchet, Marcel, "A la recherche d'une autre histoire de la folie", in Gladys Swain, Dialogue avec l'insensé, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p.XXXVI.

No longer will moral treatment be founded on an individual and direct relationship between patient and doctor but it is the institution itself that will receive the task of curing the patient. The asylum will be the creation of an artificial environment which will itself act on the very souls of the sick. By taking charge of all aspects of the patient's life, the doctor indirectly gains the power of controlling and manipulating the patients through the institutional mechanism itself. By virtue of the knowledge he has of the system he creates, the doctor knows the patient. The individual patient no longer matters as much as the functioning of the institution. The patient becomes part of a malleable mass of humans. Curability occurs through obedience to the systematic orders of operation, in other words, through the internalization of the laws. The asylum therefore becomes a method of socializing the irrational, in other words it is "a machine which reduces the Otherness so resistant in the insane".⁷⁵ The insane will therefore prove to be perfect guinea pigs since apparently pointing to an extra-human quality. Because of their illness, they cannot know the order but must simply obey its laws. The new institution is exemplary of that latent, unconscious idea of the malleability of humans found in post-revolutionary France and of the configuration of power and knowledge all aimed at denying the trace of Otherness. And as we will see, Dr. Esquirol will be able to advance one step further than his teacher in his redefinition of the insane and subsequently of man.

⁷⁵ Gauchet, Marcel and Gladys Swain, op.cit., p.100. ("...une machine à réduire l'altérité si résistante au fou.")

Pinel introduces a novel idea by conceptualizing the possibility of communicating with the insane. We may let the insane express his incoherent discourse in order to allow the doctor to decipher his message. It is thought that by allowing him freedom of expression, the insane will be able to see his own irrationality. (Even though this total freedom of expression exists, it is only to allow him to better fit into the mould drawn out by the institution.) This attempt to decipher the rationality of the insane's dialogue implies the possibility of a distance between the subject and his insanity. From this idea, Esquirol draws the significant conclusion that not only can we communicate with the insane, but that "despite his insanity, the subject remains in some way whole."⁷⁶ This entirely new idea that was implicit in Pinel's work, finds itself presented clearly by Esquirol. That insanity neither affects only the subject's mind nor does it mean total absence to oneself, this is the novelty in Esquirol's thought. In other words insanity affects the body yet leaves room for the subject's awareness be that slight as it may. The human being, therefore has the capacity to be conscious of his bizarre gestures or thoughts yet not have the ability to control them. Something exists within him, yet is out of his direct reach. In order to bring the project of curability to term (which Esquirol finally does in 1826 when at La Salpêtrière, he opens an asylum based on the theory he and Pinel developed) Esquirol must move beyond the classical and paradoxical definition of the causes of insanity.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.300. ("En dépit de sa folie, le sujet reste en quelque sorte entier.")

Insanity, according to thinkers prior to Pinel and Esquirol, was incurable since it involved the totality of the agent. However the classical model is quite ambiguous and even paradoxical as it claims to involve the subject in his totality yet is also said to be the result of a personal choice. Regardless of the various models presented at the time, traditionalists believe in :

"la détermination de la folie comme étrangeté immaîtrisable, écart irrémédiable d'avec soi, irréflexion fondamentale en son foyer, qu'ensuite elle porte sur tous les objets..."⁷⁷

Yet insanity results from a "choice, a vicious habit, and ultimately sin".⁷⁸ Despite his total lack of self-mastery, the insane chooses his condition! say the traditional thinkers. It is this choice which is thought to renders insanity incurable. For Esquirol, the causes of insanity lie not in a malfunctioning of the brain (which would invalidate the moral + treatment) but rather in the epigastric centre. This phantasmagorical representation of insanity as located in the gastric area of the body, permits Esquirol to accomplish what he had set out to do: postulate the possibility of treating the insane. By locating insanity outside of the brain, he can deduce that the condition does not affect the entire subject but permits him to preserve some form of rationality. This new idea forever changes the way of thinking about man by postulating a possible division within himself. It is through the thought of two alienist doctors, Pinel and Esquirol that, as we will see, the classical Cartesian individual's limits are brought to light.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.303

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.305

Gauchet and Swain argue that it was not philosophy but rather alienists such as Pinel and Esquirol who first became aware of the untenability of the classical definition of man as described by Descartes. The postulation of a self-sufficient, perfectly autonomous and ethically responsible subject becomes less plausible when we admit that a subject can be both present and absent to himself. When insanity is conceived as complete absence to oneself, it can only become absolute Otherness for the sane. But as soon as we postulate the presence to oneself despite insanity, that is when insanity remains within the subjective, all too human realm, we realize that what we do not control actually emanates from ourselves.⁷⁹ We can say that:

"Avec Pinel puis Esquirol, l'aliénation n'est plus le dehors de l'humain, l'autre de la raison, mais l'appartenance, certes problématique, au monde commun. Ce fou n'est pas l'autre radical mais un même en proie à une déchirure intérieure qu'il ne maîtrise pas."⁸⁰

As Gauchet and Swain explain that insanity is "not the shifting away from the ground of common experience nor is it the tilting towards a mysterious alterity..."⁸¹ This sameness is unwittingly postulated by Esquirol when he defines the symptoms of mental illness as the mere amplification of common feelings and passions. For example, melancholy is simply a deeper form of sadness. Insanity is now identified as existing within the human realm in such a way as to blur the distinctions between the normal and the pathological:

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.358.

⁸⁰ Ehrehberg, Corine, "Dialogue avec l'insensé de Gladys Swain", Esprit, février 1995, p.187.

⁸¹ Gauchet, Marcel and Gladys Swain, op.cit., p.358. ("...nul arrachement au sol de l'expérience commune dans la folie, nul basculement dans l'altérité innommable...")

"passions ou aliénation, c'est au fond le même".⁸² But the inclusion of insanity within human circles raises many questions about the very definition of man. If indeed the subject does maintain a certain degree of rationality throughout the episode, how is it that he cannot control it?

The break with the traditional vision of insanity as Otherness marks the beginning of the modern representation of the individual as defined primarily by an internal division within his individual psyche. We become aware that there is absolutely no escaping the human condition and that despite the banishment of the transcendence, there exists the persistence of Otherness. The human condition thus becomes characterized by a:

"Soustraction de l'homme à lui-même en dépit de sa possession réfléchie de lui-même, aliénation constitutive, division subjective, séparation énigmatique de la psyché d'avec son support vivant."⁸³

The evacuation of the transcendental reference point which leads to the necessity of accepting the irrational into the human family, means that insanity can no longer be referred back to a mystical evil. It now belongs here on earth, in the very heart of mankind. Around 1800, during a wave of positivist research on the human body, begins the search for the physical causes of insanity. A process that had begun with Esquirol, will reach its peak with the mid-XIXth century physiologists.

⁸² Ibid., p.360.

⁸³ Ibid., p.14.

CHAPTER FOUR

The divided subject

The dream of curing insanity, that is of eliminating Otherness is shattered quite shortly after the founding of the modern asylum. Just as at the macro level, the passage from Republicanism to democracy proved that Otherness cannot be eliminated, so to does this occur at the micro level. Esquirol had already begun seeking out the physiological sources of insanity by exploring what had been implicit in Pinel's thought. In the 1800's, the European scientific community will push forward the research started by Dr. Esquirol. The resulting discoveries will forever change the conceptualization of humans. Will become impossible from then on, the image of man as composed of a single element. We will see how these findings did not dictate but nonetheless had an impact on the Freudian theory by permitting Freud to think in terms of this divided being. Although we will show that Freud maintained an ambiguous relationship with division (as he ultimately wanted to regain the conscious control of the agent), we will demonstrate how his view of the individual represents a move beyond the Cartesian subject. In conclusion, we will see how psychoanalysis is a typically modern invention, crucial in facing some of the drawbacks of living with division.

The cerebral unconscious

The new conception of the insane as all too human and capable of being reinserted within the ranks of humanity is identifiable with the process of the dissolution of Otherness. It is because we conceive that the insane resembles the sane that we begin to question the composition of the human being. This reduction of the unknown to mere human factors calls for research into the body to find the sources of that which still seems irrational. In the mid XIXth century, science has advanced to such a point that it can explore what Esquirol had failed to find: the physical causes of insanity. It is in this context, that occur the scientific discoveries about the human body and particularly about the brain and the spinal cord which will forever eradicate the basis on which human consciousness had been understood. And according to Gauchet, the contributions made by science in this process of redefining man, have grossly been overlooked.

The definition of man as composed of a conscious and unconscious element, argues Gauchet had its roots in the research of XIXth century physiologists. Although, the discoveries themselves do not directly lead to a new conception of man, (in fact, the physiological model constructed in this period proves to be a major failure) they do "create the conditions of a new vision of man's interior realm".⁸⁴ In fact, the discoveries

⁸⁴ Gauchet, Marcel, L'Inconscient cérébral, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, p.19. (...a créé les conditions d'une vision complètement renouvelée de l'homme intérieur.)

influence the idea of man by opening the door to new possibilities without actually dictating them. Gauchet explains:

"Le nouveau modèle du fonctionnement cérébral n'a pas créé une représentation consistante de la part inconsciente de l'être humain. Mais en revanche, il a très efficacement sapé les bases de la représentation classique du sujet conscient et de sa puissance volontaire."⁸⁵

For that reason Gauchet wishes to prove that it is through the discovery of the cerebral unconscious that the functioning of man is redefined. I will systematically present what appears to be three important discoveries.

The European scientific community during the period in question took part in a ferocious debate involving research exploring both the spinal cord and the brain. The brain had been identified as that central organ responsible for organizing the human experience, therefore responsible for consciousness and subjectivity. It is this centre which was thought to permit both ethical and moral behaviour. A defective organ, thought the traditionalists, explained the permanency and the incurability of insanity. It was first discovered that the spinal cord had the power to regulate certain activities which were formerly thought to be under the dominion of the human brain. As research in the area evolves, the brain loses its privileged status as locus of human subjectivity by pointing to the possibility of a divided consciousness founded on physical characteristics. We therefore see a division amongst physiologists between those wanting to preserve the sanctity of human consciousness and those concluding that the

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.32.

subjective "I" can no longer exist in the same manner. Two such scientists defending opposite views are William Carpenter and Stephen Laycock, the former wishing to maintain a hierarchical view of man with the conscious as superior to the unconscious element, with the latter not sharing this concern. Gauchet describes Laycock's initiatives as compared to Carpenter's in these terms:

"De là une critique radicale de l'idée classique de la conscience, et spécialement de l'assimilation de l'esprit à la conscience qui ressort en formules d'une remarquable vigueur lors de son ultime discussion avec Carpenter. Que l'esprit agisse inconsciemment ou avec conscience, cela ne change rien à son mode d'action: voilà le point de fond que Carpenter persiste à ignorer. Laycock lui reproche de réintroduire l'âme cartésienne avec l'idée d'un « pouvoir d'autodétermination»."⁸⁶

The second, particularly important discovery is that the brain, just like to spinal cord functions on a reflex basis thereby implying that some cerebral activity is out of the direct reach of that organ. Some activities of the brain are therefore unconscious, that is taking place without the knowledge or will of the supposed radically autonomous and self-defining modern subject. The term "cerebral unconscious" is coined by William Carpenter in 1853 to explain this new phenomena. Gauchet explains the impact of this idea:

"Demeurera l'idée qu'avec ce qu'on sait désormais du fonctionnement du cerveau, le support existe pour une disqualification de la conscience comme ce foyer de présence par lequel l'homme se possède et se gouverne."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.60.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.61.

Finally, the third of these important discoveries is the postulation of a certain degree of continuity between the nervous system and the brain thus disallowing the capability of dividing man's nature between a material and immaterial substance.⁸⁸ This represents the last nail on the coffin of the Cartesian subject. This new model of man renders untenable the idea of conscience outside the body. But by far the most important factor to emerge from these debates and research is the idea that something is both within the human body yet independent of the subject's direct control. Ironically, it is through science, the epitome of human independence from nature, that we discover the dependence of man on an unknown (yet all too human) source. At the micro level, it is science which places us face to face with our own ambiguous relation to Otherness in modernity.

Freud and psychoanalysis - living with division

If Republicanism corresponds to the image of man as a rational, undivided being, we can say that the democratic moment corresponds to the Freudian revolution in so far as Freud goes beyond the Cartesian notion of the subject. Freud's work however, is ambiguous for it recognizes the divided nature of the individual only to attempt to promise him a more conscious domination. Gauchet explains that the Freudian unconscious:

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.87.

"L'inconscient surgit comme clé de la psychologie de l'individu pur, telle que la névrose la fait entrevoir. Mais l'histoire a poursuivi sa marche depuis la percée freudienne. Nous n'en n'avons pas fini avec le dévoilement de l'inconnu de nous-mêmes que nous promet cette réinvention continuée du sujet." ⁸⁹

For that reason, Gauchet concludes that Freud is both a revolutionary thinker, yet also a thinker to transcend.⁹⁰ And Gauchet explains how Freud is able to learn from the work of his predecessors, two very important lessons. From the physiologists, he learns that man is necessarily composed of two substances. Second, from the alienist doctors he learns that the power to change man is much more limited than was previously imagined. The Freudian revolution lay in the fact that he will marry those two elements to give us a new version of the unconscious.

Despite the fact that Freud himself does not recognize his debt to his predecessors, Gauchet believes it to be quite evident. Benefiting from the unsuccessful attempts to change man through the asylum, Freud learns to set more realistic goals when trying to cure insanity. In fact, Freud realizes from the errors of his forefathers, that the power to change man is quite limited. Gauchet and Swain comment on this realisation:

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.17.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.181.

"... n'est-ce pas justement parce qu'il y a eu ce long effort pour produire l'homme et reconstruire le sujet, n'est-ce pas directement en fonction de l'impossibilité qui s'y est découverte, qu'est devenu possible le renversement fondateur d'un Freud - ne pas chercher à s'emparer des âmes, ne pas essayer de maîtriser de bout en bout le processus en lequel le sujet se reprend, se désaliène, se reconstitue à distance de son trouble, mais accepter d'entrée, à l'inverse, de n'avoir pas pouvoir immédiat sur ce par quoi l'individu change, de n'en pas vraiment savoir les voies, d'avoir à laisser se faire une transformation dont l'ultime ressort échappe?"⁹¹

This new modesty stems from Freud's conception of the human agent as a being who is irremediably divided between a conscious and an unconscious element. In fact, the Freudian unconscious is the answer to the problem met in the asylum. The limit encountered by alienist doctors such as Pinel and Esquirol lay in the fact that man is not penetrable and programmable by power. For example, the hysterical patient who would cooperate with the doctors by adapting to the functioning of the institution should, according to the theory, have been cured. On the surface, however, the patient would be receptive to treatment yet would fundamentally remain unchanged. Despite conscious cooperation on the part of the patient, something within him would stubbornly refuse to be altered by others. Freud drew the pertinent conclusion that the unconscious is that part of the subject whose role it is to protect the individual from the intrusion of others. The key to a successful psychoanalysis is to decipher the language of the unconscious mind (through dream analysis for example) in order to treat the mental ailment. To the model of the individual as one, whereby a doctor could communicate and rationalize with, Freud substitutes a model of a human being made of factions in competition with one another. For that reason, communication with the insane is more

⁹¹ Gauchet, Marcel and Gladys Swain, *op. cit.*, p.163.

difficult without however being impossible. The aim of the treatment is, of course, the restitution of conscious control. In that way, Freud thinks in terms of a irremediably divided subject who can nonetheless achieve mental equilibrium. But this irremediable internal division, is not without its difficulties for the modern subject.

Freud therefore accepts the irremediably conflictual nature of the subject and as such can be associate with the democratic moment. In terms of his view of division, he is the antithesis of Karl Marx and as such,⁹² Freud's work has immense political significance. Marx had believed the division in society between workers and the owners of the means of production to stem from the capitalist system. Consequently, a communist revolution would result in the overthrow of capitalism therefore to the elimination of the source of division. Division, at the collective level is for Marx, suppressible. But this is not the case for Freud for he learned from his forefathers as we will see, that division is not apt to be eliminated. Gauchet elaborates on the difference between the two thinkers:

⁹² Yet in Gauchet and Swain *op. cit.*, p.12, Gauchet contradicts himself by explicitly stating that Freud is totalitarian in spirit: "Pur produit de l'âge totalitaire, plus franchement encore que celle de Marx agencée de part en part en forme de mythe, la construction freudienne représente la plus stupéfiante incarnation sans doute de cette synthèse perverse entre l'éclaircissement et l'asservissement dont le projet imprègne et domine l'époque." We are at an absolute loss to explain this blatant contradiction.

" ... si pour Marx le conflit social fait évidemment signe vers une société au-delà du conflit, pour Freud le conflit psychique, organisateur ultime de l'âme, est tout aussi irréductible. Par ce trait, la pensée de Freud est peut-être une pensée à portée politique éminente, en tant que pensée de l'irréductible du conflit constituant la psyché humaine. La pratique analytique se proposera pour fin de permettre au sujet d'accéder à la vérité de sa contradiction; elle ne saurait se donner pour but d'éliminer l'antagonisme intérieur, forme indépassable du rapport du sujet à lui-même."⁹³

Furthermore, the recognition of the irremediable psychic division by Freud meant the reneging on the dream of making and creating the perfect citizen. A more modest solution, the Freudian psychoanalysis offers a more adequate suggestion in the treatment insanity.

As a result of the subject's irreparable internal scission, modernity has made individuals face problems never imagined by previous societies, namely that of individual identity. Throughout most of our human history, relationships among individual as well as personal identity were guaranteed by an external and divine reference point. In such traditional societies, the individual is never required to question himself on what is expected of him or her. In other words, religious societies do not require us to ask the questions "who am I? " or "why me?". Gauchet defines traditional societies in the following manner:

"...chaque être y est installé dans la paisible assurance de sa *nécessité* de par la stricte assignation à son rôle, à sa place, à son âge, à son sexe, qui lui ménage un cadre social où il est toujours par avance compris. Rien qui l'y renvoie, en d'autres termes, à la question: pourquoi moi? Qu'est-ce que je fais là? Mise hors jeu, donc, de la contingence personnelle."⁹⁴

⁹³ Gauchet, Marcel, "L'expérience totalitaire", op.cit., p.6-7.

⁹⁴ Gauchet, Marcel, Le désenchantement du monde, op.cit., p.300.

Gauchet and Swain contrast this sense of security granted by traditional societies with the modern condition whereby agents must question themselves on their role and place in the social order. We are left with the obligation of creating our own place and identity in the constant insecurity that we are not like others. There is very little reassurance that who we are will be recognized as legitimate and valuable by other members of society:

"...notre société ne cesse d'exposer ses membres: obligation pour les jeunes de se frayer eux-mêmes leur chemin, dans l'incertitude radicale quant au point de savoir s'ils font route comme tout le monde, ou s'ils sont seuls de leur espèce, s'ils deviendront jamais adultes comme les autres - la schizophrénie, psychose typique d'une société sans initiation. Mais aussi bien en permanence pour tous, la contrainte de la décision singulière - avec son cortège d'angoisses : «il n'y a que moi pour faire ça», ou «cela n'arrive qu'à moi»."⁹⁵

As a result of this necessity to question ourselves, the threat of insanity has become more important but so have the means to deal with such problems.

In an interview following the publication of La Pratique de l'esprit humain, Gauchet and Swain are asked the very pertinent question of whether or not they believe our modern societies to be producers of insanity.⁹⁶ According to the authors, modernity, by not offering clear-cut answers to the question of personal identity "creates the

⁹⁵ Gauchet, Marcel and Gladys Swain, "Un nouveau regard sur l'histoire de la folie", Esprit, novembre 1983, p.85-86.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.85.

conditions for the triggering of more frequent cases of insanity."⁹⁷ But does this mean moderns are doomed to live on the brink of insanity? We do not believe so, for not only does Gauchet recognize this new danger, he also believes that appropriate tools have been developed in reaction to this problem. In fact, psychoanalysis is such a tool. Initially developed by Freud to help in the management of the irreparable psychic division, psychoanalysis has continued its development with thinkers such as Lacan.⁹⁸ Psychoanalysis, in its varied forms, can no longer promise the security granted by religious societies. It is merely a technique to assist the modern individual with the questions of his or her existence.⁹⁹ And as such, the agent is not left entirely to his own devices. All across the Western hemisphere, individuals lying on those infamous couches participate in the most narcissistic of activities in the hopes of finding answers to those important questions of personal identity. This of course raises many further questions. For if the quest for identity is done in such an individualistic manner, what type of rapport are modern subjects entertaining with one another? We will attempt to elucidate this problem with our author in our final chapter.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.88. ("Elle [our society] crée les conditions pour que la fréquence de son déclenchement augmente...")

⁹⁸ In "À la recherche d'une autre histoire de la folie" op. cit., pXV it is important to note that Gauchet makes the following sarcastic remark about Lacan's work: "Les Écrits de Lacan sont parus fin 1966. Leur obscurité oraculaire ajoute à l'attraction qu'ils exercent, dont le ressort premier réside dans la promesse d'une psychanalyse pure, délivrée de ses compromissions médicales, adaptatives américaines, et rendue à sa vocation subversive. L'ésotérisme fournira pour finir le vecteur de la popularisation."

⁹⁹ Gauchet, Marcel, Le désenchantement du monde, op.cit., p.302.

CHAPTER FIVE

Thoughts for the future

We have seen thus far that the acceptance of division, both at the collective and individual levels occurred over time in Western democracies. Although taking place unconsciously, this process has allowed for the emergence of a greater space of individual freedom and liberty. But the end of transcendence as the organizational principle is not without important difficulties. The divided subject, for one thing, will encounter obstacles in dealing with others in a significant manner due to the fact that he or she no longer has a guaranteed place in an ordered whole from which to interact with others. Secondly, class conflict which had organized the interaction between agents in a democratic society, no longer plays a crucial role perhaps leading to mutual avoidance. And we are left to wonder the nature of conflict that will organize the social space given the end of ideology, as claims Gauchet. Let us now turn our attention to these two phenomena.

Living with division: the micro level

The primacy of the collective existing by virtue of the will of a supreme being means that the relations between individuals were always pre-determined and predictable thus allowing for what Gauchet calls a form of reciprocal communication.¹⁰⁰ In fact, reciprocity in our relations with others, has characterized almost all of human history. He understands this ancient model of communications in the following manner:

"Tout le temps où la société est structurée par l'impératif d'appartenance et le primat du groupe, où vous êtes toujours déjà associé à l'autre par un lien qui vous précède et vous domine, les modalités de l'interlocution et de l'échange sensée sont rigoureusement déterminées, peut-on montrer, par une contrainte de symétrie des interlocuteurs. Vous ne pouvez, dans ce cadre strict que vous aligner sur la position du discours de votre vis-à-vis."¹⁰¹

It is precisely this reciprocity which allows society and individuals to enjoy a certain level of peace and stability. If I can know and predict the behaviour of my fellow citizen, I can act in full assurance that my acts will be understood and answered. Gauchet believes that predictability of behaviour is the condition of a tenable society.¹⁰² In traditional societies, behaviour was in fact predictable as each agent had his or her own specific role to play. Moreover, given each interlocutor's pre-assigned place in the order it results in each enjoying a certain level of autonomy by virtue of that order. In other words, power did not need to reach within the agent to make him coincide with the Law

¹⁰⁰ Gauchet, Marcel and Gladys Swain, La Pratique de l'esprit humain, op. cit., p.386.

¹⁰¹ Gauchet, Marcel, "A la recherche d'une autre histoire de la folie", op.cit., p.XXXIX.

¹⁰² Leclère, Marie-Françoise, "Interview - Marcel Gauchet: La morale ne peut être que contractuelle", Le Point, 3 février 1996, numéro 1220, p.55.

as became the case under Republican rule. By merely assigning each agent to his or her respective place, traditional societies means that each individual agent is able to have an image of him or herself as whole. As we will see, it is this sense of wholeness guaranteed by the divine that withers away in modernity.

The age-old reciprocal model of communication had been defined as a dialogue between two parties based on the ability to predict the response of the other, given each party's assigned place in the divinely-sanctioned order. With the advent of modernity and the birth of the individual containing within himself all the mysteries of life usually projected outward, communication shows itself to be extremely difficult. The container for the enigmatic qualities of life is baptized the unconscious, that is that which exists outside of the absolute control of the subject yet is always an integral part of him. The modern subject therefore lives in a state of paranoid fear that what he does not know of himself will betray him. Thus emerges what Gauchet calls a form of "structural schizophrenia", that is, a fear that the subject's actions and words will not be understood or worst that they will be misunderstood. And according to Gauchet, we are just beginning to come to grips with this new difficulty:

"Il nous reste entièrement à concevoir, par exemple, en quoi notre relation au monde et aux autres passe, non pas «psychologiquement» mais structurellement, par une certaine dimension de «schizophrénie» comme par une certaine dimension de «paranoïa»."¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Gauchet, Marcel, "Le mal démocratique", op.cit., p.72.

The society that was to allow us life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness actually becomes the very vehicle which decreases our ability to interact with others in a constructive manner. Consequently, we can ask ourselves if modernity has eliminated our capacity of acting morally towards our fellow human beings.

An important question comes to mind. Has the elimination of transcendence as the organizational principle and the authority it conferred to the actors, removed the basis on which to act morally towards our fellow citizens? For was it not by virtue of the divinely-sanctioned whole that each agent acted in the appropriate manner towards others? When this withers away what are we left with? Gauchet points out this problem:

"Quand il n'y a plus de règles spontanément intériorisés par les personnes, qui font que vous savez à peu près sans vous poser la question, à quoi vous attendre de la part de l'autre, la rencontre avec cet autre devient très angoissante."¹⁰⁴

But living with division at the macro level is just as problematic as at the micro level.

Based on what we have said about the conflictual nature of democratic society, we could believe that our main mode of coming into contact with others would be an organized fight as to the best form of government. But the contrary seems to be true due to the progressive decline of social class as a symbolic organizational principle of interaction.

¹⁰⁴ Leclère, Marie-Françoise, *op.cit.*, p.55.

Living with division: the macro level

The traditional division of society along class lines which had organized and motivated political action and encouraged a feeling of belonging to the whole, has been eroded in contemporary democracies. Gauchet explains that the phenomena of globalization has led to the elimination of the working class as a symbol of social conflict due to an increased competition between workers of different countries. In fact, a worker in Brazil can no longer feel solidarity with a worker in France. Gauchet explains the reason:

"L'internationalisation s'est traduite en effet par un partage de plus en plus accentué entre le monde des ouvriers qualifiés ... et un monde du travail déqualifié plongé lui directement en concurrence avec la main-d'oeuvre du tiers monde. ... L'internationalisation a créé une scission interne dont on ne s'est pas rendu compte sur le coup bien qu'elle ait été profonde. Le bloc unifié "classe ouvrière" dans la tête des acteurs, s'est disloqué par en haut et par en bas".¹⁰⁵

Gauchet goes on to argue that the dissolution of this symbol of conflict leads to a greater amount of individualism as class no longer serves as a way in which to become a member of the collective. Add to this Gauchet's belief that ideology no longer plays a role in contemporary democracy and we are left to wonder what can guide our political action today.

¹⁰⁵ Gauchet, Marcel, "La société d'insécurité: Les effets sociaux de l'individualisme de masse" in Face à l'exclusion, Jacques Denzels (ed.), Paris, 1991, p.172.

We have already had the chance to point out that Gauchet seems to believe that the age of ideology has come to an end. We previously explained that he has explicitly defined our current democratic regime as that which is "normal" leading readers to believe that we have reached the end of historical development. Consequently the ideas found in totalitarian, socialist or conservative doctrines, to name a few, no longer play a role in the contemporary political arena. However this is in fact a highly contentious claim. With the revival of the classical liberal model, and the success it has known across all of the Western world, we are hard-pressed to claim that ideology no longer plays an influential role. What many have termed "neo-liberalism"¹⁰⁶ gives the false appearance of not being an ideology. Indeed its success is probably due to the fact that it claims to be the mere application of "common sense"¹⁰⁷ to our current ailments. In this framework, the successful politician is the one who merely follows the "natural" flow of the market economy. In fact, the only obstacle to the prosperity of all, promised by the market forces, is the presence of politicians who are wooed and influenced by interest groups. Yet only citizens' groups, environmental lobbies and feminists (to name a few) are identified as interest groups. Powerful economic lobbies are not. And this is no hazard for economic interests are clearly defined as being the interests of all. The neo-liberal model is troublesome to the extent that it both masquerades as an non-ideology

¹⁰⁶ It is quite difficult to identify any novel elements in this body of thought. It appears to be the mere repetition of classical liberal principles postulated in the XIXth century. The only thing which is "new" is the century in which it is exercised.

¹⁰⁷ In fact, Ontario Conservative Mike Harris, probably the most accomplished neo-liberal in English Canada (other than Alberta's Ralph Klein), won the last provincial elections with his so-called Common Sense Revolution.

and also attempts to suppress other interests from expressing themselves in the social arena. Does its dominance not represent a threat to the consensus-building activity of the welfare State? How can we begin to distinguish between the period of time when government activity revolved around building institutions and the current period of destruction of the very same? And although Gauchet recognized in one 1993 interview, the "victory of the ideology of the market"¹⁰⁸ his previous development lead his readers to believe that this worrisome phenomena is not factored into the body of his analysis about contemporary democracy. It goes without saying that the near complete omission of one of the most important ideological movements in the late twentieth century represents a grave difficulty in terms of rethinking our contemporary collective existence. Notwithstanding this defect, Gauchet does offer some elements of answers to the challenge of living with division.

The intersubjective relations in late modernity can be defined as either one of avoidance or of paranoia, neither options appearing particularly positive. With the decline of both religious moral codes and class conflict as organizational principles, we are left with a serious question as to the possibility of a modern living together. On the one hand, Gauchet has been clear in arguing that class conflict represents but one form of division among social actors. Now that it is in decline in terms of its role as organizational principle, we can perhaps believe that another form of conflict can emerge to replace it. Gauchet simply says that:

¹⁰⁸ Gauchet, Marcel, "Le mal démocratique", *op.cit.*, p.78.

"Rien ne serait plus erroné par conséquent que de confondre le destin de la conflictualité institutionnalisée comme coeur du procès politique et le parcours des forces sociales et des systèmes d'idées qui lui ont prêté corps et contenu depuis maintenant un siècle. La matière collective que le conflit brasse et articule pourrait à la limite entièrement se renouveler. L'indépassable seul voué à demeurer, c'est la forme subjective qui invisiblement s'affirme au travers de lui."¹⁰⁹

This argument is of course weakened by the fact that he has made a claim that ideology no longer guides political action. Have not all conflicts been fought in the name of ideology? Is there any other kind of conflict? Because of this insufficiency, we turn to a second possible path to follow.

Gauchet also deals with the possibility of renewing a social contract on new basis. We have said that society cannot function without agreed upon moral codes that allow an individual to know what is expected of him or her. This moral code can no longer be dictated by God. It must be the result of a common understanding. In other words, it must be contractual. And as modernity unfolds, Gauchet claims that new relations based on contractual agreement can emerge. (It is interesting to note that after having discarded the social contract theorists, our author envisions no other means other than the contract to enter into significant relationships with one another). Gauchet explains the nature of this new and entirely modern contractual agreement:

"Elle ne peut plus tomber d'en haut, qu'elle soit dictée par Dieu ou imposée par une autorité collective. Elle ne peut être fondée que sur l'accord entre les individus. En un mot, elle ne peut être que contractuelle".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Gauchet, Marcel, Le désenchantement du monde, op.cit., p.282.

¹¹⁰ Leclère, Marie-Françoise, op.cit., p.56.

Of course this interpretation raises many questions in terms of the nature of the signing members of this contractual agreement. For example, how can we marry the divided subject and contractual obligations? The answer is anything but obvious.

A last possible solution we have been able to decipher lay in Gauchet's understanding of the modern Nation. The Nation, he believes will remain an important rallying force to contend with even in this age of globalization. Since the onset of modernity, the Nation has been a public space regrouping many different elements. Subsequently Gauchet explains that "la nation, ce sont des nations"¹¹¹. He believes that the welfare state as that mechanism capable of including all members of a given society still has an important role to play as a force capable of contending with the rise of individualism. But to be sure, he is not suggesting a return to a primitive notion of race as a point of convergence. In fact, he distinguishes between nationalism and nationhood:

"Mais je crois que la meilleure alternative au nationalisme réside dans la nation elle-même, dans la nation bien comprise. Si l'on tient à la liberté et à la démocratie, elle n'est pas dépassable en l'état présent du monde....Le dépérissement des nations au profit d'un enchevêtrement mondial de "réseaux" nous ramènerait très vite au tribalisme à une extrémité et à l'empire à l'autre - à la guerre à la place du commerce et aux appartenances obligatoires à la place de l'indépendance."¹¹²

Furthermore, it must be noted that Gauchet is in no way nostalgic for the past; so any solution he proposes will necessarily take us forward.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.81.

¹¹² Ibid., p.82.

Christianity by introducing the idea of the existence of two interdependent realms has led to the possibility of an autonomous visible world. The visible therefore progressively gained its independence from the invisible world thus eventually giving birth to modernity. For Gauchet, democracy appears to be the end result of this journey. It represents the visible world fully secularized. In that light, the visible world can never again be subjected to the invisible. We have already had the opportunity to point out, the author associates the desire to recreate the order of ages gone-by as a form of modern dictatorship, even totalitarianism requiring a massive amount of force and violence to maintain. He clearly states that the era of religion is past and that the answers we are seeking are not to be found there:

"Ce n'est certes pas, en revenant à la religion qu'on se prémunira efficacement contre le totalitarisme, c'est en achevant de s'en débarrasser."¹¹³

Any solution this author offers, can therefore only respect the definite end of the religious organization of society.

We have attempted to demonstrate that division is something to be taken into account in the proposal of any solutions for our modern ailments. To deny division, that is to subscribe to the belief that the individual can act morally in perfect rational transparency, or that democracy can give itself a definite and known path for the future, is to refuse to recognize the divided nature of contemporary existence. In dealing with the problems posed by living with division, it is important to note that Gauchet, does not offer definite and final solutions. For to do so would contradict his own approach. If he

¹¹³ Gauchet, Marcel, "Tocqueville, l'Amérique et nous", op.cit., p.73.

studies history in terms of the debates among social actors of a given period, it is a reflection of his belief that solutions do not come from one or a group of individuals capable of implementing their version of reality. Solutions both unfold and are discovered in a dynamic manner by social agents. However this makes it difficult to determine Gauchet's idea of the participatory role of the modern subject in his collective fate. Perhaps Gauchet's silence in this area makes him a better companion for understanding the genesis of democracy rather than addressing contemporary problems?

CONCLUSION

To conclude our analysis, we require to return to our starting point to verify the validity of our hypotheses. Our main goal in the study of Gauchet's work, was to prove that he believes division to be a necessary element in the rethinking of modern democracy. For that reason, we have shown in great detail the genesis of division at two levels. The first two chapters dealt with the way in which division came to be accepted at the collective level while chapters three and four treated parallel developments occurring at the individual level. Our conclusion was similar in both cases: Otherness remains a force to be reckoned with even in late modernity. We demonstrated that the Republican ideal of creating a transparent collective order whereby society would be the result of a merger between rational individuals, failed. In fact society remains divided from political power and amongst itself. Furthermore the individual is now identified as being composed of two distinct elements. But what became more problematical however is attempting to identify an appropriate path to follow in terms of the rethinking of our modern predicament.

The novelty of Gauchet's work lay partly in his analysis about the individual subject in modernity. As a political philosopher, he is one of the very few who recognizes the immense influence of Freud on our ways of envisioning humans today. We cannot deny that the idea of the unconscious has penetrated every level of society. We need only take any debate about inappropriate conduct such as incest or violence to immediately pinpoint proponents of the view that somehow the criminal individual was victimized in childhood thus explaining his or her asocial behaviour. In other words, humans may be wounded by others in such a way as to render them incapable of controlling their behaviour. This omnipresent debate raises the fundamental question of our responsibility for actions committed and whether or not unconscious drives should serve as an alibi. We are left to ask ourselves whether or not we can even debate the nature of ethical obligation without recognizing that the individual is thought to be composed of two elements, one escaping his or her direct reach.

Another fascinating aspect of Gauchet's work is certainly his original interpretation of the roots of modernity. Thought to emerge from the ruins of Christianity, Gauchet on the contrary argues that modernity results from the unfolding of principles contained in Christian thought. It was during the French revolutionary period that was outlawed the feudal system thereby instituting society on the basis of the individual agent. But this was made possible with the help of the national monarchies which had previously atomized individuals. Even though still explicitly appearing to be a religious society, the pre-revolutionary society was in fact already the carrier of some the

principles that would animate the events of 1789. If we are to speak of a rupture between pre- and post-revolutionary France it is only to the extent that the latter explicitly recognizes the individuals as free and equal agents.

Where Gauchet's work is somewhat disappointing is in his analysis of our current collective predicament. The rise of neo-liberalism undeniably represents one of the crucial challenges facing Western liberal democracies. In fact, the welfare state, which Gauchet believes to be an important element in ensuring the inclusion of all individuals, has been greatly undermined in the name of this body of thought. Western liberal democracies witnessed the rise of this ideological current beginning in the 1980's with the likes of leaders such as Reagan, Thatcher and Mulroney. The promoters of this ideology insist that the state play a minimal role in the social and economic arena. In the name of this ideology they promoted cuts or massive reduction of tax-guzzling social programs as well as the privatization of public goods. Underlying these policies is the idea that the holders of capital should be given the freedom to operate without hindrances such as regulations, unions and taxes since they are thought of as the legitimate creators of the nation's wealth. Yet on these important issues, Gauchet is practically silent. And it is this significant silence that leads us to conclude that Gauchet is far more helpful in understanding our past than our future.

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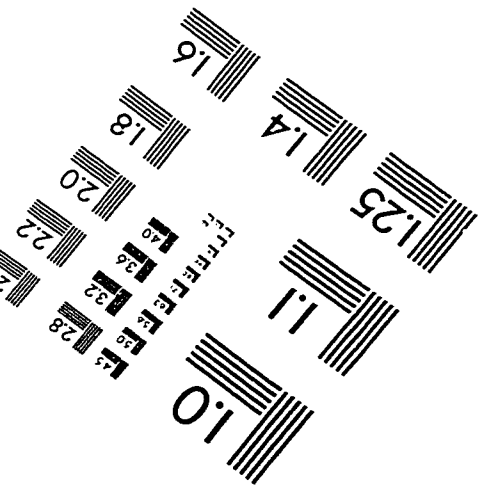
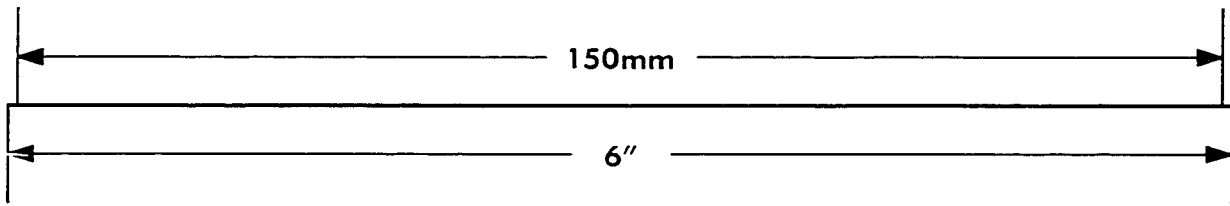
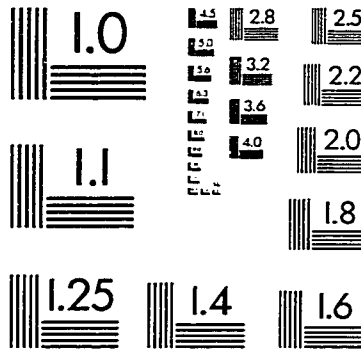
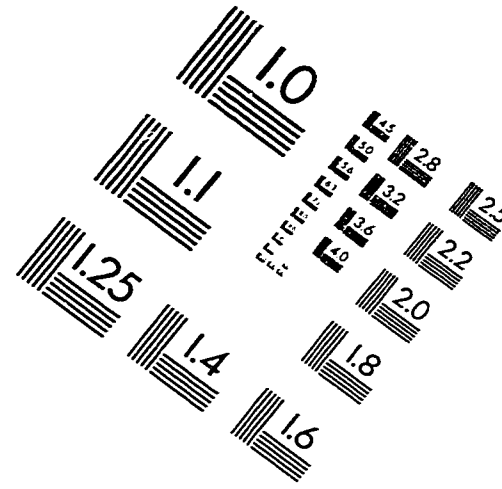
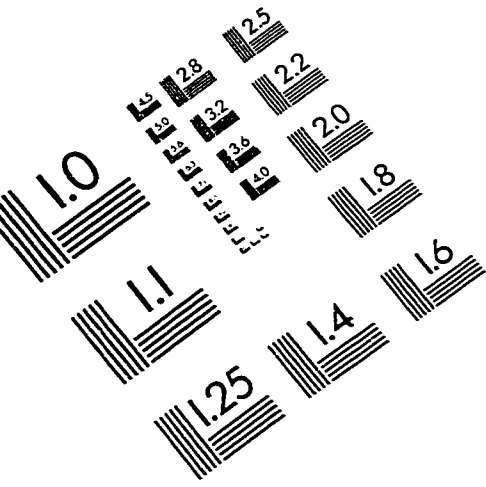
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