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ALTERITY AND DIVISION IN MARCEL GAUCHET

By
© Manon Noel de Tilly

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This research project will put forth an examination of the works of Marcel Gauchet on the subject of alterity and division and his questioning of their role in defining political and social organization. The recent presence of division and alterity, (or otherness) will be retraced through the transformation from earlier to modern societies, pausing to understand the phenomenon of the appearance of the State in human history. It will focus particular attention on the continuing role of alterity in modern and democratic society.

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*This research thesis is dedicated to those who patiently endured:
my family, my friends,
and my thesis advisor, Gilles Labelle,
who is as thankful for its completion as I am.*

Introduction

The form of political organization most associated with contemporary society, most dominant, if not predominant, is undoubtedly democracy. It could be argued, following the logic of much ancient, medieval and modern political theory, including classical liberalism, that democracy is not only a desirable form of society, but *the* ultimate Good society. It is our initial contention, however, that modern society is not living out some realization of a path toward perfection, that democracy has many inherent difficulties which make it impossible to perceive it as ideal. Democracy is, in our opinion, riddled with problems of internal strife and conflict, which could perhaps resound a lack of cohesion, even a loss of meaning. Nonetheless, it leads us to question what brought society into this present form of organization, what precursory conditions and manifestations led the social to the current appreciation of itself.

The present discussion wishes to delve into questions pertinent to the present democratic context, keeping in mind the importance we attach to some form of reference under which society feels united, and relating this to the occurrence of conflict and division in our contemporary world.

With this in mind, we chose to examine the work of an author who would provide us with a theoretical framework which delves into the relationship between society and its otherness, its point of reference perhaps external to itself, through which it comes to know itself. If indeed the question rotates around division today, how did we get to this point? Has there always been

division in society? What role does alterity, or transcendence, or some relationship with an 'Other' play in the way we choose to determine ourselves and our interaction with each other? Has that role been transformed throughout history, or has it been eliminated, or remained the same?

For this task, we focussed on an author who builds a framework around these very questions, and traces the roots of our present condition to an existential need to relate to some externality to ourselves. Marcel Gauchet, a contemporary French thinker, deeply analyses the question of alterity as a point of reference common to us all, essential to a cohesive social community, while stressing the relationship of this alterity to the institutionalization of conflict in contemporary society. Gauchet was chosen for several reasons: firstly, his approach to social organization not only take into consideration the relationship that social has with some externality, - which we felt was crucial - but he uses it as a starting point for discussion. There is no known society which has not had an understanding of itself in relation to something other, be it 'forces of nature', or 'God', or 'ancestors'...Accepting this as an initial premise for discussion, we felt that Gauchet's development had much to offer in analytic description and prognosis on the matter of determining the condition of present society. Secondly, Gauchet's work offers an overview of historical conditions by focussing on facets which we believe could potentially be connected: alterity, division in society (conflict), and meaning. Thirdly, Gauchet's appreciation of historical events provides a concretization of a theoretical framework which must withstand the test of application if it is to have any real relevance.

What we hoped to determine, in the present project, is the relevance of alterity in how Men view themselves and their society, and what has transpired in recent times to transform that perception. With this in mind, we have organized a project which will focus on the role of alterity in human history, in its

determination of how the social has chosen to establish itself, and where this has led us in contemporary society.

Our initial section will produce the groundwork for our discussion, providing the reader with an abstract explanation of the key role of alterity, in Gauchet's work, in the social's determination of itself. It will also include a cursory examination of 'non-historical' societies, which can provide a contrast to and precursor to conditions within the historical period. Our examination of non-historical societies will also stress the role of 'transcendence' in these, generally manifested as polytheistic or animistic religious representations. This will offer a contrast to monotheism, which is related and woven to the rise of the State.

Thus, our second section will discuss the relevance of the rise of the State, as an appearance of a separate instance of political power in human history. This section will cover early historical society, as well as the significant phenomenon and consequences of the innovation of Christianity. The role of Christianity's logic in determining how the social positions itself politically will be stressed at this point. Within this section, much historical ground will be covered, from ancient to medieval society, right up to the point of (but not including) the embryonic manifestations of Modernity, as exemplified in the advent of national monarchies.

Indeed, the third section will explore Modernity from this starting point of a concrete example: monarchy and the burgeoning of revolution in France, and will bring us well into the 20th century. The thread of Christianity's role will be maintained and examined, as will the conditions behind the occasion of revolution and democracy in Western society (as portrayed through one key example, France). We will conclude this discussion with a determination of present democratic conditions in a Gauchetian paradigm.

For our fourth section, we chose to distance ourselves analytically from Marcel Gauchet, to better understand both his own explanation, and provide an alternative perspective. We chose, for these purposes, sociologist Michel Freitag, whose diagnostic examination of Modernity and democracy at the turn of the 21st century (deemed post-Modernity by Freitag) seem to us not only insightful, but connected to Gauchet in certain focal areas. Nonetheless, Freitag's theories offer enough divergence with Gauchet - while still discussing our preoccupations with alterity, division and meaning -, as to enrich our present exploration. We will necessarily place these theorists in a dialogue, to draw attention to some key points in each of their perspectives, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary society.

Thus, we will hopefully conclude with a determination of the condition of the society we live in, with regards to our perception of ourselves, each other, and that otherness which we deem essential. Undoubtedly, we will be in a position to draw some conclusions and offer some areas for further discussion related to our present theme.

Section 1: Alterity in Marcel Gauchet's work

For Marcel Gauchet, the question of politics and its historical transformations can be better understood through a deeper examination of the relationship humanity has established with representations of forces or entities external to itself. The pivotal role played by this externality, this alterity¹, flows from a theoretical development involving humanity's own perception of the essence of its own Being, and the repercussions of this perception. What is therefore proposed, in this initial section, is a presentation of the essential relevance for Gauchet of alterity in human society; how it comes to affect social and eventually political organization. It will be necessary for us to initially present and define certain concepts key to Gauchet's investigation, and we will do so relying heavily upon the theoretical development of Claude Lefort and Marcel Gauchet

¹ It must be noted, from the onset, that Gauchet often seems to use the term transcendence as a synonym to alterity. It could be argued, however, that a nuance between the two terms is generally maintained. When speaking of transcendence, Gauchet generally relates this term to an alterity, or an otherness, which is represented as external to the social realm, to immanence. Alterity, however, refers to any form of otherness which is simply 'not of the immediate agent or social entity. Thus, when speaking of an otherness which is not of this place, it is perhaps more apt to speak of a transcendence, of an alterity which is transcendent to our immanence. In this sense, religiously inspired alterity, specifically, should be deemed transcendent, while an alterity deemed immanent, or purely of the social, is simply alterity. Nonetheless, the effort in Gauchet's work is to minimize this distinction, in order to understand the role of alterity, be it transcendent or immanent, as a reference point for the social. This terminological distinction will become central to our understanding of the transformation of alterity from a divine manifestation to a profane representation of an immanent otherness. With this in mind, we will maintain the term alterity throughout this work, only occasionally opting for the term transcendence when the context dictates that the meaning should reflect an alterity which could forcibly not be of the social realm itself, but must be represented as external to immanence, as in all examples of religious divinities' fulfillment of this role of otherness.

expounded in "Sur la démocratie: Le politique et l'institution du social"², which could be considered a pivotal work in Gauchet's exploration of the theoretical role of alterity in human society.

This section will offer a conceptual framework defining the terms and preliminary theories necessary for the development of the historical illustration of the connection between alterity and politics in human society. We propose, beginning with the concept of the presentation of alterity through religion, a brief analysis of key ideas, in particular the notion of the 'Law', the 'primary division', the 'debt of meaning', the 'institution of the social', and the realm of the 'symbolic'. We will then proceed with a discussion of the distinctions between 'non-historical' and 'historical' societies as defined through the relationship to the origin, followed by an examination of the particularly pivotal role of Christianity in human history, preparing for our second chapter on the Modern era.

1.1.a. Coming to terms with Alterity and Division

Marcel Gauchet begins his examination of the relationship between alterity and politics with a preliminary determination: that no society in known history - be it 'historical' or 'non-historical' (often preemptively categorized as 'primitive' or 'savage') - has existed without some form of religious framework. Religion - as that manifestation of phenomena or forces elevated above human society in a realm of transcendence, directly or indirectly affecting and effecting the natural world. The universality of the concept of religion cannot be dismissed or misjudged: there is no theological effort by Gauchet to interpret this occurrence

² Lefort, Claude and Gauchet, Marcel. "Sur la démocratie: Le politique et l'institution du social", *Textures*, 2-3, 1971 p.7-78.

as a justification for the rationalism behind any religious doctrine. But the actual significance is even more categorical, in that the universality in all known societies of the presentation of a realm external to our own must be interpreted as relevant to the very nature of those societies. Essentially, this can be interpreted as a universal perception of an incompleteness of our own Being, a certain 'something' which we lack, and which we must explain through a variety of symbolic measures. That which we lack is that part of our existence which we can never truly know, but which is necessary for our full knowledge of ourselves. 'Being' fully requires Being-in-full; only through seeing its own birth can Being truly come to know itself completely, in all its own manifestations. It is that element of our coming into Being which eludes us because we cannot, without a leap in time and essence itself (which is practically impossible), ever come to see our own birth or its creator(s). Thus, that which we can never know of our existence is termed an alterity, an otherness which completes us, but which indeed necessarily eludes us. In such, all beings are innately called to question their origins, their own birth. It is in fact the origin itself, the moment of completeness which seems to pose the question to Being as to its creation, forcing it by insinuating the discontentment of being apart from it, the origin. But herein lies the unresolvable predicament: no Being can ever assist its own birth, since, by definition, it could not have 'been' before 'Being', to see that origin.

"La conception d'un a priori postule en fait secrètement l'évènement de l'origine, la posant comme une fois pour toutes accomplie, se retirant ensuite, s'effaçant derrière l'originé, comme si elle n'avait pas eu lieu, laissant l'étant qui en est surgi en lui-même, étranger dans son être au fait de son advenue, au fait d'avoir connu une naissance."³

³ Ibid, p.13.

Thus does Being attempt to come to terms with an origin whose essence it cannot know, but which it paradoxically must continue to question. We postulate (through some form of religious or other discourse) an a priori moment because we know it is ontologically required, while accepting it is not knowable to us. And it is undeniable that the Being at the moment of origin is the complete Being, containing all potentials and manifestations of its temporal self. Thus, any Being is condemned to 'Being-after-itself', never able to embrace this constitutive part of itself (the origin), and is consequently divided with itself in perpetuity. There is, therefore, a constitutive incompleteness to the Being in the present which attempts to (but never can) reach this primary Being-in-itself. Therein lies the primary division, as the initial catalyst of the separation of the social from the realm of its own power.⁴

The division is all the more intangible because of our inability to conceive of it within any kind of chronological context: it is an event that happened *before*, but there is no marker on that previous occurrence, no date possible. If we were able to date the origin, we would be admitting that it manifested itself within social temporality, thereby re-entering it within immanence, and necessitating a further regression to a previous moment, before this quasi-origin, a moment of true origin. Paradoxically, however, humanity does repeatedly and perpetually attempt this temporal leap, this bird's eye view of creation, that manifests itself in the conceptualization of symbolic representations. But such fabrications which attempt to implant themselves imaginarily in a temporal flight back to the origin, believing they can abstract themselves from time to become elevated above it, in fact becoming the abstraction itself, and further providing themselves with the

⁴ Ibid, pp.8-10.

unveiling of their own history, these forms of contemplation miss the point of the origin completely, and can become further entrapped in the confines of the imaginary, the illusion.⁵

Thus does the origin itself call for an internal "*distortion*", since while at the same time demanding that we acknowledge its presence, as a constitutive element of Being, Being's further impossibility of ever attending its own origin insinuates its absence; but the paradox remains, since by the very fact of its inability to witness the origin, and confront the potential *absence* of this constitutive element of itself, Being further distorts its view of the primary. The distortion occurs because we are *missing* the origin, therefore it is *absent* from us, but we know it to exist, in our original Being, and, though we cannot know its content, it is thus *present*. In this sense, we are constantly sent from one pole back to the other, in a circular motion, replete with paradox. Simplified, the primary divides Being, but rejects it into an abyss of uncertainty of its own composition, which Being can thereafter never confirm or deny, never claim the *absence of* or the *presence of* this primary element, since it dissipates as soon as it occurs. The origin is infinitely present for us, as it continues to call upon us to question it, to attempt to grasp it; it must be *something* if we feel it pull us in this manner. Nonetheless, it is forever absent from our knowledge, from our understanding, since we are never able to know what it is exactly; we are vanquished by its mysteriousness. Once the originating moment has occurred, Being is relinquished to itself, founded from a moment of origin which has slipped away from it, giving birth to Being without Being ever retrieving it.

⁵ Ibid, p.12.

The effects of this division are tantamount: human society condemns itself to perpetually attempting to confirm its own existence, to justify itself as Being-in-full, something which it can only do symbolically through the image it gives to itself of the origin. Furthermore, the primary division in fact comes to define the essence of human social existence. The social, unconsciously⁶ aware of its own incompleteness, is ingrained with the desire to find this other which would complete it, while at the same time perceiving that other as an elusive force, as something which is preventing it from releasing itself completely from the pursuit of its alterity, and of the origin. The other is different, 'not of us', by definition. But the other is essential to us, is in fact a constitutive part of us, and we require it for self-realization. Thus is created a contradictory relationship to the other: we cannot reach it truly, and therefore we resent it, because it continues to call to us, demanding our attention; we cannot perceive it, so we materialize it within immanence in symbolic representations (i.e. religious dogma, myth, etc), in the form of another 'other', in concepts whom we distance from ourselves to create that sense of alterity. There is, intrinsically, an internal logic

⁶ The term requires some clarification: it could be argued that there exists a certain ambiguity in Gauchet's understanding of consciousness' role in the determination of the social in relation to the origin. Generally, Gauchet explains the social's positioning as a *choice* or even a *decision*. (Lefort and Gauchet, "Sur la démocratie", pp.10-11,p.19.) Nonetheless, he clearly did not mean to say that the social was aware of its actions and consequences, or understood the interplay of alterity with itself, and thus acted accordingly to shield itself from its own unexplainable origin. Thus, though we may speak of choices, these are clearly without the knowledge of consciousness, yet are the acts of Being itself, and are therefore unconscious. Gauchet may explain his own ambiguity in the following passage: "Lorsque nous parlons de choix, il est clair par conséquent que nous n'évoquons pas quelque chose comme des décisions arbitrairement arrêtées dans la parfaite liberté du vide. Ce que nous avons en vue, ce sont les quelques façons possibles d'assumer un nombre lui-même défini de contraintes constitutives - façons qu'on est obligé d'assimiler à des choix non parce qu'elles seraient adoptées en connaissance de cause ou témoigneraient de la puissance imprévisible de notre imagination instituante, mais dans la mesure où il est de leur teneur même de ne pas se laisser rapporter à des causes qui décideraient de leur prévalence." *Le Désenchantement du monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985, p.XIII.

to the primary division which articulates and motorizes human agency and activity, indoctrinating it into the very fabric of human essence. Quite simply, it is this very rupture within Being which animates the social, which constitutes it as such. The social defines itself according to the decision it is willing to make in relation to its position to the primary division, but the division remains; let us be clear - no known society without an Other, because of, and leading to, no known society without division.

1.1.b. The Law

Unable to say its own creation, Being is thus at a loss to know the Universal of existence: it does not have its own Law. Being is, as an incomplete manifestation of Being-in-full, trapped in the particular, since the Universal includes all potentialities, all particulars in its essence. Thus, Being does not have that reference point from which it can know its essence, that absolute Law of the determination of the founding of all possible order and existence. As Being attempts to grasp the Universal, to know the Complete of all Being, to know the Law of its own realm, it reaches toward the representation of the Law. But any effort to say the Law inherently loses it, since any statement about the Law merely reduces it to the particular, however comprehensive that statement may be.⁷ The Law is thus the potentialities of all Being, but itself without actual content (since filling it with any content would reduce it to the particular); it is void, but it is all that there is to say about Being, about the social: "La Loi comme telle, ce n'est que la forme vide du même pour tous, du général comprenant et

⁷ Lefort and Gauchet, "Sur la démocratie", p.10.

s'appliquant à tout particulier. Ainsi entendue, la Loi est une dimension qui fait sens, mais qui ne relève pas de la conscience. C'est un repère sans contenu propre, la marque d'une identité, le signe de l'existence d'un ordre, et à ceci un terme symbolique."⁸ The Law is that reference to all Being which provides for the notion of the general which inherently defines the notion of the particular. Thus, the Law gives meaning to Being, gives it its essence, its order, since without its universality there could be no manifestation of Being, of the particular.

1.1.c. Institution of the social

The social thus institutes itself through the distinction it experiences with the Law which gives it its order. It is because the Law gives it meaning, and because it is perpetually drawn to attempt to reach its own unattainable origin, that Being attempts to state the Law, to say It. Being cannot say the Law, but it represents it through the symbolic; these statements are the discourse of Being on its Law, and are traditionally seen in human society as religion or mythology. It is thus in the interplay between the primary division of Being and Being itself that appears the social to itself, as that manifestation and symbolic institution of the relationship which it holds with the primary division, with the Law. The social is a purely symbolic space which testifies its difference from the Real of itself as Being (Real essence which it can never know because it does not have its own Law...), from the Law of its existence which it does not possess, but which calls to it. By instituting itself as a symbolic space of unity, under the external alterity of the origin, and by such in itself alienated from its origin, from its 'reality' of

⁸ Gauchet, Marcel, "L'expérience totalitaire et la pensée de la politique", *Esprit*, juillet-août 1976, p.22.

completeness, the social actually maintains and produces itself.⁹ In the present-absent ephemeral distortion of the origin, in the acceptance that it gives and institutes itself to itself through a constant interplay of an immediate disappearance of that presence of origin, that Being comes to know itself as the social, as an immanent manifestation of the particularity of its own nature under the Law.

The key to understanding human society lies in our ability to see that the primary division goes as far as defining the very relationships and interactions within society, by binding the entire social to some form of arrangement in relation to the origin, thereby determining, in a sense, the political and social realms. In fact state society, within its institutions, could not have existed without this fundamental primary division, and is in fact a mere actualized potentiality of a necessary understanding of Man's relation to the Other which was always present, albeit below the surface of activity, in all human societies: "Et si l'Etat a été possible, c'est parce qu'il y avait déjà ce mystérieux impératif pour la société de se lire dans autre chose qu'elle, de penser son sens sous le signe de la dette."¹⁰

1.2. Alterity: Non-historical and Historical

The relationship which any given society establishes with the primary division, with the alterity which eludes it, provides the conceptual framework for existence within that society; Being is unable to attend its own origin, and thus

⁹ Lefort and Gauchet, "Sur la démocratie", p.20.

¹⁰ Gauchet, Marcel, "La dette du sens et les racines de l'Etat", *Libre*, no 2, 1977, p.8.

lacks the ability to determine the true meaning and configuration of existence without reference, without relegating to some alterity the responsibility of the origin. The 'debt of meaning' felt by human agency thus leads us to an understanding of the purpose of alterity in affecting and effecting the social: some form of treatment upon the realm of alterity can be traced in all known societies. An imposing and controversial statement, but one which we now plan to examine in greater detail.

To grasp the relevance of the role of alterity in modern society, it is initially necessary to retrace the evolution or transformation of alterity itself in human history. For this reason, the development of the ensuing section will be two-fold: firstly, a treatment of 'historical' societies as distinguished from 'non-historical' (sometimes deemed primitive) societies, both in view of their political dimension and their representation of the primary division and alterity in either transcendent or immanent form. Second, the focus will shift upon the birth, evolution and consequences of Christianity in human history, as the exemplary manifestation of the liberation and autonomization of Man from his alterity through a radical distancing and empowerment of a unified, subjectified God. Paying particular attention to its impact upon the human subject and the further transformation of the political dimension (primarily upon the appearance of the State as the attempted bridge between the social and its alterity), we will discern how the social was gradually freed from the incontrovertible rule of the Other, and how the social and its individual members gained both autonomy and internal division from this transformation.

1.2.a. Non-historical society

The necessity of examining non-historical societies emerges from the clues they might furnish into our investigation of the role of alterity. Following the analysis provided to us by Pierre Clastres¹¹, which Gauchet employed in his examination of these societies, it is appropriate to understand non-historical societies as our forbearers, possessing all the essential political make-up of historical society, but choosing an alternative arrangement for their relationship with the primary division, and with their alterity; they are not, as was often assumed, anomalies or underdeveloped political communities gradually revealing the truth to themselves with the help of advanced social and economic tools.

The starting point essential to an understanding of non-historical societies lies in the relationship they maintain with the primary division. Non-historical society is fundamentally original because of its lack of a conception of creation, of entities or phenomena responsible for the event of the birth of the social realm, therefore of possibility for the communication of the mysteries of the origin from the transcendent realm to the social. For the social, the moment of the origin is positioned in a radical alterity by the discourse provided by religion. That origin is completely inaccessible by any element of the social, because there is no *creation* of the natural realm within the framework of this non-historical society. The origin and the Law are intangible, chaotic, and located in a distant past which the social is now commanded (by the spoken word) to repeat and obey. But the gods or the ancestors are not responsible for

¹¹ Pierre Clastres, *La Société contre l'État*, Paris, Minit, 1974.

creation; the mystery of the origin is, therefore, never attainable by any element in the social:

“Point de création, d’ailleurs, en fait d’origine, au sens d’un événement unique et global imputable à la volonté souveraine d’un sujet ou d’un groupe de sujets: des commencements, des avènements, des avatars du monde et des créatures qui le peuplent, des instaurations partielles et successives, comme accidentelles, et rapportables à l’action d’ancêtres héroïques bien plutôt qu’à la décision des dieux par l’intermédiaire desquels on aurait dans le présent communication avec et prise sur l’intention créatrice responsable des choses telles qu’elles sont.”¹²

The social order, the daily functioning, the natural world, even morality, none eluded the grasp of the eternally sacred and unalterable. The knowledge of that origin simply does not exist. Consequently, the social does not have the possibility (and potential problem) of empowering any member(s) of the social with the knowledge of the origin, since the Law, which requires the pretense of knowledge on the origin, is never potentially accessible in any manner. Transcendence (manifested as gods or ancestors in varying religious frameworks) is presented by religion as non-omnipotent entities whose own origins are unknown, unexplained.

Thus societies which are traditionally considered ‘primitive’ in fact chose to suppress the potential for internal division, coercion and strife which accompanies the formulation of an occasion of ‘creation’, with knowable ‘creators’, choosing to organize themselves based on a choice¹³, not a constraint, with an unconscious appreciation of their decision to avoid the surge of history:

¹² Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.23.

¹³ Gauchet, “Politique et société: La leçon des sauvages (I)”, *Textures* 10-11, 1975, p.78.

“Car c’est bel et bien d’un *choix* qu’il faut parler pour adéquatement nommer la teneur de cette opération instituante désamorçant d’un coup tous les facteurs d’instabilité ou de tension dynamique au profit de l’essentielle *unité* du groupe, de l’*intangibilité* de sa règle et de l’*extériorité* de son fondement.”¹⁴

Actors in non-historical society make the implicit *Decision* to implement an order of society which cleaves the gap between the origin (which is nonetheless unattainable) and the present, thus causing a disjunction, a radical and severing of the transcendent with the immanent, of the absent with the present. Consequently, the social places itself in a position of static, of ‘non-history’, since there is no understanding of a timeline between the origin and the present, thus no possibility for a transformation of the natural world which surrounds the social, since the world is as it always was, and as it always must be. The entire structure of the social is deliberate and rational, though not consciously actualized. It *institutes* the social (through myth) upon a distant and unattainable past series of events, with no method of interpretation or appeal, so as to ensure the conformity and equality of all, the uprising of none. Religion is the force which, since the beginning, performs a bonding function, provides a framework wherein all that is in the social can be interpreted in nature, which itself arises from the supernatural - the natural, supernatural and social world are profoundly woven together¹⁵, and no human act could conceivably have impact upon the order of nature around it, thus never upon human society itself, by inference. In other words, if all that is social emanates from the order of the universe, which has simply occurred for all time, then nothing in the social escapes this

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.20.

¹⁵ Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.82.

holistic¹⁶ rationalization, and therefore no human explanation, or discovery, or innovation, could ever come to transform the established world:

“Aussi n’est-il pas d’explication concevable de l’ordre de la société qui renverrait à une cause interne à la société, qui serait liée aux actes des individus, et n’est-il pas davantage de possibilité d’une mise en question de ces justifications données à l’appui de ce qui est de ce que font les hommes.”¹⁷

Thus the level of complexity and innovation in non-historical societies indeed did not warrant a high level of social organization and stratification. It was by an unconscious *choice* that society chose to maintain its specific level of production and development. Generally speaking, non-historical societies were capable of producing surpluses, thereby allowing for the potential accumulation of goods, division of labour, etc. The contention, however, is this: that non-historical societies were aware of the threats to unity and equality ensued within any kind of system where accumulation and material distinction are concerned.¹⁸ Indeed, the primary division is managed in opposition to the insurgence of the State, in such a way as to prevent the possibility of any element of the social acting upon and controlling the natural world, which in turn paradoxically further insures the absence of the State.

Any individuals within society who claimed to have some understanding or knowledge of the mystery of the origin, thus of the primary division, could potentially manoeuvre themselves into a position of power in relation to the remainder of the community. And, within their given framework, the intent was to

¹⁶ Ibid, p.18.

¹⁷ Gauchet, “Politique et société : La leçon des sauvages (I)”, p.68.

¹⁸ Clastres, **La Société contre l’État**, p.13.

deliberately suppress such divisiveness, to maintain the status quo. To maintain peace and stability between social forces, to prevent the appearance of political power, domination and coercion, it is thus essential that no claim to supremacy be available to anyone; this society without accumulation, without any form of individual or collective supposed knowledge of Alterity but what it receives, is thus a unified society. The framework of religion and the mechanics of the social are mutually interdependent: it is because there is no order, no subjectified transcendence that there can be no instance of political power by any given social actor; yet it is also because no attempt at an usurpation of power in the temporal has been attempted that the cosmos is chaotic, distant.

It is a society that has deliberately positioned itself in opposition to the social division, by entrenching the division as one between the social and its distant alterity:

“ La dépossession radicale fonctionne comme moyen d’une égalité politique dernière qui, si elle n’empêche aucunement les différences sociales de statut ou de prestige de jouer, interdit en revanche la scission d’un pouvoir. Au regard de cet ordre intégralement reçu, auquel il est exclu de toucher, point de privilège possible parmi les vivants, tous mis sur le même plan, le rôle du chef se limitant à célébrer la sagesse des ancêtres qui ont voulu les choses telles et à en rappeler l’inaltérable et nécessaire permanence.”¹⁹

In this sense, Gauchet determines that society places itself “against the state”, - against the formation of a location of fixed political power as intermediary to the origin - or in a deliberate impossibility of it, in order to maintain everyone on an equal level, in complete subjugation and servitude to the origin, and to the alterity which represents it.

¹⁹ Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.16.

This is of course not to say that primitive societies had no rulers or leaders; tribal chiefs and shamans were indeed somewhat distinguished from the other social actors, but in a very particular way. The leaders in non-historical societies were privy to a certain respect and figurative authority, though not actual political power over others, since they exerted an important function of pacification, harmonization and arbitration. But the function of the leader is rendered empty, or futile, by an intentionality of the social, which wants the leader to 'keep the place' of power, without actually occupying it, without actually engaging in its potentially divisive activities.²⁰ The leader is absolutely within the body social under the Law, not above it, and it is his duty to speak, not his right. In such the leader has an obligation toward the rest of the community to constantly use the spoken word as a cohesive element in the community: it does little (it matters not *what* the leader is actually saying) except to fill the spot where power would attempt to implant itself, by his mere role. If in modern society, speech is the *right* of the political leader, because of his position, in non-historical societies it is the *duty* and *obligation* of the leader to utilize speech, as a means to pacify discord and prevent violence.²¹ And as much as the leader can state the precepts of sacred Law, or even lead the community in ritual, he never comes to represent that Alterity to which the social owes its existence: the chief is an equal social partner, with a task to do, and is under the dictates of sacred Law as any other member of the community. Hence, within the community, the leader can only claim his position through speech, never through deed; the unique position of the leader, and his inability to act upon the community with

²⁰ Clastres, *La Société contre l'État*, pp.21-22.

²¹ *Ibid*, p.134.

any form of legitimacy or representation of the Others, or Alterity, thereby neutralizes the coercive potential of power, while still fulfilling its symbolic function. As a man of speech and of unity of the social to itself, the leader has no more legitimacy to make the Law than any other social actor. Nonetheless, his role is pivotal as the speaker of the rituals required by the Law (which is mythologically passed down from heroic ancestors or quarrelling non-omnipotent deities): the chief ensures the obedience and inalterability of the social by repeating the ordinances of the Law as necessary and absolute for all time, in permanence. Thus, the spoken word of the chief acts as guarantor of the social order, of the eternal junction of the supernatural and social realms, but paradoxically without ever actually bridging these realms. The leader was simply the guarantor of this order: "...ferme garantie de ce que personne parmi eux ne peut prétendre parler au nom de la norme sacrée, exciper de ses rapports privilégiés avec le fondement divin pour édicter sa loi..."²² Against the menace of social division, of internal inequality, the leader is 'in power' rather to mark the place as empty, to verbalize that he is not in fact the power whose seat he occupies. A remarkable, virtually contradictory achievement: "Empêché de se disjoindre d'avec la société et de se poser en extériorité vis-à-vis d'elle, le pouvoir n'en constitue pas moins ainsi, dans la société, cet Autre à la société par lequel elle fait détour pour s'assurer de son identité."²³ Through this absolute control of all that is intrinsic and internal to the social body, and through the further interconnectedness of the Invisible with the combined natural and social worlds, all potential questioning, reasoning and accidental innovation are either disclaimed or incorporated into the static and existing framework.

²² Gauchet, "Fin de la religion?", *Le Débat*, janvier, 1984, p.13.

²³ Gauchet, "Politique et société: La leçon des sauvages (I)", p.13.

Even the shaman, often equated to a modern-day priest, is not in communication with the Invisible, cannot claim privilege from the Invisible: he is not an incarnator of the junction point between the human world and the origin or Alterity, he is simply a technician of the voyage through the magic of the invisible²⁴ - in the sense that the Invisible is interwoven with the natural world, and that the shaman, unable to mediate, simply recounts, relays the ritualistic formulas he has learned from times past, without participation or actual knowledge of the supernatural. Through magic, the shaman can even travel to the Invisible, which is represented as an alternative, parallel dimension, not transcendent as much as simply 'elsewhere' - but to him is revealed no deeper truths on that Invisible there, only information pertaining to the natural world...

It is, nonetheless, from this social function of quasi-revealer of divine ordinance that will emanate the later contradiction of this order with "masters of meaning" ('maîtres du sens'), who go further than stating the Law, and actually attempt to communicate with it and interpret it. These masters of meaning will also gradually impose themselves upon the actions and values of the social, and attempt to transform it according to their perceived acceptance of Truth and Law, thereby subjugating other members under this view of morality, justice, etc, leading to the implantation of this position of 'interpretation' and mediation into the location of political power: the State: "Avènement de l'État: avènement parmi les hommes d'un représentant de l'invisible et des maîtres du sens."²⁵

1.2.b. Historical society

²⁴ Gauchet, "Fin de la religion?", p.169; *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.24.

²⁵ Gauchet, "La dette du sens et les racines de l'État". *Libre*, no2, 1977, p.22.

The transition of certain societies into historical societies revolves around the appearance of an institution of political power as an intermediary between the social and its alterity, thus as a rearrangement of the relationship of the social to the Law, to the primary division. Actors (deemed the 'maîtres de sens') within society implant themselves in the realm of political power by appropriating the legitimacy of that Alterity for themselves through a certain symbolic (i.e. divine inspiration) discourse. The moment of mediation found in the institution of political power represents itself as the State.

The roots of the State can thus be traced to a transformation of the dynamic between the religious presentation of Alterity as a distant and Universal phenomenon and the location of symbolic mediation: power. It is in the social's reappropriation of the previous radical deposal of the alterity of foundation, of the inattainability of the origin that the State emerges and institutes political power.²⁶ The State reorganizes the social's understanding of the primary division, of the (remaining) mystery of the origin.²⁷ It is the occasion through which the temporal distance of the primary division and the Law are reduced, in such a way as to implant itself as the means by which the social can have access to, if in a very limited manner, the origin.

The State is the embodiment of the social's inclusion of alterity into its own fabric: the State is the recognition that the meaning and division of society originated in an externality, and manoeuvring that recognition into the social itself. In this presentation, the State is not a radical and complete innovation

²⁶ Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.27.

²⁷ Gauchet, "La dette du sens et les racines de l'État", p.6.

(though it may give the impression of being so), but merely a partial one, in the method it uses to express a constant dynamic: the relationship of division between Man and the Other, between the social and the alterity to whom it owes its completion, its origin:

“L'État innove à tel point de par la figure ouverte qu'il confère à la division de la société, de par l'altérité qu'il importe à l'intérieur de la communauté des hommes jusqu'à les faire se penser d'une nature différente selon qu'ils dirigent ou se soumettent, il introduit une telle coupure dans la manière pour les individus de se reconnaître les uns les autres au sein d'un même espace qu'il donne l'impression d'une invention sans précédent.”²⁸

To offer a contrast, non-historical society presented transcendence as temporally distant, even unattainable, but somehow accessible through gods or heros who where indeed present, intermingled with the natural and social worlds, constantly around through magic; history brings about a distancing of transcendence in space, in greatness, but a closing of the gap of time, with the possibility of accessing the myth of the origin through the teachings of religious revelation provided by that transcendent Alterity, now considered as a Subject (or Subjects). In other words, whereas non-historical societies did not offer transcendent subjects who were present or knowledgeable about the origin of the social realm (and therefore could not interact in the present on behalf of any Law of which they have no more knowledge than social actors, even though they are able to act, as in the gods and heros...), historical society does indeed manifest a subjectified transcendence which possesses either knowledge, responsibility or participation in the origin itself. This development ensures the formation of an active Alterity constantly interceding and interfering in human affairs - even it is only through the political institution, since it cannot actually

²⁸ Ibid, pp.7-8.

intercede directly itself (because it is so distant, so Other from us). The origin, in historical society, is temporally closer in the sense that it can be accessed through a knowable Subject who is the author of our creation. At the same time through the advent of monotheistic (or highly organized and hierarchically determined polytheistic systems) belief systems, the divine becomes paradoxically both very distant in space from the human world (because of its greatness), thereby requiring an intermediary moment (thereafter appropriated by political power), and spatially proximate: "Aussi la naissance de l'Etat constitue-t-elle une tendance lourde qui pousse à la modification de la figure du divin, laquelle donne son sens à la révolution religieuse qui marque le passage du polythéisme au monothéisme."²⁹ Thus the State can be considered as the medium of communication with the divine: to be clear, the divine can be addressed, but is indeed so distant in space that He can never completely be known or shown to the world, his figure and face are from a different nature; the transcendent must manifest its wishes through the intermediary of political power because the appropriation of knowledge of the divine demands it.

Ironically, however, the more this ability of the State to speak on behalf of the Other (Alterity) is successful, the more it displays to what extent it is not the divinity itself. Thus, the more authority or power figures emphasize their own humanity, the more they appeal to the dictates of the Other, to transcendence. By appropriating legitimacy to rule over the social through his representation of the divine, the political leader in fact pushes that divinity further away, into an absolute transcendence in space: the State illustrates the distance between the

²⁹ Labelle, Gilles, "La Loi, l'Etat et la démocratie dans Marcel Gauchet", dans Jean-François Côté (dir), **Individualismes et individualités**, dans Septentrion, Sillery, 1995, p.62.

realm of transcendence and immanence. Thus, though the political ruler may be powerful and coercive in his role of mediation, there now exists a potentiality for contestation of his claim; only the sacred is incontrovertible and infallible, not necessarily the sacred's representative...what is not absolute can be contested, and what can be contested causes division.

The State thus provides for Mankind an alternative presentation of its alterity not by inventing a new dimension, but simply and significantly by incorporating alterity into the social, instituting the division as between Man and Man, between Master and Slave or Dominant and Dominated. In this manner, the appearance of the State lends to the formation of division within the social itself. The primary division is manifested through the State as a social division, incorporating division within the social, between social actors, because of the hierarchical and conflictual ability of the institution of political power. Just as religion offered the social an external alterity for its meaning, so does the State also offer that other, still external in nature to social agency, but now an other which is part of the social, represented by an entity (the State) which mediates, but is not part of the Invisible realm. The advent of the apparatus of political domination (the State) and the disjunction between God and Man make impossible the maintenance of a society without internal division; the stratification of society is the manifestation of the maintenance of the division. Alterity is not only external to us, it is among us; our neighbour is no longer perceived as the same, as just another manifestation of a *recipient* of the immutable Invisible. The neighbour is now also an other, a separate entity, a challenge and possible threat: "Avec l'émergence d'un appareil de domination, elle (*the division*) se met à passer entre les hommes eux-mêmes, au milieu d'eux, à les séparer les uns des autres.

Dominants et dominés, ceux qui sont du côté des dieux et ceux qui ne le sont pas.”³⁰ Thus, each social actor now establishes a position for himself within the social hierarchy according to his participation in the sacred, his relation to the transcendent. The primary division is transformed into a political division, between various social actors in proximity or distance to the representative of power, who can further use his legitimacy to coercively enforce his will. The leader will fulfill his duty as mediator by attempting to impose a social order in accordance with what he conceives to be the wishes of the divine, thereby in a real sense instituting change within society. And the remainder of the social community will position itself according to that order, in agreement with or contestation of its principles: “Car l’avènement de la scission politique, c’est aussi l’introduction de la nécessité du devenir, l’installation d’une contrainte dynamique, d’un principe de changement au coeur de la pratique collective, sur tous les plans, matériel et spirituel comme symbolique.”³¹

It is within this dynamic of the relationship between immanence and transcendence that we trace the notion of history: the disjunction of the human realm from the divine, now forever maintained through the instance of political power, lends to an understanding of the human experience as a unity within which are traceable various moments of change and discontinuity, of contestation and strife. If the human world is not in absolute submission to an unknowable past, but rather to a knowable present Subject, it is capable of partially understanding itself as relevant in its present actions, in its sequence. Distance of God in the present realm, transposed into an understanding of the

³⁰ Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.30.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.30.

significance of that realm as a separate entity, producing and generating history for itself. "En se creusant, en s'accomplissant, la différence de l'au-delà appelle et suscite l'investissement radical de l'ici-bas - entendons: pas simplement la valorisation de l'activité en son sein, la pulsion à le pénétrer, la contrainte à se l'assimiler de part en part."³² The transformation of the relationship between immanence and transcendence characteristic of State societies thus makes the concept of history a phenomenon based on internal transformations within the field of religion itself.

Furthermore, once division established itself into the fabric of the social, between those who have knowledge and power and those who don't, and society was encapsulated in a system of domination and hierarchy, the social also began to transform the natural world, to develop tools of reason and physical production. Fundamentally, it is because of the change in Man's relationship with others, within the social (and thus a consequence of the change in the social's relationship to its Alterity, as we have seen), that he can *labour* upon and transform the natural world to his advantage: it is not the desire to merely increase our possessions that drives us into the world of accumulation, it is the internal social dynamic of attempting to exert power over others, and increase our own standing, influence, thereby elevating our role within the hierarchy of domination.³³

As the State emerges as the embodiment of the relationship between the divine and the social, it manifests itself traditionally as a limitless Empire, as a symbolically supreme and majestic elevation of the few above the many. The

³² Ibid, p.91.

³³ Ibid, p.87.

Emperor is that essential representation of the Invisible, that institution of political power sanctioned by the Invisible; the Emperor is the sacred, transcendently appointed and desired representation of power, whose claim to speaking on behalf of the divine entrenches his political power over the social. It is because the Emperor has legitimacy from the Invisible, as a recognized ruler, that he can maintain his power. In response to an imperative to increase his power and demonstrate to what extent he rules absolutely over immanence, the Emperor must propagate his symbolic role through conquest, domination and change: "Le plus haut que le commun des hommes est condamné à s'affirmer toujours plus haut, toujours plus loin du reste des mortels, toujours plus différents. Inhérent à la puissance, l'impératif de montée en puissance"³⁴. In other terms, his appointment from divinity engages him in a constant attempt at asserting his greatness, his closeness to divinity itself, his very legitimacy. But the more the Emperor persuades of his greatness, the more he indeed enforces his humanity.

1.2.c. Christianity

The uniqueness of the phenomenon of Christianity in human history lies in its distinctions from other monotheistic traditions: it does not propound a denial of the realm of immanence - characteristic of eastern religions -, nor does it establish a relationship of particularism of a given social entity to the universal transcendence, as in Judaism, nor does it even attempt an absolute submission of the immanent realm to the impositions of the transcendent, characteristic of

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.38.

Islam.³⁵ What Christianity does in opposition to all other monotheistic systems is conceptually establish a radical disjunction between the invisible and visible, not submission of one to the other, but equal worth in their own realms of jurisdiction. It is this notion of disjunction which will, according to Marcel Gauchet, fundamentally alter the social's perception of itself and its understanding of the political. The present section will demonstrate how this innovation within Christianity came about, and its predominant consequences.

In Christian doctrine, it is revealed that God is made incarnate within the human realm through the figure of Jesus Christ: this simple statement of the incarnation of the divine would transform the western world indefinitely. Indeed, if God is *made Man*, it assumes that God is absolutely distant from the human world, thereby requiring this gesture of rapprochement. Thus, God is Absolutely Other, completely unattainable in his divinity, since the doctrine of Incarnation states that Jesus is *God made Man*, and not *God himself*. Nonetheless, if God found it necessary to incarnate in the human form through Christ, it must fundamentally attest to the value, worth and legitimacy of the earthly realm in the eyes of its Creator: "la sphère terrestre [...] prenant en tout cas assez de dignité, si inférieure que doive rester sa réalité spéciale, pour que le Verbe s'y fasse chair."³⁶ The human world must have some independent legitimacy since God was willing to reach us in our immanence. Thus, the concept of Incarnation not only states the ultimate power of God in his ability to incarnate, but also paradoxically and necessarily elevates the human realm in esteem to itself.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 95 .

³⁶ Ibid, p.97.

Incarnation, however, will provide for another innovation, again in the person of Jesus Christ. As Christ is God made Man, he embodies the divine in human form for humanity. Thus, the Christ figure is the only and ultimate mediator between the two realms. In his incarnation, Jesus thereby categorically denounces the pretensions of previous historical Emperors in being the mediator, the bridge between the Subjectified divine and the social world. Within the logic of Christianity, Christ is the only conjunction; temporary and unrepeatable.

Indeed, the force of uniqueness of Christianity in asserting the ontological disjunction of the two realms was so radical it was rejected. For over a millenium, for more than half of the history of Christianity to date, the idea of the equality and independence of the immanent and transcendent was maneuvered into a succession and/or mixture of alternative frameworks: for example, 1) the early Church fathers (and even some Christian denominations in contemporary society) believed the doctrine of Incarnation to be merely a temporary solution to the problems of the world. In fact, they awaited the rapid return of the Messiah either as a political saviour (which was indeed the original meaning of the term 'Messiah'), or as the Incarnation of God coming to judge the living and the dead once and for all, relegating those who had accepted the beliefs of the Church into eternal Heaven (and, of course, Hell for those who had failed to accept Christ). Clearly, these perceptions stray from an understanding of the independence and worth of the two realms, rather stressing the incorporation and imposition of the transcendent into the workings of the immanent in the former, or hailing the ultimate supremacy of the transcendent in the latter. 2) Further development: once it appeared that the Incarnation of God made Man (Jesus) did not mean to return in the near future, the Church organized itself, and propagated a more permanent arrangement. Through this, the Church began to perceive itself as the ultimate representative of the transcendent on

earth during His absence, since the Church legitimated itself as the continuation of the body of Christ. Within this dynamic, we see the appearance of a thrust for papal jurisdiction and supremacy over all social matters, rationalized as necessary for the maintenance and assurance of the redemption of souls for the coming afterlife. Again, however, the claim to complete control over even secular matters - for example by some popes in the Middle Ages - further alienated the Church from its original innovation of ontological duality. The plan of the Church in fact attempted to subjugate the social world to the rules of the transcendent as they perceived them, not maintaining the initial severing of body and soul (thus of law and faith) sought by the teachings of Christ and his followers.³⁷ It will be the reasoning of political leaders, during the Middle Ages, that this attempt at holistic mediation by the Church is nothing short of illegitimate usurpation of jurisdiction. The political realm is, according to the tenets of Christianity, not only permitted to rule in its own realm, in distinction with the Church, but in a further supremacy to the Church, who is, without a doubt, also trapped itself within the physical world, in body. Conversely, several political authorities in the first millenium BCE sought to gain control of greater jurisdiction by elevating their own status, claiming themselves as appointments of the Church, of transcendence (something which pre-Christian Emperors regularly did), in an attempt to substitute the body of Christ (which occurred once and cannot, according to the logic of Christianity, be repeated) with the body of the King, for lack of being able to *actually be* the body of Christ.³⁸ It is indeed within this logical matrix that the Christian doctrine of Incarnation will again

³⁷ Ibid, p.186-8.

³⁸ Ibid, pp.187,197.

triumph for Gauchet, thereafter severing the two realms from each other through the body of the political ruler. From the Emperor's attempted propagation of the Christic symbol will emerge the monarch's further embodiment of the duality of body spiritual and physical bodies... 3) Certain currents within Christianity will attempt to further repel the worth of the immanent realm by fully disintegrating themselves from within it: hermetic and monastic traditions will suppress the world in hopes of elevating the spiritual and shedding the immanent completely.

In summary, for centuries, Christianity was exactly the opposite of its own doctrine because of a misappropriation of authority and jurisdiction by both the Empire and the Church (both of whom attempted to claim legitimacy through their representation of the continued body of Christ, the junction of physical body and soul). For the moment, it is crucial to understand that the very concepts which separated Christianity from alternative monotheistic religions, namely this radical dualism of realms, would be subjected to repeated denials, attacks and modifications during the first half of its history, because of the significant implications of liberating the two realms from each other. It would only be through the role of temporal power, as we shall examine in the following section, that these internal battles and contradictions would gradually be overcome, attesting to the victory of the fundamental precepts of Christianity over internal and external adversity. Yet it is the victory of the original revelation of Christianity, of Incarnation, over internal attempts at rejecting it, which would, according to Gauchet, transform the formulation of the political and social realms well into the 20th century.

It will be the consequences of this victory of Christianity which will transform the political arena in the Modern era: complete independence and equality between immanence and transcendence, absolute disjunction between humanity and its Other.

"C'est en fonction de cette élévation métaphysique de la puissance temporelle qu'appelle la séparation de Dieu que les idées de prééminence interne et d'indépendance externe contenues dans la notion de souveraineté prennent leur plein relief, en même temps que l'État en reçoit sa ferme identification."³⁹

Within this dynamic becomes possible an established ontological duality between divinity and humanity, between the sacred and the profane, between the political and the spiritual.

Paradoxically, Jesus's momentary mediation as manifested in the principles of Christianity will eternally legitimize the supremacy of the political over human affairs. It is precisely because Jesus is the incarnation of God in human form, and because the mediation is only in him, that the political sphere must rule over its own sphere of influence: the physical world of Men in flesh. It is therefore the religious duty of the social to manage itself in the absence of God, and thus the duty of the political ruler to enforce obedience to his commands, since the realm was relegated to him, to tend to its own development. The social must not be forgotten, it must be praised, for it is the only means by which Men can, through good deeds, hope to be redeemed and attain salvation in the transcendent.

Nonetheless Christ left behind, in his own words, a legacy of potential mediation in the institution of the Church. The Church is a key tool by which Jesus provides for the continuation of his embodiment of mediation, but there exists a fundamental nuance in his proclamation of the Church's supremacy: the Church's dominion is intended to be absolute in the determination and encouragement of the potential salvation of the souls of humanity (thus the

³⁹ Gauchet, Marcel, in *Raison et Dérison de l'Etat: théoriciens et théories de la raison d'Etat aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, under the direction of Yves-Charles Zarka, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1994, p.213.

departure from immanence). The erecting of the Church of Christ upon the 'rock' of Peter and his descendents asserts the continuation of the role of mediation for humanity, but only in its attempts at protecting the spiritual dimension of humanity, not the physical or even symbolic body of the world, which must fall into the jurisdiction of the political.⁴⁰

Thus we can determine that the very principles upon which the Christian Church will innovate (Incarnation, salvation, interpretation), and which its members and leaders will deny and suppress for centuries well into the Middle Ages will also ironically bring about its eventual overcoming, its *aufheben*, by an autonomization and liberation of the terrestrial from the celestial, through the transcendentalization of political power.

Section 2: The manifestation of alterity in the Modern era and the rise of Democracy

The uniqueness of the modern era in relation to other historical periods is due to its transformation of alterity into an immanent phenomenon: the dawning

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More importantly, the Church became the necessary response to a growing demand within the teachings of Christ for interpretation and evaluation, which thus required a strict and regulated code and analysis: dogma. The Church was essential in curtailing the chaotic potential of individual interpretation of beliefs which arose from the extreme spatial distance of that which provided the Law. Thus, categorically a religion which opened the way for individual analysis, while also implementing a system of unilateral beliefs through official dogma: "la religion de l'Incarnation est fondamentalement une religion de l'interprétation. C'est-à-dire une religion impliquant aussi bien la détermination et l'imposition d'un dogme que la liberté des consciences." (Gaucher. *Désenchantement du monde*, p.106). Important emphasis: God took on human form, as a *physical* being, in a sense cleaving a gap between the two dimensions of humanity, the corporeal and the spiritual. Thus the dogma, doctrine and ritual of the Church will be crucial in insuring the rejoining of humanity's spiritual form to the transcendent (once the human form has indeed completely left immanence) by providing potential salvation.

of the modern era occurred not around a rejection of alterity, but of an absorption of that alterity into the social fabric itself.

What we have sought to accomplish, and hopefully what will come to fruition in this section on the modern era, is an appreciation of the peculiarities and consequences of the choices that moulded our society. Specifically, we will examine the role of the primary division, manifested into the social division, in continuing to shape society's relationship with its constituent parts and with itself. To gain a better insight into the problems and advantages of end-of-the-century society, we will highlight in this section: 1) the pivotal role of the national monarchy in the advent of democracy; 2) the path to and from revolution.

2.1 From the King's Two Bodies to Representation

The effect of Christianity in the shaping of the political sphere, and vice versa, led to a gradual rearticulation of the positioning of political power vis-à-vis both alterity and the social realm. It was indeed the attempt by the Church at the modelling of the visible according to the invisible under the auspices of Papal theocracy which defined the turning to Modernity. The battle between two forces, Church and State - initiated by the attempted usurpation of political power by leaders within the Church - would eventually force political power to assert his ultimate supremacy in temporal matters and the final disjunction of the terrestrial from the celestial. The Church will claim exclusive prerogative and independence over religious matters, at the very least, and all secular matters, in

its theocratic ideals.⁴¹ Leaders within the Church will attempt a theocratic overthrow of all facets of power, now including temporal, by manifesting themselves to the social as the embodiment of the legitimate perpetuation of the mystical lineage of the divine through the inspired words of Scripture.⁴² Indeed, their reasoning would claim that, if God is truly absent, would not the ordained and appointed legacy of Jesus (the rock of Peter upon which Jesus built the Church) have righteous authority in ruling over the community of faithful? Furthermore, if the temporal ruler wishing to remain loyal to Christian teaching requires anointment from the Pope for legitimacy, does this not attest to the supremacy of that Pope over him?

It was in argumentation to this pretention of the Papacy that the temporal ruler would assert itself as the only true ruler in immanence, catapulting the dynamic relationship between the two spheres into a battle within the very logic of Christianity. The temporal ruler would argue that, if indeed God was absolutely other to that realm which He created, He left it completely in charge of its own formulation, its own validity. Thus, the temporal ruler could state his claim to authority as body and form of that terrestrial completion and self-reflection within the precepts of Christianity:

"En face donc de l'impérialisme pontifical, surgit et se dresse inmanquablement l'affirmation de la prérogative princière, et une affirmation offensive puisque au bout d'elle-même elle porte exigence d'une subordination de l'Eglise, la relation personnelle à Dieu qu'elle assure devant prendre place à l'intérieur d'une organisation collective dont le principe est hors de sa compétence et aux règles de laquelle il lui faut

⁴¹ Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.216.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.192.

Political power could not concede to the Church control over secular matters: it cannot, if it to follow the dictates of Christian doctrine. The faithful in Christ were bound by the dictates of physical and spiritual independence, and it is the temporal ruler (the monarch) who reminds the Church of their usurpation. God wishes for the autonomization of the secular realm from the Invisible, something which clearly could not be done under theocratic reign: "[...] c'est que Dieu n'est pas simplement lui-même la plus haute part de ce monde, mais son absolument autre; auquel cas il y a place pour une autorité prêtant corps et forme à la légitimité autonome et à la validité intrinsèque de l'ordre terrestre."⁴⁴

Independence of the terrestrial from the celestial, meaning in fact a full reversal of the dynamic which had to that point structured the social, and indeed a complete return, reappropriation of the original logic of Christianity. Indeed, it is in this phenomenon that Gauchet categorically announces the arrival of Modernity: separation of the realms leading to autonomization and self-definition of the social. Since God felt the value of the earthly realm warranted his descent from the celestial in human form, yet since he also left that realm thereafter, the earthly must be valued as an independent entity capable of fulfilling the wishes of the divine.

The claim of the temporal ruler is indeed based on divine right, not through a secularization of social affairs, but by an actual appropriation of sacredness within its grasp. The person of the monarch or king represents the absence of God on earth (a God who has shown himself to be infinitely other), but was

⁴³ Ibid, p.219.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.219.

himself chosen by God, in some mysterious way, to reign in the realm of the social in his absence. The Church, as the embodiment of the continuation of the incarnated presence (therefore absence, since the Church is essential to perpetuating it...) of Christ, must maintain itself in the role of spiritual guide, in charge of the souls of humanity. But the temporal ruler argues that this very delegation concedes to the political authority supremacy in all matters physical, in preserving and perpetuating the bodies of humanity. Thus the temporal ruler must fulfill his duty of enforcing the respect for this established earthly realm, in the hope of leading his subjects by salvation to the divine realm thereafter.

In this presentation, the temporal ruler comes to possess a duality of form, of body: a mortal body, which lives and breathes and errs and dies, and an immortal body, of the royalty which is manifested through him. These two bodies further come to represent a duality in the symbolic of the social: the ruler is, paradoxically, both the here and now of the social body as its figurative head, emanating the unity of all members under the one community. Furthermore, the ruler is the mystical body borrowed from the symbolism and meaning of the Christ figure, in that he represents to the social its own infallible, invisible and immortal perpetuity throughout time, as an entity which goes beyond corporalism, and lies in all past, present and future manifestations of itself.⁴⁵ In this manner, the social can come to know itself in the transcendent otherness of the unified Nation represented in the temporal ruler.

As this dynamic was working the relationship between the temporal ruler and the social through the representational potential of political power, the Nation came to exemplify the choice of God as a 'terrestrial invisible', as a collective

⁴⁵ Gauchet, Marcel, "Des deux corps du roi au pouvoir sans corps. Christianisme et politique", *Le Débat*, no.14, juillet 1981, p.135.

person fixed within a territory, and blessed with a sanctioned permanence in time: "Extraordinaire renversement de perspective qui transmue les vivants visibles en représentants d'entités immatérielles - la couronne, le royaume, le corps politique, plus tard, l'Etat, la Nation - auxquelles leur inaltérable identité à travers le temps confère le statut de *personnes*."⁴⁶ The Nation as embodied in the sacred body of the King is divinely endorsed, and the proof of this is that it lasts forever, regardless of the physical person of the temporal ruler which heads it.⁴⁷ The King represents the social to itself purely, as a sovereign state: the social transforms its understanding of its relationship to the origin by its new perception of itself as an entity onto itself, possessed of sacredness and otherness. The representative capacity of the King will transform itself into a legal representation, of the institutional self-determination of the community by its own principle, without external referent or power. The social is not organized under the dictates of the Other, but as a result of the social onto itself, because of the absence, disappearance of the transcendent Other.

Thus it can be determined that the logic of Christianity (which was so powerful it was strongly denied for centuries) reversed the relationship of the social to its otherness, and thereafter relegating full responsibility to the social of its own institution. Modernity can be understood as the result of this consequential autonomization of the social from the Other, a severing with the past, through the symbolic body of the temporal ruler. Paradoxically, it is from this confrontation of the two realms as manifested through the dual body of the

⁴⁶ Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.269.

⁴⁷ Labelle, "La Loi, l'Etat et la démocratie dans l'oeuvre de Marcel Gauchet", p.66-67.

temporal ruler, and the absorption of the sacred into the profane that is unleashed the turning point of history toward Modernity.⁴⁸

2.2 Social Contract and Revolution

The phenomenon of revolution in the 17th and 18th century can be understood as a continuation of the social's appropriation of the means of power over itself. As we have seen, the institution of the Modern State had already shed its claim to mediation or embodiment of the divine, opting rather to present itself as the transcendent embodiment and subjectification of the Nation and of Justice as a whole, of the entire social body left unto itself.

The key of these occurrences within the political power lies in their transformation of the role of political power to one of representation: if there is a sacredness to the eternal Nation, it must be autonomous from the body of the temporal ruler himself, it must predate him, and it must require only the collective person of the social. If indeed the King does possess these two bodies, and if furthermore he must administer the business of government through others who in a sense represent his natural corporality (to protect the shield of his infallibility), then the person of the King eventually comes to show itself to be somewhat superfluous. He represents to the social its own completeness and integrity; a representation which is not required, since it can simply be produced by the social itself, without intermediary. Thus, the mystical location of power in the political body of the King loses its content, its complete purpose and

⁴⁸ Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.221-2.

efficiency as all that it serves is relegated to others who govern, to the people as an entity onto itself:

"Et ce n'est qu'ensuite que cette place à la fois absolument pleine et quasi nulle en serait venue, de par le mouvement de son ineffectivité, à se vider complètement, jusqu'à perdre tout occupant physique - non sans qu'il y ait secret transfert à l'intérieur du mécanisme social de cette dimension d'un pouvoir simultanément potentiel et ultime qu'incarnait ostensiblement l'impotente personne parfaite du roi."⁴⁹

Thus, why would the incorporated social even require this person of the temporal ruler, if its legitimacy does not warrant his body? In fact, "Si la Nation participe du sacré, pourquoi accepterait-elle que sa volonté s'incarne dans un corps qui pourtant se détache d'elle?"⁵⁰ In asking this question, the roots of the impersonalization of power, of the voiding of power, thus of the process toward democracy,⁵¹ were entrenched.

In this manner, the State eventually came to be composed primarily of a system of institutions designed to *represent* the interests and objectives of the Nation, by mere delegation.⁵² The temporal power lent itself to a reflection of the collective to itself in such a way as to annul his particular role in this dynamic; the collective required the individual members as constituent parts to

49 Gauchet, "Des deux corps du roi", p.138.

50 Labelle, *La Loi, l'Etat et la démocratie dans l'oeuvre de Marcel Gauchet*, p.67.

51 Christianity thus provides the key to the progression toward democracy, by autonomizing the social. But it further enhances its movement by the autonomization of the individual: the Christian teaching of personal responsibility and choice before good and evil leads to moral liberty. If the Christian is free to choose between Satan and God, he in fact becomes liberated as a rational being, capable not only of determination of himself, but, in this moral dilemma, capable of envisioning himself as other to himself.

52 Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.201.

be considered a collective, but did not actually require the ruler to fulfill that function: only itself. The royal figure came to lose his 'specialness', since all members of the social were necessary to the body of the social, in agreement with each other to govern and exist in collective union. Thus as the royal figure was the representation of the political body to itself, the State could be potentially, legally and righteously controlled by any of the members of the community with consent from the others, as their temporary or long-term *representative*. If the social is no longer able to discern the Law as an externality to itself, if it has left the origin as the point from which to determine the social, it must look instead at an internal manifestation of the social, i.e. the social contract. To clarify, if the social can hold and maintain itself on its own, without dependence upon an externality, and if all members are equally required to participate, for the portrayal of the collective to itself, and if furthermore the temporal ruler tends to lose his privileged position, then the social can potentially maintain its cohesion; social actors are capable of self-administration and rule, through agreement of all members in the projection of a social body, thus through a contract. The social contract theory consecrates the autonomy of the social, of the visible from the invisible, acknowledging the distancing of the divine.

In such, the notion of a social contract evolved from the remnants of the monarch's role. The gradual process of substituting hierarchy of divine above earthly with radical separation and equality between realms culminated in this absolute autonomy of immanence in controlling its realm by reformulating the meaning of political rule: insomuch as the divine became distanced from the immanent, the world became appropriated by the social through the deletion of the invisible realm from its internal logic. In other words, as God became distant, Men held for themselves - not through the monarch, but through the

recognition of the distance of the divine - all capacity and jurisdiction over the social and natural world, as was given by God, now relegated to social responsibility. Individual members were all endowed with the same privileges in the body social, all worthy components who could claim equal reward and recognition, thus rights.⁵³ Within this dynamic, the pre-eminence of the individual with rights was potentialized. The ruler came to represent to what extent the social was entirely dependent upon the multiplicity of the will of each constituent part in the whole of its unity: "L'homme des droits de l'homme surgit de la sécession divine, qui le laisse en sa solitude d'origine devant un univers vacant où librement déployer ses pouvoirs."⁵⁴ The social gradually saw itself as no longer dependent upon the intermediation of the temporal ruler for manifestation of its own collectivity, since it could in itself represent the cohesion of the social. The social contract could attest to the community's ability to determine its own arrangement and organization without immediate externality, with itself as author and founder. Within a contract, obedience to the arrangement - inasmuch as this arrangement was of the conjunction of all individual wills melded into the Nation - became intrinsically obedience to oneself.⁵⁵

In this manner, division could potentially be overcome, indeed be possible, since all members were equal partners in the project, without possibility for hierarchy and conflict. Marcel Gauchet's treatment of the French Revolution⁵⁶,

⁵³ Gauchet, *La Révolution des droits de l'homme*, Paris, Gallimard, p.IX.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.30.

⁵⁶ For brevity's sake, Marcel Gauchet's analysis of the American Revolution, as well as comparisons between the two major 18th century revolutions, will not be expounded in this work. The reader is, however, referred to Gauchet's treatment of these issues in, for example,

as a pivotal example of the transformation of the social assuring the presentation of its cohesion and power to itself, delves deeply into the question of representation and the relationship between Man and society. Individual members of this body-Nation came to demand participation in the process of decision-making upon which their government rested, since, by its own claim to legitimacy, the State existed solely *for and through* the people.⁵⁷ The revolution attempted to make the social transparent to itself, acknowledging itself as self-instituting and self-defining, in an attempted denial of the social division.⁵⁸

But the revolution would be unable to overcome some inherent difficulties within the logic of contractual society: the impossibility of the concept of representation within the social contract. Quite succinctly, contractual attempts were not able to think of the division between power and society. As a starting point, advocates of contract society clearly argued that representatives were chosen, elected to indeed emulate, reflect and fully *represent* the interests of the social, for the social: there is "[...] un refus profond de penser en termes de dissociation du peuple et du pouvoir, jusque dans la plus extrême méfiance à l'égard des détenteurs de celui-ci."⁵⁹ They cannot, without a doubt, have any particular interests, any expression of anything other than the will and wish of the social as a whole. The manifestation of any such particularized interests was thus incomprehensible, unthinkable to the members and advocates of this form of representational politics. Within this logic, if those in power have private

"Tocqueville, l'Amérique et nous". *Libre*, no7, 1980: and *La Révolution des droits de l'homme*, particularly pp.36-48.

⁵⁷ Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, pp.200-201.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.248.

⁵⁹ Gauchet, *La Révolution des droits de l'homme*, p.XVIII.

interests, express volition other than that of the collectivity, they cannot be real representatives. But the fault does not lay in the theory or the system: their election must indeed be an error, or a deception, as they are false representatives who have strayed from or betrayed the general will. These faulty representatives must thus be replaced, as the general will cannot be pluralized: "car sitôt consacrés voix de la nation, il est inévitable qu'ils soient constamment soupçonnés de chercher à la trahir, à manifester une ou des volontés particulières aux dépens de la <volonté générale>".⁶⁰ Thus, the distinction between the location of power and the social is never completely represented or recognized.

Furthermore, it became apparent that the social contract could not absolutely allow for the representation of the entire social to itself, as there would always be a voice of dissent. As a member of the community could say: "it is my will which you claim to represent, and which you require for contractual representation, but I do not agree with your decision, and did not consent to it, therefore you do not represent me". In such, something tantamount occurred during this process: the appearance of factions within this apparently 'indivisible' society. The separation of political adversaries into 'left' and 'right' factions led to a permanent delineation in the realm of politics, which would not only reverse the logic of the revolution (in its attempts at absolute cohesion and self-foundation), but also categorically determine the future of democracy. Indeed, leftist and rightist affiliations meant not so much content as they did constant conflict; wherein one group could be glorifying the rights of men above the duties required by the State, the other faction could demand the adherence

⁶⁰ Labelle, "La Loi, l'Etat et la démocratie dans l'oeuvre de Marcel Gauchet", p.69.

to duty for the maintenance of proper government. And the roles could be reversed without betrayal of the fluidity of the ideological framework or heritage of either group. Left and Right thus became a way of organizing conflicts and dichotomies in society: "Il y a dans droite et gauche un signe de permanence dans la division [...]."⁶¹ Neither left nor right actually adhered to one principle in the dichotomy of rights versus duties over the other; either conception could be elevated by one faction as ultimately essential to the determination of the social, yet could be relegated to a secondary position on a future occasion.⁶² In such, democracy constantly maintains itself around this opposition between rights and duties as exemplified in ideological discourse, and perpetuates the division, the conflict intrinsically maintained by ideological perspectives.⁶³ The political scene thus becomes a location not for the expression of the general will, but of the instoration of a system of conflict. of constant debate and polarization of division within the social.

61 Gauchet, "La Droite et la Gauche", dans Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, III, 1993, p.395.

62 Gauchet, *La Révolution des droits de l'homme*, p.91-3.

63 *Ibid*, p.415.

3. Democracy and Conflict

The turning point toward democratic political organization lies in the recognition of the insurmountability of division, which became apparent in republicanist attempts. Democracy is unique not simply because it recognizes the social as self-reflecting, but more so because it elevates the idea of conflict as determinant of its relations to itself and to constituent parts. The social organized within a republicanist perspective failed to acknowledge division, though division continued to arise and persevere. The transition into modern democracy thus arose as the social came to terms with divisions and related to itself as a society through the manifestation of these divisions⁶⁴: "Le geste inaugural sur lequel se fonde le régime démocratique consiste en la reconnaissance de la légitimité du conflit dans la société."⁶⁵ The recognition of division was threefold: an acceptance of division within the social itself, between actors, a perception of division between that same social and its instance of political power, and a further division of the social/political with the Law. We will thus, at this point, focus on characteristic developments within and emanating from democracy, including bureaucracy and totalitarianism.

3.1 Division in Democracy

Social division arises from the remnants of the republican experiment, in an acknowledgement of the inability to eliminate opposing viewpoints. It introduces

⁶⁴ Lefort and Gauchet, "Sur la démocratie: Le politique et l'institution du social", p.34.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.8.

an antagonism of classes and a battle of interests in competition for political legitimation, based on an irreducibility of individual perspectives all potentially equal in claim.⁶⁶ In other words, if there is no external determinant to the social's organization, and if no single position can categorically claim supremacy, because none can tell the meaning of the Law, any viewpoint could be legitimate, as a demultiplication of opinion occurs. Thus, social actors - with their own needs and rational processes - are perpetually in conflict with one another for recognition of their alternatives and objectives. Indeed, the social division manifests itself through political factioning and class conflict, as was exemplified in the battle for legitimation between the Left and the Right.⁶⁷ These varying perceptions of the requirements and mandates of the social arise from the gradual rise of particular reasoning processes, manifested as ideological⁶⁸ viewpoints.

Furthermore, modern democracy accustomed itself with the consequences of the division between power and civil society. If no absolute referent can determine the social for itself, if civil society is unable to elevate itself above its manifestations of conflict and division, then no instance of power can ever legitimately represent the social, or mirror it. Indeed, political power cannot embody the social in its entirety because division prevents it, because dissenting voices from within the social will always speak the lie of the illusion of unanimity of power. Power can potentially represent a great majority of the interests and meaning of the social, but it will never possess it entirely, as conflict within the

⁶⁶ Gauchet. *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.279.

⁶⁷ *Supra*, p.53.

⁶⁸ The full meaning and relevance of this term ideology will be discussed at length in the following pages.

social will ensure some form of opposition (i.e. a utopian viewpoint, where all classes' goals are met, is unfathomable, as the satisfaction of the working classes requires the dissatisfaction, to some extent, of the businesses or ruling class, and vice versa...)⁶⁹

In such, power can never fully accomplish the representation of the social, and could never completely say the Law, since its knowledge of it is incomplete. It is impossible for power to transplant itself into a position above and external to the conflict which manifests itself in democratic society, since power indeed gathers and embodies the dynamic of the collectivity rendered knowable to itself, including and based on the divisions and conflicts arising within it. Those in power cannot speak the Law in its entirety, because of the manifestation of discord and conflict from those without power: power rather fulfills the function of a symbolic unifier, under which the social recognizes itself, through the divisions presented by the dynamic within power; all members in society come to recognize themselves as both actors and spectators of existing conflict.⁷⁰

The location of power is thus said 'empty', 'void', because the battle for legitimacy prevents the identification of any particular group with actual power. Groups and individuals within society can exert power, can be in *positions of power*, but can never truly *be* identified with power. If power can never say the One of the Law, the Universal, it is because that One will consequently insinuate its Other by inference: any attempt at universalism will bring about the manifestation of an ulterior representation, an opposing view which will contest the Universal, will elevate a potential Other. Thus, people in power can never

⁶⁹ Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.253.

⁷⁰ Gauchet, "L'expérience totalitaire et la pensée du politique", p.18-21.

achieve the Universal, and are condemned to incomplete appropriation of the location of power, thus never fully occupying it: if it cannot say the Law, its hold on power is tenuous, its legitimacy is not absolute because it does not represent either the Law to the social or the social to itself entirely. Indeed, power will perpetually be held 'in trust', and still only inadequately by those of the group which presently represents a part (be it a majority or minority) of the social.⁷¹

Those attempts to say the Law are further deemed *ideologies*, because they present to the social a perception of itself in potential approximation of the Law, which they have for their purposes attempted to define. Ideology arose from within this historical context as a means of managing the division between social actors, of eliminating the social division, by manifesting an articulation of the social to itself which would say all there is to say on that social, which would make an immanent notion the starting point of the society, thereby transforming this previous return to the primary division.⁷² Ideology attempts the negation of division, by assessing the Universal of the social as determining the entire collectivity. In other words, ideologies try to gather under their explanations and proscriptions all that can be said about the social, through its reference to the Law, as thus a "mouvement qui rapporte le social à lui-même depuis son dehors."⁷³ The attempt to say the One will indeed manifest itself as a projection into the future: a future One. The final reconciliation of divisions can be reached in a future moment, an idealized eventuality. Democracy institutes the appearance of conflictual views on society, giving rise to continuing division

⁷¹ Lefort et Gauchet, "Sur la démocratie", p.26.

⁷² Ibid, p.24.

⁷³ Ibid, p.32.

along ideological lines, as society attempts to organize and orient itself toward its particular perception of the future as potentiality:

"Elle (the productive projection into an unknown future around which is organized a collective reflexivity) établit une relation de référence à un autre d'un genre spécial - ce qui sera - au travers de laquelle la communauté humaine, en son labeur multiforme pour se comprendre en train de changer, pour s'ouvrir au mouvement qui la change, pour s'y ressaisir et y recomposer son identité, pour organiser son changement, s'installe dans un procès de réflexion global et permanent."⁷⁴

The future thus comes to replace the function of the Invisible of earlier societies, positioning itself as the Law, in the sense that it continues to manifest the relationship of the social to what it can and ought to be, though under the guise of a debt to rationality and progress rather than to some external divine requirements and commandments. The Law becomes the expression of a certain immanent rationality of the social, and this phenomenon is at the root of ideology.

But a reversal of this logic also occurs within the dynamic of ideology: the attempt to say the Law remains an unknown component of the social's development, since ideology exists only as this attempt to say the Law of the social to itself and to reject division, but admittedly perpetually fails to do so, never achieving the Law. Paradoxically, the effort at the totalization of the social gives rise to an irreducible antagonism and division between parts of the social. The irony of ideology lies in this creation and propagation of division directly emanating from an attempt at unity: as the given ideology attempts to seize power and assert the unity of the social under some particular perspective, there

⁷⁴ Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.255.

will always arise dissident voices which does not see themselves in this presentation and argues the legitimacy of those in power. Ideology is thus an attempt at the seizure of power through a certain discourse on the social, which gives explanation of the social from an immanent framework (i.e. the market, class conflict, etc.), but which is perpetually doomed to accomplish its end result of permanent unification. It is because there are potential alternative explanations that ideological discourse can become so vehement, so evolved in their argumentation. Ironically, it is indeed from the existence of these divergences, from division itself that arises the need for ideology, for saying the One. In other words, it is because there is this attempt to say the One that the other remains as its nemesis, yet as a necessary component of its very manifestation. And it is because agents within the social disagree that there will manifest this attempt at reuniting under the One of the Law in ideology. It is the Law's other term which is required for its manifestation, which is an internalized dimension of the social to itself. Paradox indeed, when the very end result sought by ideology, being unity, is denied in the very manifestation of that ideology itself, as it opens up, ensures the presentation of divisive forces within the social which it can never overcome. It is furthermore a presentation of the social to itself as all potentialities of itself: "L'idéologie ne se maintient en son statut de discours qu'en *réfléchissant* l'impossibilité de sa visée, qu'en marquant sa *différence* interne, qu'en produisant en conséquence une série de différences."⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Lefort et Gauchet, "Sur la démocratie", p.41.

3.2 *Bureaucratization of society*

The recognition and institutionalization of conflict leads to the inoccupation of the location of power by anything but a part of the social, which maintains itself both through ideology and bureaucracy: they are connected, in that they work in conjunction with each other, performing a dual and paradoxical role of attempting to unite what they have severed through division. As we have seen, society produces itself through conflict, through antagonism between actors vying for power. Bureaucracy necessarily traces its roots to this development of modern democracy: it is the product of division, it is the recognition of division, but it is also an attempt at reconciling the parts of the social through the One of the future Law, as we shall describe.

The profound realization of the irreducibility of conflict within democracy produces a scattering, a pluralism of perspectives, goals and meanings. The State responds to the needs of the mass of individuals who compose civil society, but who orient themselves back into a personal sphere, relinquishing political control to that designated state apparatus: "les <masses> ont tranquillement déserté vers les abris du for privé..."⁷⁶ Thus administration allows for the engagement in individualistic pursuits in civil society: "Elle (the autonomy of political identity) dégage l'ensemble des activités concrètes et des rapports effectifs entre individus de toute responsabilité et de toute obligation envers une cohésion sociale désormais assurée d'ailleurs selon d'autres voies et par d'autres moyens."⁷⁷ The bureaucratic state will produce itself as the

⁷⁶ Gauchet, "Le mal démocratique", *Esprit*, octobre, 1993, p.79.

⁷⁷ Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, p.273.

means by which change is managed, by which varying perspectives can continue to be produced and alternately dominant, through the continuity of a permanent state apparatus.

In other words, the social is fragmented, but its recomposition is attempted through bureaucratic government. Bureaucracy both arises out of this attempt at managing the multiplicity of the social and out of a desire to overcome it. Bureaucracy is the impersonal, objective and neutral agent of continuity through change, of stability, and thus represents for the collectivity that meaningful manifestation of its own production as an entity. Society provides itself with this administrative means by which it can meticulously regulate the workings, objectives and requirements of the collective existence, relegating it to the political sphere in the form of a bureaucratic network which actually *produces* cohesion and meaning through its administration of social division. Bureaucracy wants to say the One, by managing the administration for the future, and it orients itself toward this goal, which it can never reach. Thus for bureaucracy:

"Sa légitimité profonde, de ce point de vue, c'est d'être l'instance même de l'avenir, le point de l'espace social où se rassemble et se matérialise la capacité souveraine à s'instituer de part en part - mais pas dans l'instant, dans l'extension du temps, pas dans la ferme conscience du but visé, dans l'interaction éclatée, ouverte et fort peu au fait de son enjeu dernier d'une multiplicité de demandes sociales et d'un enchevêtrement de réponses organisationnelles et législatrices."⁷⁸

The bureaucracy within the State thus serves the *function* of representing to the social itself, as in a mirror-image, a reflexive agent: the State is therefore severed from the civil society which it reflects and regulates, but which in turn

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.260-261.

defines it. Gone is the traditional justification and legitimation of political power through an appeal to some external authority, to be replaced by an administrative State power, orienting itself exclusively toward the articulation of policy and regulatory functioning, arbitration and implementation: the government under democratic regimes carries out desired behaviour only inasmuch as it fulfills the function of an administrator, not as an independent moral advisor, judge or commander, but rather as the means by which the social can continue to recognize itself as the independent producer of its own realm in its entirety in the future. The reference point of the Law is maintained, even in (and paradoxically because of) this multiplication of ideologies, as a potentiality of the future, towards which bureaucracy leads us. Impersonal, functionally essential bureaucratic State in contrast with, yet paradoxically dependent upon, an atomistic, dynamic, conflictual civil society.

3.3 Totalitarianism

However, there exists in the modern era a pivotal example of an attempt at suppressing all forms of the division in society, wherein ideology actually seizes power. Certain elements of the failed 18th century revolutionary attempt at social transparency are once again brought into play, in 20th century societies of 'totalitarianism', albeit with radically different intent and consequence. It must be stressed, from the onset, that totalitarianism's evolution from democracy is for Gauchet a possibility, or potentiality, but never a necessity or eventuality. 'Totalitarian', named because of this type of society's imaginary project of reconciling all divisions within the social under the universality of the Law: an ideology which says itself as the Law, not as knower or embodier of its principles, but as its All. The innovation of totalitarianism sprouts out of the

burgeoning democratic reduction of alterity and disincorporation of the social body to fragmented units. If totalitarianism is possible, it is because of the production of multiple ideologies within democratic societies and the pursuant desire to reunite that society under the banner of the One of the future, as attempted by ideology and bureaucracy. With historical contingency, totalitarianism arises out of democracy, as that attempt at the actualization of the One in the present, not in the future. Paradoxically, the motivation behind totalitarianism rests on this desire to reincorporate that traditional unification (through the image of the body) which was lost, to artificially restore the unity previously achieved by that external and Invisible transcendence into a social body by its present manifestation of the ultra-organized modern state, (not, as in democracy, in some future potentiality).⁷⁹ Ironically, though totalitarianism emerges from the upheaval of the manifestation of the bureaucratic and ideological dimensions of democracy, - and under certain historical circumstances latent in democratic society - so does it also come to serve as its contradiction, as the suppression of conflict through the denial of multiplicity.

Remarkable undertaking, with remarkable consequences: since no society can ever truly escape the primary division, since no society can ever deny the existence and essential necessity of its alterity, totalitarianism coerces the social to fit into its desired project of social unity. The State transforms and adjusts society so that it reflects its own requirements of the ideological utterances. "Ce que *dît* l'idéologie sur le processus social, elle veut que cela *soit*."⁸⁰ The objective is clear: to elevate itself above manifestations of division, to push

79 Gauchet, "La droite et la gauche", p.449-450.

80 Gauchet, "L'expérience totalitaire et la pensée de la politique", p.10.

society back onto itself so much, and in such a way as to eliminate all potential divergence in viewpoint, by such *producing* the social it desires, under its own ideological perspectives. The totalitarian ideal coercively (often through the use of terror) elevates its principle unity by demanding 'manifestations of unanimity', the annihilation of diversity and division: the enemy, the other of the social is identified as eliminated. Yet division remains even in these united social cohesive wholes, if under a new form. The state apparatus which denies the existence of class conflict or other antagonistic forces actually itself becomes a class or enemy elevated above all others;

"C'est l'État qui est à proprement parler dominant et exploiteur, et, partant, c'est l'État qui crée l'opposition des classes. La division sociale est reproduite à partir et en fonction de la division politique entre l'État et la société."⁸¹

Paradoxically, however, that very principle of universalization upon which the totalitarian state articulates itself, the Law, eventually becomes confused under this form of regime.

"L'illusion totalitaire par excellence, c'est la volonté d'occuper cette extériorité radicale depuis laquelle gouverner au nom du savoir absolu sur la société en ramenant entièrement la Loi dans l'espace humain-social. Et comme nulle autre, la tentative totalitaire montre à quel point ce lieu est inoccupable. Lorsque le pouvoir s'empare de la Loi, se veut la Loi, *il n'y a plus de Loi.*"⁸²

Without the Law, there can be no meaning, no symbolic absent point of reference, no mechanism by which the social is instituted and maintained. The only alternative left open for the state to ensure social cohesion and unity is the

⁸¹ Ibid, p.13.

⁸² Ibid, p.24.

coercive power of terror and propaganda: an artificial social body. In other words, the totalitarian state positions itself outside of the social, to reflect back onto it its own totality; it manifests the external unifying principle by attempting to be that transcendence which previous political power had merely tried to represent. But by doing this, the state actually reduces the principle of the Law to a social concept, since it emanates from the state, which is social. It thus refers exclusively to itself for its own symbolic meaning. In this manner, it eliminates under its system the existence of any external reference and Law, of any universalizing external principle, and categorically reduces everything to immanence. And by destroying the concept of the Law as an externality, it inevitably destroys that alterity essential for social functioning: without an appeal to some form of Law, the social loses that intermediary, that common ground which enables it to relate to its immanent other, to other social actors.

The totalitarian state is essential to any study of the course of our society and political order, as it exemplifies to what extent the pursuit of social cohesion and elimination of the primary division can overwhelmingly determine, and subvert, human relations.

4. Michel Freitag: An Alternative Examination of the Question of Division and the Social

Undoubtedly, Marcel Gauchet's diagnosis of the condition of society in Modernity is not at bay from criticism and controversy. It is essential to our appreciation of Gauchet that we take some analytic distance. In particular, Gauchet's determination of the persistence of alterity within the social in modern democracy could meet with some resistance and critique. What can be offered at this time, to better understand and judge the theoretical soundness of his framework and conclusions, is a somewhat alternative viewpoint to Gauchet's, both in method and outcome.

Several contemporary authors could have been employed for these purposes, including many who view the meaninglessness of present society as a consequence of a breakdown in common language, interpersonal communication, etc. It has been argued by some authors, such as Jurgen Habermas, that contemporary society has indeed undergone a radical transformation, but only for the sake of shedding the illusions of past presentations of the social to itself, in the spirit of a form of 'enlightenment' or self-awareness (or some, like Charles Taylor, would argue perhaps the opposite...). But what we required was an approach which accepted some of the basic premises of Marcel Gauchet, in order to offer a comparison which could provide us with some further insight into Gauchet, and not a radical rejection or alteration of his presentation.

Thus sociologist Michel Freitag⁸³ was chosen as a contrasting perspective in our analysis for several reasons: primarily, his method of analysis attempts to

⁸³ Michel Freitag, of Swiss nationality, is currently Professor of Sociology at

examine society in terms of relations between individuals and their society, relations with each other, and more importantly relations of that society with some transcendence. Our starting point with Marcel Gauchet, of the perception and relevance of Otherness, of some external referent's role in the determination and continued transformation of how the social organizes itself politically and socially, must be maintained by the author whose view we wish to contrast with Gauchet. Michel Freitag tends to portray society in terms of its structuration and internal functioning: society is both the unity and grouping together of the actual and projected practices and conceptualizations of societal agents, as well as the totality of relations which can only be understood as participating in that structure itself. In other words, society encompasses the symbolic unity of its constitutive parts, as well as maintaining and regulating the structure, functioning and meaning of those very parts in relation to each other.⁸⁴ In this manner, society provides relevance and meaning to singular acts and tends to symbolically reflect to individuals their own identity as expressed in that generalized alterity, that perennial mirror of an other. Freitag admits the requirement of a transcendental foundation for society, of an otherness as a transcendentalized subject for the social upon which can be interpreted normativity and behaviour recognition.⁸⁵ Of course, this author would define these terms in a different manner than would Gauchet: for Freitag, the notion of

l'Université du Québec à Montréal, and has written extensively on the condition of Modern society, notably in an ongoing collection in 2 volumes called *Dialectique et Société*, Editions Saint-Martin, Montréal.

⁸⁴ Freitag, *Dialectique et Société I*, p.27.

⁸⁵ Freitag, "L'éclatement du social, ou oubli de la société?", *Société*, no.3, 1988, p.13-15.

alterity encompasses all manner in which can be represented an externality, an absolute point of reference upon which society can rest.

Freitag does indeed include the relevance of transcendence⁸⁶ in the determination of the social in his analysis, if indeed his conclusions differ from those of Gauchet, as we shall see: although it could be argued that Marcel Gauchet has a generally optimistic perspective on the potentialities of present condition of society, despite the danger represented by totalitarianism, Michel Freitag's analysis is somewhat more reluctant to accept the advent of a time of continued prosperity under the auspices of 'post-modern' democracy.

A lack of time and space prevents a complete examination of Freitag voluminous body of work, which would thus be required for a full and fair comparison of the two authors; however, many relevant conclusions can be drawn by focussing on Freitag's diagnosis of the functioning of Modernity and its ensuing crisis, and the fragmentation or division of contemporary society under democracy which catapulted us into a 'post-modern' period. In the following pages, we will put forth Freitag's argumentation, occasionally interjecting Gauchet's views on these questions.

4.1 What is the meaning of Modernity?

We have seen that, for Gauchet, Modernity represents an institutionalization of conflict and the maintenance of an alterity through a future projection of the Law under a multiplication of ideologies and through bureaucracy. For Freitag,

⁸⁶ It must be noted at this point that Freitag uses both the terms 'transcendent' and 'transcendental' in a manner which would appear synonymous. Indeed, the two terms generally have distinct meanings, nuances which do not appear in my reading of Freitag. It is therefore unclear if a comparison with Gauchet's notion of transcendence can be attempted.

however, Modernity is unified in its representation of itself as emanating from one unique guiding principle, through which any concept or gesture can be interpreted; that linear guiding principle is Reason. The advent of the process of Reason as an immanent⁸⁷ point upon which to potentially base all human activity brought about a transcendentalization of the role of political power, as that medium through which Reason was exercised. Reason became not only the motivator of human agency, but its legitimizer as well; no act could legitimately exist in opposition to, or external to, the dictates of Reason. Thus was society able to organize itself exclusively within the prerogatives of this reference point, and incorporate every facet of the community under the logic of its universalizing principles. In other words, Reason answered the call of the project of the modern era, which was to ensure within the political structure a function of communal recognition for each particular identity in relation to the collectivity, based on concepts which emanated from within the confines of society, making that society thus auto-referential under the dictates of Reason.

Indeed, we remind the reader at this point that Gauchet would accept only some of the importance placed by Freitag on the role of Reason.⁸⁸ But for Freitag, the role of Reason is tantamount: as executors of formal Reason, those in power were able to provide for the unity of society onto itself, advocating its supremacy and its conformity with the principles of Justice: Reason brought with

⁸⁷ Reason, though spoken of by Freitag as becoming 'transcendentalized', remains nonetheless an immanent phenomenon, though its specialization and refinement leads to its abstraction into a practically futile point of reference: this will be key in the transformation of society into post-modernity, where no reference point can be counted upon to help unite the social. See the discussion later in this section on the crisis of Modernity.

⁸⁸ Reason, for Gauchet, does figure as a key element in the process toward modern democracy, albeit not to the extent of placing it as *the* point of reference of society. This would appear to him a narrow perception of the complexity of interactions of ideologies and frameworks at work in Modernity.

it an appreciation of the claims of all individuals within the system of immanence, to all its products and properties. Ultimately, there developed within this logic the predominance of an economic structure, wherein was rationalized every occasion of societal and individual activity according to the unifying principles of the market, always under the auspices of a rational determination. To be clear, Freitag argues that political economy was the foundational discourse of legitimation for modern society which flows from the continuing dominance of Reason: "...la référence à la Raison fondait le mode également universaliste de la régulation institutionnelle propre au pouvoir d'Etat - tout spécialement dans le champ instrumentalisé de l'économie."⁸⁹

But Freitag will maintain that Reason as the force of legitimation could only bring about a crisis in Modernity, which could not be overcome through an institutionalization of conflict, since the tools of power and government were forced to take on a completely different role by those very rational processes which erected them. This crisis will appear through a descent of power into the confines of the structure which it was designed to maintain and legitimize. Indeed, formal Reason within this society brought with it a preoccupation with material Justice. Actors sought vindication for the protection of the rights of individuals which Reason had promised them. The market system made individual, competitive actors seeking restitution of their rights to a just society. But the flow of a political economy did not initially meet these needs; Reason demanded the involvement of power within the system of the social. In this manner, political power - which was previously at the center of the determinations of the society without directly participating in it, - was forced to

join the system of demands, relations and actions which it had originally 'created'. Power lost its transcendental nature, and was abstracted (because it became so rationalized as to become futile) into irrelevance. If the dictates of Reason were so abstracted, they slipped into uselessness, and were thus called back into relevance by actors within society, who demanded that Reason take on its own dictums: involve itself in the rationalization of society, and not just submit actions and concepts within society to its test. It saw its role transformed into one of an actor who must defend the rights and demands of those unjustly disadvantaged in society, because of the tenets of Justice which its rationale claimed to be warranted. There is thus a:

"...transformation de l'Etat de droit, fondé sur la 'compétence', lequel Etat, dans l'exercice et l'élargissement continu de ses nouvelles fonctions, perd alors progressivement mais inexorablement son unité formelle à caractère transcendental au profit d'une autonomisation de ses multiples agences exécutives orientées désormais de manière purement empirique vers 'l'efficacité', 'l'efficience', 'l'effectivité'...."⁹⁰

In fact, we have traversed into an epoch no longer geared toward the future, as was the case in modernity, but toward the immediacy of relations, the functionality of events, mechanism and relations, and the integrity of the system. We can recall that Gauchet viewed the condition of current society in a contrary manner: for Gauchet, Freitag ignores the maintenance of a future manifestation of the Law, which ensures a role for power as its 'marker'.⁹¹

Freitag would further argue that with the loss of Reason and political power as the means by which society referred to itself, the social became segregated

⁹⁰ Freitag, "L'éclatement du social", p.16.

⁹¹ Supra, 2.3 Democracy and Conflict, pp54-58.

into concurrent units fighting for a position within the structure. The social exploded into monads of interest, with power as merely one particular interest or force within this auto-regulated network. The social lost its transcendence, and was thus folded back onto itself in pure immanence, without a common reference point to maintain its understanding of itself as a totality. That traditional referent and representation of an *a priori* foundation and meaning for society provided by transcendence is all but lost in post-modernity, after its role was seized by Reason (which became that unique referent itself) and gradually universalized and abstracted to the point of irrelevance.⁹² There is no alterity in post-modern society because there is no transcendent referent for which this alterity could stand.

Furthermore, that alterity which we saw Gauchet trace to the future, as the potentiality of otherness for the social, is also repudiated by Freitag as no longer existent. That obsession with progress and the future characteristic of Gauchet's modernity has given way, for Freitag, to an orientation for pure immediacy: there is no concern, in post-modernity, for the betterment of society at large under some supreme good. There is only competition in the legislative and judicial arena for the recognition and advancement of particularized individual rights versus other particularized individual or group rights. We can thus ask if society has lost its language of communication and expression of itself which Reason, instead of God, or Providence, had previously provided in Modernity.⁹³

92 Ibid, p.13.

93 Freitag, "Le concept de société", texte non-publié, UQAM, département de sociologie, automne 1983, p.3.

4.2. Fragmentation or division in society: Post-Modernity or Modernity?

The loss of a common language provided by Reason in Modernity, Freitag contends, characterizes the advent of a new era in human history, of our progression into post-modernity, beyond the logic of societal cohesion and self-reference: there has now come a time in history where the relationship of society as a unity to its constitutive parts has disintegrated, eroded and perished, thus reducing society to a scattered inter-relation of individualized choices, positions and challenges, without the meaning and structural framework previously provided by political power. The apparition of political power as an actor among others thus leads to the fracturing of society with itself, at loss for an absolute point, thus causing the explosion of previous unity into segregated, functional units all separately serving the rhetoric of the principles of the working logic of their own segregated units: "[...], il institue des instances objectives spécialisées de pratiques fonctionnelles, soumises chacune à un système formalisé de régulation, spécifique et cumulatif: le politique, l'économique, le technique et le scientifique."⁹⁴ The society is stratified and divided according to spheres of jurisdiction and functionality: the individual social actor can thus judge his actions according to the specific sphere to which his behaviour pertains. The previous unity is replaced by a pragmatic system of interdependence and functions. Post-modernity, in following Freitag's reasoning, is the mechanization of society relations and the explosion of any a priori totality, and thus potentially the eradication of meaning.

94 Freitag, *Dialectique et Société 2*, Montréal, Editions Saint-Martin, 1986, p.70.

The functionings and mechanisms of society are thus transformed: if power is merely one actor among many in the dynamic battle for legitimacy between sub-systems (economic, political, technological, artistic...), a so-called 'consensus' emerges as the only way to achieve understanding, though never truly unity. Post-modernity is characterized by negotiation⁹⁵, and not by some common appreciation of the meaning and significance of the social onto itself. Each sub-system within society has its own particular logic, rationality, language and motor. There is no external unifying principle. Thus, these circles of meaning scattered within the greater area of society never communicate except in an arena of competition. Indeed, there can be no debate on social normativity and meaning previously motivated by Reason, since the basic premises vary from one sub-system of interaction to the next: "la référence de légitimation se déplace progressivement du thème normatif de la 'Raison' à celui de la 'naturalité positive' de la réalité sociale."⁹⁶ For example, the language of computers cannot have any meaning in the realm of art or architecture. Reason no longer activates and maintains the social or provides it with the pole upon which to hang its sense of itself as a whole entity: it is beyond that point, cast into competitions of the might of one sub-system over others.

Indeed, Reason catapulted human agency into an unparalleled preoccupation with the rights of its constituent parts. Civil society at the turn of the 21st century, it can be argued, perceives itself more and more in terms of a creator of a society who relinquishes control to the State of that society for its

⁹⁵ A negotiation which Gauchet would argue is actually more a battle for gain of political power, for legitimacy, and thus for the right to attempt to speak the Law of the social to itself.

⁹⁶ Freitag, "L' éclatement du social", p.14.

efficient maintenance and functioning. Indeed, there would be no strong disagreement from Gauchet on this issue, as Gauchet's perception of bureaucracy fulfills just that role of maintenance of the social for the future through administration.⁹⁷ But we are, for Freitag, immersed in a bureaucratization of the social to the point where responsibility, legitimacy and authority are in turn dispersed back into the social, which fails to define itself in any meaningful manner beyond the immediacy of the dominant rhetoric of its particular sub-system.⁹⁸

Folded back onto itself, contemporary society cannot grasp an ontological or moral understanding of itself beyond the relativism of individual perspectives, or the dominance of a sub-system's pervasive viewpoint. Legitimation is determined by consensus and functionality of public opinion, not by adherence to, or in defense of a universally accepted a priori principle. By such, post-modernity could be perceived as a world in a crisis of meaning, unable to provide for itself a referent for social existence, since it has rejected, overcome the need for any such 'concrete' transcendence in its realm. There is no common ground on which to reflect society to itself for awareness, self-knowledge and critique: "...la post-modernité telle que la conçoit Freitag est l'aboutissement extrême de cette logique négatrice à un type de société dans

⁹⁷ *Supra*, pp.61-64.

⁹⁸ In our understanding, the individual has lost the sense of his participation in both the foundation of the social and the primacy of Being, since he has, in modernity, taken on the conflictual role of being both the founder of society, and the founding principle upon which that social was initially based. In other words, there will necessarily occur an identity crisis, when an entity tautologically seeks the meaning of his existence in an object of which he is the author, and which reveals to him, once 'asked', that he is indeed the meaning of his own existence! This is, of course, an appreciation of the problem which both Gauchet and Freitag would contest, and for varying reasons. It is, nonetheless, a position which can justifiably be extrapolated from both perspectives.

lequel on ne peut plus croire en rien, parce qu'on a tout rejeté, tout vécu sous le mode négatif, à force d'émancipations multiples."⁹⁹

Nonetheless, Freitag contends, it is impossible to project ourselves back to a time where society was bound by some commonality, some transcendent point of meaning. Society must, instead, find a manner by which to reach an adhesion to common goals by the collectivity: transcendence is lost to post-modern society and cannot be brought back, but meaning can be retrieved from relations within the social, from the orientation of society toward naked self-truth. Thus to regain a sense of meaning among our society, to overcome the crisis of meaning, we must "assumer la responsabilité toute nouvelle que nous confère la puissance de la technique, et cette responsabilité, parce qu'elle est nôtre en dernière instance, et parce que nous le savons désormais, ne pourra pas être assumée en dehors d'une nouvelle conscience de l'être et de la hiérarchie immanente de l'être."¹⁰⁰

Freitag calls upon the world to embrace for itself a new form of ethics, based not on a transcendence which is forever lost, but on an appreciation and love for the present world in all its fragile richness and versatility.

99 Baillargeon, S., "Une espèce en voie de disparition", *Le Devoir*, entrevue avec Marcel Gauchet, section Société, lundi 1er juin, 1992.

100 Freitag, "L'éclatement du social", p.20.

Conclusion: Does alterity remain in contemporary society? Could we be on the verge of a world without meaning?

What we would like to question with the present discussion is this: do the examinations of alterity and division in the works of Marcel Gauchet and Michel Freitag lead us to a better understanding of the present political dominance of individual and collective legislative and judicial battles, as well as the general organization of society? Is it because of a transformation of our perception of our own society, and the role of actors within that social structure, that individual social actors are striving to define themselves and their jurisdictions on personal motivations and justifications? Upon closer examination, can we determine that alterity remains as a referent, if more indirect than previous societies, for defining relations between social actors and between the social and its overall organization? For a concrete example, we propose to look at one of the dominant nations in contemporary society, the United States, because of its import in contemporary society, and because it experienced a revolution somewhat compatible with that already discussed in the present work, the French Revolution. Indeed, Gauchet's analysis will serve us better for an examination of the foundations of American society, the Declaration of Independence; conversely, we will demonstrate the usefulness of Freitag's outlook for contemporary American society.

The United States (as a primary example of an attempt by a grouping of individuals to assert their independence from a powerful, quasi-absolute political entity, the British Crown), lends to us a fascinating historical progression of the

development of the notion of autonomy gradually severing itself from alterity, eventually eradicating its pivotal role.

The Declaration of Independence, following Gauchet's reasoning, is unique in its endeavour to both maintain an existing absolute alterity, in its proclamation of the laws which 'nature's *God* entitle them', and to institute or found a *new* form of transcendence, that being the absolute *a priori* nature of Man's inalienable rights. It has been argued many times, and warrants repetition, that there is indeed rationally, logically or even ethically, nothing which proclaims the sanctity, and 'self-evidence' of the equality, liberty, happiness, and livelihood of individuals as 'unalienable rights'. There is, furthermore, only ideological justification for the argument that governments were, and always will be, instituted to protect these rights...Nonetheless, the event of the Declaration is admirable in its ability and agility in founding a new transcendence for its purposes of nation-building, upon a previous, as yet uncontestable transcendence, God. The entire text is replete with references to both the 'Creator' and his legacy of 'rights' and duties conferred upon Mankind; the text never declared that independence is truly the 'wish' of the declarers, but rather an inevitable consequence, an obligation conferred to them by transcendence, by God and by natural law. Thus does the American act of independence uniquely found itself and its newfound transcendent 'Declaration' (for the Declaration itself does indeed take on that mystical quality of transcendence and referent) upon a regression of transcendences and alterities¹⁰¹ - inalienable

¹⁰¹ This argument resembles that put forth by Jacques Derrida, in *Otobiographies. L'enseignement de Nietzsche et la politique du nom propre*, Paris, Galilée, 1984, p.13 et suite.

rights, which are given by natural law, which was given by God, which cannot be contested and therefore legitimates the entire procedure.

Nonetheless, to offer a Freitagian perspective, this society which founded itself upon a regression of alterities finds itself, in contemporary society, without really any of those initial referents (because of the gradual reduction of alterity during the rise of the modern State, the indoctrination of all men's capacity for individual reason, etc.), and based now almost exclusively upon the concept of a future idealization of itself revolving around the individual and its pursuits. But the individual, it could be argued, does not provide a proper reflexive alterity for the social or Being itself, since it *ipso facto* can never leave its own confines for knowledge of itself. The notion of the social contract has, in current times, taken on the rhetoric of the business contract between equal and monadic entities connected only in that moment of contract and its confirmations thereafter. Modern society does not, as Rousseau would have wished, perceive the State as defender of a contract elevated above and beyond the aggregation of individual interests; it is in fact only that: an aggregation of independent interests wishing exclusion from the remainder in order to pursue individual and personal goals of aggrandizement and self-enrichment. It is the cornerstone of the international capitalistic liberal system, and it is the foundation of American democratic liberalism.

Thus do we find, in the American judicial system, an unprecedented proliferation of individual legalistic claims and demands: the legal process is perennially engaged in battles of individual rights versus each other. The right of one woman to terminate her own life, based on a rational choice to do so; the right of non-smokers and health authorities to control the consumption and accessibility of a previously deemed legal product (tobacco), based on their right to pure air and healthy living; the right of an individual to not be served

excessively hot coffee in a restaurant, even though this is the product the individual ordered, based on that individual's right to be protected from potentially dangerous food items, and also, it could be argued, based on that individual's right to be protected from his/her own carelessness and inattention, by the more powerful food item producer; the right of an individual to lend legal responsibility to a 'good Samaritan' for inadvertent injuries incurred as that individual was being rescued; the right of criminals to comfortable, tolerable living...and the cases continue.

The attempt here was not to ridicule or disgrace the American, or any, judicial system, but rather to demonstrate to what extent the individualization of society, and the obsessive reliance on rationalism, has fragmented society into units of vindication and competition. Furthermore, this proliferation of individualism in contemporary society can be directly related to the reduction of alterity, to the lack of a referent upon which to base social actions, relations, and ethics.

If there exists a fundamental problem of identity and of meaning in society at the end of the 21st century, the answer may lie, not in attempting to reabsorb old forms of social integration and unification, but in creating and elevating new ones. And even if, indeed, there lies within social relations and within social actors themselves *traces* of transcendence and that vital referent of otherness, their ability to represent the social to itself, thereby providing a coherent social and existential meaning for society, may not be sufficient. As Freitag argues: "l'unité *a priori* du sujet aussi bien que du monde objectif doivent dès lors y être réalisées *a posteriori* et pragmatiquement, c'est-à dire encore une fois d'une manière purement technique...ou disparaître. Ce sont là les nouveaux problèmes éthico-politiques et esthétiques que pose le mode d'existence technologique et technocratique contemporain: la question devient pour nous de savoir quelle sorte de sujets nous voulons être, et dans quel ordre de monde

nous voulons vivre."¹⁰² Furthermore, Freitag advances that the fundamental problem of post-modernity will be in its ability, or inability, to remain outside of the shackles of oppressive ideology without eliminating the essential component of a foundational normative transcendence this ideology traditionally provided. Regardless of our capacity for rational thought and technology, it is crucial, - for the social integrity of post-modern society not to dissolve into disaster - that society define itself with some form of *a priori* determination of itself, as a social body, as identity, as an amalgamation of desirable, communally sought and defined social practices. "En attendant, nous sommes tous en train de devenir des <autres> pour les <autres>, par défaut de l'Autre, qui seul fournit à chacun un surplomb vis-à-vis de soi-même et d'autrui. L'Autre, le <Tiers fondateur>, le miroir, le fondement de la norme et du regard commun toujours d'une manière ou d'une autre réifié (<Dieu>, le <Devoir>, la <Raison>)." ¹⁰³ For Freitag, post-modernity has trapped us in a world without meaningful communication between social agents beyond an exchange of relevant, functional information; meaning itself merely denotes the particularized motivations and interests of social actors, either converging into consensus and dominant accepted doctrine, or diverging into fractional groups or unitary individualized competitions. Thus, for contemporary society to regain a sense of living together and of belonging, it must found for itself a new identity, a new linking to others and to the world, a new form of meaning and expression, to understand and appreciate the world and its beauty, rather than its empirical reality and functional viability. ¹⁰⁴

102 Freitag, *Dialectique et Société* 2, 1986, p.335.

103 Ibid, p.339.

104 Ibid, p.340-341.

With this example in mind, we could contend that both authors provide relevant insight into contemporary society, and indeed could be taken and complimentary and equally revelatory when concerning ourselves with the condition of our society. The matter cannot be categorized: with or without alterity, which is it? Perhaps rather: we are in a crisis of meaning, thus should look to alterity for answers?

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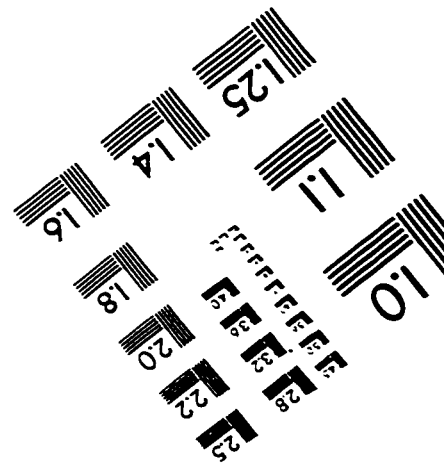
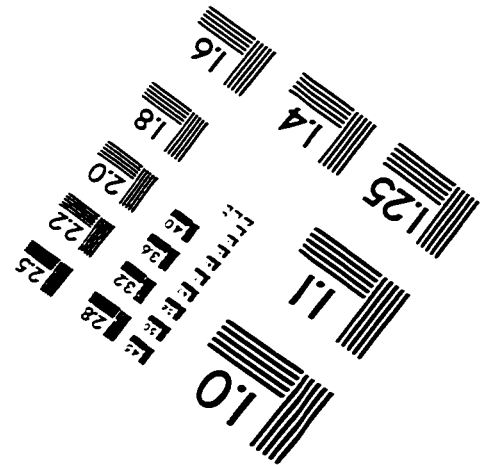
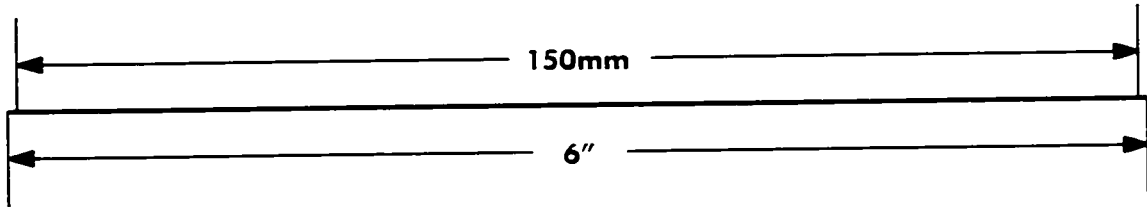
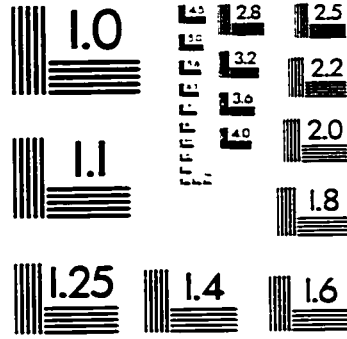
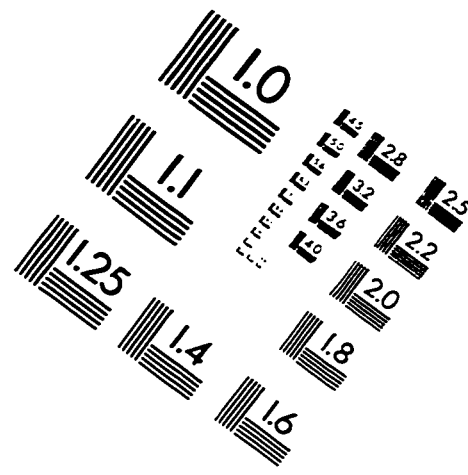
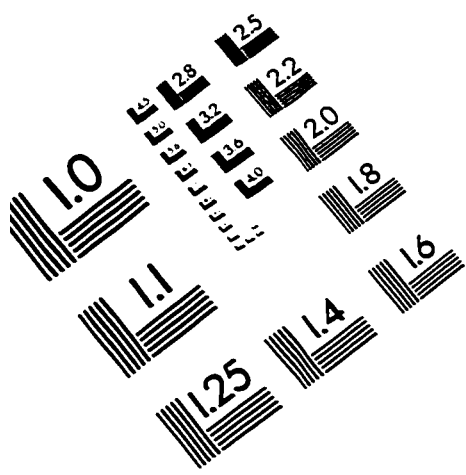
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