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JEANNENE M. PRZYBLYSKI

Revolution at a Standstill: Photography and the Paris Commune of 1871*

Revolution is a drama perhaps more than a history, and its pathos is a condition as imperious as its authenticity.

—Auguste Blanqui

"Angelus Novus"[1]

Look at them. Heads peering over piles of paving stones, smiling for the camera or squinting down the barrel of a gun (Fig. 1). They stand bathed in the flat light of late winter, suspended between the fact of photographic stillness and the promise of fighting in the streets. It hardly needs saying that in March of 1871 Paris itself was no less between states—half taken apart, half put back together. Even in Ménilmontant, far from the boulevard/showcases under construction in the city center, the effects of the official modernization projects begun under the Second Empire are detectable in the new gaslamps and iron-corseted saplings receding in the distance. Baron von Haussmann's street furniture was a sign of the times, but so equally was its use in building barricades, the one in this photograph strengthened by the interlocking fanshapes of the pavement grills designed to protect the roots of new trees. Who was in command of the forces of progress, of destruction, of regeneration? These were not easy questions to answer during the *année terrible* spanning the fall of the Second Empire and the revolutionary uprising known as the Commune. One man

*I owe special thanks to Vanessa Schwartz for her comments on an earlier draft of this essay. Research was enabled by a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend and a J. Paul Getty Postdoctoral Fellowship in the History of Art and the Humanities.

1. See Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Verso, 1969), 257, for Benjamin's reading of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus.*

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standing atop the barricade catches my eye. Baton raised to signal his troops (or to cue the photographer), he is held against the blank whiteness, transfixed, illuminated. A defiant insurgent? A playful poseur? An angel about to ascend to heaven? I look at this man and wonder what he expected to see when he faced the camera? When the shutter closed, did he feel history's force like a storm rushing against his angel-wings?

* * * * *

If you believe the newspapers, Parisians hardly could have avoided looking at the photographs made on the Commune's barricades. There also appears to have been little doubt as to their significance. Contemporary accounts had them cluttering the windows of engraving and stationary stores, displayed proudly over the mantelpieces of homes in the *faubourgs*—and falling into the hands of the police. Photographs like the one made on the boulevard de Puebla in March, it was widely reported, were used to identify those insurgents left at large in the wake of the Commune's suppression in May. "All of the arrests being made at the moment," Adrien Huart chuckled in *Le charivari,* "are owing to collodion."[2] Maxime du Camp declared that the lessons of this windfall of unintentional wanted posters were not lost on the authorities; the police went into the photography business not long after the Commune fell.[3]

By and large modern scholars of the medium have fitted these photographs into a similar narrative, identifying the Commune as an important milestone along the path of photography's progressive refinement as a tool of social oversight and regulation.[4] The barricade photographs were supplemented by numerous images of Communard notables gathered by the police into albums to identify those revolutionaries still on the lam. Hundreds more *carte de visite* portraits made

2. Adrien Huart, "Chronique du jour," *Le charivari* (21 July 1871); 4; my translation.

3. Maxime Du Camp, *Les convulsions de Paris* (Paris: Hachette, 1881), vol. 2, 235; my translation.

4. See, for example, Gen Doy, "The Camera Against the Paris Commune," in *Photography/Politics: One,* ed. Terry Dennett and Jo Spence (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1979), 17; Donald English, *Political Uses of Photography in the Third French Republic* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984), 69–70; André Rouillé, "Les images photographiques du monde du travail sous le Second Empire," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 54 (September 1984), 41. On the development of police photography in France see Christian Phéline, *L'image accusatrice* (Paris: Cahiers de la photographie, 1985) and Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 1–64.

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Figure 1. Anonymous, *Barricades, boulevard de Puebla (rue des Pyrénées), 20th arrondissement,* March 1871. Photograph. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

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in the prison camps at Versailles were added to this rudimentary archive of *malfaiteurs*. In 1874, amid continuing anxieties about recidivism, Prefect Léon Renault announced the creation of a *Service photographique de la Préfecture,* charged with the task of photographing all suspected criminals detained in Paris (the Commune stood squarely behind these anxieties: not only had its repression swelled the prison population to nearly ungovernable proportions, but the burning of the Hôtel de Ville during the Commune's last days had destroyed much of the city's civil record, making it difficult for the police to trace anyone born before 1859). In 1883 a police functionary named Alphonse Bertillon successfully identified a repeat offender via an anthropometrical system combining photography and statistical data; he would spend the next decade refining and promoting the process of criminal identification that came to be eponymically dubbed *bertillonage*. By the turn of the century, the technology of the mugshot had become a mainstay of the police and prison systems. And so it goes, we might sigh. I-could-have-told-you-so. Photography's relation to revolution is ever the same, and far more apt to serve the interests of those in the business of putting down popular uprisings than those who embrace them.

And yet . . . I find it hard to turn away from these images. I am held by their visual richness—the details of dress and physiognomy that would have been useful to the authorities, but also their hokey posturing and their cataloguing of the ad-hoc technics of barricade-building. I am touched by their combination of formal gravity and *plein air* informality, taken with their hybrid crossing of historical document and street theater. The barricade photographs offer a rare and precious vision of the living density of the Parisian street when you'd least expect it: right in the midst of Haussmannization. None of the dark and desolate alleyways slated for demolition that were so often pictured in the official photographic record; not only fighting men and women crowd the barricades, but children and sometimes even dogs perch amid the *pavés,* and rubberneckers crowd in at the sides or lean their heads out of unshuttered windows. But also none of the unstable and fugitive "impressions" typical of avant-garde versions of Parisian boulevard culture. The barricade photographs are not adequately described as alienated, disenchanted, ephemeral—in a word, "modern." Rather, their vividness is excessive rather than strategic, concrete rather than illusory, rooted in a deep familiarity with *this* street and a willingness to stand ground *right here.* They trouble the disciplinary narrative by their

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refusal of other more predominant visions of urban modernization and modernity.[5]

Or, perhaps the very terms of this refusal brought the disciplinary machinery crashing down around the Communards' heads—intransigence before the disciplinary paradigm as much as utility to it, photographically speaking. Reclaiming these terms, however, requires looking beyond the obvious connection between photography and policing, or at least asking questions about it from different angles. When the Communards mounted their barricades and faced the camera, what sparked this convergence between the repertory of revolutionary performances that was already well-established in Paris and the collective aspirations that Parisians projected on the emerging technology of photography?[6] How did the Communards' choice to "live revolution as an image" embody a bid to put photographic reality itself up for grabs? In sum, how did this choice set their claims to a place of visibility in the iconography of urban Paris and their desire for an intimate and engaged relation to its history on a collision course with the equal impetus of "the powers that be" to use photography in ways both ostensibly "disinterested" and "objective" to fix identity, define place, and write history from above?[7]

Answering such questions, I suspect, must begin by taking seriously those aspects of contemporary accounts of photography and the barricades that have been overlooked because they seem to us more frivolous or dated—a matter of petty aesthetic judgments and the same old class-based disdain. "In fact, the *fédérés* weren't bad at striking a pose," Huart allowed—before concluding his spoof on the Communards' photographic bid for "posterity" with the story of a non-combatant who couldn't resist the temptation the barricades offered to have a portrait

5. On the "simple refusal to move" as one measure of "the degree of recalcitrance, on the part of Parisians, at having Paris provided in doses by the powers that be," see T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 68–69.

6. On barricades and the repertory of images of collective action, see Mark Traugott, "Barricades as Repertoire: Continuities and Discontinuities in the History of French Contention," in Mark Traugott, ed., *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 43–56. On the desire for photography as a "conceptual . . . production" and as a "social imperative," see Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 36.

7. On "living an event as an image," see Maurice Blanchot, "The Two Versions of the Imaginary," in *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 261–62.

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made on the cheap. Protestations of innocence aside, the evidence of the photograph was irrefutable: he ended up in the crowded cellars of L'Orangerie, the makeshift prison at Versailles. Du Camp describes a typical March scene on the rue de Belleville, where a barricade was built expressly for picture-making. Once the Communards had crowded close and arranged themselves in suitably menacing postures, they held still while an obliging passerby ran for the local photographer. After the exposure was made, the paving stones were put back and traffic resumed as usual.

A caricature of the "*Barricades artistiques*" appearing in *La Parisienne* hits just as close to its mark. By heightening the appearance of Communard preening and posing, it holds up a kind of funhouse mirror to photographs like the one of the barricade spanning the rue Basfroi, thickly layered with national guardsmen and *cantinières,* and bristling with guns and swords (Figs. 2 and 3). By including the camera in the sketch, the caricature affirms the crucial role that photography played in the visual economy of the Commune's barricades, while calling attention to one of the most forceful effects of this photograph in particular, in which aperture is matched to aperture, and the monocular stare of the camera lens is perfectly aligned with the circular barrel of the cannon ready to fire. The effect was not lost on contemporary observers. "Don't move!" Du Camp gleefully repeated the familiar exhortation shared by photographer and police officer alike as he lined up the Communards in his hostile literary sights. "The photographer *shoots* the barricade and its defenders," Huart sneered, "the print/proof [*l'épreuve*] is excellent." No less than the mortar shells with which the caricaturist framed his sketch, Huart's choice of words brings to mind the grim events that so decisively put an end to the Commune. Between twenty and forty thousand were killed during the eight May days of street fighting, fires, and summary executions that became known as the *semaine sanglante.* Many thousands more were arrested, twenty-three were formally put to death by order of military tribunal (another thousand died under miserable conditions while awaiting trial). Nearly three thousand were deported to New Caledonia. Those lucky enough to survive did not return to France until the general amnesty of 1880.[8] This is where the work of writing history draws closest to redemption. It is in the full knowledge of the enormous human cost of the Com-

8. Jacques Rougerie, *Procès des communards* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 17–24.

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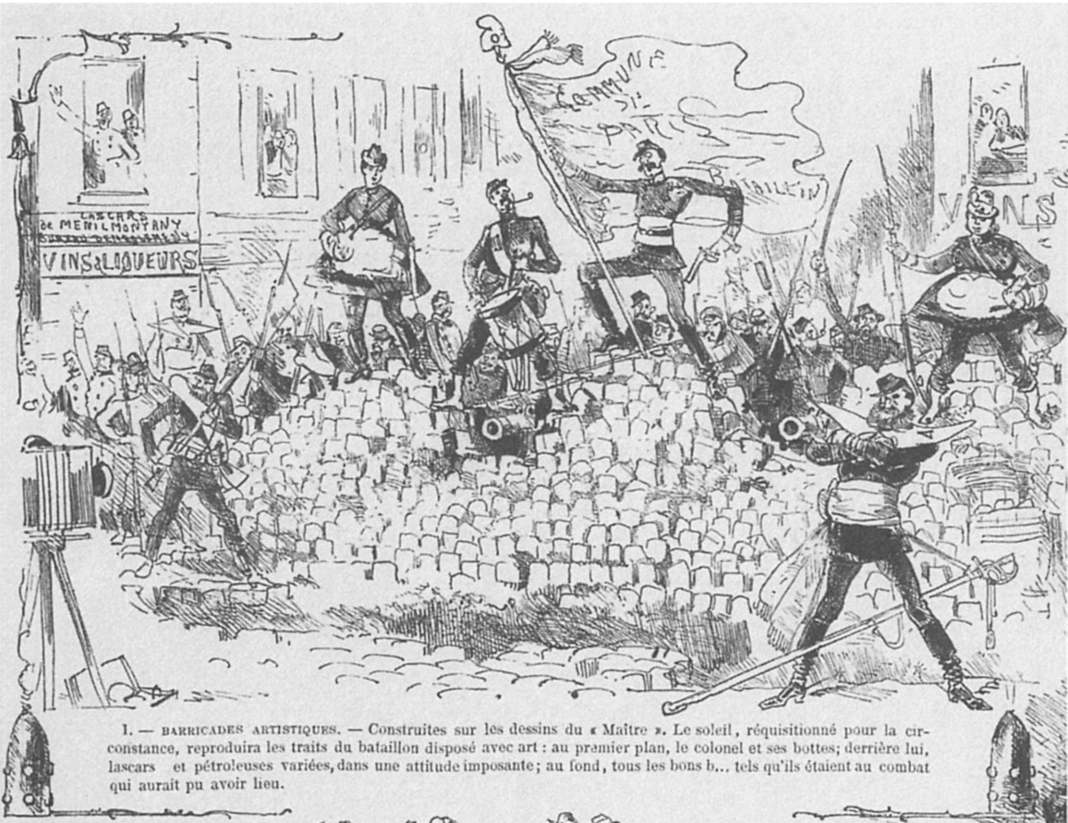

Figure 2. Anonymous, "Barricades artistiques," *La vie parisienne* (30 September 1871): 932. Lithograph. University of California, Berkeley.

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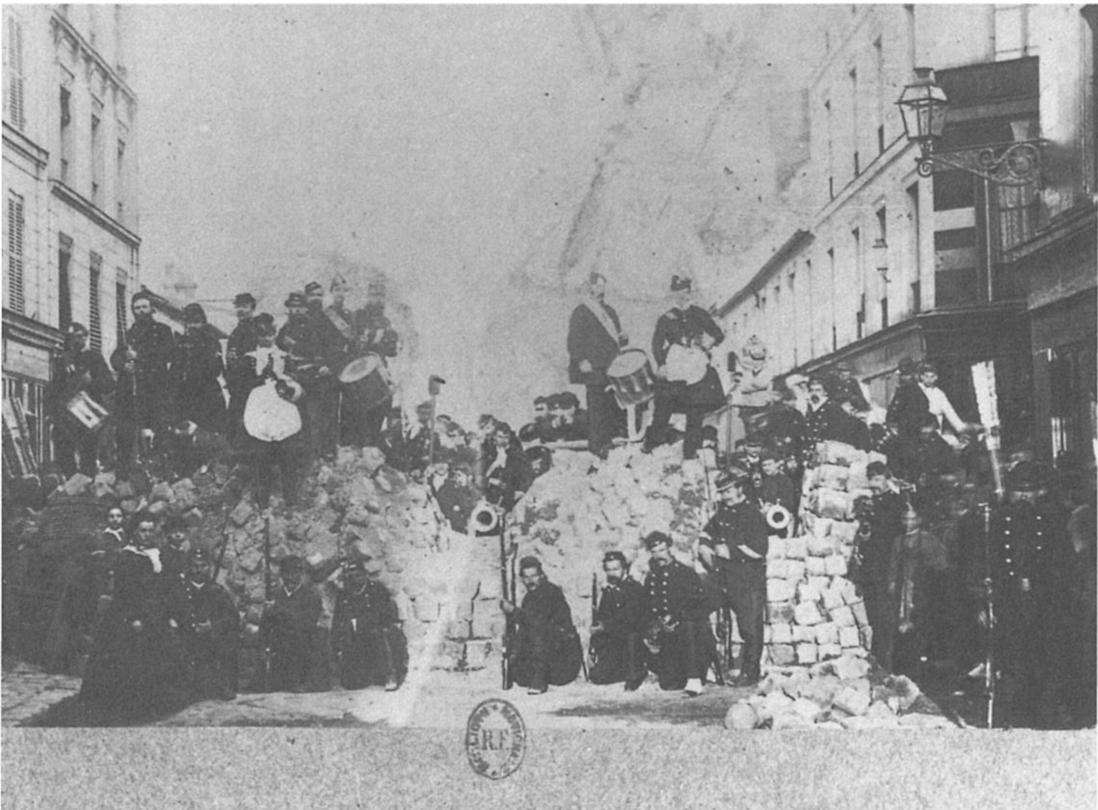

Figure 3. Anonymous, *Barricades, rue Basfroi, intersection of rue de Charonne, 11th arrondissement*, March 1871. Photograph, Bibliothèque national, Paris.

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mune's suppression that it seems so necessary to look again at the relation between the Commune, the material history of photography, and the representational politics of the barricades.

* * * * *

The first thing that should be said is that Du Camp's acid contempt for the barricade photographs and Huart's gloating parody were nothing new. They join in a larger body of nineteenth-century criticism expressing dismay at the public's fascination with the automated ease of photographic "reality"—its vulgar mimeticism, cheap theatrics, and aesthetics of the lowest common demonimator. Among others, Charles Baudelaire took elegant aim at photography in his essay on the Salon of 1859. Photography confused exactitude and truth, he complained, offering mere artifice in place of art. Just as bad, it seemed to attract a crowd, an "idolatrous mob [demanding] an ideal worthy of itself and appropriate to its nature" who found in the photographer a suitable agent of its newly industrialized aesthetic. "By bringing together a group of male and female clowns," Baudelaire continued,

> got up like butchers and laundry-maids at a carnival, and by begging these *heroes* to be so kind as to hold their chance grimaces for the time necessary for the performance, the operator flattered himself that he was reproducing tragic or elegant scenes from ancient history.[9]

Baudelaire's now classic *cri de coeur* against the tastelessness of photography's imitative capacities prefigures with startling accuracy the mainstream response to the barricade photographs. It indulges in a similar pattern of fault-finding, annoyed with the confusion of history and play-acting that photography seemed to encourage, and deeply suspicious of its complicity with society's baser predilections for facile legibility and sensationalistic pleasures. Most importantly, it pits Baudelaire's aesthetic elitism against what he saw as a broader culture of narcissism linking the fortunes of the photographic entrepreneur as one of the "industrial nomads" spawned by the rapid transformation of Paris under Haussmannization to the desire of an increasingly unsettled population for an image of itself.[10] Of course in Baudelaire's day, it

9. Translated in Vicki Goldberg, ed., *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 124.

10. Victor Fournel, *Paris nouveau et Paris futur* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1868), 129–30. On the photography industry during the Second Empire, see Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848–1871* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

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was hardly a "mob" of laundresses and butchers who had commandeered the camera; it would be quite a while before the average worker could afford the luxury of a session in the photographer's studio. During the Second Empire, photography functioned as an art of self-representation largely for the bourgeoisie, who embrraced it as a means to approximate the more privileged realm of painted portraiture. Their early and enthusiastic patronage of the new technology ensured that what Roland Barthes characterized as photography's alignment with "the body's formality," its considerable power as "an art of the Person," would be inextricably mingled with the signifiers of public identity, civil status, and social affiliations worn on the surface of the bourgeois body in particular.[11]

The barricades, however, made things look different—transforming the photographic genre scenes Baudelaire detested into a kind of portraiture by voluntary association that was to be equally decried by the Commune's critics. Not for nothing were all those March stories of the Commune as street party, in which passersby were gaily invited to join the impromptu construction crews or suffer the consequences: Contribute a *pavé* and become one of us![12] The spontaneous and celebratory quality of these actions led Henri Lefebvre to characterize the Commune as the "last popular festival," a turn of phrase that had as much to do with registering the barricades' ceremonial power as with lamenting their military ineffectiveness (in 1871, they could amount to little more than ritual—even before Haussmann's new boulevards allowed the military to make an end run around the barricades, the cannon, introduced in 1830, had effectively spelled their doom).[13] The group photo opportunity functioned as a similar intervention in the practices of everyday life, bringing together the Commune's true believers and mixing it up with those more like Huart's hapless Communard-impersonator, whose barricade antics were little more than a moment's whim. But this heterogeneity also went to the heart of the Commune's act of photographic provocation. When the Communard

11. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 79.

12. See, for example, "La Journée," *La patrie* (20 March 1871): 2; "À l'Hôtel de Ville. Dimanche matin, neuf heures," *Le petit journal* (20 March 1871): 2; "La journée d'hier. Les barricades et l'Hôtel de Ville," *La patrie* (21 March 1871): 1.

13. Henri Lefebvre, "La Commune. Dernière fête populaire," in James A. Leith, ed., *Images of the Commune—Images de la Commune* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1978), 33–45. See also Kirstin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 33.

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crowd faced the camera, they added another layer to the already substantial iconography of the barricade. Even more importantly, they also widened the realm of possibility for claiming a relation of confident entitlement to and playful familiarity with photography itself.

This was at least part of the problem: when the Second Empire's "industrial nomads" took their cameras to the streets, they also, if only hypothetically, opened the doors of the photographic studio to the Communards, and made of studio portraiture a comparable battlefield, where the signifiers of likeness were too readily counterfeited, and difference threatened to collapse into the same photographic performances. Photography's instantiation of the real, its eye for detail, its authority as evidence, and its paper-thin promise of immortality seemed to turn the barricades into a stage populated not by actors, but by ordinary people who, awakened to the expressive potential of their own bodies, acted as if they might define themselves by playing willingly and casually, almost thoughtlessly, to the camera. In other words, the Communards posing on the barricades explicitly laid claim to the theatricality that is intrinsic to photographic reality, to the performativity that is the counterpart to its opticality, especially in the commercialized realm of the photographic portrait. In doing so they put to the test what Pierre Bourdieu has called the "mediate relationship" of photography to social identity, contesting the ways in which an individual's stance before the camera not only inscribes him or her within a group, but intersects the whole structure of group identity as negotiated through photography.[14]

This photographic dispute did not end with the Commune's demise, but continued in the prison yards of Versailles, where the autumn months of 1871 would have found yet another "nomad" setting up his camera to document the Communard detainees. Ernest Eugène Appert had struck an especially good deal. In return for providing images of the accused to the government, he also retained exclusive rights over their reproduction. And to better facilitate the orderly procession of Communards before his camera, he promised each sitter a number of portraits for their own use.[15] In their memoirs of the Commune, both Marc-Amédée Gromier, secretary to the Communard leader Félix Pyat, and the Communard activist Louise Michel reported having their portraits made by Appert. Gromier remembers waiting in the photogra-

14. Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art,* trans. Shaun Whiteside (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 9.

15. *Gazette des tribunaux* (29 October 1872): 1049–50.

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pher's line with the journalist Abel Peyroutin and the Commune's Delegate of War, Louis Rossel, both of whom greeted him with some surprise, since notices of Gromier's death had been widely published in the papers.[16] Small wonder that the Communards so willingly submitted to Appert's camera. Amid all the confusion and counterinformation, his photographs offered some means of assuring the subjects' loved ones that they were still alive.

Appert's prison portraits are poignant images. More often than not tired and gaunt faces confront the camera; the Communards' abjection is obvious. But so is their stake in the photographic confrontation. Look closely and notice that if clothes are torn and dirty, they have also been hastily tidied. Arms were neatly folded, hair smoothed in make-do style; one woman struck a self-conscious air, hand to chin; two sisters posed together, as did fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. While a few Communards continued to affect the attitudes of defiance more typical of the barricade photographs (a barrel-chested man in *képi* stood arms akimbo; one *cantinière* straddled her chair and jauntily smoked a cigar), most opted for respectability. When his turn in line came, Rossel leaned almost confidingly toward the camera, his dark, full hair and bushy mustache framing deep-set eyes that look squarely into the lens (Fig. 4). Thumb hooked into waistcoat over a dangling pocket watch, he looks more like a lawyer or a journalist than a military traitor and dangerous insurgent who would stand a few months later before a firing squad on the plain of Satory.

On the one hand, their very respectability reveals these images to be no less theatrical inventions than the barricade photographs. Respectability could also be a kind of playing for the camera, a set of postures and a way of holding the body that had been seen often enough in the photographer's window to be copied and performed almost by rote. For most of the Communard prisoners, the choice to mime the practices of bourgeois decorum before the camera must have seemed not much of a choice at all; it was one of the few options available at a moment when self-preservation seemed inextricable from self-representation. But on the other hand, the prison portraits also implicate the poses of bourgeois respectability as themselves signifiers of disciplinary subjection. By envisioning the honorific become interchangeable with the repressive, the consensual become indistinguishable from the imposed, they suggest just how deeply plotted together these two mod-

16. Marc-Amédée Gromier, *Journal d'un vaincu* (Paris: Havard, 1892), 217. Louise Michel, *La Commune* (Paris: Stock, 1898), 305.

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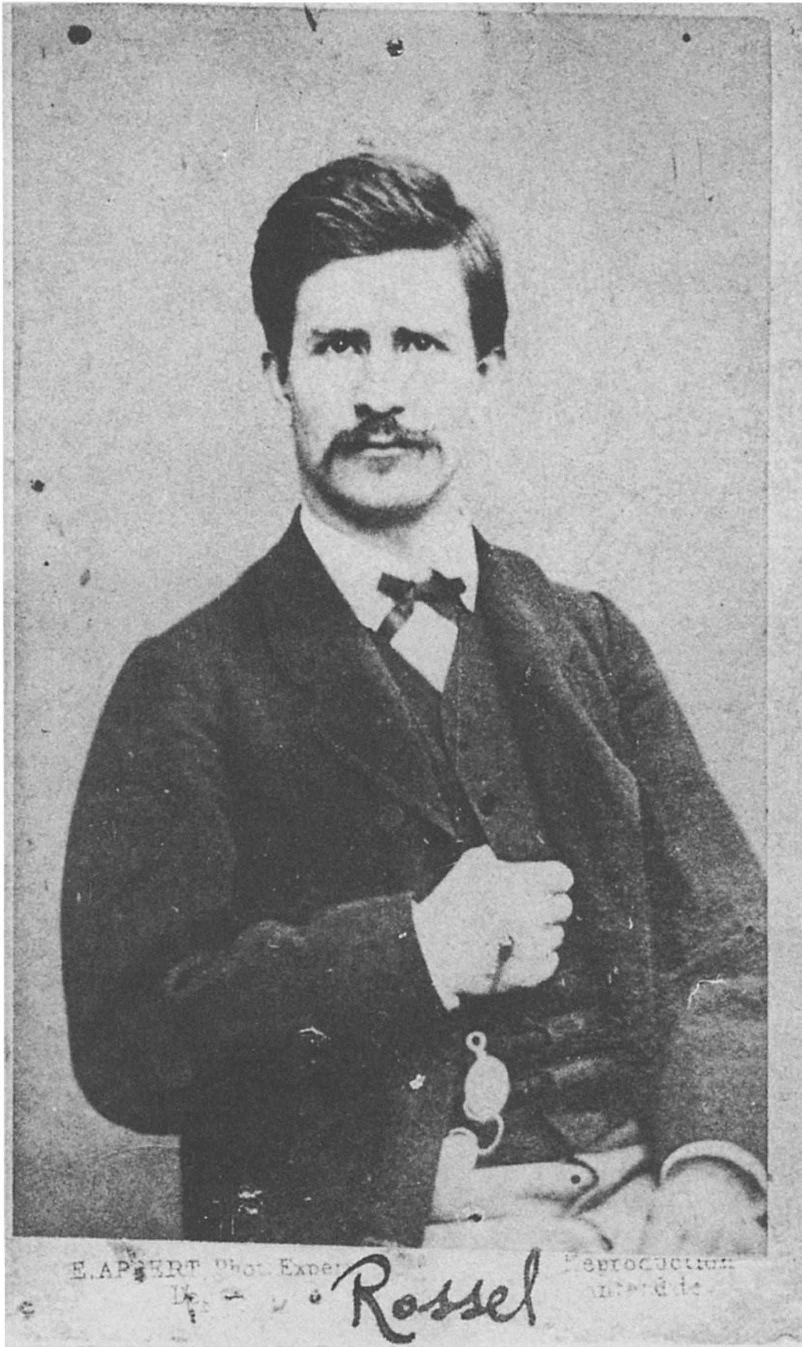

Figure 4. Ernest Eugène Appert, *Louis Rossel,* 1871. Carte de visite photograph. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

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alities have been historically—not only as products of photographic technology but as embodied relations to it. Like some of the sketches that appeared in the popular press during the first decades of photography (Daumier's observational joke about the uncomfortable lengths to which the bourgeois would go to facilitate the camera's exact transcription of his features, for example, or *L'illustration*'s sober illustration of the difficulty in getting a good-enough likeness from a resistant detainee), Appert's prison photographs threaten to collapse functional distinctions between the portrait and the police photograph (Figs. 5 and 6). They also dramatize the degree to which the mugshot could not completely come into its own as an authoritative means of constructing the criminal subject until the external supports enforcing compliance had become superfluous, the mugshot's ability to typify deviance as fully internalized (its truths so seemingly inevitable) as those photographic genres and their generic conventions celebrating individuality.

So the challenge of the prison portraits to the usual order of things cut both ways. They offered the Communards a second chance in the face of disaster while continuing, like the barricade photographs, to taint the prerogatives of bourgeois self-representation by association. Stabilizing this challenge could not be a police matter alone, all the more so since the images circulated widely; Appert busily sold them off to curiosity-seekers, and licensed them to the press. To the extent that an equally commercial counter-initiative was called for, something like Appert's *Crimes de la Commune* would seem to better fit the bill. These panoramic scenes of the most notorious of Communard atrocities, punctuated by a retributory re-staging of the executions of Rossel, Sergeant Bourgeois, and Théophile Ferré, are the ersatz history paintings worthy of a Baudelaire's disdain—cut and paste extravaganzas combining the faces of the imprisoned Communards with the bodies of actors hired to pose on the rue des Rosiers, rue Haxo, in Mazas and La Roquette prisons where, in the last desperate days of the Commune, its enemies (both real and imagined) had been put to death. Appert's transposition of Rossel's living image (made in September) to the moment of his death (in November) is disturbing enough; how callous a hand it must have taken to glue a tiny white blindfold over his eyes. But even stranger is another Appert production, a composite collectible of the Communard "celebrity" Rossel, restored to the full military regalia he had earned in the fight against Bismarck and photographically relocated from the detention yards at Versailles to the drapery-swagged and pedestal-cluttered interior of the portrait studio (Fig. 7).

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Figure 5. Honoré Daumier, "Les bons bourgeois. Position réputée la plus commode pour avoir un joli portrait au daguerréotype," in *Le charivari* (24 July 1847). Lithograph. University of California, Berkeley.

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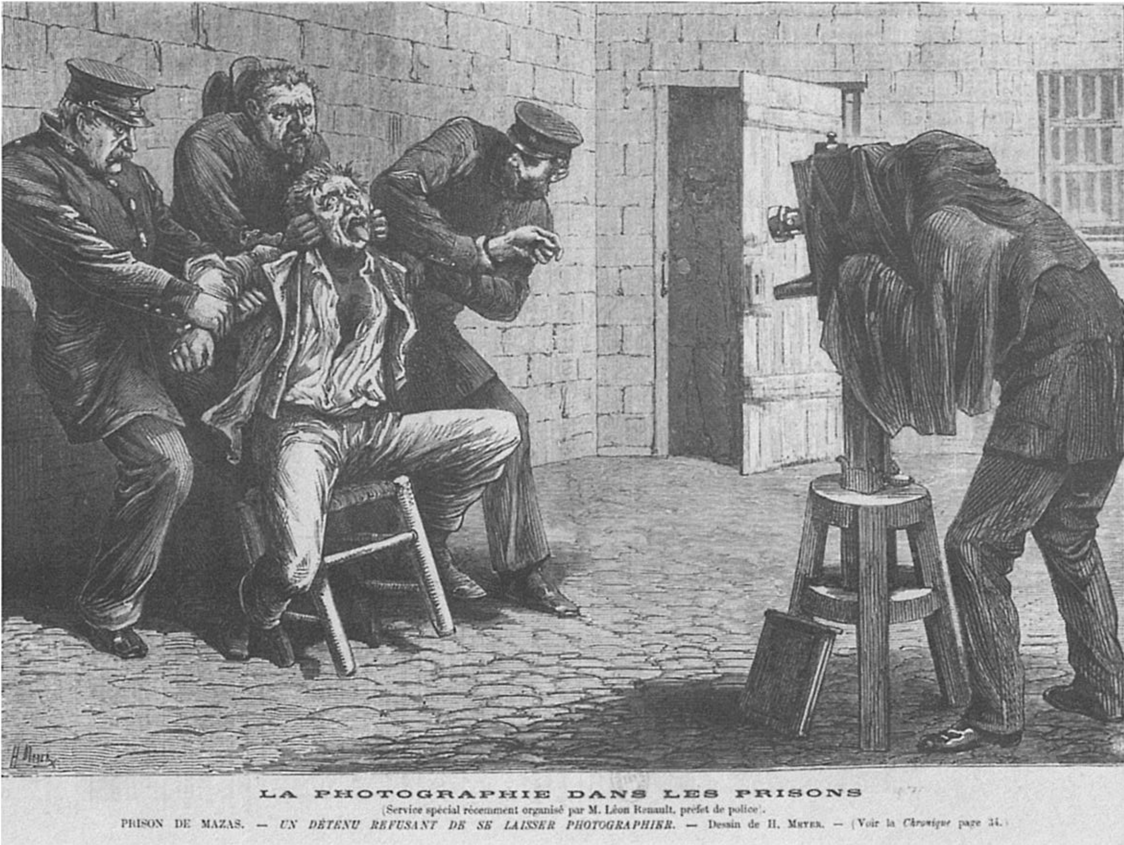

Figure 6. H. Meyer, *La photographie dans les prisons,* c. 1875. Lithograph. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

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Figure 7. Ernest Eugène Appert, *Louis Rossel,* c. 1871. Carte de visite composite photograph. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

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It has been pointed out often enough that Appert's *Crimes* are a nasty business, part of a long history of trumped up attempts to trick a gullible public with photographically manipulated propaganda.[17] But Appert's composite portraits strike me as even more insidious, not merely because they are falsified images masquerading as real, but because they potentially expose all photographic portraits as fictions, unmasking even the fragile decorum of the Communard prisoners as little more than disguise. By ironically reimposing the most reified photographic accouterments of bourgeois entitlement on the mimetic gambits of the prison portraits, and stifling the expressiveness of the body's "formality" in a mocking straitjacket of military rank, the composite Rossel provides the pendant image to his death at Satory that his prison portrait alone could not be—laminating Rossel's identity as a Communard with the artifacts of his dishonorable betrayal of his class and his commission as an army colonel. But it is more than that: look at the composite long enough and feel Rossel's body solidifying beyond the body's solidity, the photomontaged dress uniform framing his head like a sarcophagus. By willfully flattening the self-sustained stillness of the body as it gathers itself for presentation to the world into the immobilization of the body displayed, Appert's composite has the uncanny effect of aligning the portrait studio with the executioner's wall. The photograph's "likeness," powerfully convincing and unsettlingly inert, becomes like nothing so much as a corpse (Blanchot, 258).

This is the haunting power of Appert's parodic embalming of Rossel in the portrait studio: by externalizing the mortifying effects of the photographic pose, it raises the specter of the dead. Of course, in the weeks following the Commune, one would not have had to look far afield to find more concrete manifestations of their presence. Communard casualties began to accrue in earnest in April and the Communard government, hard pressed to see to the orderly return of remains to family and friends, commissioned photographers to help in the process of identification. When faced with an exponentially greater body count in May, the Versailles government appears to have authorized the continuation of photographic operations. These "morgue" photo-

17. On this series, see Jeannene M. Przyblyski, "Moving Pictures: Photography, Narrative and the Paris Commune of 1871," in Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 253–78; and "Between Seeing and Believing: Representing Women in Appert's *Crimes de la Commune*," in Dean de la Motte and Przyblyski, eds., *Making the News: Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 233–78.

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graphs would seem to provide a vision of grim finality to the Commune's embrace of a spurious, photographic aestheticism (Fig. 8). Heads are crumpled at unnatural angles, teeth are bared, clothing is torn and muddy, faces are swollen with bloat and eroding in decay. As examples of the extreme violence with which the corpse unmakes the body's "cultural content," this stripping away of the social signifiers animating the body in life provides the context for the rumors abounding in post-Commune Paris that photographs of Confederate casualities of the U.S. Civil War were being hawked to souvenir hunters as images of dead *fédérés;* in the continuing climate of vicarious blood lust that followed the repression of the Commune, one picture of a dead rebel was as good as another.[18] But such grisly opportunism also demonstrates the degree to which these images, so anaesthetic in their instrumental bleakness, remained deeply complicit in the Baudelairean vision of Parisian photographic practices as thoroughly commercialized and fashionably of the moment. In ways both banal and chilling, the morgue photographs function as the literal image of photographic fashionability's allegorical pairing with death.[19]

* * * * *

For the Commune's detractors, the difference between mere fashion and this latest revolutionary incarnation amounted to very little, especially with respect to photography. Huart saved his most damning sally against the Communards on the barricades for last. "In '93," he chided, "even if photography had existed, the revolutionaries of the time would have never thought to pose before the cameras of Disderi, Nadar, and their colleagues." As an accusation of the "crime" of a hankering for the trendy photographic emporiums of the *grands boulevards,* Huart's insult, like Appert's commodified souvenirs, was part of a host of gambits by which the Commune was to be retrospectively trivialized in the popular press as a kind of insurrectionary dandyism—the latest *article de Paris,* as *La vie parisienne* was fond of declaring.[20] Just as significantly, however, it yokes the discredited representational

18. Viator, "From Across the Water," *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* (December 1871), 397. My thanks to Alisa Luxenberg for this citation. On the "emptying of the body of cultural content" in death, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 118–19.

19. Walter Benjamin, "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard/Belknap, 1999), 18–19.

20. "Petite chronique," *La vie parisienne* (16 September 1871): 905.

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Figure 8. Anon., *Insurgés non réclamés,* 1871. Photograph. Gernsheim Collection. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

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politics of revolution *à la mode* to the Commune's self-conscious relation to the revolutionary heritage of 1793, most particularly as it was claimed by the followers of Auguste Blanqui, the legendary insurrectionist whose incarceration for the duration of the Commune did not prevent him from being a significant force in its ideological formation.[21] The Blanquists might well have joined with Huart in admitting that the barricade photographs—cheap and brash, "the historical event iself become a mass article," swept up into a circuit of mass, promiscious desire—were not quite what they had in mind when they dreamed of recreating the elaborate popular festivals of Thermidor (the hastily organized toppling of the Vendôme Column, also much photographed, would not be much of an improvement). But insofar as the barricade photographs *as* mass articles conjure up the image of revolution as "eternal return" (revolution come back yet again but as it never was in '93 or '30 or '48, its photographic difference the very figure of the accelerated pace of revolutionary crisis), then this effect was also, in Walter Benjamin's words, inextricable from the "traces of economic circumstances to which [they] owed [their] sudden currency."[22]

Here, according to Benjamin, is the relevant passage from Blanqui's *L'éternité par les astres*, the book on cosmology he wrote in prison in 1871:

> The entire universe is composed of astral systems. To create them, nature has only a hundred *simple bodies* at its disposal. . . . [T]he result is necessarily a *finite* number, like that of the elements themselves; and in order to fill its expanse, nature must repeat to infinity each of its *original* combinations or *types*. So each heavenly body, whatever it might be, exists in infinite number in time and space, not only in *one* of its aspects but as it is at each second of its existence, from birth to death. . . . Every human being is thus eternal at every second of his or her existence. What I write at this moment in a cell of the Fort du Taureau I have written and shall write throughout all eternity—at a table, with a pen, clothed as I am now, in circumstances like these. And thus it is for everyone. . . . The number of our doubles is infinite in time and space. One cannot in good conscience demand anything more. These doubles exist in flesh and bone—indeed in trousers and jacket, in crinoline and

21. On Blanqui and the Commune, see Patrick H. Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864–1893* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 49–54.

22. Quoted in Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 31. On Benjamin, photography, and Blanqui, see Cadava, 31–42.

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> chignon. They are by no means phantoms; they are the present eternalized. Here, nonetheless, lies a great drawback: there is no progress. . . . What we call "progress" is confined to each particular world, and vanishes with it. Always and everywhere in the terrestrial arena, the same drama, the same setting, on the same narrow stage—a noisy humanity infatuated with its own grandeur. . . . The same monotony, the same immobility. . . . The universe repeats itself endlessly and paws the ground in place. In infinity, eternity performs—imperturbably—the same routines. ["Paris," 25–26]

For the Communards who struck one repertory of poses on the barricades of the boulevard de Puebla, the rues de Charonne, des Pyrenées, de Belleville, de Basfroi, and elsewhere, only to strike another pose in the prison yards of Versailles, or to end up staring sightlessly at the camera in a numbing parade of anonymous corpses, *l'actualité éternisée* is the image of cosmological repetition as catastrophe—the doomed repetition of a limited set of possibilities whose finitude can only be dimly grasped from the prison house of the present. It is also the image of cosmological repetition as a photographic image, proliferated through copies, infinitely reproducible, each image little more than typical; Blanqui's "noisy humanity infatuated with its own grandeur" is deeply resonant with the ragtag figures of Baudelaire's "tragic or elegant scenes from ancient history." Equally significantly, in Blanqui's cosmology this photographic repetition works not with but against the authority of progress as an animating force of the disciplinary narrative, not with but against the tendency to wed the trajectory from revolution to repression to the promise of the perfectibility of photographic technologies of ordering and overseeing the world. Instead it sets the sameness, the monotony, and the static immobility of the photographic copy against photography's equal affinity for lifelikeness, illusory mobility, and fashionable novelty ("crinolines and chignons")—in a word, the effects of instantaneity and ephemerality that inform photography's dominant aesthetic myths.

I said at the outset that the barricade photographs did not seem adequately described as modern. This is what I mean: for the Communards facing the camera, the catastrophic is instantiated by *holding still.* Du Camp was right: "*Ne bougeons plus!*" The Communards' voluntary assumption of the pose might be contrasted on the one hand to "arrest" (the imposition of stillness through police restraint) and, on the other, to the endless stillness of the morgue. The immobility of the Communards on the barricades is not yet the funereal stillness of

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death, but rather the stillness of historical contingency. As the embodiment of the photographic "currency" that linked the fortunes of the barricades and the camera in 1871, this stillness defines the photographic relation to actuality and mortality, everyday life and history, commercial camera practice, its technological limitations and its attendant tactics of self-representation that allowed the uncertain play of identity to open up—all too briefly—in the space between the street, the portrait studio, and the prison. In this respect, the vision provided by the barricade images of photography as a habitable state of mind for those on the economic and social margins was not only a matter of too-little-too-late (it is not merely a question of faulting the foolhardy Communards for posing on the barricades when they should have been organizing for battle). It was also too-much-too-soon, an apparently unregulated vision of photographic immortality that would not be safely permissible until it had been transformed into the ephemeral instantaneity of a standardized and thoroughly commodified "Kodak moment."

This then is the power (and the threat) of the barricade photographs as revolutionary images. In their banal repetition, their purloined aesthetics, and their tragic inability to imagine any other relation to the camera than the ones that had already been, they remind us that the risk of an engaged relation to history as performative, self-conscious, deeply (and yet casually, almost thoughtlessly) invested in the "battlefield of representations," is the surrender of voluntary will (even as it appears as voluntary, a matter of the brave or imprudent choice to stand on the barricades, to be photographed, and to fight) (Clark, 6). The risk is to give one's self up to the symbolic order, to mourn that there is no hopeful way to see oneself outside it. But this risk also resists the dominant fiction of the disciplinary regime of the photographic archive, the fiction that anyone can stand apart from the archive—using it, ordering it, and bending it to social imperative while remaining oneself above the fray, safely segregated by the line drawn between the celebratory and repressive practices of photography, a boundary line imposed not only by cultural conceit but by the institutionalized history of photography and its uses. This is the fiction that must be fought at all costs—because it is the fiction that allows the distinction between "them" and "us," the false distinction upon which theories of domination and repression rest. The photographs of the barricades in 1871 allow us to glimpse this fiction for what it is; they demand that we recognize that we are all joined together as "doubles," in the body's "for-

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Figure 9. Anon., *Barricades, rue des Amandiers, near Père Lachaise cemetery, 20th arrondissement,* March 1871, Photograph. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

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mality," its mortality and in its persistence (its infinitude) as a universe of photographic copies.

* * * * *

Look at them. Grouped around the fortifications of earthworks and paving stones built on the rue des Amandiers near Père Lachaise cemetery, where the last of the Communards would make a desperate stand only a few weeks later (Fig. 9). Crouched in a pit fronting the barricades, the National Guardsmen posed arms to the ready while the neighborhood looked on. We know only too well that the men will prove better at menacing the camera than the Versailles troops, and the pit is the same place where many of those who had fallen during the "bloody week" would later be buried. Why *were* these photographs made? Perhaps it *was* for the fun of it—out of the sheer giddiness of playing at revolution, or out of the boredom that arose when the Versaillais failed to attack in March and the jubilant Communards were left, if only for a short while, with nothing else to do. The men on the barricades shake their fist at history, they seem prepared to will the Commune into being. Look at them. If the Communards seem to us now to already have one foot in the grave, it is worth recalling, in the words of Benjamin, that "only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious" ("Theses," 255).

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