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Comets & Barricades: Insurrectionary Imagination in Exile

Sean Bonney

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Let every word indicate the most frightening of distances, it would still take billions of centuries, talking at one word per second, to express a distance which is only an insignificance when it comes to infinity.¹

– Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *Eternity by the Stars*

Imprisoned on the day before the declaration of the Paris Commune, in a cell in the Fort du Taureau, ‘an ellipse-shaped fortified island lying half a mile outside of the rock shores of Morlaix at a place where, after briefly morphing into the English Channel, the Atlantic Ocean finally returns to the North Sea’, Blanqui tries to imagine absolute infinity, and further, how that infinity might be expressed in language. He wrote his ‘astronomical hypothesis’, *Eternity by the Stars*, in the months following the bloody massacre that finally defeated the Commune, and while Walter Benjamin was accurate in describing the book as a final statement of revolutionary defeat, an account of the universe as an inescapable hell, an infernal kaleidoscopic system, it is also a book that imagines insurrection on a cosmic scale, and in cosmic time. A book of shattered poetry, equivalent to its near contemporaries *Une Saison en Enfer* and *Maldoror*; works that get called poetry simply

because there is nothing else to call them, or rather this is poetry transformed by its proximity to the revolutionary imagination. Franklin Rosemont writes:

Wasn't it under the sign of *poetry*, after all that Marx came to recognize himself as an enemy of the bourgeois order? Everyone knows the famous 'three components' of Marxism: German philosophy, English economics and French socialism. But what about the poets of the world: Aeschylus and Homer and Cervantes, Goethe and Shelley? To miss this fourth component is to miss a lot of Marx (and indeed, a lot of *life*). A whole critique of post-Marx Marxism could be based on this calamitous 'oversight.'²

This only makes sense within the context of a definition of 'poetry' very different from that of bourgeois versifiers, be they of the so-called mainstream or the so-called avant-garde. In his cell, Blanqui's concerns transform from questions of strategy into those of imagination, into poetics as a form of self-defence. The enormity of the sentence that Blanqui describes – i.e. a sentence that can be almost imagined, but never spoken – is a counter to and negation of the sentence the judge had imposed upon him. Within an infinite universe, defeat is always inevitable, but so also is victory. The judge's sentence expresses an absolute compression of all of Blanqui's life: his activity, his 'literary' production is crushed into the counter-infinity of his reality as prisoner, trapped in absolute immobility, whose guards have instructions to shoot if he goes near the windows. The judge's sentence encloses him, traps him in an eternity where 'what I write at this moment in a cell at 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'. But what he writes there is the attempt to imagine a universe where the judge's sentence is, if not impossible, then, within the context of the infinite, absolutely insignificant. For Blanqui, the universe is 'populated by an infinite number of globes and leaves no room in any corner for darkness, for solitude and for immobility'. The darkness and solitude of his cell is left out of the universe that he imagines, and thus the revolutionary imagination is also left out, meaning that Blanqui, and the radical traditions that he represents, must occupy a counter-universe, an anti-gravity, a negative magnetism that the thought of the bourgeoisie cannot enter, encompass or occupy. The judge's sentence has occupied all of reality, and so Blanqui's imagination is forced to become the defect in that sentence, an insurrectionary poetics that comes to define the judge's law, and as such makes that law insignificant and ridiculous. Blanqui said as much in the face of an earlier prison sentence, in his Defence Speech of 1832:

I am thus not in front of judges, but in the presence of enemies; so it would be quite useless to defend myself. Also, I have no fear of any sentence that you may pass on

me, while protesting nevertheless with energy against this substitution of violence for justice, for this frees me in the future of any inhibition against repaying the law with force.³

Even when captured and walled in, Blanqui refuses to accept that the judge's language can enclose him: the judge's sentence is perversely liberating, the law as it expresses itself within the insurrectionary imagination ignites a 'force', a force that, by 1871, would be expressing itself in a cosmic rage that would make the judge inaudible. Even in 1832, he concluded his defiant mockery of the power of the judge with a threat that anticipated the visions of his later cosmological speculations:

You confiscated the rifles of July. Yes; but the bullets have taken off. Every bullet is on its way around the world: they strike without cease; they will continue to strike until not a single enemy of the happiness of the people and of freedom is left standing.

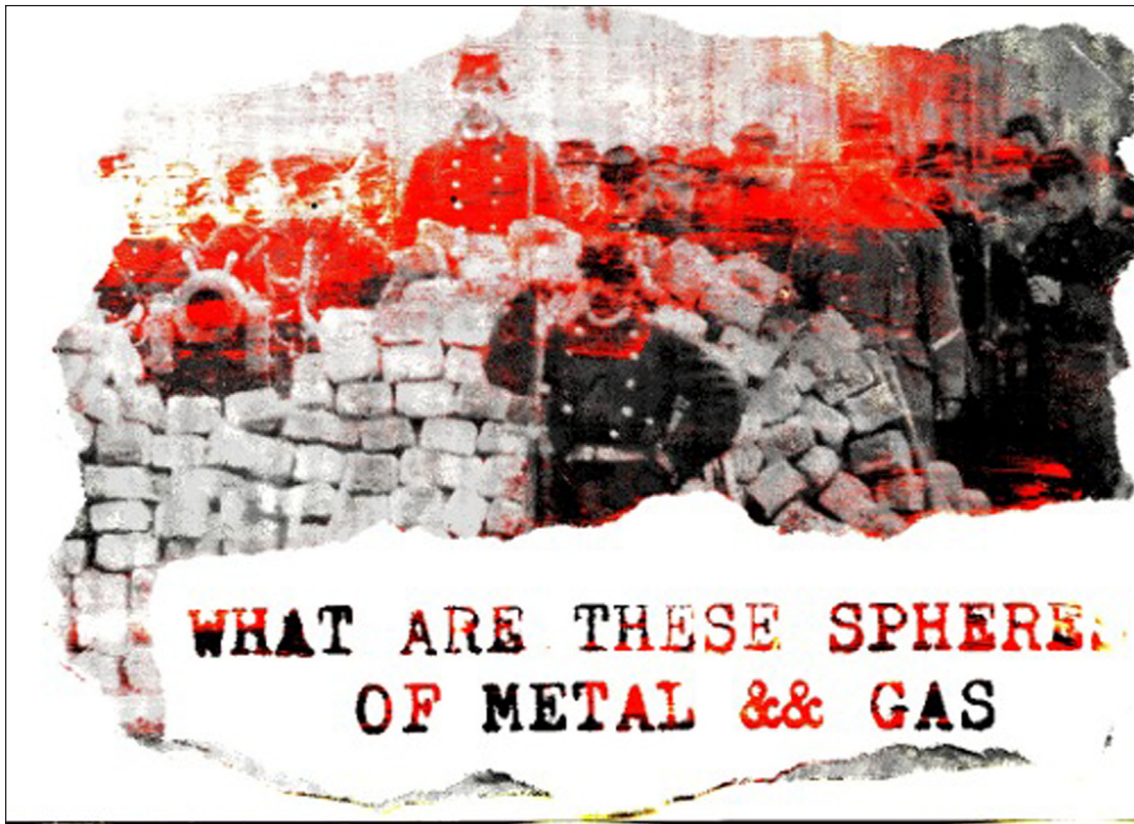
Bourgeois barbarity makes the bullets of the insurrectionaries into semi-imaginary machines; semi-imaginary in that, to use a Surrealist formulation, 'the imaginary is what tends to become real'.⁴ Even a failed insurrection has set off an anti-cyclonic ring that will compress, tighten and finally implode bourgeois reality. But how much use is this for Blanqui in his netherworld? For all his defiance and bravery, he is still locked up. His insurrectionary imagination is still only imaginary. His invisibility, in his cell, is not a spectral threat to the bourgeoisie, but one imposed by a reality he refuses to acknowledge. He has been defeated by the negation of imagination and the all-too-real abstractions and vampiric vortices of capital. Benjamin summed up his fate: 'within three decades they have erased the name of Blanqui almost entirely, though at the sound of that name the preceding century had quaked'.⁵ It is the 'almost', the almost imperceptible crack in the walls of his cell, which prevents despair. In 1850 Marx had anticipated that erasure, suggesting that it was through the negation of the actual name 'Blanqui' that a proletariat victory would become a force that could shatter the imaginary and become a possibility. 'The proletariat rallies more and more round revolutionary socialism, round communism, for which the bourgeoisie has invented the name Blanqui'.⁶ The name 'Blanqui' becomes a trap. It is a bourgeois obfuscation of the real possibility of communism, the substitution of the personality for the revolutionary idea. Blanqui himself becomes the prison walls that keep the revolutionary imagination quarantined, excluded from cosmological history, as well as preventing human history from becoming cosmological. By imprisoning Blanqui, by erasing him, the judge has deprived the bourgeoisie themselves of a name that they can fear, but also a name

that they can hide behind. Just as Blanqui represents a crack in the judge's law, so the prison sentence implies a crack in Blanqui's name, through which the revolutionary imagination can escape. By intoning his prison sentence, the judge intones the death sentence for the world he defines.

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Benjamin thought the poet with the most immediate affinities with Blanqui was Baudelaire. The conspiratorial cells that Blanqui operated in, according to Benjamin, were closer to the bohemia of Baudelaire, closer to poets and criminal weirdos than to the organised working class. A more accurate affinity, however, would be with Rimbaud, who more than any other could be called the poet of the Commune. Rimbaud's 'logical derangement of all the senses' is a theorisation of the convulsions in collective subjectivity set off by the experience of the Commune. The senses are not the privatised senses of the official world, Bohemian or otherwise, but a collectivity that runs outward into a revolutionary sensory system that itself reaches backwards and forwards into time, upending capitalist temporality. The young Marx, famously, wrote that 'the forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present', and so, for Rimbaud, the task of poetic labour is to suggest methods to bring about the derangement of the 'entire history of the world'.

'*L'Orgie Parisienne*' is one of Rimbaud's great poems relating to the Commune. In it, he imagines the bourgeoisie re-entering the city following the final massacres of the Communards. They are a parade of insipid and wretched grotesques: 'hip wrigglers', 'puppets', 'panting idiots' with 'hearts of filth' and 'terrifying mouths'. They drink themselves senseless, ignoring the traces of the Commune all around them, the boarded-up shops with 'Business as Usual' pasted onto them, the stink of gasoline and liberty and blood. But for Rimbaud the city itself is a slaughtered Communard, and the wounds and the scars that the Commune and its violent suppression has left criss-crossed all over it like a counter street map are a 'thousand doors' through which the past and future come tumbling, splitting the city apart so that it is made to exist on a thousand different sensory dimensions, thus keeping the idea and possibility of proletarian triumph forever present, no matter how ghostly. The Commune has even in defeat transformed the city, and 'the sobs of the infamous/the hate of the convicts/the clamour of the damned', that is the voices of the victims of massacre, the real negative content of the satisfied yelps of the bourgeoisie, will always be audible, echoing again and again throughout future and past history in a counter-time to the parched orbits of capital's realism and 'thought devoid of eyes, of teeth, of ears, of everything'.⁷



Blanqui, in 1869, had noted that capital employs a pseudo-occultist poetics, tampering with perceptions of an actually lived reality in order to ensure its own survival even within self-destruction. ‘The hate of the convicts’ and ‘the clamour of the damned’ are, like Blanqui in his cell, partitioned off, smoothed over and dissolved into capital’s history, negating their potential as blockages and interruptions in ‘the forming of the five senses’ and ‘the entire history of the world’:

All the atrocities of the victor, its long series of crimes are coldly transformed into a regular, inescapable evolution, like that of nature ...[Capital] sacrifices with neither pity nor scruple all the martyrs of thought or justice.[...] It does not dare condemn them, it confines itself to concealing their names or their roles, and to simply erasing from history the great names which contradict its thesis.⁸

Capital’s erasure of thought, justice and contradiction condemn it to an irreality (albeit an irreality with the power to kill) always in danger of immolation by the powers of all it has made invisible, that is, by the wretched of the earth forever in place on the other side of its walls. In ‘Instructions for Taking Up Arms’, Blanqui engages in a spot of proletarian town-planning:

Barricades shall be constructed every 50 metres on all streets. The stones shall be removed and in the principle streets the stones should be taken to upper floors and thrown at the troops of Charles X.⁹

The content of the walls is transformed, the meaning of the street is appropriated. Its matter, its molecules are transformed from a tool for the free-flow of capital, employees, victims and troops into a blockage, interruption and means of self-defence. The barricade uproots the history of the city, stacks up 'the atrocities of the victor' into a dense interruption, inducing a blockage in the city's veins, a cardiac convulsion, the street as missile where each impact on a cop's head smashes open the cells where 'the great names which contradict its thesis' are kept imprisoned, releases the forces imprisoned by 'the great names'. Those 'great names' are no longer monuments, hidden or otherwise, but explosive remnants of excluded history tossed into the heart of the enemy citadel. Meanwhile, the 'upper floors' where the *détourned* stones are to be taken are made absolutely inaccessible to the troops:

When, on the line of defence, a house is particularly threatened, we demolish the staircase from the ground floor, and open up holes in the floorboards of the next floor, in order to be able to fire on the soldiers invading the ground floor.¹⁰

The proletariat seizes the forces of invisibility imposed upon them by the bourgeoisie. From something whose humanity is denied but whose labour is demanded, they become a monstrous force whose task is to repudiate the enemy's monopoly on humanity and history. This is an invisibility in the immediate instant of its becoming visible. The invisibility Gustave Geffroy noted when he described the appearance of the Blanquists in May 1839: 'the revolutionary band all at once musters and appears. Immediately a vacuum, a silence sets in around them'.¹¹ The invisibility noted by Heine when he described his walks through the proletarian quarters of Paris:

[T]he songs I heard there seemed to be composed in hell and the refrains rang with furious anger. The demonic tones making up these songs can hardly be imagined in our delicate spheres.¹²

The invisibility of the 'spectre of communism', and also the negation of invisibility imposed by the Major and Blair governments with their famous prattle about how there is 'no longer any working class', and that 'we' are 'all middle class'. The separation and exclusion implied within that 'we' ensures further irruptions of proletarian violence. If the bourgeoisie and their polite barbarism have continued to be victorious, the traces of their negation, invisible points on the spectrum, continue to be a presence, a nightmare and a threat last seen, in Britain at least, in August 2011. Meditating in his cell, Blanqui imagines an intergalactic dialectics, conflagration and impact and struggle as the way

the universe sustains itself, a horrendous vision of mortality and death and rebirth, a metaphoric system of hell and defeat, but one that continues to contain at its centre the endless promise of an infernal return:

Stars are born, shine, die out, and even as they survive their lost splendour for thousands of centuries, all they offer to the laws of gravity are wandering tombs. How many icy cadavers are crawling like this in the night of space, awaiting the hour of destruction, which will be, at the same time, the hour of resurrection!¹³

*

In moments of defeat, revolution tumbles back into poetics, just as in moments of insurrection – as Rimbaud, as the Surrealists and as the Situationists knew – the energies concealed in poetics explode outwards into revolution. Revolution doesn't become poetic, poetry shatters itself in the process of becoming revolutionary. In 1929 Benjamin had suggested that 'this is the moment to embark on a work that would illuminate as has no other the crisis of the arts that we are witnessing: a history of esoteric poetry'. His claim was that poetry carried a 'secret cargo', and that poets like Rimbaud and Lautreamont were 'great anarchists' whose 'infernal machines' were ticking away, ready to blast apart the boredom of literary history, to transform the poetic knowledge they contained into revolutionary knowledge.¹⁴ In the 1940s Aimé Césaire's essay 'Poetry and Knowledge', published in *Tropiques*, an anti-fascist journal that had disguised itself as a magazine of poetry and folklore, outlined what he considered to be the revolutionary content of poetic thinking:

It is through the image, the revolutionary, distant image, the image that overthrows all the laws of thought, that mankind finally breaks through the barrier [...] In the image A is no longer A.¹⁵

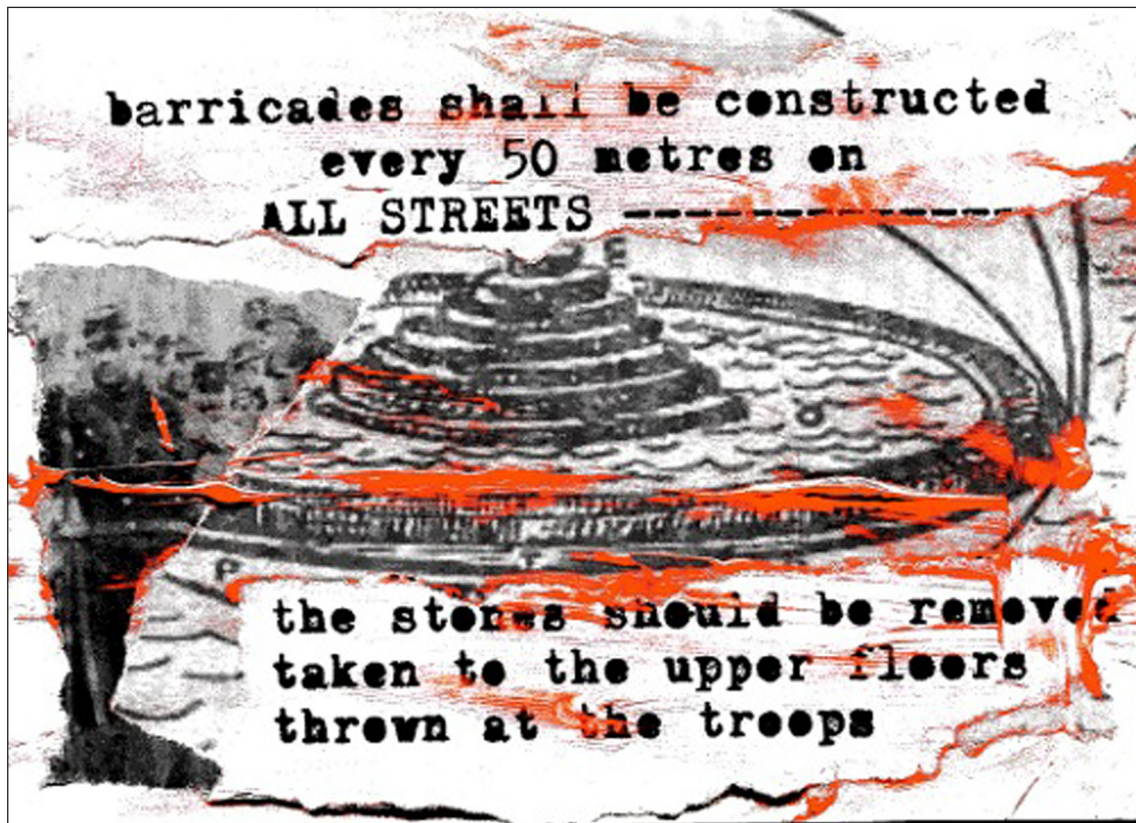
In the same essay, Césaire wrote in detail about what that image might actually consist of:

Everything that has been lived; everything that is possible. Around the poem as it forms is the precious whirlwind: ego, self and the world. And the strangest combinations, every past, every future (the anti-cyclone forms plateaux, the amoeba loses its pseudopodia, extinct vegetations confront each other). All the flux, all the radiation. The body is no longer deaf or blind. Everything has the right to life. Everything is called. Everything is waiting; I mean everything. The individual whole is stirred up once more by poetic inspiration. And, in a more disturbing way, so is the cosmic whole.

More recently, the poet Will Alexander described the L.A. rebellions of 1992 as an irruption of forces previously concealed in poetry and history:

America, an incessant nitroglycerine story, where the sun has been historically stored to energize the crops of the ambassadorial slavers, crops, initially grown and watered by the blood of free labour. But during the revolt, a Rubicon has been crossed, and we have witnessed the telepathic artistry of revenge, the molecules of rebellion, which because of optimum social deterioration, have exploded into a metamorphosis of nightmares, where wicker stick thrones have blown up and vanished.¹⁶

For Césaire, poetic thought involves a cosmic totality twisting and transforming into new shapes and new dreams which demand revolt in order to make themselves real. For Alexander, the histories of imperial American brutality have been compressed into poetic molecules that, in the moment of revolt, the moment when it all kicks off, metamorphosise into nightmare and conflagration. Césaire's 'revolutionary, distant image' is dragged down to earth and brought into contact with the dominant capitalist image to the point that two conflicting images of reality are forced into crisis and conflict due to their impossible occupation of the same historical moment, the same physical space. The poetic imagination, as used by Surrealists like Césaire and Alexander, is that which explodes the continuum of history in the same way that Blanqui's barricades smashed apart the smooth flow of capital through the streets of Paris.



‘The individual whole is stirred up once more by poetic inspiration. And, in a more disturbing way, so is the cosmic whole’. Césaire could almost be talking about Blanqui, thrown back in his cell onto merely poetic inspiration, where revolutionary collectivity collapses into cosmic enormity. While *Eternity by the Stars* undoubtedly is, as Benjamin pointed out, a vision of an inescapable Hell, it is not an inert defeated one, but rather the point where ‘Hell wanders through humankind’: a harrowing of Hell in reverse.¹⁷ The enormity of Blanqui’s imaginary system is the enormity of the achievement of the Commune, as well as the enormity of the horror of its defeat. In Blanqui’s system, the Communards do not die, but dissolve into a metaphoric squall, a revolutionary poetics. In the most oblique and confrontational aspects of Blanqui’s system they become comets, which in his cosmological imagination are always interferences, barricades, revolutions. There is a ‘radical separation’, for Blanqui, between comets and ‘the stellar systems that constitute the universe’. They are ‘true scientific nightmares’ that are not part of, and certainly do not obey the 19th Century empirical and positivist cosmological maps that Blanqui draws upon, and which he dismisses as being controlled by a ‘near-insane gravity’, the near-insanity of capital, that has to omit any non-symmetrical anomaly from its system. As he tries to imagine the comets’ indifference to standardised rules of gravity, Blanqui transforms the entirety of the universe into a police system:

Their avoiding Saturn only throws them into the arms of Jupiter, the policeman of this system. Ambushed in the shade, it smells the comets even before any sunbeam makes them visible, and it leads them, panicked, into the perilous abysses. There, abandoned to the heat and dilated to the point of monstrosity, they lose their form, become elongated, dissolve and rush through the dreadful pass, shedding slow-pokes everywhere before painstakingly recovering their unknown solitudes, under the protection of the cold.¹⁸

The comets are intercepted on a high-speed car chase through the solar system. Jupiter, King of the Cops, hauls them in with its pig-gravity, and hurls them into abysses, dungeons and finally the scaffold. They are burned, murdered and forgotten. But like the revolutionary desire itself, they cannot be destroyed, but merely lie dormant, waiting for the chance to re-emerge:

Those comets alone make it through that escaped the trappings of the planetary zone. Therefore, avoiding fateful passes, & eluding the big spiders of the zodiacal planes that linger around their webs, the comet of 1811 washes over the ecliptic, from the polar heights spilling out over the sun, and promptly circling it before regrouping and reforming its immense columns once scattered under enemy fire. Only then,

after the manoeuvre has succeeded, does it parade before our amazed eyes with the splendour of its army, before majestically continuing its victorious retreat towards deep space.

Blanqui references the Great Comet of 1811, which had been visible to the naked eye for around 260 days; rather more than twice the time that the Paris Commune survived. The portentous light in the sky metaphorically marks the always present possibility of a sudden reappearance of the revolutionary forces that the bourgeoisie always like to imagine have been vanquished for good. And even though it doesn't really achieve anything, but simply parades 'before our amazed eyes' before beating a 'victorious retreat', it is a reminder that other possibilities exist that are more or less impermeable to the pull of bourgeois gravitational systems. The August Riots also didn't 'achieve' much, but they did at least remind us of the existence of rage and of fire. For millennia comets have been sources of terror. Pliny the Elder describes terrifying shapes in the sky: 'it had a fiery appearance, and was twisted like a spiral; its aspect was hideous, nor was it like a star, but rather a knot of fire'.¹⁹ It is a terrifying portent of doom, of plagues, floods, the burning buildings and looted shops of August 2011. The official stargazers of the existing order observe a vicious mystery proposing magnetism far beyond the comprehension of its observers, that could only be explained by the creation of new, and wildly paranoid superstitions:

If it resembles a flute, it portends something unfavourable respecting music; if it appears in the parts of the signs referring to the secret members, something respecting lewdness of manners; something respecting wit and learning, if they form a triangular or quadrangular figure with some of the fixed stars; and that some one will be poisoned, if they appear in the head of either the northern or the southern serpent.²⁰

They inspire terror and this terror imposes fanatical meanings on the universe. They will smash apart official harmony, spreading atonal x-rays and inaudible measures. They will inspire hilarious orgies and counter-knowledge to challenge the obnoxious hierarchical astrological systems of kings and shopkeepers. They predict poison, insubordination, new tremors through the intellectual atmosphere. They will probably raise the dead. Like 19th Century Anarchists, they will convert the divine universe into a shadowy system of bombs and barricades. Their weirdness will be echoed in the words of the communard Louise Michel, on trial for her life in December of 1871: 'I do not wish to defend myself ... I wanted to erect a wall of flames'.²¹ And their wild orbits, disappearing for millennia only to appear again, they echo her great poem marking

the murder of the Commune: 'We will return, an infinite mob/through all your doors, we'll return/vengeful spectres, out from the shadows/with raised fists, we will return'. Finally, for Blanqui, they propose the apocalypse itself:

Such volatile clusters, taken to a maximum temperature, would appear to us not as a subtle, immobile, and unassuming fog, but rather like the dreadful jet of light and heat required to bring our polemics about them to an end.²²

Superstitions, fiery portents that threaten ruling class ownership of the sky, these are metaphors become ideology, an anti-poetic, or versified, system that out of paranoia and a social desire to perpetuate injustice and terror, becomes a network of laws. And like a metaphor, in a revolutionary moment it can be grasped, transformed, its rational kernel brought to the fore. Frantz Fanon noted the same process taking place a century after Blanqui's barricades had been torn apart by the pigs:

In the liberation struggle [...] this people who were once relegated to the realm of the imagination, victims of unspeakable terrors, but content to lose themselves in hallucinatory dreams, are thrown into disarray, re-form, and amid blood and tears give birth to very real and urgent issues.²³

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Pliny the Elder's vision of the terrifying, oracular comet as a 'knot of fire' could fit the whole of Blanqui's universe as a system of absolute compression (his cell at the Fort du Taureau) within a locked down eternity. The entire universe is a trap, an infernal magnet where everything stays the same by virtue of the fact that everything is possible. At best, it is a battleground, sheets of flame and conflagration:

Once one of these immeasurable whirls of stars, having been born, gravitated and died at the term of millions of centuries, it completes its wandering across the regions of space that lay open before it. Then, its outer frontiers collide with other extinguished whirls coming its way. A furious melee rages for countless years, on a battlefield billions of billions of leagues wide. In this part of the universe, all is now nothing more than a vast atmosphere of flames, ceaselessly stabbed by the volatilized lightning of conflagrations that annihilate stars and planets in the blink of an eye.²⁴

Eternity by the Stars is a poetic text by default. Poetry itself is a cell, only possible as the expression of a cosmic trap. In the middle of the twentieth century Octavio Paz claimed that it 'has no other mission than to transmute history [...] the only truly revolutionary

poetry is apocalyptic poetry'. Blanqui expresses the bourgeois apocalypse. Everything is predictable: his vision of 'eternal return' is of endless repetition of incident and idea, of line and vowel, expressed as endless repetition of destruction, war and flame. The time-cycle of the universe is one of deep silence, dead rocks floating towards each other, their impact setting off enormous struggles and revolutions that are themselves absolutely insignificant. The universe is accumulated death, is eternal life. The terror of Blanqui's vision is echoed in Rimbaud's '*Qu'est-ce pour nous?*', his last and most apocalyptic poem of the Commune. In this poem there is none of the confidence in defeat expressed in '*L'Orgie Parisienne*', but only an ecstatic plague-feast of rage, blood, fire and vengeance. The 'thousand doors' into the past and the future of the latter poem are transformed into the grim 'thousand murders' of the apocalypse: the insurrectionary inferno expands outward until everything is consumed and annihilated, the sheer boredom of nihilism, or imprisonment. Rimbaud's poem ends with the Earth melting, and then, in one final line, the realisation that everything was wholly pointless: '*Ce n'est rien! j'y suis; j'y suis toujours*'. Even after the apocalypse has reached its ultimate point, Rimbaud's body is still there, and not as some superhuman survivor, but simply the same bored teenager he was before everything went wild. He is trapped, as Blanqui is, sitting at his desk, understanding his cell to be the limit of the cosmos, knowing he'll be there forever, that he is still there now, can't tell the difference between his prison cell and the entire cluster of universes. The stars are nothing but apocalypse routines, the constellations negative barricades. But it is not tragic: if it was, if the situation was truly hopeless, then Blanqui would no longer even be writing.

In the aftermath of defeat he falls back on a revolutionary poetics, a system of metaphors and ideas that can lie dormant, disguised as poetry or as cosmology. He imagines an unspeakable sentence, a sentence that can crush the judge, a sentence that will outlive capital. He imagines an infinite universe that will 'take its lies beyond the possible'. His revolutionary poetics are grimly realistic in that he knows he will always be in his cell, but they also grimly hold onto and insist upon a utopian conflagration that always exists just beyond the finite bourgeois imagination. 'There is not one place in the universe', he sneers, 'where the disturbance of this so-called harmony is not flagrant at every moment'. Capitalist harmonics are blasted apart at every step by the anti-gravitational anarchism of comets, by barricade fighting, by writing like that of Blanqui, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Aimé Césaire and a million others. These dissonant upsurges of utopian glee may only last a couple of seconds, but that doesn't matter: 'the absence of such disturbance would only amount to stagnation and decomposition'. The boredom of Blanqui's cell is just that stagnation: it contains the real meaning of all of capital's history, the meaning of every bullshit phrase spoken by kings, the content

of every hymn and national anthem and financial formula. Blanqui ends his book, and thus almost all of his writing life, with a statement of unbridled scorn:

At the present hour, the entire life of our planet, from its birth to its death, unfolds, day by day, on myriads of twin globes, with all its crimes and misery. What we call progress is locked up on each earth and disappears with it. Always and everywhere, on the terrestrial camp, the same drama, the same set, on the same narrow stage, a noisy humanity infatuated by its own greatness, thinking itself to be the universe and inhabiting its prison like an immensity, only to drown soon along with the globe that has born the burden of its pride with the deepest scorn.²⁵

This is by no means a statement of defeat, but one of contempt and defiance. The bourgeoisie may think that they have triumphed, gloating over the blood of the Communards, but they too will stagnate, decompose and die. Furthermore, their triumph will always contain its own negation, the dissonance and disturbance of revolution, of people like Blanqui, writing manic cosmological fantasies in their cells. The world has ended but the body of its enemy has survived. Even as revolutionaries are slaughtered, bloody sacrifices to the bourgeois god, the revolutionary imagination keeps the possibility of their return alive:

For tomorrow, events and men shall resume their journey. From now on, only the unknown is before us. Like our earth's past, its future will change direction millions of times. The past is a *fait accompli*; it belongs to us. The future shall come to an end only when the globe dies. Until then, every second will bring its new bifurcation, the road taken and the road that could have been taken.²⁶

Notes

- ¹ Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *Eternity by the Stars*, trans. Frank Chouraqui, Contra Mundum Press, New York/Berlin.
 - ² <http://libcom.org/library/karl-marx-iroquois-franklin-rosemont>.
 - ³ <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/blanqui/1832/defence-speech.htm>.
 - ⁴ Andre Breton, *Earthlight*, trans. Bill Lavatsky and Zack Rogow, Los Angeles, Sun and Moon, 1993, p.90.
 - ⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History'.
 - ⁶ Marx, 'The Class Struggles in France'.
 - ⁷ Marx, 1844 Manuscripts.
 - ⁸ Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *Eternity by the Stars*, *ibid.* For a version online: 'Notes on Positivism', <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/blanqui/1869/positivism.htm>.
 - ⁹ Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *Eternity by the Stars*: 'Instructions for Taking Up Arms'. For a version online: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/blanqui/...>
 - ¹⁰ Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *ibid.*
 - ¹¹ Quoted in **Walter Benjamin**, *The Arcades Project*, Boston: Belknap/Harvard, 1999.
 - ¹² Shlomo Barer, *The Doctors of Revolution: 19th Century Thinkers Who Changed the World*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.
 - ¹³ Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *ibid.*
 - ¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism'.
 - ¹⁵ *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. Michael Richardson, Verso 1996.
 - ¹⁶ Will Alexander, 'Los Angeles: The Exploding Cimmerian Fish', *Singing in Magnetic Hoofbeat*, Essay Press, Ithaca, NY, 2012.
 - ¹⁷ Theodor Adorno, Letter to Walter Benjamin, 2 August 1935.
 - ¹⁸ Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *ibid.*
 - ¹⁹ Pliny the Elder, 'Natural History'.
 - ²⁰ *Ibid.*
 - ²¹ Louise Michel, *My Trials*, trans. Mathew Lyons, Commune Editions, Oakland, 2013.
 - ²² Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *Eternity by the Stars*, *ibid.*
 - ²³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, Grove Press, New York.
 - ²⁴ Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *ibid.*
 - ²⁵ *Ibid.*
 - ²⁶ *Ibid.*
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