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Abstracts

**FROM ANARCHISM TO STATE FUNDING: LOUIS LUMET AND THE
CULTURAL PARADOXES OF THE THIRD REPUBLIC**

In 1896 Louis Lumet despised the state and openly yearned for a red Messiah to sweep away bourgeois culture and politics. By 1904 he was in the receipt of state funding. This article unravels the paradox of his trajectory by focusing on the common interest that eventually united his interests with those of republican governments: the relationship between art and the people. Drawing on hitherto unknown writings by Lumet himself, as well as on little-used archives, the article explores Lumet's anarchist persona and connections in fin-de-siècle Paris, charts his involvement in the Théâtre d'Art Social and the Théâtre Civique, and examines his role in the state-supported Art pour Tous. The final discussion reveals areas of conflict and convergence in the perception of the people as political actors by both anarchists and the state, raising questions about the theory and practice of cultural democratization.

**DE L'ANARCHISME À LA SUBVENTION DE L'ETAT: LOUIS LUMET ET LES PARADOXES
CULTURELS DE LA TROISIÈME RÉPUBLIQUE**

En 1896, Louis Lumet souhaitait l'effondrement de l'Etat et l'apparition d'un Messie rouge qui balayerait la culture et la politique bourgeoise. En 1904, il était subventionné par l'Etat. Cet article dévoile le mystère de ce personnage en interrogeant la relation entre l'art et le peuple qui attirait l'attention de Lumet ainsi que des gouvernements de la troisième république. En s'appuyant sur les écrits peu connus de Lumet lui-même, ainsi que sur des documents d'archives, l'article met en évidence le rôle de Lumet dans les milieux anarchistes. Il retrace sa contribution aux initiatives tels que le Théâtre d'art social et le Théâtre civique, et sa participation à l'Art pour tous (avec le soutien de l'Etat). Cette étude fournit la base d'une discussion plus approfondie sur la démocratisation culturelle, où les perspectives anarchistes et officielles se trouvent parfois étrangement rapprochées.

**FROM ANARCHISM TO STATE FUNDING: LOUIS LUMET AND THE
CULTURAL PARADOXES OF THE THIRD REPUBLIC**

In 1896 the young anarchist Louis Lumet (1872–1923) published a biting indictment of his era entitled *Contre ce temps*. Flamboyant in style and caustic in observation, Lumet’s essay condemned artists and writers who were devoted to art for art’s sake, and chose instead to engage directly with the social and political problems of his age. In an imagined encounter with a young student at graduation, Lumet outlined his advice: to mistrust religion, progress, patriotism, and the law; to reject the arid, book-based learning of the republican education system, and to return to the rhythms of nature and the tangible realities of rural life. In subsequent chapters, Lumet denounced priests, deputies, and magistrates, bourgeois culture and proletarian cabarets, and finally concluded with an apocalyptic vision of a “red Messiah” who would proclaim the triumph of nature and free will, and herald a new age in which humanity would be unshackled from its laws and masters. Through the sabotage — verbal and physical — of the values, leaders, and institutions of the Third Republic would come the sublime future of anarchism and fraternity.¹

By 1904 Louis Lumet was in receipt of state funding. *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* lauded his cultural initiatives for their public utility and contribution to “national artistic culture,” while Lumet received enthusiastic attention from the vice-president of the Municipal Council of Paris, the Ministry of Public Education, Art, and Religion — even the Minister of Defense.² In 1904 Lumet became one of the secretaries for the French Fine Arts Section at the forthcoming International Exhibition in Liège; in the following years he was regularly re-elected to government councils and commissions on artistic policy and acquisition.³ Meanwhile, Lumet

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¹ Lumet, *Contre ce temps*, especially 18.

² *Les Annales politiques et littéraires*, May 17, 1903; Lumet, *L’Art pour tous*, 32.

³ On Mar. 2, 1905, *Le Journal officiel: lois et décrets* named Lumet secretary and advisor to a commission studying art exhibitions for works suitable for public acquisition (1422). By 1907 Lumet

himself emphasized the continuity in his efforts to bring art to the working people, with the ultimate aim of uplifting their tastes and achieving their individual and social emancipation.⁴ His evolution from self-conscious subversion to official approbation therefore offers an intriguing paradox. Why did he denounce the Third Republic so comprehensively, and then so swiftly relish its approval? Why were his cultural initiatives forcibly interrupted by police and then championed by municipal and national government? What interests and objectives could Lumet — and other anarchists — possibly hold in common with ministers and officials of the Third Republic? How might the case study of Lumet's trajectory shed light on the broader challenges and ambiguities in the relationship between culture and democratization in republican France?

This article proposes a solution to the paradox of Louis Lumet by exploring the theme that first brought him to the attention of republican officials: the relationship between art and the people. Beginning with Lumet's construction of an anarchist persona in the fin de siècle, the article subsequently examines wider anarchist engagement with art as a form of social revolt. The focus here is on the initiatives pioneered by Lumet and his literary collaborators: the short-lived Théâtre d'Art Social and Théâtre Civique. Then, moving forward to the longer-lasting Art pour Tous, founded in 1901 and still in existence in the early twenty-first century, the focus shifts to Lumet's broadening social and artistic concerns, as through the contacts made during his development of popular theater he developed more specifically socialist sympathies, while shifting his attention from theater towards art in its broader sense.⁵ Examining Lumet's political and artistic evolution alongside the changing composition and concerns of republican governments makes it possible to demonstrate how a common focus on democratizing elite culture — albeit with often divergent objectives — transformed Lumet from self-styled social pariah to model republican citizen.

had been elected member of the commission for two years; he was re-elected in 1907, 1909, 1911, and 1913. *Le Journal officiel: lois et décrets* named Lumet as a member of Conseil Supérieur des Beaux Arts (Feb. 13, 1906, 954).

⁴ Lumet, *Art pour tous*, 4.

⁵ The website of Art pour Tous — now discontinued, but still active in 2014 — proudly traced its existence to Lumet and his associates. (www.lartpourtous.fr/historique, last accessed Dec. 4, 2014).

Solving the mystery of what might first appear to be a state-funded anarchist offers more than a quirky detective story. Instead, it both illuminates a forgotten figure and his milieu and equally prompts a rethinking of the relationship between art, politics, and the people in the early Third Republic. Lumet is now a little-known character who makes only brief appearances in cultural studies of this period.⁶ Although there has been some discussion of his Théâtre Civique and Art pour Tous, his wider importance as a literary figure, and his evolution from rebellion to respectability, have not been explored. Yet Lumet was not only a journalist and social activist but also a prolific author. In the 1890s he published a series of semi-autobiographical novels, while at the same time editing and contributing to the anarchist reviews *L'Enclos*, *L'Art Social*, and *Matines*, as well as to the *Revue naturiste* and a number of other social and literary publications.⁷ In the early 1900s he became involved with the socialist newspaper *La Petite République*. Alongside its editor Gérault-Richard [Alfred Léon Gérault], and well-known socialist leaders such as Jean Jaurès and Aristide Briand, he represented the Parti Socialiste Français at the Amsterdam Congress in August 1904.⁸ Through Art pour Tous, Lumet contributed to the production and dissemination of books on famous writers and artists; he himself penned or contributed to biographies of political leaders, writers, and scientists including Napoleon, Mirabeau, and Clemenceau, as well as Shakespeare, Pasteur, and

⁶ Lumet is not, for example, mentioned in Maitron's *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste*, although he does feature, together with other members of his family, in Maitron's *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier*. The Théâtre Civique has been discussed by Durand, White, and Charnow ("L'Art social au théâtre"; "Democracy in the Theatre"; and *Theater, Politics, and Markets*, 167–8), and Beach notes its intention to serve as a "weapon of combat" in *Staging Politics and Gender* (15). Fulcher and Mercier refer briefly to the longer-lived Art pour Tous (Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music*, 101; Mercier, *Les Universités populaires*, 167). Yet Lumet's evolution beyond anarchism has not been studied in detail. McWilliam's study of Lumet's sculptor friend Jean Baffier describes Lumet as "closely involved in anarchism and syndicalism" in *Monumental intolerance*, 228; while Herbert identifies him as "an ardent exponent of revolutionary doctrines, close to both anarchist and socialist circles" in *The Artist and Social Reform*, 37–8.

⁷ Following *Contre ce temps*, Lumet published *Conversations avec Idée* (Paris, 1897) and *Un Jeune Homme dans la société* (Paris, 1898–1901). (I. *La Fièvre*; II. *Le Chaos*).

⁸ See Thomas, "Le Congrès d'Amsterdam." Gérault-Richard, journalist and songwriter, was a socialist deputy for the Seine in 1894–98. *La Petite République* was also known as *La Petite République française* and (between 1898 and c. 1905) as *La Petite République socialiste*.

Edison.⁹ His obituary, which appeared next to that of nationalist writer Maurice Barrès in the *Bulletin de la vie artistique* in December 1923, described him as “a worker, scholar, and man of compassion”, and his loss was marked by the renowned theatrical review *Comœdia* as that of “an upstanding and learned writer.”¹⁰ Though now largely forgotten, Lumet was thus in his time a well-known and latterly much respected figure in cultural politics. Tracing his trajectory in detail sheds new light on journeys from subversion to centrism by revealing the importance of concurrent as well as consecutive boundary crossings between ideas, networks, and communities.

Lumet’s trajectory also sheds new light on anarchist cultural life in the fin de siècle. The apparent parallel between fin-de-siècle anarchist *dynamitards* and twenty-first century terrorists has prompted renewed interest in French anarchism of this period, yet such interest has often focused more on violence than cultural initiative.¹¹ Certainly, an interest in the texts of anarchist plays has been sustained by some Francophone writing, including a three-volume anthology.¹² But these studies — presented by openly sympathetic authors as resources for future revolt — inevitably neglect parallels with less subversive works, as well as the thorny question of whether revolt on stage fomented revolt in the audience. Moreover, as the case of Lumet demonstrates, artistic militancy in an anarchist milieu could prove a pathway towards different, sometimes less radical forms of social engagement, with boundaries often surprisingly porous between anarchism, socialism, and more mainstream republican culture.¹³ Casting new light on the content and context of anarchist culture, this article

⁹ Lumet, *Napoléon 1er*; Mirabeau, *Œuvres de Mirabeau: les écrits, avec des notes et une introduction par Louis Lumet*; (with Keim), *Edison*; (with Keim), *Shakespeare*; (with Geffroy), *Clemenceau*; *Pasteur: sa vie, son oeuvre*.

¹⁰ See *Le Bulletin de la vie artistique*, Dec. 15, 1923, 526–7 and *Comœdia*, Dec. 8, 1923.

¹¹ Recent studies include Merriman, *The Dynamite Club*, idem, *Ballad of the Anarchist Bandits*, and Shaya, “How to make an Anarchist-Terrorist,” and Berry and Bantman, eds, *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour, and Syndicalism*. Hewitt makes no mention of either Lumet or the Théâtre Civique in *Montmartre: A Cultural History*, although he does discuss anarchism in the fin de siècle.

¹² Ebstein et al., *Le Théâtre de contestation sociale*, and Ebstein et al., *Au Temps de l’anarchie*. Cf. also Asholt, *Gesellschaftskritisches Theater im Frankreich*.

¹³ Weber describes the 1890s as a time when “the up-to-date young ‘Ravacholized’,” (Ravachol was a notorious anarchist-terrorist), even if anarchism would soon diminish in popularity. Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle*, 118.

also illuminates the symbiotic relationship between anarchism and the society it ostensibly opposed.

Ultimately, this analysis of anarchist culture in its broader context enables a critical reassessment of the concept of “cultural democratization” in the *fin de siècle*: a continuing preoccupation for both policy and research. “Democratizing” culture — whether understood as popularizing elite culture by extending its accessibility, or as involving the people in culture as part of their political and civic education — has been a priority for French Republics since the Revolution of 1789. Indeed, writers such as Laurent Martin describe “disseminating the benefits of culture to the greatest possible number” as “inseparable from the democratic and republican project.”¹⁴ For cultural historian Pascal Ory, republican initiatives to bring culture to the people demonstrate continuity of thought and practice that can be traced through the Enlightenment to the classical precedents of ancient Greece.¹⁵ Historians sharing this view also tend to assume that improved access to elite culture is both morally advantageous and politically transformative in a democratic sense. Jann Pasler, for instance, argues that the development of music as a “public utility” in the early Third Republic was not only emotionally but also politically beneficial. “It broke down the barriers of class and politics,” she asserts, “[...] reminded everyone of a tradition the French shared as a nation, infusing a sense of fraternity, albeit limited, among elites and workers.”¹⁶ This contention has often been developed with particular insistence in the case of popular theater, with Jean Vilar’s post-war Théâtre National Populaire praised as the culmination of the more faltering, earlier initiatives: the final ideal of “elitist theater for everyone.”¹⁷

Yet exactly how — and how far — popular involvement in culture might be politically transformative remains a contentious and complex question. Historians of the revolutionary period have, for example, described the relationship between theater and democracy as both supportive and antagonistic.¹⁸ Debate continues over whether

¹⁴ Martin, “La Démocratisation de la culture en France” [accessed Aug. 30, 2018].

¹⁵ Ory, *Théâtre citoyen*, 13. Cf. Puaux et al., *L’Aventure du théâtre populaire*.

¹⁶ Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 155.

¹⁷ Godard, *Chaillot*, 65.

¹⁸ Friedland has argued that “representative democracy and modern theatricality are not merely related; they are conceptual siblings,” while Maslan suggests in contrast that “theatre and representative political institutions embodied two distinct, often antagonistic, modes of representation,” with direct

the impulse to involve broader sections of the population in culture is philanthropic, paternalistic, or more cynically hegemonic, especially in the case of popular theater initiatives. Sally Debra Charnow emphasizes the paternalism of Lumet's Théâtre Civique; James Lehning similarly identifies "projects that yoke together *popular* and *theater*" as "unable to escape the persistently patronizing rhetoric of general edification," noting the more general role of spectacles and ceremonies as agents of capitalist social control.¹⁹ Still more pointedly, theater historians such as Baz Kershaw highlight the binary distinction between state initiatives premised on the ideal of a docile republican citizen — "a hegemonic procedure that aims to cheat the mass of people of their right to create their own culture" — and left-wing and working-class initiatives inspired by more militant incarnations of the people as rebels and revolutionaries.²⁰

Equally, despite perceived connections between popular theatre and either liberal parliamentary or more direct democracy, there is strong evidence that it was, in practice, not necessarily democratic at all. Popular theatre during the Third Republic encompassed not only anarchist, socialist, and state-led initiatives, but also productions by folkloric, Catholic, and right-wing circles — not all of which aimed to integrate the people into democracy. Indeed, the royalist group Action Française turned to classical theater with the very opposite intention, producing a modern version of Aristophanes' *The Clouds* with the aim of recreating "for our French democracy, that 'ancient comedy' with which Aristophanes castigated the democracy of the Athenians at the close of the fifth century B.C.," and anticipating that this new theatre would become both "public and popular."²¹ Since supporters and opponents of

democracy continuing in the theatre after its political demise. See Friedland, *Political Actors*, 3 and Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts*, 24.

¹⁹ Charnow, *Theater, Politics, and Markets*, 168; Lehning, *The Melodramatic Thread*, 81 and 9. Similarly, Kruger explores ways in which the rhetoric of popular sovereignty can often be "harnessed to reinforce popular consent to continued subordination" in *The National Stage*, 4.

²⁰ Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*, 12.

²¹ Maurice Pujo, "Le Théâtre d'Action française," (Extract from *Action Française, revue bimensuelle*, Oct. 1, 1907), Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Arts du Spectacle (hereafter BN DAS), Rt 3794. In the 1930s, the right-wing Parti Social Français also envisaged authoritarian alternatives to the parliamentary Republic in mass spectacles celebrating heroism and elitism. See Wardhaugh, "Un Rire nouveau," and Wardhaugh, *Popular Theatre and Political Utopia in France*, 299–302.

the Third Republic imagined the “people” according to their own assumptions and aspirations, their varied initiatives in popular culture could not align with a single political ideal. Instead, such initiatives offered a dialogical space that framed debates over popular identity, behavior, and participation, and in which the assumptions of rival political groups and figures could both conflict and converge.²²

In all of this, Lumet might seem to be a marginal character. But that is precisely his usefulness. He was indeed a liminal militant, someone whose ideological and political trajectory drew him across boundaries and between social milieus as he evolved from angry young anarchist to upstanding member of government councils and commissions. Nonetheless, through many of his initiatives ran an abiding concern to work as a politically engaged writer bringing art to the people. This combination of conflict and continuity makes Lumet a figure of ambiguity, certainly, but for the same reason he offers a valuable insight into the common concerns and bitterly divided communities that lay beneath the mantle of “cultural democratization”. His case study allows us to see what united the French, and what continued to divide.

Louis Lumet, Anarchist of the Belle Epoque

That Lumet launched himself into the literary and political life of Paris as an anarchist writer is certainly clear. Born in Issoudun (Berry), he remained profoundly shaped by the rural upbringing that his literary ambitions caused him to leave behind, and eager to juxtapose the degeneracy of social and political institutions with the regenerative qualities of a more natural and artisanal milieu.²³ In his first series of novels — *Contre ce temps*, *Conversations avec Idéa*, *La Fièvre*, and *Le Chaos* (the last two jointly published as *Un Jeune Homme dans la société*) — he traced the semi-autobiographical adventures of his young, libertarian protagonist Louis Léclat. Resonating with contemporary anarchist discourse on the natural world as both inspiration and metaphor for social transformation, these narratives expressed

²² Theatrical writing and performance are in themselves a “dialogic process,” which, as Nellhaus and Haedicke suggest, may both challenge and reinforce ideas of community. Nellhaus and Haedicke, *Performing Democracy*, 7.

²³ Lumet’s Parisian circles of acquaintance would include others from the same region. McWilliam mentions that Jean Baffier was drawn to Lumet through shared memories of the Berry area. (*Monumental intolerance*, 8).

impatience with authority in all its forms, and a thirst for the destruction of contemporary society and politics — including the politics of the left.²⁴

“Having suffered from my first reasoned contact with my own times,” Lumet explains to the reader in *Contre ce temps*, eliding his own convictions with those of his protagonist, “I had of necessity to undertake an act of revolt. I could not create without destroying.”²⁵ In this first novel of the series, each chapter therefore satirizes the failings of a particular social group or institution: the bourgeoisie and the tedious minutiae of their obsessions, for instance, or the republican school with its focus on discipline, abstraction, and uniformity rather than individual development. Specifically anarchist sympathies emerge in the praise of the individual artisan over the working class as a whole, as well as in the denigration of politics *per se*, without distinction of party. Indeed, Lumet’s portrayal of parliament and its deputies is particularly unforgiving. The winegrowing ancestors of the fictional Louis Léclat became republican during the Revolution; Louis continues this political engagement through journalism and electoral propaganda. “Instinctively,” surmised one reviewer, “Léclat is republican.”²⁶ Yet the political experiences of Lumet’s protagonist bring disillusionment both with the parliamentary candidates and equally with the deputies they become. “When we visit them,” he warns, “it will not be with hands reverently joined, but in the light of the setting sun, fired by the hope of a new dawn, with fists raised in terrible threat.”²⁷ Little wonder that he should describe the general strike — which also enthused anarcho-syndicalists — as a “rational weapon” against the system in general.²⁸

Subsequent novels in the series continued this dual preoccupation with decadence and renewal. Inflamed by a “fever” for universal happiness, Lumet’s protagonist turns first to literature and subsequently to lively café discussion. Distracted by romantic entanglements and high society, the young idealist finally

²⁴ Louise Michel’s study of natural evolution would, for example, powerfully influence her imagination of human and social development. “Even physically, new humans will not be like us,” she writes in Book I.9 of her *Mémoires* (119), where she also likens revolution to the metamorphosis of caterpillar into butterfly.

²⁵ Lumet, *Contre ce temps*, 18.

²⁶ *La Nouvelle Revue*, 22 (July 1901), 143.

²⁷ *Contre ce temps*, 79.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

returns to the realities of social engagement among the fervent militants of the Paris Commune: “self-conscious forces of nature,” as he describes them, “free from masters and conventions — individuals in communion with the collective soul.”²⁹

Lumet’s semi-fictional narratives struck an immediate chord with other Parisian anarchists. Jean Grave’s widely influential weekly newspaper *Les Temps nouveaux* reviewed Lumet’s *Contre ce temps* in glowing terms as expressing “his ardent faith in the better future being fomented by liberating revolt,”³⁰ although it should be added that this newspaper had received ten copies of the book to be sold for its own profit.³¹ Similarly, anarchist writer and symbolist poet Adolphe Retté endorsed the book for its “evocative descriptions of nature, irrefutable details on the moral depravity of socialist politicians, and novel insights into artisanal work.”³² Subsequent novels in the semi-autobiographical series were also welcomed. André Girard offered an enthusiastic review of Lumet’s *Conversations avec Idéa* for *Les Temps Nouveaux* in 1897, describing it as “the work of a warm-hearted man, inspired by ideals and revolted by the platitudes, scandals, and low and unworthy compromises to which anyone who wishes to live at peace with bourgeois society must stoop.”³³ Strikingly, even reviews sympathetic to Lumet’s personal evolution towards socialism acknowledged his novels to be more libertarian in character. In a review of 1902, literary critic Sainte-Claire highlighted the evident scorn of Lumet’s protagonist in *La Fièvre* for the “flock of red sheep” encountered in politics.³⁴ Others noted the eclectic influences on Lumet’s auto-didactic workers in *Le Chaos*, which included not only Karl Marx but also the utopian socialists Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint-Simon.³⁵

Meanwhile, Lumet himself also propounded his ideas elsewhere, in conversation with some of the most renowned anarchist writers of contemporary Paris. By the time *Contre ce temps* was published in 1896, Lumet’s circles of anarchist acquaintance included the sociologist Auguste Hamon, and the writers and

²⁹ Ibid., 13.

³⁰ Charles-Albert, “Contre ce temps.”

³¹ They were marketed at 3 francs apiece. See *Les Temps nouveaux*, 2.21 (Sept. 16–19, 1896).

³² Retté, *Aspects*, 137.

³³ Girard, “*Conversations avec Idéa*, par Louis Lumet.”

³⁴ Sainte Claire, “Etudes littéraires.”

³⁵ Kahn, “Le Roman socialiste,” 144.

journalists Jean Grave, Laurent Tailhade, and Paul Adam.³⁶ In April 1895 he founded *L'Enclos: arts, dits, et faits, pour le mieux* (which he would direct until February 1899), together with the poet and novelist Charles-Louis Philippe and the music critic Jacques-Gabriel Prod'homme. A libertarian review, freely available in bookshops as a gesture against capitalism, *L'Enclos* was enthusiastically promoted in anarchist newspapers such as Jean Grave's *Les Temps nouveaux*, and numbered many well-known anarchists among its contributors.³⁷ These included Fernand and Maurice Pelloutier, key figures in the development of anarcho-syndicalism, alongside the sociologist Auguste Hamon, mentioned above, whose articles addressed the "constant conflict" within the anarchist community between individualism and collectivism.³⁸ At the same time, Lumet contributed to the anarchist monthly *Art Social* (which merged briefly with *L'Enclos* in 1896), as well as to Jean Grave's weekly *Le Libertaire* and to *Le Journal du Peuple*, which partly replaced *Le Libertaire* from 1899.³⁹

Yet Lumet also found himself at the intersections between different worlds. Some of these worlds were within anarchism itself. Anarchists in the Third Republic were broadly united in their rejection of authority (the etymological meaning of "anarchy"), and skeptical of the efficacy of political revolution in achieving utopia. Yet they were often at odds in their imagination of future society, as well as in their methods of propaganda and revolt. There were ideological differences between

³⁶ Jean Baffier describes Lumet's circles of friendship in his preface to *Contre ce temps*.

³⁷ See *Les Temps nouveaux*, 1.14 (Aug. 3–10, 1895).

³⁸ Hamon, "Association et liberté." Some anarchists focused on individual liberty, increasingly curtailed by a bureaucratic state determined to record and regulate the lives of its citizens. Others looked to the proto-communist preoccupation with common property developed by François-Noël ("Gracchus") Babeuf, or to the emphasis on foregoing personal pretensions for the greater good of the community in the works of his contemporary William Godwin. Such positions had been further developed in the later nineteenth century by the first self-styled anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–65), whose ideal cooperative society was based around small-scale enterprises and skilled artisans, as well as by Russian anarchists whose work was highly influential in France, among them Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76) and Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921). For further discussion of these ideas and influences, see Higonet, "Babeuf: Communist or Proto-Communist?" Godwin, "Of Political Authority," *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, Book III. 4, and Oved, "The Future Society according to Kropotkin."

³⁹ On Lumet's involvement in a variety of anarchist reviews, see McWilliam, *Monumental intolerance*, 228.

individualism and collectivism: individualists who called for their fellow anarchists to renounce patriotism, militarism, and anything that might “demand love of others to the detriment of self-love;” collectivists who founded communes or sought liberation through the general strike.⁴⁰ Approaches differed between those who trusted in literary and artistic propaganda and those who preferred “propaganda by the deed,” with Lumet in the former category and anarchist-terrorists such as Emile Henry in the latter. Equally, there were marked socio-economic differences between anarchists in different areas of Paris. Anarchists and artists mixed in bohemian Montmartre, (where most of the anarchist press was also based), while more working-class anarchists met in the suburb of Belleville or lived in communes around the city.⁴¹ Lumet’s writings and activism would draw him into the relationships between these dissonant ideas and communities. His semi-autobiographical fiction expressed individualist revolt, for instance, yet he also believed in collective protest and supported the idea of the general strike. He was a self-consciously literary figure — and even, judging from a drawing preserved in the theater archives of the Bibliothèque nationale, something of a dandy (fig. 1). (***Fig. 1. Louis Lumet (BNF DAS Rt 3925 © Bibliothèque nationale de France)**) Yet his writings were imbued with rural and artisanal nostalgia. Lumet thus exemplified the paradox of the fervently literary figure preoccupied with the problem of popular engagement — a figure by no means unique in his time.

Nevertheless, Lumet’s earliest literary endeavors were not entirely circumscribed by anarchist networks and objectives. He was, for instance, concurrently involved with the literary movement of Naturism, centered on the poet Saint-Georges de Bouhélier. Described in its manifesto of 1897 as youthful revolt “for Zola against Ibsen, for Diderot against Nietzsche, and for Jean-Jacques [Rousseau] against Wagner”, the movement turned against Germanic poets (“so incoherent in their frenzy”), and instead sought inspiration and national regeneration in writers, artists, and sculptors such as Emile Zola, Claude Monet, and Auguste Rodin. In such examples, wrote de Bouhélier, the nationalism of elites and masses in a generation marked by the Franco–Prussian War could converge in the celebration of national

⁴⁰ “P.P. 11 juillet 1912. Meeting de la Fédération Anarchiste Communiste, Salle Madras, Rue d’Alésia,” and “Groupe de la *Vie anarchiste*,” Archives Nationales de France (Pierrefitte) (hereafter AN), F7 13055.

⁴¹ On anarchist communities in Paris, see, for example, Varias, *Paris and the Anarchists*, Meusy (ed.), *La Bellevilloise*, and Wardhaugh, *Popular Theatre and Political Utopia*, Chapter 5.

genius, epitomized by “the classical cult of nature and of man” by such past masters as François Rabelais, Nicolas Poussin, and Honoré de Balzac.⁴² Lumet’s own contributions to *La Revue naturiste* united his anarchist rejection of society and politics with his lyricism about the natural world. In an issue dedicated to the study of feminism, Lumet mocked the desire of feminists to seek increased legal rights and political privileges. What was the point of piecemeal reform, he challenged, when the whole social edifice must crumble?⁴³ As for activists envious of economic and political office: “such young ladies would do better to pasture cows in the long grass than spend every minute of the day trembling at the shock of telephones ringing.”⁴⁴

While some anarchists were nihilistic, Lumet’s involvement with the Naturists — together with his wider literary contribution — suggests a deep-rooted desire for renewal. Reviewing Gustave Geoffroy’s biography of Louis Auguste Blanqui in 1897, Lumet described this study of the oft-imprisoned revolutionary as testament to the “living waters springing from our sacred soil”, and cited as further “proof of renaissance” the anarchist writers Jean Grave, Lucien Descaves, and Adolphe Retté, as well as the ardently anti-Semitic Edouard Drumont (whose *La France Juive* of 1886 had become a national bestseller).⁴⁵ This miscellaneous selection of right and left among Lumet’s ideological mentors certainly offers, as Neil McWilliam suggests, “eloquent testimony to the blurred ideological divisions that make categorical distinctions between left and right so difficult in the fin de siècle.”⁴⁶ Yet it also points to the role of anarchism in a youthful search for renewal,⁴⁷ and to Lumet himself as representative of this generation. This was certainly the impression of some of his contemporaries. Reviewing *Un Jeune Homme dans la Société* for Grave’s *Temps nouveaux*, Charles-Albert described Lumet’s protagonist as, in this sense, exemplary:

⁴² De Bouhélier, “Un Manifeste.” Others were more skeptical of the edifying character of the movement, and described its disciples wandering down from the *Chat Noir* in Montmartre to the boulevards of Paris, “not thinking of literature at all.” De Rosa, *Saint-Georges de Bouhélier*, 8.

⁴³ Lumet, “Pour les femmes et contre le féminisme,” 127.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁵ Lumet, “De la littérature,” 42.

⁴⁶ McWilliam, *Monumental intolerance*, 228. His reference is to an article by Lumet that appeared in *L’Enclos* in 1898.

⁴⁷ Although the intellectual generation of 1890 is often described as that of the Dreyfus Affair, they might, as Datta argues, “more accurately be called the ‘anarchist generation’.” (*Birth of a National Icon*, 51).

We feel that what Lumet, for example, has sought to depict is not some kind of anecdotal young man in society, it is *the young man*. He has endeavored to create a particular human type: to discern, develop, and idealize through his art an inchoate hope in contemporary society.⁴⁸

Social Art and the Théâtre Civique

Anarchistic, self-consciously subversive, but also wide-ranging in his search for renewal, Lumet immediately captured attention both within and beyond the anarchist community. Meanwhile, what emerges from the cultural initiatives to which he contributed was both a resolute focus on defining an anarchist approach to art but also — and increasingly — a broader interest in bringing together art, the people, and “beauty”. Indeed, Lumet’s own trajectory reveals a widening participation in cultural networks that spread outwards through anarchism to socialism and even to more mainstream republicanism, notwithstanding the complex and sometimes bitter divisions between these communities.

The Théâtre Civique — Lumet’s first large-scale initiative to unite art and the people — developed from connections within and beyond the anarchist community, especially with *Art social* and the Naturists. *Art social* (with which, as previously mentioned, Lumet’s *L’Enclos* merged briefly in 1896) was a monthly anarchist review founded in November 1891 by Eugène Châtelain and Gabriel de la Salle. It published poems, articles, dramatic and literary criticism, and was fiery in tone, self-consciously youthful and subversive in character. Its contributors insisted that those over thirty had achieved little good in the world, and were forthright in their criticism of the Republic and its institutions, skeptical of universal suffrage, and derisive about the values and accomplishments of bourgeois capitalism.⁴⁹ In contrast, contributors to *Art social* rejoiced in their role as the “new barbarians,” heralds of a new society and culture.⁵⁰ For them, social art was a potent agent of transformation: a means of denouncing existing society while imagining the freedom and fraternity of the future.

⁴⁸ Charles-Albert, “Bibliographie,” 336.

⁴⁹ Coutard, “Jeunes et vieux.”

⁵⁰ Museux, “Mission.”

While questions of popular art and leisure were becoming increasingly relevant to political groups across the spectrum, *Art social* was distinctive in seeking to define an anarchist understanding of “social” rather than “socialist” art.⁵¹ Contributors to *Art social* shared with many anarchists the conviction that the ideal state of anarchy would also be one of leisure. Even the anarchist-terrorist Emile Henry had labored this point in a letter to the Director of the Conciergerie, where he was interned before his execution, insisting that the universal sharing of work would reduce the working day to five hours and therefore offer greater scope for “the continuous development of scientific knowledge” and “the flourishing of all physical, cerebral, and mental faculties.”⁵² With similar logic, and again insisting on a five-hour working day, Paul Pourrot argued in *Art social* that the very materialism of atheistic anarchists offered an impetus to seek in this leisure time “all possible sensations and joys during life on earth,” while Eugène Thebault emphasized that the future “anarchist regime would suit only a leisured, cultivated, and energetic people” — a point with which Lumet concurred.⁵³

Other contributors to *Art social* were explicitly wary of socialist approaches to culture. Paul-Armand Hirsch, for instance, specified that in the utopian future anarchists would allow “talent and geniuses — where these exist — to develop freely,” without seeking to supervise or censor creative activity in the manner of “Jacobin republicans or orthodox socialists.”⁵⁴ Auguste Linert, later to provide his own play for *Art social*, likewise condemned the subservience of socialist art (and especially drama) to political ends. While criticizing bourgeois theater for its excessive focus on the ménage-à-trois, Linert was equally quick to challenge socialist theater for its preoccupation with dry “problem plays” and “dramatized lectures.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ See, for example, the use of popular theater and song by the anarchist commune “Le Nid” (the nest), as described in AN F7 13055. The integration of cultural events into the “backstage” life of political parties was also a wider European phenomenon. See, for example, Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany* and Ritter, “Workers’ Culture in Imperial Germany.”

⁵² Emile Henry, *Lettre au Directeur de la Conciergerie* (Feb. 27, 1894), reprinted in Guérin, *Ni Dieu ni maître*, 415.

⁵³ Pourrot, “Paroles d’anarchiste,” and Thebault, “Inductions.” Lumet discussed the prospect of a future society of leisure with his sculptor friend Jean Baffier, though the latter preferred to imagine the ennobling of work itself. Baffier, preface to *Contre ce temps*, vii.

⁵⁴ Hirsch, “Notes anarchistes.”

⁵⁵ Linert, “Le Socialisme au théâtre.”

Although contributors to *Art social* were far from prescriptive about how anarchist culture might be characterized, they did move beyond theory to practice by developing a Groupe d'Art Social and Théâtre d'Art Social in the early 1890s.⁵⁶ As presented in 1892, the ambition of the new theater was to serve revolution by describing “the iniquities of the present time,” studying human passions, and offering idealized visions of the future.⁵⁷ A year later, in March 1893, the Théâtre d'Art Social gave its first — and, in the event, only — performance at the Salle des Fantaisies-Parisiennes, producing two one-act plays: Séverin Lepaslier's *Reconquise*, and Auguste Linert's *La Cloche de Caïn*. These were introduced by a prologue (Jean Richepin's *Le Baiser de la Chimère*) and concluded with an epilogue (Gabriel de la Salle's *Ave, Libertas*, which had appeared in *Art social* in September 1892).⁵⁸

The plays of the Théâtre d'Art Social were celebrations of anarchist theory and practice. *Reconquise* presented the story of an anarchist nobleman who accepts his wife's affair and illegitimate child: indeed, he returns from delivering a highly popular lecture against marital tyranny to condone his wife's departure with her lover, and welcomes her return only after the lover has declared himself unable to offer financial support. The nobleman even agrees to bring up the child as his own, and to call him Jean, after his natural father, if he is a boy. (*Art social* considered this a particularly innovative treatment of the familiar adulterous triangle).⁵⁹ Similarly, Linert's *Cloche de Caïn* offered an anarchist take on the battle between Labor and Capital, a theme much more widely treated in contemporary literature in France and elsewhere.⁶⁰ Rejecting naturalism, Linert sought a more “primitive” form of theater, re-engaging with “crude morality plays, reminiscent of the drama of antiquity, the only drama that is both philosophical and human.”⁶¹ His hero is neither the collective working class nor an individual working-class leader, but instead a dreamy anarchist

⁵⁶ See also Wardhaugh, *Popular Theatre and Political Utopia*, 199–203.

⁵⁷ “Statuts du Théâtre d'art social,” *Art social*, Feb. 1892. This was one of a series of (possibly unrelated) anarchist attempts to create social theater in the 1890s. See, for example, Leneveu's *La Sape: drame social* and Grandidier's *Tuer pour vivre*, in which a number of anarchist newspapers were recommended, including *Le Libertaire* and *Les Temps nouveaux*.

⁵⁸ For the program, see BN DAS Rt 3833.

⁵⁹ Hamilo, “Chronique dramatique.”

⁶⁰ See for example, Zola, *Germinal*, Veyrin, *La Pâque socialiste*, and Mirbeau, *Les Mauvais Bergers*.

⁶¹ “Le Théâtre d'Art Social,” (program) BN DAS Rt 3833.

employee (the blue-sky thinker “Rêve-azur”) who comments on the action around him while remaining at a key critical distance.

The direct conflict between Labor and Capital is thus transformed into a more complex triangle, visually reinforced by absence of the “people” — represented by soldiers and workers — from the stage. In the first scene (“For the fatherland”), the patriotic songs of a group of conscripts are heard only through the window, while inside the anarchist argues with the principal capitalist, Mangeor, in front of a symbolic safe. In the second scene (“Vox populi”), Mangeor and his colleague de Ritch decide to lower their workers’ salaries, notwithstanding the anarchist’s complaints. And in the third (“The tocsin”), the two capitalists turn to the army to suppress the workers’ resulting strike, and are rewarded for idolizing the safe by its explosion, possibly provoked by the anarchist. This dramatic conclusion was highly appreciated by the audience at the 1893 performance, whose enthusiastic cries included “Down with the fatherland!”, “Down with the army!”, “Long live dynamite!”, and “Hurrah for anarchy!”⁶²

Although the Théâtre d’Art Social gave only one performance, Louis Lumet and his associates pursued its aim of providing the people with dramas of individual revolt through the Théâtre Civique, established in 1897. Lumet’s connections with the writers in *Art social* had by this point already drawn him into the question of “social art.” Following *Art social*’s merger with *L’Enclos* in June 1896, the latter surveyed interpretations of “social art” by contemporary writers, publishing the results the following December.⁶³ *L’Enclos* itself resumed its independence shortly afterwards,⁶⁴ but maintained a similar agenda of promoting “social art” alongside art in general. When Lumet launched the Théâtre Civique — in association with musicographer Charles-Louis Philippe, critic Jean-Gabriel Prod’homme, and the actor Mévisto — the creation of the new theater was publicized in *L’Enclos*, *Lutèce*, and *La Revue naturiste*, as well as in the more widely read anarchist newspapers *Le Père Peinard*, *Les Temps nouveaux*, and *Le Libéraire*.⁶⁵ Moreover, Lumet ensured that an appeal for written contributions in poetry or prose, as well as for volunteers to participate in a

⁶² “Le Théâtre d’art social,” *Le Père Peinard*, Mar. 19–26, 1893.

⁶³ “De l’Art,” *L’Enclos*, Dec. 1896.

⁶⁴ *La Revue d’art* announced the break on Jan. 1, 1897.

⁶⁵ Mévisto (Auguste Marie Wisteaux) was also the new theater’s artistic director.

symphony orchestra, appeared in *Les Temps nouveaux* in advance of the first spectacle.⁶⁶

While the Théâtre Civique continued some of the themes and preoccupations of *Art social*, it nonetheless developed its own agenda, characterized not only by an emphasis on revolt but also by an interest in festival and popular regeneration. Presenting an idealized vision of the new theater in *Matines* in October 1897, shortly after its first production, Lumet described a pioneering enterprise by pure young men abstaining from absinth and debauchery. The ideal theater, as he imagined it, would address working people from Paris and its suburbs, drawing them away from immoral bourgeois theater and the doubtful humor of the café-concert, and preparing them for what he described as the engagement (*fiançailles*) between the People and Beauty.⁶⁷ Thus far, Lumet very much reflected the concerns of his predecessors in *Art social*, who had similarly envisaged the theater as inspiring greater closeness between artist and audience.⁶⁸ Where Lumet went further was in describing the new theater as not merely social but also “civic” and religious, with the ultimate aim of providing public festivals that engaged both implicitly and explicitly with the revolutionary festivals of the 1790s. With a Rousseauian emphasis on theater’s didactic importance, the guiding ideal of the Théâtre Civique was “a solemn festival where human passions and actions would be celebrated, magnified, and projected towards infinity.”⁶⁹ Theater would, as Lumet described it, offer an experience of “solemn communion” to which the poet-priest, “drunk with the forces of this world,” would invite the faithful.⁷⁰ Central to the public sphere and fully engaging the people, such theater would also renew what Lumet described as the “broken tradition of the great libertarian and social movement of 1789 [...] assassinated by the Thermidorean reaction.”⁷¹ Lastly, in a gesture against

⁶⁶ “Correspondance et communications,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, May 29–June 4, 1897. Contributions were to be sent to either Lumet or Prod’homme.

⁶⁷ “Ce que nous voulons,” *Matines*, Oct. 1, 1897.

⁶⁸ Cf. “Statuts du Théâtre d’art social,” *Art social*, Feb. 1892.

⁶⁹ Charles Max [Charles Poirson], “Le Théâtre civique.” Rancière cites this description in *The Intellectual and his People*, Vol. 2, 19–20.

⁷⁰ Lumet, “Le Théâtre: critique.” Lumet’s highly idealized vision of the poet’s role had previously been articulated at the “Congress of Poets” in 1894, convened to “elect” a suitable successor to Leconte de Lisle as national poet. See Docquois, *Le Congrès des poètes*.

⁷¹ “Ce que nous voulons.” This reconnection is significant: although Lumet made no reference to revolutionary popular theater in this article, the Thermidorean reaction had also derailed plans for a

“Money, that modern force of corruption,” the Théâtre civique would offer free performances (at least initially), with tickets available through such outlets as sympathetic anarchist newspapers.⁷²

In practice, too, Lumet’s experimental Théâtre Civique went further than the Théâtre d’Art Social by giving a variety of performances in Paris and the suburbs, and over a number of years. For the first performance, Lumet consulted not only with the Pelloutier brothers but also with the Naturist poet Saint-Georges de Bouhélier about the choice of location. They eventually decided on the Maison du Peuple at 47, Rue Ramey in Montmartre: a Spartan wooden structure with the anarchist slogan “Ni Dieu ni maître” (neither God nor masters) emblazoned in capital letters on one of the galleries.⁷³ On July 3, 1897, the first spectacle of this new peripatetic theater featured a particular emphasis on the people and revolt. As was common in contemporary popular theater, the performance consisted a composite spectacle (*spectacle coupé*), with a series of readings, speeches, and songs as well as a piece of staged drama.⁷⁴ In this case, the numbers included a speech by anarchist militant Léopold Lacour, a reading of the introduction to Michelet’s *Le Peuple*, traditional songs performed by Mme Deschamps, and the performance of a one-act play: Le Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *La Révolte* (the tale of a wife leaving her husband, although — unlike in Ibsen’s *Doll’s House* — returning at the end of the play).⁷⁵

Publicity around the Théâtre Civique’s first production suggests critical appreciation of the new venture both within and beyond the anarchist movement. *Les Temps nouveaux* advertized Lacour’s opening speech, while readers of this and other anarchist newspapers were offered personal invitations to the event, to be collected from the newspapers’ headquarters.⁷⁶ The speech itself, explicitly devoted to “social

“Théâtre du Peuple” under the direction of Joseph Payan, established by a decree of the Committee of Public Safety on 10 March 1794. See Brisson, “Le Théâtre populaire et ses précurseurs,” and Rolland, *Le Théâtre du peuple*, 82.

⁷² Coindreau, “Les Tentatives du théâtre populaire,” 182. Free entry, often with a compulsory cloakroom fee, was a common ruse to avoid censorship by maintaining such events as “private” rather than public.

⁷³ De Bouhélier, *Le Printemps d’une génération*, 318–19.

⁷⁴ White also notes the dominance of the composite spectacle (“Democracy in the theatre,” 38).

⁷⁵ Lumet, *Le Théâtre civique*, 28. Jules Michelet’s writings on popular theater certainly influenced the Théâtre Civique’s founders.

⁷⁶ See, for example, “Le Théâtre civique,” *Les Temps nouveaux*, 3.8 (June 19–26, 1897).

art,” traced the history of art, literature, sculpture, and drama with the overarching idea that “great art” was intrinsically connected with the “happiness of humanity, of society, and of the people, the hope of the future,” and won frantic applause.⁷⁷ Yet some anarchists complained that advance invitations privileged a particular audience. Anarchist playwright Georges Leneveu — who would publish his own elegy on social theater and anarchist ideals in 1899 — noted that only 28 tickets remained for distribution at the Maison du Peuple, leaving several hundred workers unable to enter the building. One worker apparently departed grumbling that, “it’s the same as everywhere else. Just a bunch of swells... everything’s always for *them*. But the Théâtre Civique wasn’t set up for *them*...”⁷⁸ Possibly some of those who did attend — and the Maison du Peuple could hold up to 800 — had come from further afield, given that the opening spectacle was advertized not only in small-scale partisan newspapers but also in theater reviews such as *Le Ménestrel* and *La Vie du théâtre*, and even in the widely circulating conservative daily *Le Figaro*, all of which praised the intention of elevating the people through drama, and making “art and beauty” more widely accessible.⁷⁹

Inspired by this initial success, Lumet and his associates organized a second spectacle in Montparnasse — another area of Paris well known for its anarchist connections — where they hired the Salle des Mille Colonnes on the Rue de la Gaité. Responding to some criticisms of the first performance (one worker had apparently complained at the absence of Victor Hugo’s works from the program), Lumet and his collaborators designed another composite spectacle with extracts from Victor Hugo, Catulle Mendès, and Georges Clemenceau, and a performance of Henry Fèvre’s *En Détresse*. Artistic director Mévisto delivered the opening “manifesto,” emphasizing the people’s right to beauty and knowledge, and claiming that the new theater would shape “citizens, not electors” — a distinction often mentioned in reviews and retrospectives of the initiative.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Leneveu, “Le Théâtre civique.”

⁷⁸ Leneveu, “Le Théâtre civique.”

⁷⁹ See *Le Ménestrel*, July 4, 1897, *La Vie théâtrale*, 6.39 (July 25, 1897), and *Le Figaro*, June 30, 1897 (“*Courrier des théâtres*”).

⁸⁰ See Besnard, “Deux Essais de théâtre populaire,” 785. See also Ferrière, “Au Théâtre civique,” and De Lacaze-Duthiers, “Il y a cinquante ans.”

Although the program of this second spectacle was more mainstream, the performance gained notoriety from Lumet's unexpected arrest by the police. Whether this was for his subversive profile or for the audience's potential for disorder is open to question. Like other club theaters of the time, the Théâtre civique eluded censorship by offering private performances for which attendance was by invitation only. This created an ambiguous situation that, as Sally Debra Charnow has argued, could lead to divergent responses from the Ministry (prepared to turn a blind eye to such performances) and the police (responsible for the preservation of public order and concerned by the size and potential disorder of the audience).⁸¹ Lumet insisted that an audience of 1,000 was compatible with the "private" status of the event; the police disagreed; Lumet agreed to vacate the premises.⁸² Others, however, linked police intervention to Lumet's renown as an anarchist writer and speaker. After the repeat performance at the Moulin de la Vierge in the fourteenth arrondissement, *La Lanterne* described it as common knowledge that the previous attempt had been derailed because of correspondence between the censors and the police commissioner, following Lumet's lecture on the theater's ambitions. Yet Parisian authorities allowed the repeat performance to proceed without interruption. Meanwhile, the earlier intervention merely heightened the status of the Théâtre Civique among anarchists — with *Le Libertaire* fulminating against this arbitrary repression of "the nascent voice of liberating art."⁸³

It was clear from these initial performances that the Théâtre Civique was by no means solely anarchist in inspiration and choice of subject matter (even if anarchist cultural events were themselves often eclectic in theme and genre).⁸⁴ It did, however, adopt a language of conscious revolt, even revolution, styling itself as offering a very different cultural experience from those promoted by the Third Republic. Reflecting on the first three performances of 1897, the sympathetic Charles Max sought to outline the idealism of the core group — "the elevated and noble mission of disseminating beauty, and bringing art to the people" — while also praising their subversive spirit. The Théâtre Civique was for him a weapon with which to combat existing society, and, more specifically, the "aridity" of republican education, with its

⁸¹ See Charnow, *Theater, Politics, and Markets*, 67–9.

⁸² Lumet, *Le Théâtre civique*, 33–4.

⁸³ Ferrière, "Au Théâtre civique."

⁸⁴ For further examples, see Wardhaugh, *Popular Theatre and Political Utopia*, 212–18.

emphasis on intellectual achievement over moral and emotional development. Such “civic” engagement would, from the perspective of the Third Republic, be closer to civil disobedience.⁸⁵

Nonetheless, the Théâtre Civique at the turn of the century moved gradually from anarchism to socialism, often through the pursuit of concerns common to both. Rifts appeared between the original organizers by Fall 1897: but by 1899 a new group had been formed with increasing considerable support from socialist writers, journalists and militants (it is no coincidence that Louis Lumet was by this point literary editor at the socialist newspaper *La Petite République*).⁸⁶ On May 13, 1899, a new spectacle at the Maison du Peuple in Montmartre honored the poet Eugène Pottier, author of the working-class anthem *L’Internationale*, and was lyrically celebrated in *Gil Blas* as uniting trenchant social criticism with the scattering of “handfuls of golden rhymes” among “workers and women from the laboring classes.”⁸⁷ Socialist orator Jean Jaurès spoke at the Dreyfusard event “On Justice” organized by the Théâtre Civique in June 1899, and on “Art and Socialism” at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint Martin on April 13, 1900 in an evening jointly arranged with *La Petite République*. Here, following a speech by the presiding Anatole France, Jaurès lauded the “communism” of the visual arts, described as a universal patrimony to be shared as broadly as possible through public exhibition, as well as praising the skill of both artisanal and industrial workers.⁸⁸ On December 30, 1900 Jaurès also introduced the Théâtre Civique’s performance of Romain Rolland’s *Danton*, organized to raise funds for striking textile workers in the Nord.⁸⁹ Rolland’s memoirs describe the audience as “revolutionaries from all countries: trade unionists, socialists, anarchists,” although some contemporary socialist reviewers scorned *Danton*’s privileging of historical leaders over proletarian revolutionaries.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Charles Max, “Le Théâtre civique,” BN DAS Rt 3925. Cf. “Ce que nous voulons.”

⁸⁶ Francis Jourdain, for example, recalled meetings in the headquarters of *La Petite République* to plan Théâtre civique productions with Louis Lumet, Romain Rolland, and Firmin Gémier (later director of the Théâtre National Populaire). Jourdain, “Souvenirs sur Romain Rolland,” 40.

⁸⁷ Royer, “Un Chansonnier.”

⁸⁸ Jaurès, “L’Art et le socialisme,” 520.

⁸⁹ Customary gradations in ticket pricing were maintained for this private and charitable performance, with seats reserved by prior written subscription. “Au Bénéfice des Tullistes de Calais,” *La Lanterne*, Dec. 31, 1900.

⁹⁰ Rolland, *Mémoires*, 313. Mayron, “*Danton*, de Romain Rolland.”

Some spectacles remained distinctly anarchist in character. One performance at the Maison du Peuple on June 9, 1900 (entitled “Solidarity”) included poetry by Hugo, Lamartine, Baudelaire, and Eugène Pottier.⁹¹ But there was also a much-applauded speech by the anarchist poet Laurent Tailhade, notorious for his observation that the victims of terrorism mattered little “if the act is beautiful” — and who would in October 1901 be tried and convicted for incitement to murder in an article for *Le Libertaire*.⁹² The same evening featured Octave Mirbeau’s scathing drama on middle-class self-protection in time of peril, *L’Epidémie*, with performances by Lumet as well as by Mirbeau himself in the role of the mayor.⁹³

Other performances at the turn of the century engaged with both socialists and anarchists. This was particularly clear in the theme and participants in a series of anti-militarist spectacles of 1899–1900 entitled “Down with War.”⁹⁴ Of six spectacles planned by Lumet, three were realized on November 4, 1899, January 12, 1900, and March 3, 1900.⁹⁵ Invited speakers included anarchist militant Léopold Lacour, future Prime Minister Aristide Briand (renowned in this period for his theories on the general strike, developed with Fernand Pelloutier), and the Italian deputy and criminologist Enrico Ferri. Drawing inspiration from both classical and modern authors (Aeschylus and Aristophanes on one hand; Leconte de Lisle, Lamennais, and Théodore de Banville on the other), the series of antimilitarist spectacles also devoted space to anarchist writings, such as those of Mikhail Bakunin.⁹⁶

⁹¹ “La Solidarité. Conférence par Laurent Tailhade. Présidence de Alfred Edwards,” (program), BN DAS Rt 3295.

⁹² See Lay, “Beau Geste,” 83. Tailhade was tried according to one of the so-called *lois scélérates* (“villainous laws”) of 1894 restricting freedom of speech in the wake of the anarchist attacks.

⁹³ “Théâtre civique: programmes,” BN DAS Rt 3925. On Mirbeau’s role in the Théâtre Civique, see also Coindreau, “Les Tentatives de théâtre populaire en France,” 182. Languier recalls attending this performance and listening to Tailhade in “Souvenirs de la vie littéraire.”

⁹⁴ Police reports on anarchist youth groups noted that antimilitarist propaganda was disseminated through “brochures, lectures, and plays,” and urged that this be censored through the application of the laws of 1881, 1893, and 1894. See “2e Jeunesse révolutionnaire de la Seine,” AN F7 13054.

⁹⁵ Lumet briefly describes these three spectacles in *Le Théâtre civique*, 47.

⁹⁶ “Théâtre civique: représentation du 12 janvier 1900 sur la scène des Gobelins. Contre la guerre. Conférence par Enrico Ferri,” (brochure), BN DAS Rt 3295. Lacour spoke at the spectacle of Nov. 4 at which extracts from Bakunin’s works were read. See *Les Temps nouveaux*, 5.28 (Nov. 4–11, 1899), 4.

Was the Théâtre Civique anarchist? Previous studies have tended to avoid this question.⁹⁷ Certainly some of its texts, speakers, and performers and even locations were explicitly anarchist, and the initiative — not only in its original performances of 1897 but also in its subsequent spectacles from 1899 onwards — was actively promoted and supported by the anarchist press. Anarchist, too, was a proportion of its audience, judging from cries of “Long live anarchy!” and the complaints at more mainstream program choices. *Les Temps nouveaux* welcomed the project as “a weapon of war,” advertizing its calls for works “of enthusiasm and revolt” and assiduously promoting its spectacles, especially if these included Léopold Lacour or Laurent Tailhade.⁹⁸ Some themes linked anarchists and socialists — such as the relationship between the people and “art” (broadly interpreted as the visual arts, literature, music, and drama), explored in speeches by the anarchist Tailhade and the socialist Jaurès, as well as in the writings and prefaces of Lumet himself. At the same time, the dexterity with which Lumet and his associates drew on wider intellectual, Naturist, and socialist networks also made the Théâtre Civique fluid and eclectic in character.⁹⁹ Although resolutely “social” and anti-capitalist in inspiration, the Théâtre Civique later staged spectacles for which seats had to be purchased — albeit to raise funds for suitable causes — and which maintained traditional gradations of seating according to price. *La Revue Franco-allemande* described one such performance on June 8, 1901 as “a remarkable evening, suitably appreciated by the elite public,” even though occasions such as Jean Jaurès’s lecture on art and socialism more clearly targeted the working-class community.¹⁰⁰ Anarchist in initial inspiration and appeal, the Théâtre Civique thus evolved to attract more varied publics in the years that followed, while Lumet himself continued to negotiate the boundaries between elite literary activity and social engagement.

⁹⁷ Durand, for example, writes that “Lumet’s choices were not neutral, but they were not clear.” (“L’Art social au théâtre,” 33).

⁹⁸ “Correspondance et communications,” *Les Temps nouveaux* (May 29 – June 4, 1897).

⁹⁹ Maurice Le Blond, for instance, described both the Théâtre Civique and also Lumet’s fictional work as an attempt to bring Naturist ideas to a wider public. See Le Blond, “Conversations avec Idéa.” Le Blond would work as Lumet’s editorial colleague in *La Revue provinciale, mensuelle, littéraire, régionaliste*.

¹⁰⁰ Fisher describes these initiatives as “propagandistic and limited to a public of anarchist militants,” but a closer study of the Théâtre Civique suggests otherwise. (“Romain Rolland and the French People’s Theatre,” 78).

The Théâtre Civique did not attract state funding. Nevertheless, it did prompt incipient interest among Parisian authorities, partly on account of its ambiguous title. After Lumet had announced its creation, the former vice-president of the Paris Municipal Council (Hector Dépasse) published an enthusiastic article on the new venture to bring theater to the “deepest layers of universal suffrage.” He was particularly impressed that Lumet’s peripatetic theater would include Montmartre, Montparnasse, Grenelle, and Belleville, since state proposals for popular theater had so far tended to suggest a central (and thus more inaccessible) location. With particular irony — given Lumet’s own diatribes against republican schooling and the military — Dépasse envisaged this new theater as a suitable means of bringing education and patriotism to the working-class areas of Paris, and as bridging the gap in civic instruction between school and military service. He even went so far as to describe the Théâtre Civique as “a joyful and valiant companion to the army itself.”¹⁰¹ Such enthusiasm gave hints of the more collaborative relationship that would develop with Lumet’s future initiatives.

Art, Education, and the People: Lumet’s *Art pour Tous*

Common interest in the relationship between art, education, and the people, and gradual shifts in political allegiance, self-presentation, and professional activity, finally secured Lumet both official approbation and public funding for his next cultural venture: *Art pour Tous*. From modest beginnings in guided tours of museums and lectures for Parisian workers, *Art pour Tous* rapidly became the organizer of visits, lectures and amateur groups through which working people could further their knowledge — and in some cases practice — of visual arts, crafts, literature, drama, and music. Lumet’s initiative related closely to other contemporary experiments in popular education, not least the popular universities that sought to unite workers and intellectuals and, like the Théâtre Civique, sometimes organized composite spectacles and play readings alongside full-length performances.¹⁰² What was striking about *Art pour Tous* was its emphasis on the working-class auto-didacticism that Lumet had

¹⁰¹ Hector Dépasse, writing in *Le Réveil de France* on June 27, 1897. Lumet proudly cited this approval in *Le Théâtre Civique*, 6.

¹⁰² Jomaron, *Le Théâtre en France*, Vol. 2, *De la Révolution à nos jours*, 308; Mercier, *Les Universités populaires*, 166.

eulogized in his youthful novels, rather than on the visions of apocalyptic revolt that he had also favored in those earlier years. Nonetheless, the final municipal and ministerial support of Art pour Tous depended both on a slackening association with anarchism and also on a leftward shift in the composition of local and national government.

Like the Théâtre Civique, Art pour Tous both began and developed as a collaborative enterprise. This time the connections were both socialist and anarchist. In 1901 Lumet was approached by Edouard Massieux, secretary to a group of young socialists in the thirteenth arrondissement of Paris, who wished to organize Sunday museum visits for workers featuring lectures on art by sympathetic writers. Lumet was at this point better known for his organization of literary readings, plays and speeches than for his concern with the visual arts, although some of the Théâtre Civique's lectures had addressed both "high art" previously restricted to elite education and possession, as well as artisanal and technical expertise. Flattered, Lumet accepted the proposal.¹⁰³ But as he helped to develop Art pour Tous from these small-scale, partisan beginnings into an association of national dimensions, he also drew on his anarchist connections. Strikingly, Lumet's "manifesto" described Art pour Tous not as the obedient servant of the Socialist Party but rather as an independent provider of popular artistic education alongside popular universities, popular theater, trade unions, and political groups.¹⁰⁴ Founding members included artisans such as lithographers, typesetters and engravers, but also Jean-Gabriel Prod'homme, Lumet's earlier collaborator at the Théâtre Civique, and the anarchist writers Lucien Descaves and Octave Mirbeau.¹⁰⁵ Anarchist newspapers were meanwhile influential in promoting the new initiative, having earlier supported the Théâtre Civique. *Les Temps nouveaux* praised Lumet's promotion of artisanal crafts alongside "high" art, and directed readers to an article in *La Revue d'Art pour Tous* on the Musée Plantin, a fifteenth-century printer's workshop.¹⁰⁶ Interest within groups such as the Federation of Popular Universities and the Engravers' Union boosted

¹⁰³ Lumet, *Art pour tous*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Lumet, *Art pour tous*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ The list also included the symbolist painter Eugène Carrière, the editor Gustave Téry, the art critic Gustave Geffroy (with whom Lumet would later write a laudatory study of Clemenceau), and the architect Frantz Jourdain.

¹⁰⁶ *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 4.34 (1902–05), 415.

membership of Art pour Tous to a total of 2,300 by 1904.¹⁰⁷ The movement's wide-ranging attention to industrial and artisanal art was also commended in more intellectual reviews. Marius-Ary Leblond in *L'Œuvre nouvelle* noted its attention to provincial artists and artisans, from pottery production in the Nivernne to Art Nouveau furnishings by Lorraine artist Emile Gallé.¹⁰⁸

Established through both socialist and anarchist connections, Art pour Tous won the acclaim of more mainstream political and artistic publications as its activities diversified. Enthusiastic articles appeared, for example, in newspapers and reviews such as *Le Temps*, *Le Journal des Débats*, *Le Monde artiste*, and *Les Annales politiques et littéraires*.¹⁰⁹ By 1904, activities included not only museum visits and lectures on art, craft, music, and literature, but also guided tours of factories and national monuments, both in the French capital but equally in Dieppe, Beauvais, Rouen, Versailles, and Chantilly.¹¹⁰ In addition to the adult groups there was an increasing number of children's sections — especially in Paris — for which both indoor and outdoor activities were organized: visits to the Jardin des Plantes or the Bois de Vincennes, as well as singing and amateur dramatics. The movement also encompassed flourishing amateur musical and literary groups on a larger scale: a literary section that explicitly continued the work of the Théâtre Civique, and a musical section that included among its organizers both Jean-Gabriel Prod'homme and also Henri Kaiser, professor at the Paris Conservatoire. It was the very breadth of these activities that led the organizers, Lumet among them, to seek official republican support — for the minimal subscription fees could not feasibly support further expansion.

¹⁰⁷ By 1903, the association was also being more widely advertized, e.g. in *Les Cahiers de l'ouvrier*, where readers were encouraged to subscribe to Lumet's monthly review, *L'Art pour tous, bulletin mensuel artistique, littéraire, social* at an annual cost of three francs. See *Les Cahiers de l'ouvrier. Revue de propagande et d'éducation syndicale*, Sept.–Oct. 1903.

¹⁰⁸ Leblond, "Louis Lumet: *L'Art pour tous*."

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, *Le Journal des Débats*, Nov. 17, 1902; *Le Monde artiste: théâtre, musique, beaux-arts, littérature*, Jan. 18, 1903; *Les Annales politiques et littéraires*, May 17, 1903; and *Le Temps*, Feb. 21, 1904.

¹¹⁰ *Le Monde artiste* praised the willingness of specialists to offer both expertise and locations, and mentioned archivist Charles Malherbe, who delivered a talk on the history of opera to a 300-strong audience at the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra in Paris in January 1903. *Le Monde artiste: théâtre, musique, beaux-arts, littérature*, Jan. 18, 1903.

All the same, official approval was by no means instantaneous, and it was not until Lumet received support from within government that funding became possible.¹¹¹ Radical deputy Julien-Antoine Simyan was, for instance, fulsome in his praise for Art pour Tous in proposals for the Arts Budget of 1903, and made a personal plea for state support.¹¹² The following year, Alfred Massé of the same Ministry added his approval, with special praise for the provision of affordable musical entertainment. Indeed when Art pour Tous presented its first series of concerts at the Théâtre du Peuple on the avenue de Clichy, the president was no less than Joseph Chaumié, Minister for Public Education and Art. And while this Ministry supported the work of Art pour Tous in general, the Minister for War, General André, particularly lauded the cultural activities for military conscripts.¹¹³ When Lumet wrote his history of the movement in 1904, he therefore included specific and grateful mention of the Ministers whose patronage was now essential to its success. Nor were his ambitions for the movement complete: rather, inspired by Henri Turot's intentions in the Ligue du Bon Goût, Lumet suggested that Art pour Tous should campaign not only against the crudeness of the café-concert but also against the low-brow "nonsense" performed at family festivities.¹¹⁴ In an article for *Le Mouvement socialiste* he offered a surprisingly scornful depiction of a family event at which "comrades performed social plays and sang revolutionary songs, acclaimed the red flag and the new dawn of Revolution." Such sentiments of revolt, however "excellent in themselves," were in his view "out of place at a family party," where the audience might more profitably encounter the works of "great poets" and "literary masters."¹¹⁵ Here, the Lumet who directed Art pour Tous was far removed from the youthful

¹¹¹ Lumet was, for example, refused municipal support for his proposal to take schoolchildren on visits to the Musée Galliera in 1902, allegedly on account of his socialist leanings, although the refusal was subsequently revoked. Destrem, "Nos Leaders: Art pour Tous." Cf. *Le Journal des débats*, Nov. 17, 1902.

¹¹² Extract from "Le Rapport de M. Simyan, député, sur le budget des Beaux-Arts pour l'exercice 1903, en faveur de l'Art pour tous (chaps 33–35)," cited in Lumet, *Art pour tous*, 324. Simyan's report was also discussed in detail (and more critically) in the press. See, for example, *Le Courrier de la Nièvre*, Nov. 22, 1903.

¹¹³ Lumet, *Art pour tous*, 32.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹⁵ Lumet, "L'Art, la littérature: réflexions."

revolutionary of *Contre ce temps* — and more totalitarian than his state sponsors in his aspiration to regulate culture and leisure not only in the public sphere, but also in the private and domestic one.

Culture and Democracy: Proposals and Paradoxes

Within ten years, Louis Lumet had transformed his public persona from social pariah to public-spirited citizen of the Third Republic. His political sympathies and connections gradually converged with those of municipal and national governments: Lumet himself moved from the far left towards the centre, and at the same time municipal and national governments moved further towards the left. By no means unusual in itself — many a youthful rebel has later become a pillar of the establishment — Lumet's trajectory is important in allowing us to discern how individuals shifted across political boundaries, with the boundaries themselves sometimes more porous than might be supposed.

Strikingly, in Lumet's case, there seems to have been no definitive rift with either anarchism or socialism as he progressed by degrees towards republican respectability. Instead, his very success relied partly on this ability to sustain concurrent networks of sympathy and acquaintance within distinct (though sometimes overlapping) circles: anarchist and socialist, intellectual and political, artisanal and elite. When Lumet and his associates established the Théâtre Civique, they drew on anarchist writers, speakers, and workers to provide publicity, performances, and audiences. Yet Lumet himself also drew on his developing connections within and beyond Parisian socialism, not least in working closely with Jean Jaurès and Romain Rolland for the Théâtre Civique's speaker-meetings and performances at the turn of the century. By the time Lumet founded Art pour Tous — which overlapped chronologically with the later years of the Théâtre Civique — his socialist engagements were developing rapidly. Several creators of the Théâtre Civique attended the Socialist congress in the Parisian Salle Wagram on September 28–30, 1900, at which they called upon the organizing committee to consider establishing a sub-committee specifically devoted to art.¹¹⁶ Lumet himself became a regular

¹¹⁶ “En réponse à l'enquête de M. Maurras: M. Louis Lumet,” *La Justice, journal politique du matin*, Oct. 26, 1900.

contributor to *La Petite République* and would also contribute to *Le Mouvement socialiste*. At Emile Zola's funeral in 1902, he represented the Groupe de la Jeunesse Socialiste Internationaliste.¹¹⁷ In August 1904 he was among the French delegates of the Parti Socialiste Français at the International Socialist Congress in Amsterdam — with Enrico Ferri, previous contributor to the Théâtre Civique, an Italian delegate.¹¹⁸ At the same time, Lumet continued to cultivate his anarchist connections. In 1900, while working with socialist acquaintances, he also collaborated with Octave Mirbeau, Fernand Pelloutier, and others to plan an international congress on “Social Art.”¹¹⁹ In founding Art pour Tous he drew on similar networks. The support of well-known anarchist writers such as Lucien Descaves and Octave Mirbeau helped to establish the intellectual credentials of Art pour Tous, while anarchist newspapers such as *Les Temps nouveaux* assiduously promoted its activities, even as it also garnered wider interest and increasing respectability.

At the same time, Lumet's trajectory benefitted from greater political convergence with the aspirations of municipal and national governments. For Lumet's Art pour Tous, it was particularly fortuitous that the 1902 elections should see a majority for Pierre Waldeck Rousseau's Alliance Démocratique and for the Radicals, as well as the election of 43 socialists. In 1902 the militantly anti-clerical Emile Combes replaced Waldeck Rousseau as Prime Minister; and as more radical republicans came to power, they also proved increasingly willing to work with socialists, with Jean Jaurès himself chosen as Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies. In 1903, Lumet's study of a priest emotionally broken by the Church, *Les Cahiers d'un Congréganiste*, could almost have served as government propaganda.¹²⁰ Indeed, the new Chamber's extensive application of the 1901 law on Associations entailed the closing of 12,000 schools run by now unauthorized religious orders, with

¹¹⁷ “Pour les Obsèques: réunions et convocations,” *L'Aurore*, Oct. 3, 1902.

¹¹⁸ Thomas, “Le Congrès d'Amsterdam.” Lumet had also taken part in a socialist congress in March 1903. See *L'Encyclopédie socialiste, syndicale et coopérative de l'Internationale ouvrière* (Paris, 1912), 252.

¹¹⁹ “Le Congrès international d'art social,” *La Revue franco-allemande*, 2.3 (1900).

¹²⁰ The novel was widely praised in the left-wing press, e.g. *L'Œuvre nouvelle*, Apr. 15, 1903 and *Les Temps nouveaux*, 38 (Jan. 21–27, 1905).

approximately 50,000 members of these orders dismissed.¹²¹ During debates on the proposed law to separate Church and state in 1905 (after the fall of Combes's government), tensions ran high. On July 3, 1905, one deputy spoke bitterly against the partisan behavior of the Minister for Public Education, Art, and Religion, who was prepared to banish priests from the teaching profession and yet allowed his colleagues to take part in banquets with schoolteachers "who insult both the flag and the nation."¹²² Meanwhile, subversive sentiments sometimes animated the ministers themselves. In 1903, even the Minister of Foreign Affairs Théophile Delcassé voiced his disgust. "The regime is lost," he asserted, "and perhaps France with it. What we need is a violent change, legal or not, shutting down the talking shops in Chamber and Senate."¹²³ Such ministers were, by this point, probably closer to the anarchistic revolt of the younger Lumet than he was himself.

The paradox of Lumet's conversion from anarchism to officialdom can thus be explained by a series of shifts — by Lumet himself, and by republican officials with whom he cooperated. And yet this explanation also reveals further paradoxes. This concluding debate therefore develops two final contentions: first, that the relationship between anarchists and contemporary society was not always one of straightforward opposition; and second, that there were areas of convergence as well as conflict in the attitudes of anarchists, socialists, and state officials towards popular culture.

To begin with, the case of Louis Lumet — and of anarchist culture more generally in this period — suggests a fluid and complex relationship between the art of revolt and the status quo, the subversive and the subverted: a valuable corrective to the starker rhetorical opposition of the times. The preoccupation with the artist as a potential radical is a well-established one in French history, and anarchist writers such as Louis Lumet — or the better-known anarchist playwright Octave Mirbeau — espoused positions of conscious defiance in their writing.¹²⁴ Yet any writer seeking a wider audience needed to compromise with the system (and individually, anarchist

¹²¹ Sowerwine, *France since 1870*, p. 81. For a more detailed study of local reactions to the application of this law, see, for example, *Les Creusois face à la loi de séparation des églises et de l'état*, 9.

¹²² The deputy in question was M. Lasies. See *Le Journal officiel*, July 3, 1905, 2668.

¹²³ Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle*, 128.

¹²⁴ See, for example, Hemmings, *Culture and Society in France, 1848–98*, Chap. 5; Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois* and *The Painting of Modern Life*; Nord, *Impressionists and Politics*; and Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform*.

writers were by no means loath to receive accolades from institutions they might rhetorically despise). Lumet required external funding to continue his work with *Art pour Tous*. Octave Mirbeau wrote the preface to Jean Grave's *La Société mourante et l'anarchie* (a publication landing the latter in court), yet was a member of the Académie Goncourt. Though Mirbeau's drama of individual and collective revolt *Les Mauvais Bergers* perplexed critics with its anarchist take on the social question, his anti-capitalist *Les Affaires sont les affaires* was a huge success at the Théâtre Français, even though this particular relationship between subversion and the cultural establishment proved difficult to sustain.¹²⁵ Indeed, the theater critic of *La Plume* was amused to watch an audience including businessmen, bankers, and aristocrats wholeheartedly applauding their own satirical portraits on stage — even crying “encore.”¹²⁶ In short, the relationship between subversion and the establishment is not always what it first appears, and those whose aim is *épater le bourgeois* sometimes owe their success to the fact that the bourgeoisie (at least in part) rather likes to be *épatée*.

At the same time, there could be unexpected areas of convergence between anarchists and state officials in the perception of how culture should edify and transform the people. One example is the concern that culture (theater, music, literature) should be made more widely accessible to the working people, and that its content should be determined and regulated by suitable authorities. Indeed, a distinctive characteristic of culture provided for the people by literary, political, and religious groups in this period was its resolute opposition to a culture that was genuinely “popular” in the sense of being widely enjoyed — the café-concert, popular press, or boulevard theater. Lumet referred approvingly in 1904 to Turot's Ligue du Bon Goût and its ongoing battle against the cabaret, but such remarks would not have been out of place in *Art social* in the early 1890s.¹²⁷ In strikingly similar vein,

¹²⁵ For an ambivalent response to *Les Mauvais Bergers*, see Malpy, “Le Théâtre littéraire.” The problematic hero of the play, Jean Roule (possibly one of the eponymous “bad shepherds”), privileges the sensation of revolt over practical improvements for the workers. See especially Act IV, Scene 2, 124. On the success of *Les Affaires*, see Dargan, “Some recent French plays,” 91.

¹²⁶ Carr, *Anarchism in France*, 119.

¹²⁷ One early suggestion in *Art social* was to provide an anthology of “approved” poetry and prose containing wholesome thoughts, good counsel, and useful suggestions for moral and intellectual life. “Le Peuple, ses prosateurs et ses poètes,” *Art social*, Dec. 1891.

architectural designs for national popular theaters submitted for ministerial consideration in the early Third Republic emphasized both moral and physical hygiene. In 1905, architect Alphonse Gosset submitted a proposal for a neo-classical theater that would offer edifying spectacles while meeting modern demands for cleanliness and hygiene, its iron seating “allowing a plentiful circulation of air.”¹²⁸

Anarchists, state officials, and later also socialists, communists, and members of right-wing theater groups were generally agreed on the need for popular entertainment to be edifying: a bold stand against the corrupting influences of more populist culture. But how would such edifying entertainment be imagined? Here, too, there were important areas of convergence. Providing popular entertainment on a small budget and with the participation of amateurs rather than professionals often led political groups to choose the composite spectacle, with short readings and musical numbers rather than a full-length dramatic work. Similarity in form could also bring similarity in content. The Théâtre Civique offered a varied repertoire, yet some at least of the works performed would not have been out of place in more mainstream or state-approved entertainment.¹²⁹ Although the Théâtre Civique favored self-consciously “social” literature such as the one-act plays *En Détresse* and *La Révolte*, there were also readings from classic nineteenth-century authors such as Lamartine or Hugo — the type of “edifying” elite culture also mentioned in proposals for local or national popular theatre received by governments of the Third Republic.

Convergence in form or content should, however, come with a proviso. For social, political, and religious groups creating popular theater, social and spatial context mattered as much (and in many cases far more) than the exact content of the works performed. To watch or participate in a performance that heightened awareness of belonging to the “people” — whether these people were socialist, anarchist,

¹²⁸ Alphonse Gosset, *Projet de théâtre populaire pour la ville de Paris sur son terrain du Marché du Temple*, AN F21 4688. The concluding report offered by the government commissions of 1905–6 would make similar connections between the morality of popular performances and the cleanliness of the theaters. “Commission financière des théâtres populaires: rapport de M. Chéramy, 26 novembre 1906,” AN F21 4688.

¹²⁹ When state initiatives for popular theater came to fruition in the Théâtre National Populaire (housed in the Trocadéro Palace), similar concerns prevailed. In 1922, plays by Victor Hugo (*Ruy Blas* and *Hernani*), Corneille (*Le Cid*), and Molière (*Le malade imaginaire*) were the most popular. See “Recettes brutes réalisées au Trocadéro,” “Ministère des Beaux-Arts. Note pour le budget de 1923. Le Théâtre National Populaire, année 1922.” AN F21 4691.

communist, right-wing, or royalist — often made cultural content subservient to the experience of community. And when the same plays were performed in different popular contexts, these contexts were necessarily transformative. The farces of Georges Courteline are just one example. Firmin Gémier once remarked that when organizing theater for soldiers during the First World War, he found only the plays of Molière and Courteline “capable of uniting in fraternal joy all the sons of France.”¹³⁰ Yet the effect of a Courteline play on its audience was surely very different according to whether the context was a professional production in a boulevard theater or a festival organized by the “Friends of *Le Libertaire*” that also included speeches on anarchism and trade unionism.¹³¹ In political and sometimes also clandestine contexts, popular theater could be shaped much more profoundly by political visions of the people than by artistic aspirations for their theater.

The experience of popular community could divide in practice, but it could also unite in theory. Lumet’s proposals for quasi-religious festivals for the people, presided over by the artist, chimed with official initiatives to create a civic, republican religion. Although Lumet and municipal or ministerial officials propounded different interpretations of the word “civic,” they shared a conviction that popular theater — didactic, festive, and religious, as Lumet had described it — should play a vital role in establishing the ideal city. What would better advance republican civic religion than a network of theaters, complementing republican education with wholesome plays (and beverages) for the French people, while diverting their attention from rival ideologies? It is surely no coincidence that the height of state interest in popular theater before the First World War was in 1905, the year of the separation of Church and state.¹³² Indeed, the case of popular theater suggests some of the ways in which the Third Republic sought to counter the Catholic Church “by opposing the counter-model of a ‘genuine civil religion’, which includes (...) its own pantheon, martyrology, liturgy, myths, rites, altars and temples.”¹³³

¹³⁰ Gémier, “Le Théâtre populaire.”

¹³¹ “Fédération Communiste Anarchiste, soirée artistique, samedi 26 octobre 1912,” AN F7 13055.

¹³² For government proposals and commissions in 1905, see Wardhaugh, *Popular Theatre and Political Utopia*, Chapter Two.

¹³³ Hervieu-Léger, “Le miroir de l’Islam en France,” 82. Charles Rearick has contributed to this debate with particular reference to the Third Republic by discussing the Republic’s quest for secular festivals to replace religious ones. See Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque*.

This area of convergence sheds light on what is perhaps the most fundamental paradox revealed by the case study of Louis Lumet, challenging the very assumptions of “cultural democratization.” Louis Lumet — like state officials, and many other proponents of popular culture across the political spectrum — aspired to popular participation in culture formerly been reserved for a wealthier social elite. They wanted the people to be edified through contact with what was culturally accepted as moral and beautiful. This goal was desirable and defensible not only because of the dangers of moral corruption offered by more genuinely popular (i.e. widespread) entertainment such as the cabaret, but also because the “people,” whether in the sense of the nation or the working class, were an extremely powerful historical actor. For anarchists, communists, and socialists, but also for those of the more extreme right, the people held the potential for radical political change. And yet within the context of ideal popular culture, these people were not to be allowed to choose for themselves. They were to be offered cheap access to bourgeois culture, or even (in post-war visions of a more “total” art that are nonetheless prefigured in the writings of Lumet and others) participation in transformative new drama.

In short, the participation of the people — the democratizing aspect of such popular culture — was to be carefully scripted. And their experience of religious communion within such culture would depend on their mediator with art and beauty: the poet, director, or leader. Even those who admired popular spontaneity as an agent of political transformation — such as Romain Rolland, whose entire cycle of the *Théâtre de la Révolution* revolves around revolutionary genius as expressed through the crowd — were actually much more ambivalent, and surprisingly cynical, in their assumptions about popular action.¹³⁴ Both positions (belief in the sovereign and transformative people, and belief in their need for leadership and direction) might be held concurrently with perfect sincerity, and even with fervor and idealism. But the paradox remains.

Thus the initial irony of an anarchist writer subsequently receiving state funding reveals a paradox of wider significance: that initiatives classified together as “cultural democratization” should not be taken at face value, for the relationship

¹³⁴ Charnow notes that “Rolland’s relationship with the audience, the crowd, the people was a strained one,” and that *Danton* reveals his “fear of the crowd.” *Theatre, Politics, and Markets*, 172. Cf. Wardhaugh, “In the Shadow of Danton: Theatre, Politics, and Leadership in Interwar France,” in Wardhaugh (ed.), *Politics and the Individual*, 13–28.

between culture and democracy is far from straightforward. Strikingly, assumptions about the participation of the people in a culture of integration or even of subversion may clash with concurrent convictions about their role as transformative political agents. Indeed, these people are often conceived as an audience whose individual predilections for other forms of culture to be curbed, whose convivial and familial circles or traditions of entertainment need to be supplanted, notably by the more public and controllable environment of theater or festival. Behind the exaltation of popular communion and fraternity as the highest goal that such culture can provide, there is often the assumption of a director behind the scenes — be this a government or party, or even an anarchist poet.

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