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## **'Un depot précieux': matter, agency and politics, and the siege of the Bastille**

This article examines how in the weeks after the siege of the Bastille in the summer of 1789 the material remains of the fortress were used as political tokens of the nation's newfound freedom. These tokens comprised maquettes of the Bastille carved from its stones, medals and buttons made from the irons that once constrained its inmates, flags captured from its ramparts, and even the mortal remains of prisoners uncovered beneath its walls. Taken together, these tokens constituted a 'precious repository' of objects animated by citizens' acute consciousness of the significance of the Bastille's fall not only for Paris and for France but for the rest of humanity.<sup>1</sup> The significance of these objects, largely overlooked in the history of the Revolution, rested not on the mystical symbolism of absolute monarchy but on their material proximity to the siege, their direct indexical connection to an event that was seen to mark a defining break with the past. Close examination of the objects, texts and images that followed the siege shows the formation a new historical calculus, one that is contingent on an almost phenomenological consciousness of things and time, and their transformative agency. This article explores the agency of such objects and their inter- and intra-textual connection to contemporary images and accounts of the French Revolutions' first weeks.

Key Words: materiality, French Revolution, Bastille, eighteenth-century Paris, methodology, time.

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‘... The past two days (the 12 and 13 July 1789) have only been formed by a sequence of events which cross, merge and unfold one after the other; it is this which has stopped us from describing them with any precision ...’<sup>2</sup>

***In medias res:*<sup>3</sup> by way of an introduction ...**

This article examines the production of a range of visual, textual and material artefacts commemorating what was widely agreed to have been an event of millennial significance, not just for France but the ‘entire universe’: the siege and destruction of the Bastille.<sup>4</sup> Contemporary accounts were clear. The prison’s destruction signaled citizens’ final liberation from the crimes and arbitrary injustices of a corrupt and self-serving aristocracy. The political arithmetic was soon to change but for the moment the king was the custodian of a free nation and the material fabric of the Bastille, now in ruins, served as a powerful token of this newfound Liberty. In France, the symbolic significance of objects had long been integral to the political operation of power. According to the logic of absolute monarchy, authority was conferred on the French king’s thoughts and deeds through the application of chrism to his head and hands taken from an ampulla given by an angel to Saint-Remi for the anointment of Clovis, the first king of the Franks in 481. Thereafter the body of the king was an incarnation of his divinity and the rituals and objects connected with it acquired a quasi-religious lustre.<sup>5</sup> Writing on Hyacinthe Rigaud’s portrait of Louis XIV of 1702 (Fig. 1), Louis

Marin points to the part played by the epideictic representation of monarchy – the baldachin and throne confirming the sanctity of the king's person, Charles V's arm of justice denoting the king as the conduit of divine law, Charlemagne's sword as a sign of imperial authority, the oversized ermine-lined blue velvet cape decorated with the Fleur de Lys as the ancient sign of Christian Frankish kings - in the symbolic affirmation of absolute power.<sup>6</sup> As Paul Ricoeur notes, the portrait does not *represent* the king, rather it and the objects it contains combine to *present* him to his subjects as an incarnation of royal authority.<sup>7</sup>

The siege and destruction of the Bastille in July 1789 also saw the generation of objects with political meaning but under conditions radically different to those made during the *ancien régime* and, indeed, to those made in the later phases of the Revolution. The painter and radical Jacobin Jacques-Louis David famously developed an austere neoclassical style that later became equated with political reform.<sup>8</sup> The Musée du Louvre's *Oath of the Horatii* of 1784 and the *Lictors returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons* of 1789 - two of the painter's most stridently neoclassical pictures - show patriotic themes from the early history of Rome in which the interests of the individual were sublimated to those of the republican state. Both pictures, however, were commissioned by the crown rather than a republic, their meaning to change as France shifted from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy and on to republics of the left and right. Back in 1789, there was no simple connection between neoclassicism and political reform.<sup>9</sup> Rather, in the very early stages of the Revolution, particularly in the production of material and visual culture, citizens created an impromptu lexicon that broke with the past. By the early 1790s, this lexicon was broadly legible: trees were

well established as symbols of Liberty and national regeneration, broken chains and Phrygian caps signs of freedom, tricolor cockades markers of citizens' affiliation to the Revolution, fasces as a sign of unity, and so on. Back in the summer of 1789, however, this lexicon had to be made and learned. When on 17 July 1789 the king was given a tricolour cockade before 5000 citizens at the Hôtel de Ville, the event was accompanied by a pamphlet with a detailed explanation of the new revolutionary symbolism.<sup>10</sup>

The material, textual and visual culture of the first days of the Revolution are significant because they show this lexicon in the process of its formation. The meaning attached to the Bastille's remains were made in the crucible of the moment and animated not by the conventional lexicon of monarchy and church but by an amalgam of sources, hastily and imperfectly conceived by newly-empowered citizens dizzied by the pressing and unfamiliar demands of Liberty. So pressing were the needs of the moment and so radical the break with the old regime, it was as if the old cultural fabric was suddenly inadequate and other cultural forms - some material, others iconographic and textual - were pressed into service. After July 1789, it is possible to swap the category *epideixis*, the rhetoric of display, with another Aristotelian mode, *forensic* rhetoric, one used to evidence wrongdoing using judicial evidence and the calculation of injury.<sup>11</sup>

This article locates itself tangentially beside a number of studies about material and visual culture of the period. Writing on the recent historiography of material and visual culture and the French Revolution, Rolf Reichardt and Hubertus Kohle call attention to the methodological limitations of several seminal studies on art and the Revolution

written to coincide with the bicentennial of 1989. In their reading of Michel Vovelle's *L'Image de la Révolution française*, Reichart and Kohle acknowledge the comprehensive nature of the study but point out how art and popular culture have little generative agency in their own right and are mainly used to illustrate broader events in politics.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, in both Annie Jourdain's *Les monuments de la Révolution* and Philippe Bordes and Régis Michel's *Aux armes et aux arts! Les art de la Révolution 1789-1799*, Reichart and Kohle point to the absence of a substantive connection between 'high art and popular artistic productions'.<sup>13</sup> Rather, art and visual culture of the period, they argue, comprise 'an amorphous, hybrid, multifarious artistic production', productions that demand a more nuanced and layered analysis tracing points of conjuncture between various strata in visual culture.<sup>14</sup> Examination of the primary sources found in the first weeks of the Revolution show, however, not just the importance of visual culture in its wider form but also the material fabric of the French Revolution.

Writing in 'Beyond Words', a *résumé* of material culture studies' methods and their application to the study of the production of decorative arts during the Revolution, Leora Auslander calls attention to the value of artefacts in expanding the often logocentric preoccupation of historians. Auslander advocates an interdisciplinary approach where the insights of art and design historians, anthropologists and historians of the decorative arts might come together to create an expanded field for the subject.<sup>15</sup> For Auslander, it seems there remain defining constrains for material culture studies, notably a binary division between the 'material' and the 'linguistic', and 'aesthetic objects' and 'goods with which people have been in bodily contact'.<sup>16</sup> In her shift of

attention from words and images to artefacts, there is another omission: the material incarnation of the Revolution, from human remains at one end of the spectrum to the repurposed fabric of the razed prison at the other and the way in which such material was animated by a highly specific discourse that tests and sits uneasily with normative disciplinary frames. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Reichardt’s *The Bastille: a history of despotism and freedom* exhaustively examines the siege and the objects generated around it and begins to address the potential expansion of the history of art and the history of design’s remit. Here, Lüsebrink and Reichardt are attentive to the ‘concrete tangible materiality’ of the siege but see the objects fashioned from it largely as symbols or ‘visual aids’ for the instruction of the newly constituted citizen.<sup>17</sup> Richard Taws’ recent study *Politics of the provisional* helpfully extends this remit still further identifying a much-expanded field that comprises the fine arts at one end of the spectrum and ‘ephemera’ at the other. In writing on the material fabric of the Bastille he attributes to such ephemera ‘a transubstantive effect’ and, by extension, the possibility of political agency.<sup>18</sup> It is this transubstantive effect that this article sets out to explore.

The subject under scrutiny then, is neither art or design, nor the decorative arts or ‘material culture’ (or at least material culture studies as an academic discipline) but a broader domain: the agency of matter both in its capacity to act upon men and women from the necrotizing effect of bacteria on the bodies of the Bastille’s inmates to men and women’s capacity to repurpose the material fabric of the fortress as a form of political expression; from a virtual materiality generated by psychic projection, to the materiality of texts written around July 1789. It is here perhaps that a contribution to

the disciplinary frame of design history (and indeed other histories) might potentially lie. Alongside the already expansive disciplinary axis of the production, mediation and consumption of artefacts that shape design history, the discipline's connection with the museum studies, sociology, anthropology and so on,<sup>19</sup> there emerge other concerns, the forensic agency of matter both imagined and real, made and found, their capacity to evidence a moment of significance and with it a new consciousness of time. The task (or rather *my* task) is not as Auslander suggests, 'to meld the approaches of the historian, the decorative arts historian and the specialist in material culture' – what Gilles Deleuze might term an over-dependence on the use of pre-existing disciplinary frames, or 'decalcomania',<sup>20</sup> - but to take step back a bit, to start *in medias res*, in the middle of things, to search for a wider plane and with it plural axes to recuperate a set of things and texts generated by the siege that have a new form of meaning.<sup>21</sup>

While it may not be productive to get mired in Bruno Latour and Deleuze's metaphysics, it is worth recognizing the potential constraints of established discipline boundaries and, above all, the liberating potential of *starting in the middle* and working outwards in a potentially unbounded network untroubled by posthumously applied *decals*. Deleuze speaks of decalcomania in terms of a discipline's dependence on a genetic axis or foundational points of reference to categorize and explain phenomena. He is concerned with psychoanalysis but the point applies easily to other disciplines.<sup>22</sup> Here, one part of an enquiry has its origins in another and when taken together comprise an arboreal form, a disciplinary domain. As Deleuze concedes, arboreal forms of thought are not necessarily problematic. David's paintings, for example, fit as comfortably into the domain of art history as costume history comfortably



accommodates David's contribution to revolutionary dress.<sup>23</sup> Arboreal forms of this kind are necessarily reductive, including (or potentially excluding) concerns on the basis of their disciplinary relation to other parts of the tree. The texts and objects encountered around July 1789 are often hard to contain and have no obvious single genetic axis or arboreal filiation with other disciplines. Consider: medals struck from chains taken from the razed Bastille were not symbols but constituted forensic material proof of the fortress's destruction. (Fig. 2) Stones from the Bastille were also carved into *maquettes* of the fortress and sent by Pierre-François Palloy, the entrepreneur responsible for overseeing the Bastille's demolition, to the nation's new Departments as a tangible demonstration of the dawning of a new political order. (Fig. 3) In each case the objects' indexical proximity to the event was fundamental to their signifying power. In some respects, the study of such phenomena might be plausibly contained within material culture studies but primary sources show that their meaning rests not on the prior political and aesthetic categories – the *decals* of art, design, the decorative arts and so on – but, in this instance at least, a set of other conceptual categories articulated through texts, contemporary pamphlets, newspaper articles and summary histories of the moment. Categories such as *light*, for example, the importance of the visibility of the Bastille and its contents, the idea that the dark crimes committed within it were now open for inspection and *light's* co-relate *time*, citizens' acute awareness of the importance of lived experience, a kind of phenomenology *avant la lettre*, were also integral to an understanding of the Bastille's destruction. Many of these concerns emerge unexpectedly and have few obvious roots or parallels within older cultural forms, other than as sudden inversions of older religious or monarchical tropes. Such concerns were also the expressions of the newly enfranchised citizen - doctors,

butchers, bakers, cutlers – or pamphleteers writing under the guise of doctors, butchers etc., rather than professional historians and provide a quotidian view rarely found during the *ancien régime*. In many cases, these events are documented in texts but they are speedily written and quickly and poorly printed giving a codicological urgency to their narrative, compounding still further the boundaries of material and textual culture, what is made and what is written. It is precisely this fragmented, rhizomatous material incarnation of the Bastille and the textual and visual referents used to describe it that this article sets out to examine.

### **The Bastille and the poetics of subjection**

On one level the Bastille's qualifications as the Revolution's epicenter were poor. The Bastille featured in a number of eighteenth century guides to Paris but often received little more than a perfunctory description of its appearance and history. Charles-Georges-Thomas Garnier's popular encyclopaedia, the *Voyages imaginaires, songes, visions, et romans cabalistiques* of 1788, acknowledged the distress and inconvenience of imprisonment but was dismissive of the Bastille's reputation describing the prison as providing an opportunity for a bit quiet reflection at the king's expense.<sup>24</sup> Although the marquis de Sade's novel *Les 120 journées de Sodome ou l'école du libertinage* is set within a prison modeled on the Bastille, the physical and sexual crimes he catalogues bear little resemblance to his own experiences there as an inmate. His cell was apparently spacious and well furnished, and his wife regularly sent clothing, medication and food.<sup>25</sup> When the attack on the Bastille finally took place, the prison was disappointingly found to contain just seven inmates.<sup>26</sup> Deprived of genuine

political victims and urgently in need of evidence to substantiate the crimes of the old order, the Revolution invented them, among them Jean-Louis Carra's wholly imaginary comte de Lorges, an inmate liberated from the Bastille after 37 years of incarceration.<sup>27</sup> So desperate was the need to fashion a material incarnation of those who had suffered at the hands of the old order and had been liberated by the new that Anne-Marie Tussaud even went on to create a life-mask of the count.<sup>28</sup> Alongside the mask there were numerous prints of the *comte's* liberation and his part in a public procession from the Bastille to the National Assembly's provisional headquarters at the Hotel de Ville. A hatred of the old order and a conflicted enthusiasm for the new formed, it seems, the capacity to generate victims where none existed – a kind of virtual material culture - and to locate them squarely within the early history of the French Revolution. (Fig. 4)

The figure of the count, far from fake, was more a prosthesis of Liberty where revolutionary desire was of such intensity that it demanded what Richard Taws describes as a 'transitional object' to give it substance.<sup>29</sup> In this instance, however, the transitional object is made to negotiate the dawning of Liberty rather than the trauma of separation, a new, complex and imperfectly formed political ideal inflected with a hatred of the old order and joyful anticipation for the new. Seen in this context, the object represents a moment not in the formation of the ego but rather in the formation of citizens' political consciousness: after July, the Revolution is predicated on a renewed affirmation of the monarchy in the image of a paternal monarch now once more in touch with his children but also disconnected from the corrupted machinery of the court and ministry. There was also some anxiety about the king's new place in the constitution, his ties to the old order and his genuine affiliation to the new. Seen in the

context of Freud's observations of his grandson's play where the loss and return of an object are used to master a potentially painful experience of parental separation, the revolutionary process might be reconfigured in terms of the joys and anxieties of dispatching a regime only to recall part of it and to recall it under new and unfamiliar conditions.<sup>30</sup> The objects fashioned from the Bastille might be seen as an attempt to give this partially formed regime something of a fixity. It is for this reason that the indexical character of such objects, their forensic potential are of such importance.

If some records paint a benign picture of prison life, clandestine literature - much of it written by exiled dissidents and printed abroad – showed the Bastille in a different light. These sources are central to an understanding of the material and visual culture of the Bastille's destruction because it was partly to these that many turned in their search both for a narrative to explain the siege but also the process used to commemorate it. René-Auguste-Constantin de Renneville's *Inquisition française ou l'histoire de la Bastille* of 1715 set the tone.<sup>31</sup> Imprisoned at the Bastille for espionage in 1706, Renneville described a regime that would have made 'Nero blush', harsh conditions and gratuitous punishments meted out with singular cruelty to victims of arbitrary arrest for crimes unknown.<sup>32</sup> The most lurid came from the *cachots*, cells in the prison's basement. Here, offenders were variously forgotten, tortured, died of hunger, cold or infection finally to languish, steadily necrotizing until they finally formed a material communion with their late peers interred beneath the prison's walls. In one gruesome passage, Renneville described his discovery of the remains of a partially clothed corpse interred in the freshly dug bare earth of his basement *cachot*, one of three recently discovered in the same cell.<sup>33</sup> Soon after, his own body begins to be

subject to the same kind of necrosis in what is described as a veritable tomb. Renneville recounts how, half-naked, fed on nothing other than bread and water and sleeping on rotten straw mattress with flea-ridden and moth-eaten bed linen, his physical health and mental health begin to decline. His face swollen, Renneville is beset by shaking so violent that he fears the paralysis of his entire body. Shivering on his bed, he has only the company of rats tamed by a late-prisoner who, Renneville learns, hanged himself in his cell.<sup>34</sup> The Bastille thus constitutes a liminal world somewhere between life and death, where the material process of inmates' physical decay becomes steadily more tangible over time until overcome by the inevitability of death.

Drawing on Renneville's experience and a host of other pamphlets and novellas about life in the prison, the journalist and lawyer Simon-Nicholas-Henri Linguet later recorded his own internment in one of the best-selling clandestine publications of the 1780s, the *Mémoires de la Bastille*.<sup>35</sup> Like Renneville, Linguet spoke of the cold in winter, the heat in summer, the insanitary conditions in the cells but singled out psychological tortures, arbitrary arrest for crimes unknown and a regime of enforced silence depriving prisoners of virtually all points reference to the outside world. Linguet spoke of a dull routine in which the perception of time was agonizingly extruded through the deprivation of experience, a privation so complete that the slightest stimuli assumed a magnified importance. In one passage, he recalls counting changes in the number of footsteps as guards went from cell to cell at mealtimes as the only means of indicating the arrival or departure of an inmate but also the endless cyclical repetition of time marked by the Bastille's clock visible from his cell window.<sup>36</sup> The 'living hell' of the Bastille, in essence a potential eternity of time

without any hope of redemptive experience to render it meaningful, had been suddenly transformed by the siege into its exact opposite: the florescence of experience, instantly liberating men and women making them conscious of the importance of each lived moment as it unfolds.<sup>37</sup> In the same way that dawning of Liberty was to transform the necrotizing fabric of the prison into something approximating secular relics, sanctified by their indexical proximity to the crimes they had witnessed, so after 1789 the timeless time of incarceration is transformed into the immanence of lived experience. Indeed, included in the frontispiece of Linguet's *Mémoires sur la Bastille* is an image prophesizing the destruction of the fortress. Here, one of two bolts of lightning ending both the time of incarceration but also prophetically the time of the old regime. (Fig. 5) The material prostheses of the Bastille – imagined counts, clocks, medals and cadavers - contained not only an indexical connection to the site but also something of this transformative chronometry.

### **Matter, texts and forensic rhetoric in the articulation of Tuesday's siege**

Material objects - both real and imagined, made and found - figured prominently in the early history of the Revolution. Conspicuous was the work self-styled 'Citoyen Palloy'. Palloy famously oversaw the Bastille's demolition and the production and distribution of revolutionary memorabilia on a near industrial scale. His workers were active in the fabrication of both scale models of the Bastille made from its stones (and, when supplies became limited, scale models comprising only dust from the prison mixed with plaster), inkwells, buttons and medals formed from irons taken from the prison's cells.<sup>38</sup> One 'Dax', one of Palloy's 800 workers employed to complete the demolition

of the fortress, explained how, although a humble mason, he was galvanized by the spirit of Liberty to make a maquette of the prison from one of the first stones to fall on the afternoon of the 14 July, a testimony given at a celebration of the siege held in the District headquarters of Saint-Louis de la Culture in February 1790.<sup>39</sup> Another of the Bastille's stones comprised part of a funerary monument for the remains of four bodies reinterred at the church of Saint-Paul and was recorded in a print published by Palloy. (Fig. 5) Over the next two years, other stones were sent out to town halls in the provinces accompanied by Palloy's agents, the 'Apostles of Liberty', to political clubs, to Versailles, the Jeu de Paume and the National Assembly. Palloy's diary records numerous other commissions for *bastilles*, each with a certificate guaranteeing its provenance and dispensing a kind of revolutionary grace.<sup>40</sup> There were also plans to site a *maquette* as the centerpiece of Fête de la Fédération, the celebration of the first anniversary of the siege held in Paris at the Champ de Mars. (Fig. 6) Palloy both planned for the king ritually to destroy the centerpiece to symbolize the 'extinction of hate' and the collective reconciliation of new French citizens, and to stage a *tableau* involving the construction of a larger model of the Bastille that was to be besieged by the same *vainqueurs* who had taken part in the event a year earlier.<sup>41</sup> Palloy's diaries do not record why the plans came to nothing but the king was clearly anxious about the degree to which the accoutrements of Absolutism were losing their power. According to the contemporary British observer Helen Maria Williams, the Fête de la Federation passed off magnificently and, like Wordsworth, she was beguiled by the spirit of universal fraternity that, in 1790 at least, seemed to grip Parisian citizens. Only one event, she records, tainted the celebration, the king's refusal to leave the sanctity of his

canopied throne and take an oath at the National Altar, a last gasp of epideixial rhetoric on Louis' part in the face of repeated incursions of a forensic kind.<sup>42</sup>

Although Palloy's efforts have been well documented, little detailed attention has been given to the processes of signification, the textual and material exchange whereby texts, images, materials and objects garnered meaning. One among several examples of this process at work is found in a short pamphlet to commemorate the discovery of two cadavers in the Bastille's foundations, the *Discours sur la liberté françoise, prononcé le mercredi 5 août 1789* by the firebrand cleric and *vainqueur*, Claude Fauchet.<sup>43</sup> For Fauchet, the bodies' exhumation from the literal dark of the older order into the light of the new was an act of patriotism marking a new form of history. Twinning the language of the Liberty with that of the pulpit to substantiate the kinds of atrocities sensationalized in pre-revolutionary clandestine literature, Fauchet explained how the crimes of the *ancien régime* had long been sealed beneath the Bastille's walls and were thought impervious to daylight. 'The day of Revelation had arrived' he explained; the victims of the Bastille '... have heard the voice of Liberty' and were now poised to rise again on what was seen as a secular Day of Judgment.<sup>44</sup> Once discovered, the prisoners' remains were duly reinterred.<sup>45</sup> The cortege comprised twelve workers engaged in the Bastille's demolition including those who had discovered the bodies. They accompanied the coffin with the ball and chain found beside the late prisoners placed on its lid, with each bearer carrying the tools of his trade with a placard reading 'tremblez les ennemis du bien public'.<sup>46</sup> Absolute monarchy drew its power from ancient rituals mediated through symbolic objects conferred around the body of the king. Liberty's authority, by contrast, rested not on symbolism but on material



evidence, testimony, a time and a place. The stuff of the body, the state of the cadavers, the presence of the implements used to disinter them, the discovery and presentation of the ball and chain were each material proofs of atrocities. Those involved, were also on hand to give personal testimony to verify the evidence, a testimony that was often underwritten by the authorities. In numerous cases, events documenting the siege were considered so extraordinary and so important that – like some of Palloy's medals - they bore the signatures of those involved who, in this instance, sought the additional affirmation of a convocation of the National Assembly.

The events of the siege were not only precisely documented, they also happened in a precise location at a given time: at the eastern end of the rue Saint-Antoine between two and five o'clock in the afternoon. Colin Lucas has called attention to the siege as an essentially local event, a community endorsed gesture initiated by members of a famously radicalized quarter.<sup>47</sup> However, when three weeks after the siege, citizens gathered at the Church of the Fathers of Nazareth to remember the fallen, Fauchet left his congregation in no doubt about the wider significance of the events. The Bastille's fall is set beside Judas Maccabees' part in the uprising of Seleucid Empire of 160 BC, Joshua's role in the Battle of Jericho and David's conquest of Jerusalem. Again, the intensity of citizen's lived experience is recorded, underscored, substantiated with material evidence but then magnified in significance, contextualized within the passage of millennia. This sense of revolutionary time is quite distinct from the new method of calibration found in Charles-Gilbert Romme's de-Christianized revolutionary calendar introduced in 1792 in which months are rationally divided into 3 ten-day *decades* and days into 10 hours, comprising 100 minutes. Fauchet's sense of chronometry is

something different. It shows not so much a modernizing time pointing to the novelty of a new order but rather a sense of time predicated on citizens' consciousness of the importance of lived experience, the sense that the events unfolding around them were at once singularly unpredictable but of enormous historical moment and, as such, deserved immanent conscious recognition and documentation. It is this configuration of the present, it seems, that was thought to be indexically embodied in objects: stones, medals and so on were tangible proof that an event took place in a precise location at a precise moment.

The transformative powers of the Bastille's remains were recognized not only by early luminaries of the Revolution like Fauchet but also by common citizens. A physician, Mauclerc de Chalons en Bourgogne, another participant in the siege who in the summer of 1789 worked as a guide to the razed Bastille, describes an evening tour through its notorious basement cells, the *cachots*.<sup>48</sup> Mauclerc's experience was clearly primed by his reading of Linguet. The Bastille is the aristocrats' 'infernal manor', 'a tomb for the innocent'. As he passes beneath the remains of the Bastille's drawbridge - the severing of the chains supporting the gate signaled the start of the siege - he recalls the massacre of the delegation that went to negotiate with the fortress's governor at the start of the uprising and confesses to the same sense of 'hate and injustice' towards the old order that had so galvanized him only a month before. 'Tread carefully', he advises, 'lest you step on the remains of your father, your mother, your brother'.<sup>49</sup> As the tour continues, Mauclerc points out the name of the comte de Lorges scratched into the *cachot*'s walls and a Latin inscription that prophesies that the remains of dead will be avenged. Mauclerc also notes how the clock that had marked Linguet's time in prison had now

been reduced to rubble and makes a lucky discovery: a folded note from Linguet himself hidden in a crack on the left-hand side of the chimney in his cell. It read 'the constitution of a state is usually a work of chance, that time has gradually fashioned by rolling down the slope abuse.' How, Mauclerc asks, could the author have ever imagined that this note would be read so soon and not least by 'a patriot' 'grinding underfoot the source of his misery'.<sup>50</sup> For Mauclerc, the lived experience of visiting the Bastille again demanded a material engagement with the site where to walk around it was vicariously to share the plight of those interred there, one that betokened both memories of crimes and now their political redemption. At the tour's end, Mauclerc finds that dust from the site had settled on his shoulders as a kind of transformative mantle, a material testimony to the new order and his place within it.<sup>51</sup> As so often happens, the siege and the material connected with it are configured as a moment of inversion where the material remains of the Bastille's crimes are brought into the light and chronometrically transubstantiated into the working proof of Liberty's agency.

If some of the Bastille's remains may have worked as 'transitional objects', tools to negotiate the absence of the old regime and the birth of the new, then Mauclair's experience comes close to rehearsing Freud's death drive, where death is the original inorganic state from which we emerge and the state of quiescence to which we all seek to return. In Freudian terms, Mauclerc's tour through the Bastille underscores the moment in which the 'unpleasure' of incarceration is suddenly redeemed through a living being's physical contact of the remnants of death, what Freud would term a discharge. It is, as Freud notes, 'when these forces are turned to destruction in the external world, the organism will be relieved', a process he sees both as psychically

and physically 'beneficial'.<sup>52</sup> Freud even sees 'culture' as a means of mastering such drives but it is worth noting that the forms Mauclerc encounters have agency and are subject to interpretation but, unlike culture, or at least the kind of culture Freud had in mind, have yet to be shaped by human hands and take their place within a social order. In this context, it is worth stepping back a couple of years. Back in 1788 the fortress had more than its fair share of neurotics who were yet to recover this state of quiescence and were obsessively compelled to repeat the trauma of incarceration: the marquis de Sade conspicuously, but also Henri Masers comte de Latude who, deprived of pen, ink and paper, wrote an account of his incarceration first on a chemise and later a compound of bread bound by his own saliva using a pen made of a carp-bone and ink formed from a dilution of his own blood.<sup>53</sup> Here, as François Ansermet notes, without such discharge, aggression is turned inwards.<sup>54</sup> For Latude, the story of the bodily and psychological pains of imprisonment, set out in agonizing detail in his enormously popular *Histoire d'une détention de trente-neuf ans, dans les prisons d'état. Ecrite par le prisonnier lui-même* of 1787, are told through a process that recreates those pains through self-harm.<sup>55</sup> Here the pains experienced through the abuse of others are translated into material form through self-inflicted pain that, in turn, becomes a documented testimony to a physical and psychic trauma. Codicologically, the book is autobiography but articulated in a form in which its fabric is an account of the man and the pains he suffered made from the material traces of that suffering. Although the manuscript no longer exists, the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal contains a letter by Latude written in his blood on a chemise dating from his term of imprisonment. (Fig. 7)

Alongside the generation of the material objects came their complement, a new equally volatile visual vocabulary. The preface to a description of the ceremonial banners made for each of the capital's newly revolutionary parishes or 'Sections' published in 1790 recalled a moment during the siege when a brave young apprentice cutler, one Louis-Nicolas Binet from the rue de Roquette, seized a sixteenth century flag, quickly adapted it and paraded it around the Bastille's ramparts to the delight of the crowd below. The moment and the objects and signs connected with it again crystalized part of a day of unprecedented historical significance but did so not in a symbolic but rather a conspicuously forensic form. The forensic details come thick and fast: snatched from the Bastille's walls at around 'half past four in the evening', a 'five and a half feet square' blue and white flag dating from 'the reign of Henri III' and 'festooned with the devices of the Orders of St. Michel and the Holy Spirit' had hastily applied to it the unusual revolutionary device of a crimson flame with the legend 'I serve Liberty, taken from the despots on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1789.' The record noted how Binet fended off attempts to retrieve the flag by several of the Bastille's guards with the aid of two other brave citizens - the nail-maker Joseph Masson and the metal worker Noel de Lemaire both from the nearby rue de Lappe - where after they were duly awarded the exclusive right to carry the flag in local festivals.<sup>56</sup> All three were given an oval badge with an image of the flag and its impromptu legend embroidered in gold and awarded with a certificate signed by the District's president and secretary. Here, a single, localized and contingent act of bravery connected with the siege is once more recorded in forensic detail and then given official approval lest anyone doubt its veracity. The event is then given visual, material and chronometric form three times over: once by the capture of the sixteenth century royal standard (a mark of how things were), again through the

addition of the somewhat unusual revolutionary device of a red flame (a sign of how things are), and finally through the representation of the amended flag in the form of a badge. There is also no doubt about the significance of this one act. The event is both given local relevance but becomes part of the District’s longer term memory (a sign of how things will be) with the right to carry the flag being bequeathed to Binet *fiils* and his progeny.

### **Memorializing the Bastille**

The destruction of the Bastille was inevitably followed by plans to memorialize the siege. Questions instantly arose about how an event of such importance might be given architectural expression. Some suggestions were relatively conventional but others clearly struggled to find a language to mark so profound an event. Some proposals came from qualified architects, others from enthusiastic citizens. One such ‘citizen from the District of Saint-Germain des Près’, ‘honoured to have destroyed at least one stone’, suggested that the site be used by the National Assembly where the tears of the destitute might nurture wise government;<sup>57</sup> another petitioned for a Temple of Immortality to be erected with the names of the Bastille’s inmates to be carved in stone and gilded. The proposal insisted that the event be recorded in French as Latin was nothing other than a mark of servitude.<sup>58</sup> There were also several proposals to leave the site as a ruin, one with a platform for contemplation carrying the unusually precise inscription: ‘here lies despotism, killed at two o’clock on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1789’, another example of both material and chronometric testimony.<sup>59</sup>

Two proposals, however, stand out. In François Davy de Chavigné's monument, fortuitously conceived just five weeks before the siege, a statue of Louis XVI is set on a Doric column modeled on the Trajan and Antoine Columns in Rome. (Fig. 8) The column rests on a plinth supported by the allegorical figures of France, Liberty, Law and Concorde, themselves supported by figural representations of the four rivers of France distributing their abundance proportionally to all. The structure of the pedestal is made from roughly hewn stone over which flow the waters of the Seine, the Loire, the Rhone and the Garonne.<sup>60</sup> Davy de Chavigné's proposal was looked on with suspicion by the conservative press. The architect's contention that the king's dignity now rested on a Constitution rather than the epideictic trappings of Absolute monarchy was thought ill-conceived and dangerous by the correspondent for the journal *L'Ami du Roi*.<sup>61</sup> But there was little objection to the design of the monument. Davy's politics might be suspect but the symbolic imperatives of Enlightened monarchy were easily contained within the allegorical conventions of French Baroque architecture.

A second proposal came in the form of a large annotated engraving by the artist and engraver Amant-Parfait Prieur entitled *Temple eddied à la liberté: projeté sur les ruines de la Bastille, proposé par souscription, l'auteur renonçant à toute espèce d'honoraires et contribuant pour sa part de la somme de 300 £* published in 1790. (Fig. 9) Prieur wore his political heart on his sleeve and as a good citizen proudly declared that he would take no payment for the project and make a contribution of 300 Livres to its cost. Like Davy, he remained an advocate of a constitutional monarchy and the king again found his place on the top of the monument looking westwards into the city. The remainder of the structure, however, is studiously unconventional. In contrast to what

Prieur described as 'the monotonous monuments that are testimony to the pride of despots', structures that call upon a conventional architectural language, 'one submits to the public', he explains, 'a design for a monument that resembles nothing known'.<sup>62</sup> In fact, on closer scrutiny, the project calls upon some of the same forms of material and chronometric expression found in many other texts and objects connected with the Bastille. The proposed monument was to integrate part of the prison's foundations into a constructed representation of four of the Bastille's six towers: thus to visit the monument was not only to see a representation of the fortress but to see it both on the site of its destruction and to witness something of its very fabric. Central to the design was the inclusion of a representation of a portcullis and drawbridge with a broken chain, another representation of a defining moment on Tuesday afternoon, the point at which canon-fire severed the chain enabling the first of the *vainqueurs* to cross the drawbridge and enter the fortress. Numerous accounts and objects, popular, prints, ceramics and textiles, and not least written accounts record this one defining event as pivotal to the success of the siege.<sup>63</sup> In this sense, such early accounts of the siege and Prieur's monument find a common cause. The texts describing the siege were typically underwritten by witnesses in the same way that the constructed monument gained its authority both from the material presence of the Bastille's foundations and the material absence of the rest of the fortress. Clearly, there are earlier instances in which Baroque monuments represent a moment but these are mainly religious, typically moments of conversion or grace, baptism or ecstasy. Prieur's proposal is conspicuous because, like the breathless immanence of the narratives in so many revolutionary pamphlets, it too represents a moment, one of lived experience to which, had the monument been built, thousands of Parisians would have been able to give personal testimony. The



monument constitutes a moment of universal significance located on the very spot it represents and made with the very stuff of its own creation. Not least, this baroque enterprise – Prieur's prodigious capacity to add referent after referent to the project - was to be built through 'patriotic' subscription with subscribers' names carved on the monument's base, listed in order of the size of their donation.

### ***In medias res: by way of a conclusion***

Such was the pace of political change during the first years of the Revolution that successive regimes found it impossible to agree on a way of commemorating the siege. In July 1790, Palloy organized a dance on the site in a specially garlanded bower that followed the Bastille's original ground-plan to celebrate the Revolution's first anniversary. Here citizens danced on the site 'to stamp out Absolutism's last breath' but the epicenter of the revolution had already moved westwards into a de-historicized space of the newly constructed space on the Champ de Mars set apart to emphasize the Revolution's universal rather than local appeal.<sup>64</sup> A couple of years later, Deputies came to the site of the Bastille to celebrate the siege by drinking the water of Liberty that flowed from the breast of Jacques-Louis David's temporary plaster statue of Isis, a goddess of fertility and motherhood.<sup>65</sup> (Fig. 10) The iconography evoked a de-Christianized idea of regeneration but it is clear that the figure had no material connection to the site and the events that took place on it. Bonaparte's desire to 'terminate the Revolution' rendered a location indelibly connected with popular unrest in this unfashionable working-class quarter all but redundant. All his cash-strapped administration could come up with was Charles Percier and Pierre-François Fontaine's

monumental plaster elephant, the final bronze version of which would never be realized.<sup>66</sup> The rat-infested temporary structure was torn down and replaced with the July Column erected to commemorate the fallen of the revolution of 1830. Here, the remains of those killed in both this uprising and the Revolution of 1848 were interred as a way of finding common cause with the Bastille's insurgents. But again the column was a symbol of revolution rather than a material testimony to a political event.

Over the next century or so, as Keith Reader and Christopher Prendergast have shown, successive administrations made a Bastille of their own choosing as they each attempted to renegotiate a connection with the Revolution. In 1889, the Bastille and part of its surrounding quarter were reconstructed a few kilometres west as part of the Exposition Universelle. Here, the siege was seen as a foundational moment in the course of the last one hundred years but carefully depoliticized to promote an image of France as a modern secular republic and the history of the Revolution as a subject for academic enquiry.<sup>67</sup> The 'Events' of May 1968 – however, effectively passed the Bastille by. Political unrest now took shape in the industrialized zones of Nantes, Rouen, the Paris suburb of Boulogne-Billancourt and in the Universities of Paris at Nanterre, the Sorbonne and the ateliers of the École de beaux-arts where impromptu revolutionary imagery was again produced speedily and in some quantity to sustain the protest's momentum. Some of the most compelling imagery, however, is found in the hastily assembled posters and graffiti asserting the importance of personal and political integrity over creative facility, and intuition and liberty over any one theorized political programme. Like the texts and objects created in 1789, those of 1968 were made as an instant response to a popular political event that again unfolded quickly and resisted

any single political explanation. As Sherry Turkle has argued, the events of May 1968 demanded the reinvention of language, a return to an edenic moment where theory and practice were enshrined in action, where 'the word and thing were one'.<sup>68</sup> Turkle also speaks of the suspension of 'capitalist time', a break with the conditions of the past and unbridled enthusiasm for the possibilities of the future, what Anne Dary, Pascale Le Thorel and Didier Semin and have termed an 'existential spring'.<sup>69</sup> The comparison is vividly made by Michel de Certeau writing only a few months after the events of May 1968 where he directly compares the siege of the Bastille with the 'seizure of speech'. For de Certeau, capitalism is put in the position of the old regime and May's events, like those of July, become a means of inverting the established political and cultural order for the generation of new 'symbolic sites', sites that have yet to be aestheticized as politics or art, but remain as what de Certeau terms 'possibilities'.<sup>70</sup> By way of a footnote, de Certeau's description of the material expressions of revolutions stands in contrast to the way in which the Berlin Wall has been seen as material evidence of capitalism's triumph over communism. In a wave of initial optimism, components of the wall were distributed to some 50 nations in the early 1990s including the United Nations, where they were preserved as tokens of newfound freedom. The character of such objects as a material witnesses to a popular uprising is now arguably less important than their ambivalence, the degree to which over the course of 30 years, they have variously refracted the fears, hopes and disappointments of a range of nations as political events unfold around them.<sup>71</sup> In a German context, Christine Leuenberger has compellingly shown how the image of the Wall now endures either as a source of psychic trauma for citizens or as an object of 'ostalgie', a lament for a lost communist past.<sup>72</sup>

It is perhaps in the expression of Thorel and Semin's existential spring that much of the visual, material and textual culture connected with the Bastille's siege might be understood. Such was the political significance of the uprising and the breadth of its mandate that the newly-enfranchised citizen struggled to find ways of conceptualizing the Revolution. Revolutionary memorabilia would be produced in some quantity for some years but in the days, hours - moments even - after the siege, citizens found themselves pressed into fashioning a near instant cultural response to the events around them, responses that broke with the symbolic conventions of the old regime without formulating a set of coherent alternatives. Later, the task of shaping a new lexicon for conceptualizing the Revolution was later taken up by David and others. But it was this initial absence of coherence in a moment of political turmoil and the demand to give an instant material, visual or textual shape to the Revolution, a task typically undertaken by the inexperienced democratic figure of the citizen rather than the specialist artist, historian or architect, that so tests established discipline boundaries.

Consequently, it was then (and arguably still is now) difficult to find a single place for such expressions within the normative discipline boundaries and it is here that Deleuze's methodological concerns about posthumous categorization or *decalcomania* come into sharper focus. The mobilization of plural, possibly permeable genetic axes across a broader plane, axes that typically comprise established disciplines – the history of design *and* art, material *and* visual culture – but also potential antinomies such as psychoanalysis *and* phenomenology, and not least partially formed or historically contingent thinking about the study of time *and* light offer what Deleuze and Felix

'Un depot précieux'

Guattari might term an 'expanded system of enunciation'. This expanded system insists on the priority of primary sources and their capacity to question disciplinary boundaries and, not least, to insist on a planar field in which events unfold. It is within this expanded system that the processes of convergence, intersection and unfolding that Dussaulx so movingly spoke in 1789 that the Bastille as a *depot precieux* might best be understood.<sup>73</sup>

**Figures**

Figure 1. Hyacinthe Rigaud, Louis XIV aged 63 years in full royal costume, 277 x 194 cms, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1701.

Figure 2. P.-F. Palloy, Medal struck from the iron chains of the Bastille, Paris, 1789, Iron, 4 cms., Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

Figure 3. Model of the Bastille formed from a stone from the fortress, 1789, stone, 37 x 97 x 48 cms., Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

Figure 4. L. Carpentier, L'Heure premier de la Liberté (The first hour of Liberty), engraving, 27.5 x 34.5 cms., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 5. T. Spilsbury , Frontispiece to S.-N.-H. Linguet's *Mémoire sur la Bastille, et sur la détention de M. Linguet, écrits par lui-même*, engraving, 18.3 x 10.9 cms., London, Spilsbury, 1783.

Figure 6. P.-C. Lebas, The bones of bodies discovered during the demolition of the underground cachots of the Bastille, engraving, 1790, 24 x 28 cms., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 7. A.-C. Giraud, Fête de la Fédération of 1790 showing a maquette of the Bastille, 1790, coloured etching, 30,5 x 34,5 cms., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 8. J.-H. Latude, Letter written in blood on Latude's chemise, 1761, linen, 125 x 35 cms., Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

Figure 9. F. de Chavigné, Proposed Colum of Liberty for the site of the Bastille, engraving, 1790, engraving, 45.5 x 60 cms., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 10. Jean-Louis Prieur, Temple dedicated to Liberty on the ruins of the Bastille, 1790, engraving, 25 x 37 cms., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 11. I.-S. Helman, Fête de la Fédération, Fontaine de la Régénération on the site of the Bastille, Paris, engraving, 31.5 x 45 cms., Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

Figure 12. Screen-printed poster produced at the Atelier des Beaux-Arts et École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Residents of the ... support the strikers of your quarter, (Habitants du ..., soutenez les grévistes de votre quartier) screen-print, 44 x 57 cms, Paris, 1968, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> J. Dusaulx, *De l'insurrection parisienne, et de la prise de la Bastille: discours historique, prononcé par extrait dans l'Assemblée nationale*, Paris, Debure, 1790, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> A. S. Miller, *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2013, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Par un citoyen du District du Sépulcre, Observations patriotiques sur la prise to la Bastille*, Paris, 1789, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> O. Ranum, ‘Courtesy, Absolutism and the rise of the French state 1630-1660’, *Journal of Modern History*, 52, September 1980, pp. 431-432.

<sup>6</sup> L. Marin, *The Portrait of the King*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982, p. 7. See also L. Marin, *Food for thought*, Baltimore & London, Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 200-201.

<sup>7</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 266.

<sup>8</sup> P. Bordes, ‘L’Art et la Politique’, P. Bordes and R. Michel (eds), *Aux Armes & Aux Arts: les arts de la Révolution 1789-1799*, Paris, Musée de la Révolution Française, Vizille, Adam Biro, 1989, p. 117-118.



<sup>9</sup> H. Kohle, 'The Road from Paris to Rome: The Birth of Modern Neoclassicism', D Johnson (ed.), *Jacques-Louis David, New Perspectives*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, p 79. See also T. Crow, *Emulation: David, Douai's and Girodat in the Art of Revolutionary France*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006, p. 101.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>15</sup> L. Auslander, 'Beyond Words', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 110, No. 4, October, 2005, p.1016.

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<sup>17</sup> H. J. Lüsebrink & H. Kohle, *The Bastille: a History of a Symbol of Despotism and Freedom*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, p. 132.

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<sup>20</sup> G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (tr. B. Massumi), London, A&C Black, 2004, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> A. Miller, *Speculative Grace*, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> L. Taylor, *Establishing Dress History*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> C.-G.-T. Garnier, *Voyages imaginaires, songes, visions, et romans cabalistiques*, Paris, Rue et Hôtel de la Serpente, 1788, vol. 28, p. 121.

<sup>25</sup> E. B. Larrea, *Regards sur le locus horribilis : manifestations littéraires des espaces hostiles*, Zaragoza, Universidad de Zaragoza, 2012, p. 100.

<sup>26</sup> N. Faucherre, *Sous les pavées, la Bastille: archéologie d'un mythe révolutionnaire*, Paris, Caisse nationale des monument historiques et des sites, 1989, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> J.-L. Carra, *Le Comte de Lorges, prisonnier à la Bastille pendant trente-deux ans enfermé en 1757, du temps de Damien, et mis en liberté le 14 Juillet 1789*, Paris, Buisson, 1789, vol. 2, pp. 357 ff.

<sup>28</sup> *Biographical and descriptive sketches of the whole length composition figures and other works of art, forming the unrivalled Exhibition of Madame Tussaud, etc.*, Bristol, J. Bennett, 1823, pp. 38-39.

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<sup>30</sup> S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, (ed. A. Phillips) London, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> R. Constantin de Renneville, *L'inquisition françoise ou l'histoire de la Bastille*, Amsterdam, E. Roger, 1715, see also Archives de la Bastille, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Constantin de Renneville, MS 10,530, pp. 197 ff.

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<sup>37</sup> *Le Point du jour, ou résultat de ce qui s'est passé la veille à l'Assemblée nationale depuis 1789 à 1791*, Paris, Chez Cussac, 1790, vol. 12, p. 156.

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

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<sup>56</sup> *Extrait de la délibération du District de Madeleine de Tresnel*, Paris, July 28<sup>th</sup> 1789, reprinted in M. Sepet, *Le drapeau de la France: essai historique*, Paris, V. Palmé, 1873 pp. 96-7.

<sup>57</sup> *Adresse à tous les districts au sujet des papiers de la Bastille par un citoyen au District de Saint-Germain des Prés*, Paris, Volland, 1789, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Cri d'un citoyen à la nation, pour la destruction de la Bastille*, Paris, 1789, unpaginated.

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<sup>61</sup> *L'Ami du Roi: des François, de l'ordre et sur-tout de la vérité*, 26 August 1790, p. 361.

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<sup>66</sup> *Sous les pavés, la Bastille: archéologie d'un mythe révolutionnaire*, Paris, Caisse nationale des monuments historiques et des sites, 1989, p. 154.

<sup>67</sup> C. Prendras, *The Fourteenth of July*, London, Profile Books, pp. 160-161.

<sup>68</sup> S. Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics: Freud's French Revolution*, New York, Basic Books, pp. 70-72.

<sup>69</sup> A. Dary, P. Le Thorel, D. Semin and S. July, *Les affiches de mai 68*, Paris, ENSBA, 2008, p. 45. See also Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, p. 69.

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<sup>72</sup> C. Leuenberger 'Constructions of the Berlin Wall: How Material Culture Is Used in Psychological Theory' *Social Problems*, vol. 53, 1, 2006, pp. 18-37.

<sup>73</sup> J. Dusaulx, *De l'insurrection parisienne*, p.26. See footnote 2, *supra*.