HOTSPOTS OF VIOLENCE, NARRATIVES OF HOPE

Celebrating the 150th Birthday of the Paris Commune

Research Master's Comparative Literary Studies
Rikst Maria Catharina van der Schoor
5036135
Supervisor: prof. dr. Ann Rigney
Second reader: dr. Michela Borzaga
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Abstract

How do we deal with things that do not fit the story we want to tell? The Paris Commune was a short-lived workers' revolution in the spring of 1871. After two months, it was bloodily put down by the French army, who massacred the *Communard.e.s* in the *Semaine Sanglante*. Despite attempts of the French government to suppress and villify the Commune, it has since lived on in songs, books, and films; inspiring artists, thinkers, and politicians; and has been celebrated all around the world. Little scholarly attention, however, has gone out to the acts of violence committed by the *Communard.e.s* themselves. This project seeks to rectify that by studying how recent cultural products deal with Communard violence. Four cases across different media and genres are examined to see how they deal with three different "hotspots": the fire and destruction wreaked on Paris, the hostages who were executed by *Communard.e.s*, and the fighting against the French army during the *Semaine Sanglante*.

The project demonstrates how all cases employ a range of argumentative and narrative strategies to legitimate these instances of violence, using the various affordances of their specific medium and genre to bring across a certain interpretation of the Commune. In particular, they legitimise the Communard violence by invoking self-defence, thereby effectively extending their own idea of self to that of the *Communard.e.s*. As a result, the participants in the Commune are humanised: they are not beasts or martyrs, but rounded and flawed people. In precisely this way, the Commune is kept alive and accessible for new generations at the 150th anniversary in 2021.

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Introduction

Despite COVID-related lockdowns and restrictions, France, and Paris in particular, extensively celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Paris Commune in the spring of 2021, with events, books, articles, documentaries, interviews, demonstrations, lectures, street art, and even a cycling route. Although the Commune lasted only two months and ended in the worst massacre that Paris has ever seen, the overall mood was one of celebration and joyous coming-together, as has been the case for most earlier anniversaries.[1] The victims of the massacre by the French army are remembered as martyrs rather than victims, and the focus is on their lives and ideals rather than on their deaths.[2] These assumed lives and ideals of the *Communard.e.s* are seen as inspirational, pursuing equality, self-governance, liberty, democracy, *laïcité,* peace, and republicanism.[3] By proclaiming the agency of the *Communard.e.s,* however, one needs to admit that there were also some actions that did not follow these values. Most grating here are the violent actions committed by the *Communard.e.s* themselves, such as the destruction of buildings and the killing of hostages and other enemies. These historical facts can be elided in art, but not in the history books. Yet in the case of the Commune, the line between the imaginary and the historical is often blurry, making it difficult to escape the confrontation with facts that do not fit the idealised story. It is precisely this awkwardness on the margin of the memory of the Commune that is the topic of this thesis.

The Paris Commune took place during two months in the spring of 1871. After the Franco-Prussian War in which the Second Empire fell, the Third Republic was proclaimed, and Paris was besieged for months, Parisians felt that the monarchist president Adolphe Thiers was a danger to the existence of the Republic and declared that they no longer accepted his government. The Paris Commune was thus a proletarian revolution, a civilian expression of dissent, a barbaric insurrection, or a local attempt at self-governance – depending on who you ask.[4] Responding to the strong economic and political inequalities of the time, the Commune was pro-worker and anti-clerical, and enabled women to take up prominent positions. After ten weeks, the army of the government (who had fled to Versailles and are therefore indicated with "Versaillais") reclaimed the city in such a destructive way that the week of recapture is called the *Semaine Sanglante* ("Bloody Week"). Between 10,000 and 30,000 people were killed during this week, including many women, children, and male civilians.[5] During the takeover, tens of thousands of people were rounded up and thousands of them were shot without trial. Of those who were tried, two dozen were shot,[6] about 4,500 were exiled to labour camps in New Caledonia,[7] and most of the rest were imprisoned or fined. In 1880, Léon Gambetta convinced the parliament to grant all *Communard.e.s* amnesty.[8]

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[1] Jean-Pierre Azéma and Michel Winock, *Les Communards* (Paris: Éditions Thierry Marchaisse, 2015), p.387; Ann Rigney, "Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism Beyond the Traumatic" in *Memory Studies* 11, vol. 3 (2018), p.377.

[2] Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p.171; Rigney, "Remembering Hope", p.377.

[3] Throughout this study, I use "*Communard.e.s*" as a noun to indicate both male and female Commune participants, in acknowledgement of both genders participating in the Commune, following the *écriture inclusive*. As an adjective, I use "Communard" to indicate "of the Commune" or "of the *Communard.e.s*".

[4] For example, see Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (London: E. Truelove, 1871); Jean-Pierre Azéma and Michel Winock, *Les Communards*; Émile Zola, *La Débâcle* (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1892). Source: Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, p.168.

I have identified three significant modes of violence, which I call "hotspots". The declaration of the Commune was overall a remarkably nonviolent affair (in part by the government fleeing to Versailles on their own accord).[9] The most drawn-out form of violence is the destruction of several buildings in Paris. Most notable in these are the Palais de Tuileries, the Hôtel de Ville, the Palais de Justice, and the Colonne Vendôme, but some accounts mention many more. Again, there is debate about who should be blamed for the damage done to these buildings, as well as how big the role of arson was in their destruction.[10] Furthermore, several dozens of police officers, army members, and clergy were taken as prisoner and later shot as hostages.[11] Although none of these executions were authorised by the official representation of the Commune, they are often blamed on the Commune.[12] Lastly, the *Communard.e.s* fought against the Versaillais army, in particular on the barricades during the *Semaine Sanglante*. The three hotspots are therefore: the fires and destruction, the execution of hostages, and the fighting against the Versaillais, summarised in "*Semaine Sanglante*". These are all the instances of Communard violence that are described in historical overviews, but historians do not agree on the precise severity, frequency, and Communard involvement in any of these three examples. As a result, there is some leeway in describing them, and narratives can vary in how extensively they treat them.

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[5] Azéma and Winock, p.279. The exact number is fiercely disputed: Louise Michel already said that we would never know the precise number of victims, John Merriman wrote in 2014 that this remains true today (John Merriman, *Massacre: The Life and Death of the Paris Commune of 1871* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), p.483). The official government report mentioned 17.000 people, but there are sufficient reasons to doubt the account of those responsible for illegal executions; similarly, the municipal council report estimating 100,000 people killed, deported or imprisoned may be much too high (Merriman, *Massacre*, pp.482-3). As such, the number mentioned in an account of the Commune is telling, and the continuing discussion on the exact number shows that, a 151 years later, it still has an impact.

[6] The death penalty was not allowed for those charged for political purposes, which partly explained why so many people were executed before the trials could happen. For those who were given the death penalty in a trial, common-law reasons had been found, such as murder, arson, and desertion to the enemy (Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (London: Longman, 1999), p. 180).

[7] Dennis Bos, *Bloed en Barricaden: De Parijse Commune Herdacht* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2014), p.178.

[8] Along with victims of the French army shooting at the crowds, several members of the National Guard, soldiers and officers died when government troops tried to seize cannons from Montmartre. Merriman, p.487.

[9] Merriman, pp.185-194.

[10] A dominant myth in the first century after the Commune was the one of the *pétroleuse*: the dangerous woman who enjoyed committing arson. Since this has been disproved by Édith Thomas in her 1963 book *Les Pétroleuses*, the image has mostly disappeared.

[11] Merriman, *Massacre*, p.485.

[12] Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, p.178.

Still, it is undeniable that in sheer numbers and displays of cruelty the Versaillais army exceeded the *Communard.e.s*. While there have been many attempts by the French government and its allies to paint the *Communard.e.s* as an inherently criminal and bloodthirsty bunch, historical research has demonstrated that this was not the case.[13] By and large, this image has disappeared from the popular imagination and generally been replaced by a more sympathetic regard of the *Communard.e.s*.[14] This shift is partly caused by the "liberation" of the Commune from Soviet communist claims after the fall of the Soviet Union.[15] Furthermore, in recent years a space has opened for a careful inclusion of the violent actions by the *Communard.e.s* in narratives about the Commune.[16] In academia, this space has been open for longer, as can be seen in the works of among others Jacques Rougerie and Robert Tombs, but now narratives aimed at a more general public also take up this question. However, in a polarised country where the remembrance of the Commune is not undertaken on a national level, this is a delicate operation: the commemoration of the Commune does not appear sufficiently anchored in society to be able to survive harsh criticism.[17] As such, it is a perfect case study to examine how we deal with elements that do not fit the story we want to tell, whether this is the national story of France or the story that has developed in sympathy with the *Communard.e.s*. While every narrative about the Commune needs to contain a minimum of factual information to be recognisably *about the Commune*, a novelist has greater freedom in the selection, organisation and depiction of these facts than a historian. Yet as the facts themselves are subject of debate, as seen before, a historian also has some degree of liberty in how to depict the Commune. How fact and fiction are mixed, interpreted and presented changes over time, with societal developments and sometimes discoveries of new sources, and also inherently depends on the medium and genre of the story.

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[13] Bos, *Bloed en Barricaden*, pp.74-5; Tombs, p.191.

[14] Still, some commentaries are published that emphasise the destruction and violence on behalf of the *Communard.e.s*, especially in conservative newspaper *Le Figaro* and catholic newspaper *La Croix*. These are however a small minority.

[15] Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London: Verso, 2015), p.20.

[16] See Bos, *Bloed en Barricaden*.

[17] The French president at the time of the 150th anniversary, Emmanuel Macron, did not publicly acknowledge the anniversary.

The question that I ask in this research project is therefore *How do recent French narratives about the Commune use the affordances of medium and genre to present Communard violence?* To answer this, I will be close reading four different yet interlinked case studies: a novel, a graphic novel, an animated documentary, and a historical work. The first of these is Jean Vautrin's 1999 historical novel *Le cri du peuple*, on the Commune from the point of view of the "petit peuple" of Paris, which inspired Jacques Tardi to create a graphic novels series under the same title in 2001-2004. In honour of the 150th anniversary of the Commune, this series has been reprinted in one single volume, which is the one I use for this project. Raphaël Meyssan has similarly created a graphic novel series, *Les damnés de la Commune* (2017-2019), based on original engravings. In 2021, he reworked this into an animated documentary for ARTE. To see the affordances of different media more clearly, I investigate Meyssan's documentary rather than his graphic novel. Lastly, all of these cases are featured in the final case of this project, Ludivine Bantigny's 2021 *La Commune au présent : une correspondance par-delà le temps*, a historical study in epistolary form. Bantigny has written letters to a wide range of participants of the Commune, an original way of conveying historical research in an imaginative manner. To analyse these cases, I will be using concepts and ideas from various fields of study: cultural memory studies, theories of violence, narratology, and Commune studies.

The cultural memory and historiography of the Paris Commune once more confirm that it is impossible to write about the past in a neutral, objective manner. An event too large to be ignored, it has generated controversy for a century and a half, and it does not look like it will crystallise anytime soon, as France is too divided. Precisely because the ideological background is so clearly visible in the case of the Commune, it can provide an insight into how stories of the past are built in general. In lieu of objectivity, one can try to be balanced: show what both sides have done and let the reader decide. Yet this choice is one that will be heavily influenced by the way that the narrative is structured. The effect this structuring has on the audience is more important than the unverifiable intention of the author. Analysing how Communard violence is given a place in accounts of the Commune is therefore not only interesting, but also important: the Commune and its memory still influence present (and thus future) thought and action. Moreover, understanding how the process of how these stories are constructed gives us an insight in how other stories can be constructed as well. For when building a story with stones of the past, you have to find a way to deal with the stones that you do not like anymore: do you throw them away, act as if they were never there in the first place, repaint them, hide them in a small corner, or put them into the geological layer where they were found? This choice is never a disinterested one: it shapes how the audience will see their past, their present, and their future.

Cultural Memory Studies

Cultural memory is "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts", or "those memories of events we ourselves did not directly experience but of which we are nevertheless aware".[18] As a result, it is almost entirely dependent on the mediatisation of events.[19] In studying the Paris Commune through the lens of cultural memory studies, the facts of the events themselves are less central than their later interpretations and representations. Although the Commune has ended and all its participants have died, today it still prominently figures in the general imagination thanks to the many different representations that have been created after 28 May 1871, when the last Communards were killed. Cultural memory thus studies the way in which the Commune has been remembered by looking at cultural "objects" such as books, music, films, paintings, and monuments, rather than, for instance, studying legal and political reactions to the Commune such as the 1880 Amnesty Law of Léon Gambetta.

Since the Second World War, the field of cultural memory studies has been particularly interested in the traumatic effects of war, genocide, and violence; and how these sources of death, pain and suffering are worked through in cultural productions.[20] Yet when looking at the cultural memory of the Commune, this lens of trauma does not seem sufficient to show what is going on.[21] Peter Starr's 2006 *Commemorating Trauma: The Paris Commune and Its Cultural Aftermath* employs the trauma perspective most strongly. He considers "the complex relation between the confusions and melancholies attendant to the collectively traumatic experience of the Terrible Year, and the transcendence of that trauma through the positing of an essential futurity".[22] In other words, the trauma of the Commune appears to have been transcended. Enzo Traverso has echoed this idea of trandescension in *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History and Memory* (2016). He observed that for many contemporary actors, "remembering the bloody defeat of May 1871 was not an impotent or desperate mourning; it was the inescapable road through which the legacy of the Paris Commune – both its political imaginary and its practical experience of social transformation – could be assimilated and transmitted".[23] In other words, the remembrance of the Commune has always been concerned with present and future action more than with past victimisation. In "Remembering Hope: Transnational activism beyond the traumatic", Ann Rigney has studied how as a consequence, the Commune has overall been remembered as a party, thus ensuring its survival as a hope-giving event rather than a purely traumatic one.[24] In short, the memory of the Commune is not simply a *working through* the events, but more of a *working with* them to achieve a – usually socially progressive – goal.[25] By redeeming the violence, the Commune is given meaning, *despite* the violence that was committed against the Commune[26] The present study also moves away from the traumatic perspective, but looks more closely at the role of violence in the remembrance of the Commune.

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[18] Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara Young (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies: an international and interdisciplinary handbook* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), p.2; Max Saunders, "War Literature, Bearing Witness and the Problem of Sacralization, Trauma and Desire in the Writings of Mary Borden and Others" in E. Lamberti and V. Foruneti (eds.) *Memories and Representations of War: The Case of World War One and World War Two* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p.178.

[19] See Astrid Erll and Sara Young (trans.), *Memory in Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.28; Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.6.

[20] Anna Reading and Tamar Katriel (eds.), *Cultural Memories of Nonviolent Struggles: Powerful Times* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.2.

[21] See Rigney, "Remembering Hope".

Cultural memory is, as said, reliant on the mediation of past events. The experiences of *Communard.e.s*, Versaillais soldiers, government officials, foreign observers, and other participants were collected and written down. Initially, strict censorship and political repression in France forced *Communard.e.s* to write abroad.[27] After amnesty had been granted, *Communard.e.s* returning from exile united in 1882 in the association *Les Amies et Amis de la Commune de Paris*, which still exists today.[28] Through organisations such as these that facilitated the oral transmission of experiences and the publication of books, the creation of songs, films, plays, art, et cetera, the Commune has been "kept alive". With the last *Communard.e.s* having died decades ago, the only way to access the Commune is through media. Some of these are contemporary with the Commune, such as photos and news reports; others were created shortly afterwards by witnesses, second-hand witnesses, or contemporaries, partly based on said pictures and news reports, such as the books by Karl Marx and Émile Zola and the songs by Eugène Pottier; and others are based in turn on *these* sources, such as Bertolt Brecht's *Der Tage die Kommune* (1949). The first example could be called *mediation,* i.e. the turning into media; the last two are instances of *remediation,* i.e. the turning of media into other kinds of media.

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[22] Peter Starr, *Commemorating Trauma: The Paris Commune and Its Cultural Aftermath* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), p.8.
[23] Enzo Traverso, pp. 172-3.
[24] Ann Rigney, pp.371; 375.
[25] For the ruling classes (in both France and internationally), the Commune could be seen as traumatic in a different sense: to them, not the brutal suppression of it was harrowing, but the possibility of a successful popular revolution. Yet that is a subject for a different project.
[26] Traverso, p.172.
[27] Bos, *Bloed en Barricaden*, p.228.
[28] See *Les Amies et Amis de la Commune de Paris 1871*, https://www.commune1871.org.

However, as Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney have pointed out in the introduction to *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, "Just as there is no cultural memory prior to mediation there is no mediation without remediation: all representations of the past draw on available media technologies, on existing media products, on patterns of representation and medial aesthetics."[29] Even a medium such as photography, which promises direct accessibility, is thus not a direct representation of the real. Take for instance this picture of a group of *Communard.e.s* at a barricade.

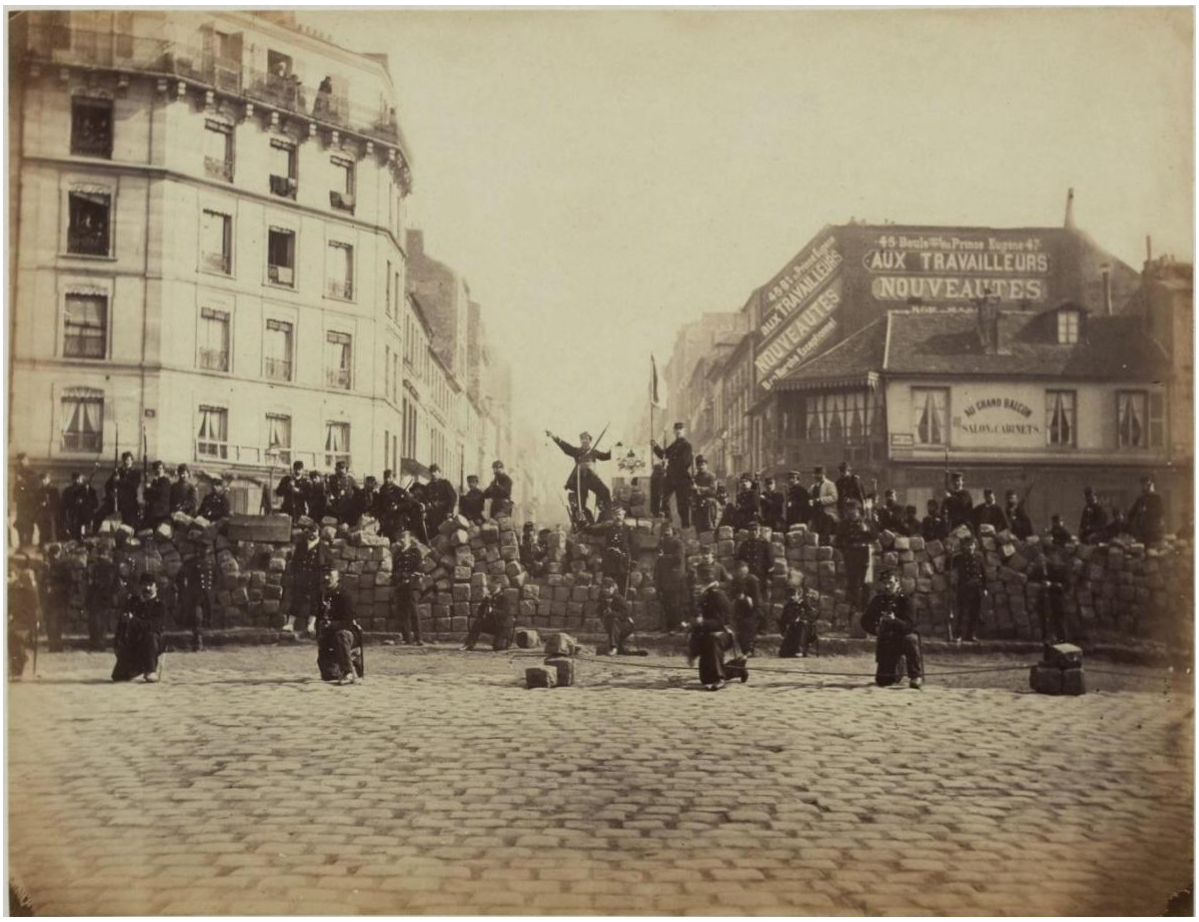

Figure 1: *Barricade de la Chaussée Ménilmontant, 18 mars 1871*, author unknown. Paris : Musée Carnavalet. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Barricade18March1871.jpg.

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[29] Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (eds), *Mediation, remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), p.4.

Photography at the time was constrained by the necessity of immobility of the depicted. If one moved slightly, they would become blurred, as can be seen on this picture as well: one of the soldiers in the first line has moved their head, and those behind him are quite blurry as well. The people in this picture are posed, the frame is selected, in other words, this is not a door through which one can access the Commune, but a carefully directed window that shows what the photographers wanted you to see, which is also transformed by the constraints and possibilities of the medium itself. Even though unmediated access to the past is thus impossible, it is still strongly desired.[30] My case studies demonstrate this will to be closer to past events through mediation: Meyssan, for instance, based his drawings on contemporary gravures, Tardi on photographs, and Bantigny inserted many pictures – including fragments from the graphic novels of Tardi and Meyssan. They all uniquely remediate the Commune, building on other remediations, thus showing that the cultural memory of the Commune is not static, but inherently dynamic.[31] As such, the hotspots of Communard violence are also continuously reinterpreted and reimagined through the lens of the present. This project seeks to understand how that is done with the use of narratology.

Narratology

Narratology was originally developed for folk tales in the early 20th century, it has since evolved and reached the discipline of cultural memory studies. [32] A fundamental distinction in narratology is the one between the "fabula" and the "syuzhet" of a text. The *fabula* is the thematic content of a story, or the events that take place in it; and the *syuzhet* is the chronological content, or the way in which these events are organised. For any given fabula, the syuzhet can take many different forms. Over the past century, narratologists have developed further understandings of this distinction as well as identified more aspects that make up the way in which a story is told.[33]

Taking this, the *fabula* of the Commune would be the individual events in chronological order (as far as events can be considered as loose blocks), while the *syuzhet* is the way in which the writer organises these events. Someone who writes the history of the Commune could start with the seizure of the cannons on 18 March 1871, but also with the Franco-Prussian War (1870), or the French Revolution (1789). What is considered as the "beginning" of an event, or for that matter its "end", depends on the writer.[34] Similarly, whether an event earns their place in a narrative of the Commune or not, how prominent this place should be, how expansive and detailed the description is, and how the event is contrasted with other events, all depend on the author of the narrative – this is both finite, in the sense that the Commune lies in the past and the events cannot be added to, and limitless, in that the amount of constellations that can be made with this set of events knows no bounds.[35] Therefore, a comparative study can bring to light the various ways in which the same story is told, and what effect this has on the narrative as a whole as well as the reader.

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[30] Erll and Rigney, *The Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, p.4.

[31] Erll and Rigney, *The Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, p.2.

[32] Astrid Erll, "Narratology and Cultural Memory Studies" in Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer (eds.), *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), p.212-3.

[33] See David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).

As an aid, I use the theory as developed by Gérard Genette in his *Discours du récit*, or *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. In this fundamental text, Genette employs the concepts of order, duration, frequency, mood, and voice to analyse Proust's series. The first three are related to time: order deals with how events are structured in a narrative (for instance through flashbacks or flashforwards), duration with how much time of the narrative is devoted to a part (some actions are extensively described, while others are more summarised), and frequency with how often something happens and how often it is mentioned in the narrative. Mood is concerned with point of view and focalisation, while voice is about who narrates and what their function in the story is.[36]

Building on this framework, Ann Rigney has investigated in her 1990 book *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation: Three Narrative Histories about the French Revolution* how "the literary, and specifically narrative, means through which real events in the past can be symbolically reconstituted and invested with a particular significance for a latter-day public".[37] Her narratological analysis of French revolution historiography is partly a response to Hayden White, who postulated that modern historical writing is strongly dependent on literary forms, thus giving historical reality the form of a story, a structure not present in the events as they unfolded themselves, but did not explain *how* this was done.[38] Rigney shows that historians have to deal with uncomfortable facts and that they therefore use narrative strategies not only to generate meaning, but also to downplay the significance of these uncomfortable facts. Every historical narrative, Rigney argues, highlights what they do want to show ("en relief") and downplays ot mitigates what they do not want to show ("en creux"), and these two are inherently linked.[39] Her uncovering of various narratological strategies forms the basis of my hypotheses.

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[34] While there is often some consensus (few people will say that the Second World War began before the Common Era, for instance), one could ask a group of historians when the Roman Empire ended and get dates ranging more than a thousand years from one another – none of which being "objectively" false. See also William H. Walsh, "Colligatory Concepts in History" in Patrick Gardiner (ed.), *The Philosophy of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[35] Ann Rigney, *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.24.

[36] Gérard Genette and Jane E. Lewin (trans.), *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

[37] Rigney, *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation*, p.xii.

The current project continues in this vein, taking not only historiographical texts, but also other media and genres that are interested in questions of the historical, thus broadening the scope to cultural memory studies. Where Rigney 1990 focussed strictly on the narratological strategies and not on the "interpretations of the Revolutions and the ideologies which inform them", I am interested to see how the authors' interpretations of the Commune interact with the narrative strategies. Taking the ever-controversial topic of violence will enable me to discover the intricate relations between argumentative and narrative strategies. To better understand why violence can be the key in this process, I will now turn to leading theories on violence and self-defence.

Violence and self-defence

"Violence" is usually taken as "hurting or doing harm to others" with (physical) actions or words, in which "others" can be other humans, animals, objects, or sometimes even more abstract notions, such as "democracy", "honour" or "the Republic".[40] Violence happens near constantly, in various forms – at the time of writing this introduction, among others, there is the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the Israelian occupation of Palestine, the civil wars in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Libya, and Myanmar, the drug wars in Mexico and Colombia, and the famine in Yemen. And those are only geopolitical conflicts – not including forms of systemic oppression by states, and inter-civilian violence. In the spring of 1871, violence was also taking place all over the world. In France alone, there had just been a war with Prussia and a long siege of Paris, the brutal colonisation of Algeria and related famine led to the Kabylie revolt, there was the bloody suppression of strikes and protests, as well as slower and systemic forms of violence such as worker exploitation. In most of these cases, the oppressors and perpetrators were the French state and those with power within it. The same is true for the Commune: most shots were fired by the French army, most men were killed by the French army, and all women and children who died were killed by the French army as well. By examining the historical facts accessible to us, it can be said that the *Communard.e.s* were primarily victims of violence. Yet they did have agency, to a certain degree, and in some cases, that agency was used for violence as well: in the fighting on the barricades during the *Semaine Sanglante*, in the shooting of hostages, and in the destruction of various buildings such as the Tuileries, the Hôtel de Ville and the Vendôme Column. These facts impair the simplistic story that the *Communard.e.s* were victims *only*, and as the facts cannot be denied, they need to be mitigated: fitted into the story with the use of narrative strategies.[41]To understand how this is done in the 21st century, I will give a short overview of how the topic of violence figures in the contemporary imagination. As a foundation, however, I will briefly explain the tradition of "revolutionary violence" that has long played a vital role in interpretations of the Paris Commune.

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[38] See Hayden White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), and Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p.2.

[39] Rigney, *Historical Representation*, p.91.

[40] Cambridge Dictionary, "Violence", https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/violence, accessed 4 July 2022; and Merriam-Webster, "Violence", https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violence, accessed 4 July 2022.

Revolutionary violence is violence in service of a revolution. Revolution is usually comprised of two interlinked parts: a) a rejection of the authority of the existing government and b) an attempt to replace said government with another government or political system. Both are done by anti-constitutional means, though not necessarily through the use of physical force: the method of a strike, for instance, can also be employed. A revolution is swift, as opposed to evolution, and often takes the form of a popular uprising against a government that is considered tyrannical.[42] France is known for its revolutions: 1789, 1830, 1848 were all successful in terms of achieving regime change. The Commune is often interpreted as a revolution, but one that ultimately failed.[43] Its violence can thus be considered in the context of revolutionary violence.

The question as to whether the use of violence to further revolutionary goals is permissible has a long tradition of debate.[44] I consider three approaches that are relevant in the context of France and the Commune. The oldest of these comes from Immanuel Kant, writing about the Revolution of 1789. Although Kant sympathised with the republican cause of the revolutionaries, he rejected the method of revolution.[45] For Kant, people did not have the right to rebel against the state, even if that state was tyrannical.[46] Kant based himself on an interpretation of social contract theory in which the state was created to end violence by acting as an authority to decide in conflicts.[47] The problem with a revolution is that there is no higher authority to decide on who is right when both parties employ violence.[48] In other words, out of principle, Kant only accepts nonviolent resistance, never revolutionary violence.[49] Only state violence can ever be legitimised.

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[41] Rigney, *Historical Representation*, p.90.

[42] Allen Buchanan, "Revolution" in Zalta, E. (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/revolution/.

[43] Jacques Rougerie, *La Commune de 1871*, pp.3-5 ; Tombs, pp.2-3; Ross, p.20.

[44] It needs to be remarked that the combination of the ideological aspects of revolutions and the fundamentally anti-constitutional (and thus illegal) nature of a revolution makes it impossible to be a disinterested participant in said debate.

For later philosophers such as Frantz Fanon, the question was less one of principles and more one of practicality. Living as a black man in the French colonial empire, he personally experienced how the colonial power uses violence to dominate and dehumanise the colonial subject.[50] Fanon saw revolutionary violence as the only response with a chance of succeeding, and thought that it simultaneously worked to mobilise the subjugated population and unify them for a common cause, which would provide a strong foundation for a future political community.[51] However, for Fanon, only violence with a clear goal that does not escalate and repeat the cycle of domination and subjugation can be legitimate.

A rather different approach comes from Karl Marx. Marx thought that revolution was a necessary step to destroy the conditions of alienation. As such, revolutionary violence is not so much a question of morality, because it will happen regardless.[52] In this amoralistic perspective, the violence is legitimate as if it is part of nature: like the violence of a hurricane, it cannot be immoral.

All three of these approaches have influenced interpretations of the Commune, but less so in recent decades. This decline might be explained by the fact that since 1968, no revolutions have taken place in France or its neighbouring countries.[53] Revolutions in the eastern part of Europe have mostly been against the Soviet regime and, fitting the anti-Soviet and anti-communist narrative of the Cold War, been accepted as legitimate. In France itself, the idea that liberal democracy is the best option seems to be tacitly accepted: none of its mayor parties advocate a regime change. As such, the idea of revolutionary violence does not seem to resonate in early 21st century France, although some cases do mention it in the context of the late 19th century. It is thus allocated to the past and not copied for the present.

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[45] Avram Alpert, “Philosophy against and in Praise of Violence: Kant, Thoreau and the Revolutionary Spectator” *Theory, Culture & Society* 33, no. 6 (2016), p.51.

[46] Immanuel Kant “On the Common saying, that may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice” in M. Gregor (ed.) *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.298-300.

[47] Alpert, p.56.

[48] Alpert, p.56.

[49] Alpert, p.57.

[50] Frantz Fanon, in C.L. Markman (trans.) *Black Skin, White Masks* (Chippenham: Grove Press, 1952), chapters 5 and 6.

[51] Franz Fanon, in C. Farrington (trans.) *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p.93.

[52] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “On the Division of Labor in Production” in Robert Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.V. Norton, 1978), pp.683-717.

[53] Isabelle Sommier, *La violence révolutionnaire* (Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, 2008), p.7.

In 2021, then, this way of defending the use of violence has largely disappeared from the general discourse. Instead, most people seem to accept nonviolence as the norm, with several exceptions. It is these exceptions that generate most of the discussions. The main exceptions are state violence, following Max Weber's idea that the state has a monopoly on violence and can use violence to maintain order; and self-defence, the idea that violence is allowed if violence is inflicted upon you.[54] In the following, I will first examine state violence and self-defence before turning to civil disobedience and slow violence.

Violence is either done by the state and its agents, or not. Generally, violence done by the state is legal: as long as there are no *abuses* of force, the *use* of force is permitted.[55] The line between these two is of course blurry and open to interpretation. But overall, state violence is *a priori* justified and accepted societally. Violence done by non-state actors is considered *a priori* illegal and unacceptable, with several exceptions. In France of 2021, self-defence ("la légitime défense") is allowed within limits: if the threat is unjustified, the defence needs to be for oneself or another person, immediate, proportional, and the only possible choice. It is illegal to kill another person in defence of property.[56] For civil disobedience and direct action, there is currently no legal exception, but there is a debate as to whether this is necessary or not, especially in the context of the climate crisis.[57] However, unlike in countries such as the US, the context in which Butler writes, civilian use of violence in the pursuit of political goals is more widely considered as *legitimate* even if it is not strictly *legal*.[58] To better understand this dynamic, I will now turn to an analysis of how violence gets attributed and instrumentalised.

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[54] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), p.78.

[55] Weber, p.78.

[56] "Qu'est-ce que la légitime défense ?", *Service-Public*, https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F1766, accessed 19 April 2022.

[57] See Albert Orgien, "La désobéissance civile peut-elle être un droit ?" *Droit et Société* 3 (2015), pp.579-592 ; **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**Laurentin, Emmanuel. "La désobéissance civile est-elle une vertu démocratique ?" 8 February 2021. *France Culture*, https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/le-temps-du-debat/la-desobeissance-civile-est-elle-une-vertu-democratique, accessed 19 April 2022; and Greenpeace, "Activisme climat : un nouveau projet de loi pour réprimer la désobéissance civile", 5 July 2021, https://www.greenpeace.fr/espace-presse/activisme-climat-un-nouveau-projet-de-loi-pour-reprimer-la-desobeissance-civile/, accessed 19 April 2022. The case of the Roissy Airport protest by various organisations, including Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion, who scaled the fences to paint an airplane green in protest to greenwashing, is particularly interesting in the context of recent legal developments in France.

[58] Andreas Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*? *Learning to Fight in a World on Fire* (London: Verso Books, 2021), p.117.

In *The Force of Nonviolence*, comparatist Judith Butler proposes a non-individualistic approach to nonviolence, taking it less as a personal moral position and more as a social and political practice.[59] To understand nonviolence, however, Butler posits that it is necessary to also understand what is taken as "violence". Both "violence" and "nonviolence" are terms that are disputed or "labile"[60]: it is more complex than simply an act that "relies on two figures, one striking and the other struck". Instead, violence can also be social, systemic, political, verbal, legal, and economic, depending on how the concept is interpreted and instrumentalised.[61] The difficulty lies in that calling something "violent" is not only a description, but also an altering of what can be thought of as violent, so that nonviolent practices can be renamed and suddenly become violent.[62] Butler notes that the state often redefines nonviolent actions in order to legitimise and maintain its monopoly on violence.[63] In doing so, the state declares some lives as more "grievable" than others. Lives that are grievable are lives that are mourned, but lives that are not considered grievable are "treated as if they can be neither lost nor mourned".[64] Butler mentions for example the lost lives of people who are crossing the Mediterranean to seek refuge and asylum in Europe, who are not always found, identified, and mourned: their lives are not even "registered as a loss".[65]

Butler shows that those who can decide what violence is and those who have the interpretation of their actions are changed by this attribution, are usually those with state power and those without. For instance, Black Lives Matter activists peacefully protested race-based police violence but were then themselves "construed as violent threats to state security".[66] Writing explicitly in a twenty-first century context, Butler says that

> As much as it would make matters easier to be able to identify violence in a way that is clear and commands consensus, this proves impossible to do in a political situation where the power to attribute violence to the opposition itself becomes an instrument by which to enhance state power, to discredit the aims of the opposition, or even to justify their radical disenfranchisement, imprisonment, and murder.[67]

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[59] Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An ethico-political bind* (London: Verso Books, 2021), pp.62-63.
[60] Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence*, p.20.
[61] Butler, p.30.
[62] Butler, p.20.
[63] Butler, pp.25-28.
[64] Butler, p.41.
[65] Butler, p.28.
[66] Butler, p.24.
[67] Butler, p.25.

In other words, the definition of violence is dependent on who is in power, and therefore the definition is a shifting one, as the Black Lives Matter example demonstrates. The "political war at the level of public semantics" has in the case of the Commune continued, although the constellation of power has shifted.[68] The politically informed designations of the time have not disappeared, but the advantage of looking back enables the scholar to look beyond them with the use of later attributions and "name state violence as 'violent' even though it has used its own power to name and to represent the dissenting power of some group of people as 'violent'."[69] Of course, the scholars who identify the violence as violence are themselves inescapably formed by contemporary notions of violence and nonviolence – an issue that can only be acknowledged, not avoided.

Intrinsically bound together with the question of violence is the question of attack and (self-)defence. In her 2017 book *Se défendre : une philosophie de la violence*, philosopher Elsa Dorlin proposes a historical overview of instances of "autodéfense" (self-defence). *Autodéfense* is part of the "dispositif défensif", the power device that frames a physical instance of force or movement and renders it either legitimate or dangerous. The first of these are "des sujets dignes de se défendre et d'être défendus", while the dangerous ones are "des corps acculés à des tactiques défensives".[70] For Dorlin, *autodéfense* has no subject : "le sujet qu'elle défend ne préexiste pas à ce mouvement qui résiste à la violence dont il est devenu la cible".[71] In other words, the act of calling something *autodéfense* creates both the group that inflicts and the one that endures the violence. As a rhetorical strategy, then, claiming self-defence is a very strong tactic.

Similarly, Dorlin draws attention to how in some cases, the more someone defends themselves, the more they will be hurt.[72] This can lead to a counterintuitive reversal of the roles between aggressor and victim:

> Le renversement du sens de l'attaque et de la défense, de l'agression et de la protection, dans un cadre qui permet d'en fixer structurellement les termes et les agents légitimes, quelle que soit l'effectivité de leurs gestes, transforme ces actions en qualités anthropologiques à même de délimiter une ligne de couleur discriminant les corps et les groupes sociaux ainsi formés. Cette ligne de partage ne délimite jamais simplement des corps menaçants/agressifs et des corps défensifs. Elle sépare plutôt ceux qui sont agents (agents de leur propre défense)

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[68] Butler, p.20.
[69] Butler, pp.24-25.
[70] Elsa Dorlin, *Se défendre : une philosophie de la violence* (Paris : Éditions La Découverte, 2017), p. 52.
[71] Dorlin, *Se défendre*, p.54.
[72] Dorlin, p.24.

> et ceux qui témoignent d'une forme de puissance d'agir toute négative en tant qu'ils ne peuvent être agents que de la violence « pure ».[73]

In other words, the invocation of self-defence can radically change the way in which a situation is perceived, separating those with agency from those without, and those capable of violence *for* something from those simply capable of violence *an sich*. Frequently, Dorlin demonstrates, the power to label an action as self-defence lies not with the victim, but rather with those in power. In the case of Rodney King, for instance, the police officers (who targeted him as he was walking in the other direction and then beat him up and kicked him while he was lying on the ground) were seen as engaging in self-defence: "l'État – par l'intermédiaire des bras armés de ses représentants – n'est pas perçu comme violent, il est considéré comme réagissant à la violence, *il se défend contre la violence*".[74] Thus, agents of the state can instigate violence and still be perceived as defending themselves. Determining who initiated the first blow is less relevant than being the one who tells the story.

This fluid attribution of self-defence and attack is particularly interesting in the case of the Commune, where the most prominent narrators of the story of the Commune have slowly changed from the victorious government to those who sympathise with the *Communard.e.s*. At the same time, there is no longer one official story, as the local government of Paris approaches the Commune in a very different way from the national government of France. Furthermore, the "self" that is defending or to be defended (or not) is shaped by a backwards gaze, rather than a sideways one: the Commune lies in the past, unlike for instance the Black Lives Matter movement, who are still operating in the present day.

The delineation of the self in regard to the notion of self-defence is of interest for Judith Butler as well. Following Dorlin, she asks how encompassing the 'self' of self-defence is: given that nobody can be completely independent for their entire lives, and that most people would consider their family, their friends, and other social groups as part of themselves, Butler asks whether one cannot extrapolate this to everyone on the planet.[75] Who is not part of this self? And how can one claim self-defence if one moves against someone who is part of this self? In other words, can you even "believe in nonviolence but make an exception for self-defense"?[76] In the case of the Commune, for instance, why did the Versaillais army fight more against the Parisians than against the Prussians who were still within the French borders? Were the

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[73] Dorlin, p.46.
[74] Dorlin, p.50.
[75] Butler, p.41.
[76] Butler, p.34.

Prussians more part of the Versaillais self than the Parisian people? And on the other side, why would some French men be considered as part of the Communard self, and the French men fighting for the Versaillais not?

A possible way out of this conundrum lies in the idea of direct action and civil disobedience. Civil disobedience is always a reaction to a state hurting the interests of its citizens, thus breaking the agreement that the state should serve the citizens. In this frame, the Commune is an expression of civil disobedience in protest to a government that threatens both national sovereignty (by capitulating to Prussia) and the republic (by displaying royalist sympathies), and also does not protect people's personal safety and access to food. The question is, however, whether such civil disobedience is allowed to be violent in 21st century narratives of the Commune.

One of the earliest texts on civil disobedience comes from France: the *Discours de la servitude volontaire* by Étienne de la Boétie from 1577, in which he argued that tyrants remain in power because their subjects voluntarily obey them by paying taxes, conducting the administration, etc.[77] Today, some forms of nonviolent civil disobedience are accepted, but as said before, the French state does not allow for violent civil disobedience. But following actions from various groups of activists against climate change, debate on this issue has become possible, as in other countries in Western Europe. In the 2021 book *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, Andreas Malm makes the case for including violence against property in the arsenal of climate activism. He sees sabotage as a legitimate tactic if that is necessary to make leaders act to solve the climate crisis.[78] The idea of civil disobedience, then, might be used to legitimise some of the violence of the *Communard.e.s* against leaders who structurally exploited them.

This relates to the idea of "slow violence", which originates in environmental studies but is productive for the present case as well. Whereas "normal" violence immediately shows its impact, slow violence is defined by Rob Nixon as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."[79] As examples, Nixon gives "climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans".[80] Following the definition of gradual and delayed destruction, the concept of slow violence can also be applied to the structural deprivation of resources like food, housing, healthcare, hygiene, and a safe working environment; as was the case in Paris in the 19th century.[81] Missing a meal or going a day without food will not kill you immediately, but it does weaken the body. During the Prussian siege, famine was widespread in Paris.[82] Afterwards, the government ended moratoriums on rent, pawn shop items, and the payment of bills of exchange, which effectively left "tens of thousands of families without enough money to buy food and fuel."[83] In other words, the slow destruction of the bodies of the poor in Paris was a consequence of government policy that favoured the ability of the elite to earn money over the ability of the lower classes to live without precarity. It can therefore be seen a form of slow violence by the elite against the rest of the country.

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[77] Étienne de la Boétie, *Discours de la servitude volontaire* (Clandestinely published, 1577).

[78] Andreas Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*.

[79] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), p.32.

[80] Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p.32.

Paris Commune

Scholarly attention to the Paris Commune has from the beginning not been limited to historical research. Instead, it has generated interest from philosophy, sociology, literary studies, political science, and more recently, cultural memory studies, alongside non-academic interest by novelists, visual artists, politicians, theatre and film directors, musicians, journalists, and activists. If one could speak about "Commune studies", the field would be populated by an international and diverse group of academics from various disciplines, and it would have strong connections outside the ivory tower of academia.

One of the earliest responses to the Commune was Karl Marx' *The Civil War in France,* a pamphlet written on behalf of the General Council of the International which appeared on June 13, shortly after the defeat of the Commune. Marx' framing the Commune as a class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie set off a tradition of interpretations of the Commune that has been dominant ever since. Many important left-wing thinkers, politicians and activists, from anarchists to socialists, have developed their ideas, sharpened their strategies, felt inspired by, and connected themselves to the Commune: Kropotkin, Bakunin, Jaurès, Luxemburg, Kautsky, Trotski, Lenin, and movements as diverse as the Red Khmer, Mai '68, Rote Armee Fraktion and the Nuit Debout.[84] The Commune was also used as a learning opportunity: the ultimate defeat of the Commune (or "failure" by its opponents) was explained by analysing a list of "mistakes" that had to be avoided in future revolutions, such as the *Communard.e.s* not taking the money stored in the national bank.[85] Simultaneously, the idea that the *Semaine Sanglante* meant the end of the Commune was refuted: "elle n'est pas morte" because her spirit and thought were continuously reproduced.[86] Nonetheless, in the 30s, 40s and 50s, the Commune figured less prominently in the popular imagination than before: Bertolt Brecht's *Der Tage die Commune* was written in 1949 but not performed until the 60s.[87]

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[81] See Merriman, pp.31-2; Azéma and Winock, p.22; Tombs, pp.13; 16-17.
[82] Merriman, p.75.
[83] Merriman, p.84.
[84] Bos, p.17; Ann Rigney, "Memory, Mediation and Narratives in the Wild: How the Commune was Remembered in the *Nuit Debout*" (2022), forthcoming.

In the 60s and 70s, the approaching 100th anniversary combined with an upswing in widescale urban popular revolts, especially in Paris in '68, saw a new interest in the Commune, again mostly on the left end of the political spectrum. Many of the works published in that era are now considered classics and have been revised and reprinted for the 150th anniversary. For instance, the aforementioned historians Jean-Pierre Azéma and Michel Winock published *Les Communards* in 1964, but it was reprinted on 4 March 2021 by Perrin. Similarly, Edith Thomas' *Les Pétroleuses* (1963), a seminal work that dispelled the myth of the women incendiaries, was republished by Gallimard on the same date as *Les Communards*, two weeks before what is seen as the birthday of the Commune (March 18). The books of the late Jacques Rougerie have equally been reappearing over the last years: *Paris Insurgé : La Commune de 1871* (1995) in 2021, *Paris Libre* (1971) in 2004, *La Commune et les Communards* (1964/1995) in 2018. All these authors are broadly seen as canonical and frequently cited. They played an important role in making the Commune relevant again in the 1960s and 1970s.

These historians did not operate in a vacuum, and their work was picked up in other parts of society. Several novelists wrote literary works about the Commune, such as *Souvenirs d'un insurgé – La Commune 1871* by Paul Martine (1971), *La Communarde* by Cecil Saint-Laurent (1970), *Une histoire de la Commune de Paris* by Armand Lanoux (1971-2), and *L'ordre et le désordre* by Claude Spaak (1971). In philosophy, it was picked up by the Situationist International. Philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre wrote *La Proclamation de la Commune* (1965) in cooperation with Guy Debord, Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem. As said, activists also picked up the Commune, notably during the events of May '68. Building on the historical, literary, and philosophical foundation and generated interest of the preceding decade, 1971 was a year with many new songs, films, documentaries, TV-series, artworks and plays, as well as massive public events, especially in France.

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[85] Bos, p.222 ; Tombs, p.199.

[86] Professor emeritus of French history at the University of Cambridge Robert Tombs describes this as a "threat" (*The Paris Commune 1871*, p.193), echoing the bourgeois fear.

[87] The anti-German sentiments were brought to the fore in the Second World War, with Thiers' government compared to the Vichy *collaborateurs* (Tombs, p.197).

One aspect that differentiates the 100th anniversary from the 150th is the collapse of the Soviet Union and their brand of communism that took place in between the two anniversaries. In 1971, the Commune was celebrated in many countries of the Eastern Bloc, with movies, events, publications, and even commemorative stamps, as well as in France. In 2021, most attention came from the western part of Europe, but there was more interaction between the various countries: experts were invited across borders. Another big difference was the COVID-19 pandemic, which made it nearly impossible to organise demonstrations, lectures, conferences, festivals, and other large-scale in-person events in the Spring of 2021. This might also be an explanation for the comparatively large number of non-scientific publications in journals and magazines: they responded to a need that could not be filled by public gatherings. Similarly, for an online event or an interview, it mattered less if the interviewee was in another country, since meeting physically was impossible anyways; this may have increased the international qualities of the network.

Equally, a range of scholars, of various disciplines and nationalities, have written about the Commune in the decade preceding the anniversary, showing that the Commune is still generating widespread and international interest that goes beyond the field of history. Historians have been mostly interested in the revolutionary aspects of the Commune and have provided several detailed overviews of the events of the Commune, that serve both as an introduction to the topic and as book of reference for those who are more familiar with it already.[88] A new appearance is that of the essay collection, of both older essays that were contemporary with the Commune (*Découvrir la Commune de Paris* by Jean Baptiste Thomas et al.) and collections of new essays (*The Paris Commune: An Ode to Emancipation* and *Vive la Commune !*).[89] The shorter texts and the wide range of perspectives can work to make the ideas more accessible to a general public. At the same time, more in-depth studies into the thoughts and ideas of the Commune have also been published, such as Kristin Ross' *L'imagination de la Commune*/*Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* about the Commune's philosophy and *La Commune des écrivains: Paris, 1871: vivre et écrire l'insurrection* by Alice De Charenteney and Jordi Brahamcha-Marin about how writers experienced the Commune. Outside of academia, novels and graphic novels about the Commune and its actors appeared.[90] In other words, readers of all levels of familiarity with the Commune could find something that suited them.

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[88] See *Massacre: The Life and Death of the Paris Commune* (2014) by American historian John Merriman, *The Paris Commune: A Revolution in Democracy* (2021) by British historian Donny Gluckstein, *La Commune de Paris : les acteurs, l'événement, les lieux* by French historian, translator, and Anglicist Michel Cordillot (2021), *Bloed en Barricaden: De Parijse Commune herdacht* (2014) by Dutch historian Dennis Bos, *Commune 1871. La Révolution Impromptue* (2021) by French historian Roger Martelli, and *Revolutionary Thought after the Paris Commune, 1871-1885* (2019) by British historian Julia Nicholls.

[89] See *The Paris Commune: An Ode to Emancipation* (2021) by Daniel Bensaïd, Olivier Besancenot, Sandra Bloodworth, Judy Cox, Penelope Duggan, Mathilde Larrère, Michael Löwy, Kay Mann, and Eric Toussaint; *Vive la Commune ! by* Patrick Amand, Michèle Audin, Laurence Biberfeld, Antoine Blocier, Odile Bouhier, Didier Daeninckx, Patrick K. Dewdney, Michaël Dias, Pierre Domengès, Maurice Gouiran, Alice Jack, Nadia Khiari, Anouk Langaney, Éric Maneval, Roger Martin, Rachel Mazuy, Laurent Mely-Dumortier, Rosa Moussaoui, Jean-Louis Nogaro, Max Obione, Philippe Paternolli, Michèle Pedinielli, Serge Pey, Philippe, Pivion, Stéphane Tamaillon, Vincent Sauvion, Serge Utgé-Royo, and Eloi Valat; illustrations by Bésot, Jean Biret, Bobika, Brouck, Cambon, David Eusebio (Mexique), Elchicotriste (Espagne), Faujour, Gab, Krokus, Lacombe, Lardon, Lasserpe, Mako, Micaël, Plop et Kankr, Samson, Tardi, and Valère.

A new perspective that appeared in Commune studies in the 2010s and early 2020s is that of cultural memory studies. Dennis Bos' *Bloed en Barricaden: De Parijse Commune herdacht* is partly a work of historical research, partly a work of cultural memory studies, partly psychoanalysis, investigating how an international collection of communists, socialists, and anarchists have remembered the Commune. Likewise, the Commune figures in surveys of revolutionary and left-wing remembrance such as Mathilde Larrère's *Révolutions : quand les peuples font l'histoire* (2015) and *Il était une fois : les révolutions* (2019) and Enzo Traverso's *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History and Memory* (2016). Ann Rigney has drawn attention to how the Commune has been remembered as a party to avoid remembering the violent parts in "Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism beyond the Traumatic" (2018). Michelle J. Coghlan studied the American fear response in *Sensational internationalism: the Paris Commune and the remapping of American memory in the long nineteenth century* (2016).

These analyses are mostly, and understandably, concerned with the excessive violence suffered by the *Communard.e.s*, especially during the *Semaine Sanglante*. On the Left, they have sometimes been seen as martyrs, dying for a greater cause, such as equality, workers' rights, emancipation, *laïcité,* or republicanism. Various coping mechanisms, such as the emphasis on celebration rather than grief, have been employed.[91] The violence inflicted upon the *Communard.e.s* was redeemed by making it meaningful. However, the violence inflicted *by* the *Communard.e.s* has not yet been a focus of study, perhaps because this trope was prevalent in contemporary communophobic propaganda, perhaps because it is dwarfed by the violence inflicted upon the *Communard.e.s*. But those are also precisely reasons to study it: how can propaganda be countered? what agency do we have against a *force majeure*? how can violence against an oppressor be justified if there is no consensus on the oppressor being oppressive? how can we deal with violence without it destroying ourselves? how can violence be narratively instrumentalised in different ways? This study aims to sketch several answers to these questions, that sadly have not lost their relevance today.

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[90] See Audin, Michèle. 2017. *Comme une rivière bleue* (Paris : Gallimard), Audin, Michèle. 2021. *Josée Meunier. 19, rue des Juifs* (Paris : Gallimard), Berthet, Sandrine. 2021. *Jetés aux ténèbres* (Paris : Les éditions du Sonneur), Constantine, David. 2021. *Living in Hope* (Manchester: Comma Press), Le Corre, Hervé. 2019. *Dans l'ombre du brasier* (Paris : Payot et Rivages) (Translated into English (*In the Shadow of the Fire*, Europa Editions, June 2021), Italian (*L'ombra del fuoco*, E/O, January 2021), Spanish (*Bajo las llamas*, Reservoir Books, June 2021), and Catalan (*Sota les flames*, Edicions Bromera, December 2019)), Bourgeon, François. 2018. *Le Sang des cerises* (Paris: Delcourt), *L'Homme de l'année* - tome 5. 1871, écrit par Jean-Pierre Pécau, dessins de Benoît Dellac, éditions Delcourt (2014), *Jacques Damour* de Vincent Henri et Gaël Henri, éditions Sarbacane (2017), d'après l'œuvre d'Émile Zola, *Des graines sous la neige, Communarde et visionnaire Nathalie Lemel*, éditions Locus Solus (2017), dessins de Laëtitia Rouxel et textes de Roland Michon, *Les Damnés de la Commune* de Raphaël Meyssan, Delcourt, tome 1 *À la recherche de Lavalette* (2017), tome 2 *Ceux qui n'étaient rien* (2019), tome 3 *Les Orphelins de l'Histoire* (2019), *Rouges estampes : Une enquête pendant la Commune de Paris*, Jean-Louis Robert, Carole Trébor et Nicola Gobbi (Éditions Steinkis). 2021, Daeninckx, Didier. *Louise du temps des cerises 1871 : la Commune de Paris* (Mako: 2012)

[91] Rigney, "Remembering Hope", p.377.

Corpus and methodology

The Commune has since its beginning driven writers, artists, musicians, politicians, thinkers, playwrights, activists, historians, directors, journalists, and many others to creation, leading to a treasury of sources in various shapes, sizes, and languages. By their nature, they all necessarily deal with the historical aspect of the Commune: its events, participants, and places. The desire to show the Commune "wie es eigentlich gewesen" is, despite its inherent impossibility, potent.[92] Like the French Revolution, the story of the Commune has standard fabula elements, sets, scenes, cast members, and props: from the seizing of the cannons on Montmartre to the *Semaine Sanglante*'s last bullets on Père Lachaise, from Louise Michel to Adolphe Thiers, from the red banner to the blossoming cherry trees. To be credible as a source, one cannot leave out too many of these, as Rigney has argued.[93] Yet precisely the defeat of the Commune makes it a magnet for the imaginary: it prompts questions like "what if?" and "what would it have been like?" that beg for a creative answer, since a purely factual one is impossible.

It is precisely this *mélange* of the historical and the fictional that can help us understand how the Commune functions in the cultural memory. Which elements are altered, elided, or filled in, shows precisely where the facts are not deemed satisfactory. Whether these facts clash with the overarching story that the writer wants to tell or whether it would simply be more poetic if they are different, the alteration is rarely coincidental and can potentially be highly revealing.

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[92] Ranke, *Die Geschichten der Romanischen und Germanischen Volker von 1494 bis 1535* (Leipzig: G. Reimer, 1824), p.vi.

[93] cf. Rigney, *Historical Representation*, p.90.

As noted, the relative number of narrative works on the Commune has diminished in recent decades. New media have emerged: there are now fewer songs and novels created, for instance, than in the 19th and 20th century, yet more YouTube videos, memes, street art, and graphic novels. The visual, then, is becoming more prominent, taking its place next to the textual and the auditory. Therefore, this study considers all three of these modes, as they interact and play out in various media and genres, respecting traditional forms and new interpretations. Thus, I will study a historical novel (*Le cri du peuple* by Jean Vautrin) that is purely textual, a history with literary elements (*La Commune au présent : une correspondance par-delà le temps* by Ludivine Bantigny) that is primarily textual but contains visual material as well, a graphic novel (*Le cri du peuple* by Jacques Tardi, based on the novel of Vautrin) that combines the visual with the textual, and an animated documentary (*Les damnés de la Commune* by Raphaël Meyssan, a reworking of his own graphic novel of the same name) combining the visual with the auditory.

Le Cri du peuple by Jean Vautrin is as said a historical novel, but it is also a thriller: the plot centers around the murder of a young woman. It is written in a feuilleton-style, with short chapters and a strong sense of action and speed. The graphic novel by Tardi of the same title follows the same plot and falls into the same genre but is a different medium. It therefore does not have the form of a feuilleton and expresses the sense of action and speed in a different way. *Les Damnés de la Commune* is presented as a documentary but has elements of the graphic novel (as it is inspired on one) and can sometimes appear more like a fiction film. However, it is based on the memoirs of a Communarde, Victorine Brocher, and the drawings are based on contemporary engravings. Lastly, *La Commune au présent* is a history book, but it is written in the form of letters to the participants of the Commune. It is thus quite personal in places, befitting the epistolary genre, but it is based on historical sources, which are also sometimes shown in the book itself. Meyssan and Bantigny thus play with the expectations of their genre, but Vautrin and Tardi less so. In each chapter, the introduction of the case study also contains a short introduction to the affordances of their genre.

All these cases are comparable in the sense that they are Francophone and published in Paris in roughly the last two decades, combine the historical and the fictional, and aspire to both inform and entertain in interestingly different ways, partly due to their genre and medium of choice. As such, they are perfect cases to study how various media and genres facilitate the presentation of Communard violence, using the three “hot spots” of violence by *Communard.e.s* that I have identified: the Communard fighting during the *Semaine Sanglante*, the execution of hostages including the archbishop, and the burning of prominent buildings such as the Tuileries. In the *Semaine Sanglante,* most killing was done by Versaillais soldiers, but it took an entire week because the *Communard.e.s* fought back with all their might. The shooting of hostages was undeniably done by *Communard.e.s* and can therefore be challenging to work into a story otherwise sympathetic to the Commune. Lastly, the torching of Parisian landmarks leads to heated debates as to who caused it and who were responsible. In each chapter, I will discuss the hotspots in a roughly chronological order, as they are presented in historical research and the cases themselves too: the fall of the Vendôme column came first and therefore I will start with the fires and destruction, then followed by the hostage situation, and I will end with the physical end of the Commune: the *Semaine Sanglante*.

Using techniques informed by narratology and genre studies, I examine how each case uses or subverts the affordances of and expectations implied by the particular genre in which they are written and analyse through close reading how these instances of violence are presented and how they are given meaning and significance. I have developed a hypothetical list of potential strategies of legitimisation of violence, based on my theoretical framework. It is my expectation that these are used in the cases to deal with the hotspots. The goal is to look beyond the explicit argumentations and see how some arguments are made implicitly and how narrative elements are used as conduits for particular arguments. After all, an argumentation such as the one of self-defence is a highly complex one that requires multiple steps and has many parts that can be emphasised or instead compressed. My close reading of the hotspots will then be put in conversation with the rest of the text: what is the larger story that the author is trying to tell? After all, the concealment of actions can only be understood by seeing what it has been replaced by. Finally, a comparison of the four case studies will show the impact of genre and medium, but also what the cases have in common.

In my analysis, I work with the concepts of “medium”, “genre”, and “affordance”, which I will shortly introduce here. “Medium” comes from Latin, literally meaning “(the) middle, centre”. It is used figuratively to mean “any extension of ourselves”, in terms of transmitting information from one person to the other, for example through print, radio waves, or movies.[94] The main forms of media in this project are the print book and the film. The concept of “genre” is used for the classification of texts, based on for instance themes, styles, and time periods.[95] Text within a certain genre share certain characteristics, like a romance novel featuring a love story. In this project, the main genres are the historical novel, the murder mystery, the graphic novel, the documentary, the history book, and the epistolary novel. Lastly, the concept of "affordance" originates in design theory, referring to the potential a material holds: glass, for instance, is transparent and it also can break easily.[96] This perspective can also be applied to artistic objects: rhyme, for example, affords repetition and thus memorisation.[97] Each genre similarly has its own affordances, to which expectations are bound: the reader of a romance novel will expect a love story. Not every object uses all the possibilities that its material or form holds, and the mixture of genres and media can lead to unique combinations of affordances.

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[94] Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message” in *Understanding Media* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p.7.

[95] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) p.13.

Hypothesis: Strategies of legitimisation

In this section, I lay out several strategies of legitimisation that can be expected to appear in the case studies. They are strategies that are used in all kinds of contexts by all kinds of people, from toddlers to prime ministers. To provide examples, I have applied them to the Commune, but they do not necessarily appear in exactly this form. My aim here is to recognise rhetorical forms of legitimisation of violence and not to judge whether they are indeed legitimate. The strategies are based on my theoretical framework, in particular *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation*, and added to based on the content of the cases.

1. The downplaying-strategy: The argumentation that the action was not that bad, in comparison to other actions. This is a highly comparative argument, that can be made directly by, for instance, putting the number of casualties next to one another. It can also be made indirectly, for example by preceding and/or following up the section dealing with Communard violence with sections devoted to violence inflicted upon *Communard.e.s*, eclipsing the first one, or by burying it in a wealth of other facts and descriptions.[98]
2. The expectation-strategy, based on the sentiment that "They knew what they were getting into": This strategy shifts the blame to the victim of the violence in question, who is thought to have been able to expect that this would be the outcome of their actions. Often, the outcome is then considered to be *deserved*, giving it a moral dimension as well. The agency of the perpetrators is thus altered by the moral necessity

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[96] See J.J. Gibson, "The Theory of Affordances" in R.E. Shaw and J.Bransford, eds, *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1977), pp.67-82; and Donald Norman, *Design of Everyday Things* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p.9.

[97] Levine, *Forms*, p.6.

[98] cf Rigney, *Historical Representation*, pp.91-96.

of the actions. An example could be that soldiers should expect to die in the line of duty.

3. The forced-hand-strategy: This strategy shifts the blame to the opponent, who "didn't give them a choice". In the context of the Commune, this could be Adolphe Thiers, who refused to trade the hostages of the Commune for prominent socialist Auguste Blanqui and thus signed their fate. The agency of the *Communard.e.s* who inflicted the violence is thus erased. Similarly, in the context of setting buildings on fire, the Communard hand could be forced by the army that was trying to conquer Paris.[99]
4. The higher-justice-strategy: when an action appears disproportionate, the appeal to a higher form of justice – such as moral, religious, or within the narrative – brings the action to a higher level, whether the actors are aware of this or not. It depends on the reader recognising the action in the wider scheme of the story or the world, and hinges on the reader receiving more information than the characters. This can be combined with the omelet-strategy, but the omelet-strategy is not in itself appealing to a higher *justice*, but more to a higher *goal*.[100]
5. The marginalising-strategy: in a diverse and hierarchical society like France, especially in the 19th century, there were always groups that could be blamed if something went wrong.[101] This scapegoat-argument rests on dividing the actors in "pure" or "true" *Communard.e.s* and "others" who are not representative of the Commune, in other words, they are dissociated from the others. Generally, it is easiest to blame a marginalised group, such as foreigners, sex workers, Jewish people, queer people, et cetera, because a) these groups usually lack the power to protest and b) it avoids introspection on the side of the dominant group.[102]
6. The omelet-strategy, based on the idea of "One cannot make an omelet without breaking a few eggs": This strategy follows the argument that to achieve something (usually something important or good), obstacles must be removed. The violence of the breaking of the eggs is not denied but seen as an intrinsic part of the process. Yet it does not go quite as far as "the ends justify the means", which transforms violence into a *good* thing. Because these expressions entail an "end" or "goal", they can be expected in texts that argue for a higher goal, such as revolutionary or civil disobedience

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[99] cf. Rigney, *Historical Representation*, p.92.

[100] Seen in all four cases.

[101] cf Rigney, *Historical Representation*, p.129; Bos, p.51.

[102] Cf Ross, *Communal Luxury*, pp.50-52.

argumentations. An example is Andreas Malm's *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, that argues that destruction of property is necessary to prevent climate catastrophe.[103]

7. The one-off-strategy: like the report of the Dutch government on the "excessen" (standalone events that were not part of a pattern) perpetuated by the Dutch army during the Indonesian independence war, this is a strategy that isolates the action from the other actions by a group by emphasising that it only happened once, or at most a couple times, and therefore cannot be seen as representative for the entire movement. When it comes to violence, this argument is often combined with the othering of the opposing party, to reduce the relative harm that has been inflicted. For instance, the argument that the Commune only once shot hostages, while the Versaillais...[104]
8. The othering-strategy: where other strategies are basically defensive in nature (attempting to make an action admissible), this offensive strategy serves less to legitimise the actions of the preferred group and more to delegitimise the Other and their actions by portraying them in a negative way. It is not a stand-alone argumentation but rather serves as a lubricant for other strategies to work more effectively. The Versaillais are, in most cases, othered: they are depicted as callous and cruel, for instance.[105]
9. The reaction-strategy: As young children are already acutely aware, the argument that the other was the instigator is a very convincing one. It is not limited to the actual use of physical force (see #6), any earlier actions can be taken as the "start" of the conflict. It is partly for this reason that analysing the designated starting point of an historical event is important: this determines how far back the blame can be cast. Sometimes this contains an idea of tit-for-tat as well, which labels the reaction as proportionate to the one that came before and is a more revenge-based method. In the context of violence, the reaction-strategy quickly turns into an argument of self-defence: the other attacked first.[106]
10. The rightful-owner-strategy, referring to the idea that "It was theirs to begin with": Especially in the context of property, this argument looks at who were the "rightful" owners of a building or a thing. From that, it is followed that the owners can do as they see fit. For example, the cannons were paid for and made by Parisians, and thus theirs

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[103] Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, pp.66-70 in particular.
[104] Can be seen in Vautrin and Tardi.
[105] Cf Ross, p.51.
[106] Cf Dorlin, p.22.

to use; and that the Hôtel de Ville was paid for, made by, and intended for the "Ville", and thus theirs to use as they wanted to.[107]

11. The symbol-strategy, based on the idea that something is a symbol of an hated system: The violence is in this strategy not directed to the "victim" as an individual, but as a representative of a system. For instance, the Tuileries could be seen as a symbol of the French monarchy, the Vendôme Column as a symbol of French imperialism, and the archbishop as a symbol of the Catholic Church. Their destruction would thus be "nothing personal", but as a means to send a signal (see also the omelet-strategy).
12. The underdog-strategy: sometimes used in contrast to the othering-strategy, the underdog-strategy emphasises the weakness of the preferred party in contrast to the (often quantitative) overwhelming power of the Other. Often this will be accompanied by the use of numbers. In the context of violence, it serves to delegitimate the use of force of the Other (which quickly becomes seen as excessive) and simultaneously legitimate the self-defence of the own group. The Communard victims are for example mentioned alongside the Versaillais deaths.[108]

I will refer to these strategies when they appear in the case studies. My expectation is that they will be used across genres and media, but that the limits of both genre and media as well as narrative elements, such as focalisation, influence which strategy is used when.

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[107] Cf Malm, pp.126-7.

[108] See Tardi.

I : *Le Cri du peuple* – Jean Vautrin

Jean Vautrin’s 1999 novel *Le Cri du peuple* is a murder mystery taking place in the historical context of the Commune. As the story is divided into 100 chapters, many ending in a cliffhanger, it is reminiscent of the feuilleton, a quintessentially 19th-century form.[109] Two main storylines interact with one another: detective Horace Grondin tries to solve the murders of two young women while his main suspect lieutenant Antoine Tarpagnan joins the Commune and engages in a love affair with Gabriella Pucci, also known as prostitute Caf’Conc. The Commune is more than just the setting, however: it influences the plot, provides motivations for the major and minor characters, and determines the timeline of the story. The omniscient narrator is heterodiegetic but becomes more visible and emotionally involved as the story continues, shifting the narrative voice.

The different genres and forms that this book plays with (the historical novel, the murder mystery, the feuilleton) provide various affordances, that I describe when relevant. The action-based narrative of the murder mystery is supported by the form of the feuilleton with its short chapters and enticing cliffhangers. The reader expects that the murders will be solved and will keep reading until that is the case, accepting the historical context and seemingly irrelevant plot lines as vital clues to the eventual solution.[110] Through the sprinkling in of historical figures such as Louise Michel and Gustave Courbet, and the intertextual winks at Jules Vallès’ *L’Insurgé*, a fundamental novel about the Commune, the reader is reminded that these events correspond to a reality outside that of the novel, which heightens the suspense of the book and thus the will to keep reading.

As it is a historical novel, techniques are employed to establish historical authority for the novel to be accepted as plausible. Therefore, from the beginning the novel, specific details meet the reader: the exact time (“le soir du 17 mars 1871”) and place (“la Seine, à hauteur de la troisième pile du pont de l’Alma”) of the discovery of the body are in the first sentence. Directly after, institutions such as the fire brigade (“[le] corps des pompiers de la caserne Malar”) and the river brigade (“[les] hommes de la Brigade fluviale”) are introduced and three people are named.[111] The first one, sailor Clémens Van Cooksfeld who found the body, has such a thoroughly unlikely name that it may tip off readers to his fictionality.[112] The second one, local police commissioner Isidore Mespluchet, is introduced factually by mentioning his profession, but then described poetically ("dont l'esprit et le zèle scrupuleux furent rapidement accaparés par d'autres tâches, autrement plus urgentes"), suggesting that this might be a romanticised version of an historical person.[113] The third one, then, is not present in the scene and only mentioned in passing: "général Valentin, nouveau préfet de police".[114] The foregoing of his first name by his title signals his rank and unimportance to the story (he is never mentioned again) yet makes it also easy to look up who the préfet de police was on 17 March 1871. Indeed, this was a Louis Ernest Valentin, who took office on 11 February 1871.

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[109] Many 19th century classics, for instance by Charles Dickens, Alexandre Dumas, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Eugène Sue, appeared first as feuilletons.

[110] Cf Carl E. Rollyson, *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (Salem: Salem Printing, 1988) p.1918.

[111] Jean Vautrin, *Le Cri du Peuple* (Paris : Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle,1999) p.13.

[112] “Clémens” is French, a capitalised “Van” Flemish, “Cooks” English, and “Feld” German.

This *mélange* of recognisable facts, convincing details, and poetic elements is characteristic of the entirety of *Le cri du peuple*. Each chapter contains names, places and events that the reader may be familiar with if they have a basic knowledge of Paris, French history, and the Paris Commune. Most chapters also contain facts someone with a more than general expertise of these three topics will recognise. And then there are some people who are made up, yet introduced in the same style as historical figures: usually, Vautrin mentions their name, age, gender, and occupation. The effect is that the reader is unsure about which elements are historical and which are fictional. But the constant reminders of familiar facts in combination with the speed of the story tempt the reader to keep reading, rather than look up which details are imagined and which are supported by sources. The result is that the reader assumes that what they are reading is a novel, but one that is grounded in history.

By following the grand lines of the history of the Paris Commune and providing small verifiable details, *Le cri du peuple* can take the middle range: describing experiences, dialogues, and minor events that could very well have happened, but that are not represented in sources. As such, the novel provides an understanding of history in a different way than a history book does: *Le Cri du peuple* brings the past to life not by providing verified information, but by making it speak and act through the characters of the story. By basing himself on historical research and combining that with a creative extrapolation of known facts, Vautrin establishes his authority as a writer of historical fiction. Precisely because of this extensive establishment of authority at the beginning of the book, the readers will be inclined to keep following the narrator when he becomes more involved with the story and starts to speak directly to the reader. As such, the book is quite affective; it makes the reader sympathise with the characters and in extension with the Commune.

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[113] Vautrin, p.13.
[114] Vautrin, p.13.

Sympathising with the Commune appears to be important for Vautrin. He does not draw any parallels between the Commune and the present day, but the act of writing the novel signals that he considers the Commune sufficiently significant. In the (posthumous) preface to Tardi's 2021 version, he writes how he wants to take up "la torche jamais éteinte" of the Commune, and how he feels that writing about the Commune is necessary for it is an episode of history that has actively been suppressed by the "héritiers de M.Thiers".[115] In *Le Cri du peuple*, Vautrin creates a Commune that is characterised by brave, loving and interesting people who are fighting for social justice. The intended audience is not one of Commune-enthusiasts: rather, everyone should be able read the novel, regardless of their knowledge of the Commune. As such, the book works as a rehabilitation of the Commune, transforming it from an ignored and shamed episode of French history into an admirable display of courage and solidarity.

Hotspot: Fire and destruction

Throughout the novel, the coming destruction of Paris is foreshadowed in various instances of prolepsis, leading to an expectation of doom and a tense hope that the main characters, to which the readers feel attached after long exposure, will survive. Already in the very first chapter, the focalisation through a bourgeois character, police officer Mespluchet, shows that the gap between the rich and the poor has grown too much:

> la partie la plus désobéissante de lui-même entraîna le commissaire vers d'inavouables songes d'incendies qui jetaient à bas les nouveaux quartiers érigés par Haussmann, capotaient les arrogantes façades au goût de banque et laissaient entrevoir au fond de leurs perspectives de ruines la verdissante vue des collines ouvrières.[116]

The Haussmannian destruction of workers' quarters in favour of bourgeois neighbourhoods, often interpreted as a cause of both the Commune and its defeat,[117] here legitimises the anger of the poor against the rich who exploit them, as well as a destructive response to that exploitation (reaction-strategy). Also, the motif of bourgeois arrogance is established. This understanding for a hypothetical revenge turns, at the flight of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of the Commune, into one that is actually possible, as photographer Théodore Mirecourt muses whilst walking through bourgeois neighbourhoods:

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[115] Jean Vautrin, "Preface" in Jacques Tardi, *Le Cri du peuple* (Brussels: Casterman, 2021), p.3.
[116] Vautrin, p.15.
[117] Tombs, pp. 21-7.

> Il glousse en pensant à tous ces gras propriétaires exilés qui, du fond de leur étroit logement de Seine-et-Oise, tremblent pour leurs possessions des beaux quartiers et leurs riches appartements laissés au bon vouloir des aventuriers de la Commune. Il sourit en pensant à la rage personnelle qui l'anime, en cultivant son désir iconoclaste de saccager la caste des nantis à laquelle son éducation préservée le destinait.[118]

In this paragraph, we can see the interdependence of the bourgeoisie and the working class, and Mirecourt struggles with how his trade in photography is mostly for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. Yet the idea that we need each another is immediately undercut by the illustrative emphasis on the “possessions” and the “riches appartements” of these fat landlords. In a way, the departure of the home-owning class has enabled the *Communard.e.s* to claim their possessions and make use of the spaces and objects that would otherwise not be used. At the same time, the future realisation of his “désir iconoclaste” is predicted: the bourgeoisie cannot expect to retrieve their possessions in the state they left them in.

The prediction is that the bourgeois houses will be burned (“on jetterait le feu”).[119] The desire for this iconoclasm is put into action by the *pétroleuses* and *pétroleurs*, whose presence is predicted in chapter 20, before the attempt to seize the cannons: “elles s’exaltent, les futures pétroleuses”.[120] While these fiery actions are premeditated (“sur les habitations des riches afin de les jeter à bas, de les flamber au pétrole”),[121] they do not actually take place in the narrative until the Versaillais army has begun their ruthless conquest of the city. By extending the distance between the first acknowledgment of the desire to commit arson and the actual commiting of arson, the narrative implies that all that happens in between led up to this final deed of arson. For example, one named *pétroleuse*, Amélie la Gale, who has just lost her husband Fil-de-Fer, is described by police officer Barthélemy as follows: “Une outre de pétrole à la main, elle courait incendier les beaux quartiers… Elle ne pensait pas à sa mort… Elle pensait à sa délivrance !”[122] The use of “délivrance” indicates that this may be more than simple reactive revenge (tit-for-tat): as “sa” can point to both Amélie and her deceased husband, “délivrance” can also be interpreted as Amélie’s attempt to be freed from the world without her love, attacking the houses of those who took him from her, an act that is both symbolically and materially hurting (the higher-justice-strategy in combination with the symbolic-strategy).[123] The other instance of arson is towards the end of the story, when protagonist Tarpagnan encounters a *pétroleur*. Together they torch a building, but the *pétroleur* dies directly afterwards, and Tarpagnan not much later. Their deed is also framed as a reaction to the Versaillais advance. The impact of the fires on the inhabitants of the buildings is not a part of the narrative, a not insignificant ellipsis, because it does not award them the status of victim, reserving that for the *Communard.e.s*.

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[118] Vautrin, p.290.
[119] Vautrin, p.445.
[120] Vautrin, p.89.
[121] Vautrin, p.586.
[122] Vautrin, p.567.

Similarly, the destruction of symbolic buildings such as the Tuileries is only mentioned in passing and is not a significant plot point. The exception here is the destruction of the Vendôme column, depicted as a cause for celebration. For the Commune, taking down this "symbole du bonapartisme et monument de haine"[124] is a way to reclaim the agency of the people without any bloodshed (symbol-strategy in combination with the omelet-strategy). The other buildings mostly serve as recognisable landmarks adding to the grandeur of the story, because mentioning unknown houses would not have the same dramatic effect:

> Géante trombe dans la ville entière ! Un ouragan ! D'énormes creux ! Des fumées noires ! Le drama est là dans toute son horreur ! Paris brûle ! La poudrière du Luxembourg saute ! Les Tuileries, le Palais-Royal, le ministère des Finances flambent. Plus de repères. Plus de boussole.[125]

Who is to blame for these fires? The reader can fill this in themselves, but as it is followed by *Communard.e.s* "qui marchent vers leur mort sans haine pour leurs exécuteurs",[126] they will likely blame the Versaillais executioners. On top of that, only Communard victims are mentioned.

For it is the continuous onslaught of bombs (*l'obus*) that hurts the city the most in the narrative. An important character, photographer Théodore Mirecourt, is killed in a strike, together with the nursing mother whom he was photographing – only the infant survives.[127] This scene, which in real time only takes a couple of seconds, is narrated extensively: the heterodiegetic narrator pauses and even intervenes, begging for a couple more seconds. The damage done by these bombs is repeated (in terms of Genette, the narrative frequency would be repeating), and the use of short sentences with exclamation marks (staccato) imitates the bursts of violence they bring forth: "Il se poussait au milieu du mugissement hurlant des obus.

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[123] It is unclear whether she actually burned down any buildings, but in the epilogue, it is revealed that she was not killed, but deported to New Caledonia for forced labour.
[124] Vautrin, p.341.
[125] Vautrin, p.589.
[126] Vautrin, p.589.
[127] Vautrin, p.528.

Feu ! Flammes ! Cendres ! Linceul ! Poussière ! Viandes mortes !"[128] The obus, fired by the troops of the government, is responsible for most of the destruction: "le spectacle de Paris est effroyable. Rues défoncées. Maisons écornées par les obus, façades tavelées d'impacts de balles." The victims of the bombs are then not the buildings, but the Parisians.[129] The effect is that the reader feels a bit of the urgency and chaos that the bombs caused, making them more likely to emphasise with the victims of the bombs than the throwers of the bombs.

In short, *Le cri du peuple* does not deny the destruction of large areas in Paris. However, through the omission of the effects of the actions of the *pétroleu.r.se.s*, the brevity of the description of the fires of landmarks, the repeated mentions of the bombs, and the pauses to describe their effects, the violence of the *Communard.e.s* is quickly passed over, while the violence of the Versaillais is placed front and centre. To add to that, Communard violence is justified in the narrative, by contrasting it with violence done *to* them (reactive strategy), both directly in the form of murder and indirectly in the form of decades of exploitation resulting in a deeply unequal society.

Hotspot: Hostages

The Communard treatment of prisoners and hostages is not trivialised but treated quite extensively. An entire chapter is dedicated to introducing them (chapter 81, "Les prisonniers de la Roquette") and one to their eventual execution as well (chapter 99, "Le messager du diable", the penultimate chapter). The hostages are named, making them recognisable to the audience,[130] engage in dialogue, which gives them significance, and are even compared to lambs, signifying innocence.[131] Yet for the narrative, the most well-known executed hostage, archbishop Darboy, is not the main focal character on behalf of the hostages. Instead, Abbé Ségouret, a character who only figures in the universe of *Le cri du peuple,* receives most lines, thus enabling the author to depict the Catholic clergy and the hostages in a more negative light than if he had only considered historical characters.

Abbé Ségouret was responsible for the safety of the young Jeanne Roumazeille and her unborn child, but instead killed her. This cruel murder kicked off the main conflict between protagonists Horace Grondin and Antoine Tarpagnan. Both think that the other killed her, and therefore they try to kill each other. As such, the plot could be seen as a reflection and criticism of contemporary society, in which the lower classes (soldiers and police officers) fight one another whereas the bourgeoisie and the clergy actually cause the problems. By making one of the hostages a major villain of the story, then, Vautrin legitimises the execution by using the higher-justice-strategy. It may not have been done for the "right" reason (supposedly, punishment for the murder of a girl and unborn child he was supposed to protect, rather than as a way to pressure the Versaillais), but the outcome is the same, and the effects are more important than the intentions – at least in this situation. This higher form of justice is not recognised by any of the Communards, because they are not aware of Ségouret's crimes. It is recognised by the police force, represented by Barthélemy and Mespluchet,[132] and also by the reader. The legitimisation is thus placed outside of the events themselves in an example of the higher-justice-strategy: the narrator gives this information to the reader, but not to all the characters, in a form of dramatic irony.

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[128] Vautrin, pp.599-600.
[129] Vautrin, p.538.
[130] cf. Rigney, *Historical Representation,* p.106.
[131] Vautrin, p.608.

Another strategy of legitimisation is the juxtaposition of the hostages' destiny with scenes describing what happens to the *Communard.e.s*. These take a summarised form, for instance in the following enumeration in the form of a parallelism:

> Fusillés les jeunes et les vieux !
> Fusillés les insurgés, les petits soldats de l'invincible idée !
> Fusillés de dos quarante fédérés surpris les armes à la main, rue Saint-Jacques.
> Fusillé sans jugement rue Gay-Lussac, Raoul Rigault, procureur de la Commune.
> Fusillée toute femme mal vêtue ou aux effets en désordre.
> Fusillés les godillots et les haillons ![133]

By questioning the justice of the executions of this long list of *Communard.e.s* (mentioning the absence of due process, the crime being "mal vêtue", and how the victims were shot in the back), the reader has these injustices fresh in mind when the execution of the hostages takes place. The comparison will thus be made in various terms. Firstly, regarding cruelty, because the manner of execution is mentioned ("de dos", "surpris"), and both are not examples of fair play. Secondly, on the perception of agency, i.e. whether the executed had a chance to defend themselves (again, prompted by "de dos", but also "sans jugement"). Thirdly, on the idea perceived innocence: whether the executed actually committed any crimes, such as being "mal vêtue ou aux effets en désordre", or whether they could have been fighting at their age ("les jeunes et les vieux") or physicality ("les godillots et les haillons"). It is likely that the execution of the hostages will appear less cruel, less arbitrary, and less unexpected than those of the *Communard.e.s*, as an effect of this combination of the othering- and underdog-strategies. The problem of the potentially perceived innocence of the hostages (who are also unarmed and partly elderly men) is undercut in two ways. Firstly, by the following passage:

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[132] Vautrin, p.620.

[133] Vautrin, p.608.

> Le grand sabre à décerveler du fervent catholique Marie Edme Maurice Patrice de Mac-Mahon, duc de Magenta et maréchal de France, fonctionne jusqu'à l'hôpital. Quatre-vingts blessés exterminés sur leur lit de douleur en même temps que leur médecin ! Le cœur monte à la bouche ![134]

The reader is here not only reminded of the cruelty of the Versaillais (attacking a hospital is a severe war crime), rendering them more likely to accept some form of revenge, but also of the identity of the main killer. *Maréchal* MacMahon has a high function in the army and in French society (being a duke), and he is also a "fervent catholique". By only providing this information about MacMahon, the implication is that it is relevant to understand his actions. Not only is he thus someone who fights for the upper class to which he belongs, it is implied that his cruelty is caused by his Catholic convictions. Executing Catholic priests, especially when they are of high rank in the Church and thus have a hand in what is preached, is then justified both by arguing a tit-for-tat and making them emblematic for the system (reactive and symbol-strategies). The reactive argument is further strengthened by the fact that one of the executioners has a personal revenge motive on top of the broader Communard one:

> – Qui est volontaire ?
> Un pompier sort des rangs.
> – Moi, dit cet homme sans hésiter.
> Il a les yeux rouges.
> Il ajoute :
> – Mon frère a été fusillé ce matin.
> Ils sont partis.[135]

Remaining unnamed, the only thing the reader knows about this executioner is that he lost his brother that morning, that he is strongly affected by this ("il a les yeux rouges", implying tears and raising empathy in the reader), and that he therefore will without any doubt take his chance to avenge his brother. Arguing against him is difficult, because the execution is legitimised and the sparse information does not give any reason to doubt the intentions of the executioners.

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[134] Vautrin, p.609.
[135] Vautrin, p.608.

In fact, while the victims are all named, only some of the perpetrators are: prison director François, who barely speaks, the duo in charge of the operation, Genton ("le blanquiste") and Fortin (no further information given), and guardian Gavin McDavis. McDavis plays the most active role: he was introduced to the reader earlier in the novel as a rather unreliable carriage driver, he has several conversations, and we know that he is not French, but Scottish. The narrator describes him quite negatively ("vilain ambassadeur du mal, prophète des apocalypses, prédicateur de menaces")[136], yet at the same time asks the reader to not judge him too harshly: "je vous demande par-dessus tout, comme moi, d'avoir merci et mansuétude pour McDavis, pauvre créature déposée en marge du genre humain, mal aimée".[137] The fact that one of the cruelest characters in the series, who actually tries to save the murderous Abbé Ségouret from the fire squad, is not French *and* a marginalised person, is a legitimisation technique as well (marginalisation-strategy).[138]

What remains, however, is the question of why the reader is presented with the information that Genton, who speaks barely ten words, is a Blanquiste. The answer is that Blanquism is the last strategy that is used to legitimise the execution of the priests. In the earlier chapter on the hostages, the narrator tells the audience that archbishop Darboy has tried to convince Thiers to exchange him and his fellow hostages for Auguste Blanqui, an old socialist revolutionary who had been imprisoned by the Versaillais since 17 March. But Thiers refused to free him: "Le « petit homme » respectable avait besoin d'un cadavre".[139] Thiers, the narrator says, needed a martyr, the death of a person of significance whom he could claim to revenge. Not only is sacrificing someone who begged for his life not very "respectable" (othering-strategy), its unethical nature is further underlined by Vautrin emphasising the good qualities of Darboy: he is a "saint homme", "pieux et loyal" with a "voix douce", who was sadly afflicted by "la délicate naïveté" in believing that Thiers would care about his life.[140] By sanctifying Darboy, the treatment of Thiers seems extra harsh, displaying the opposite of the downplaying-strategy, that could be called amplifying. At the same time, this move absolves the *Communard.e.s* of a lot of the blame by employing the forced-hand-strategy: it is hard to judge someone who did not have any other options.

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[136] Vautrin, p.511.
[137] Vautrin, p.518.
[138] cf Rigney, *Historical Representation*, p.129.
[139] Vautrin, p.507.
[140] Vautrin, pp.506-7.

Hotspot: *Semaine Sanglante*

The *Semaine Sanglante* is the narrative and emotional climax of the novel. It is by far covered in most detail: it takes up the entire 6th and 7th parts of the book, or roughly a third of the pages. In this part, most of the characters, major and minor, meet their death. The main tension in this part is between the expectation of the reader, who likely knows how the Commune ended, the expectation of the characters, who do not think that they will survive, and the irrepressible hope for resolution and survival against all odds, implied by the genre of the murder mystery. The reader, knowing the main characters are fictional and thus may survive this event that the reader knows was a massacre. The reader hopes that they will not perish, and therefore keeps reading despite the graphic descriptions of cruelty, destruction, suffering, and death. More than in all other parts of the novel, the narrator directly addresses the reader, compelling them to look in a certain direction ("le voilà")[141] or move to another part of the story ("Revenons sur la rive gauche, où nous avons laissé Horace Grondin"),[142] and at several points even directly asking them to trust him ("Lecteur, je ne vous demande pas grand-chose sauf de me croire")[143] and try not to rush into the end of the book in an example of prolepsis by the involved narrator of the story:

> Et nous allons tout faire, quant à nous, pour retarder le récit de sa fracasse, persuadés que la véritable aventure d'un livre réside à la fois dans sa capacité à aiguiser l'impatience du lecteur (voyageur impatient qui souhaite dévaler à toute bride dans l'action) et dans son aptitude à ménager l'avancement de limace des sombres arcanes de la vie profonde.[144]

The stronger presence of the narrator in this part adds to the tension of knowing what will happen and yet refusing to accept this knowledge. Reading the narrator's words also reminds the reader that they are not reading a pure fiction (if that would even be possible), but something that is based on historical events. The addition of precise dates and places, which had slightly lessened in the middle part of the novel, also serves to remind the reader of the authority of the narrator. In turn, the involvement of the narrator strengthens the impact of the unfolding events. Of these events, I concentrate on Communard violence during the *Semaine Sanglante*, with independent sections for the treatment of hostages and the destruction of Paris following this section.

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[141] Vautrin, p.511.
[142] Vautrin, p.551.
[143] Vautrin, p.518.
[144] Vautrin, pp.551-2.

Most striking is that the deaths of Versaillais are never mentioned explicitly, only implied through the presence of the barricades and their defenders. The *Communard.e.s* who fight are depicted as brave and tragic: “ils ont le courage du désespoir” and “elles se font écharpiller, elles succombent souvent avec un courage indéracinable”.[145] Their couragous fighting is justified in various ways. First of all, the numerical unfairness: the *Communard.e.s* have to fight “un contre dix”, against a seemingly unending supply of Versaillais soldiers (the underdog-strategy).[146] The idea of an underdog is strengthened by the dramatic irony caused by regular reminders that the Commune will be crushed (“La lutte pour la conquête du ventre de la ville est engagée, Elle sera terrible. Elle annonce la destruction complète des défenses et des défenseurs.”).[147] Secondly, Vautrin mentions the higher goals that *Communard.e.s* are fighting for: “pour que leurs enfants ne travaillent plus quinze heures par jour dès l’âge de huit ans”.[148] This is a combination of the reaction-strategy (the *Communard.e.s* fight in response to past exploitation) and the omelette-strategy (to prevent further exploitation, they need to fight now). Thirdly, the opponent is depicted almost exclusively in a negative way, as in the othering-strategy. The French army is unnecessarily cruel, targeting hospitals and children.[149] The only named Versaillais soldier, Arnaud Desétoiles, kills without mercy and is described as “plus que jamais l’homme de sa caste”: “Un reître de bonne famille dont l’aïeul a été pair de France. Un ambitieux qui a trouvé son chemin. Un défenseur convaincu des valeurs de la famille, de l’Eglise, du progrès, du mérite et de l’instruction.”[150] By placing this description directly after a description of the bravery and just goals of the Commune, and before a section in which Tarpagnan has to crawl between wounded and dying *Communard.e.s*, Vautrin shows the emptiness of Desétoiles’ values (othering-strategy). Similarly, members of the bourgeoisie are shown as cowardly. Not only do they flee the city, but they also cheer on the executions of defeated *Communard.e.s*,[151] and in one instance, Alphonse Pouffard (a friend of Tarpagnan) is shot by a bourgeois man for simply walking on the street.[152] In short, by showing the opponent as immoral, the *Communard.e.s* are made to shine in comparison.

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[145] Vautrin, p.521; 626.
[146] Vautrin, p.521.
[147] Vautrin, p.602.
[148] Vautrin, p.602.
[149] Vautrin, p.528, 608.
[150] Vautrin, p.602.
[151] Vautrin, p.529.
[152] Vautrin, p.544.

Similarly, all instances of Communard violence are paired with violence against them. In the example mentioned above, Tarpagnan kills the bourgeois man only after Pouffard is killed, returning the fire (reaction-strategy).[153] Not only is this a direct response to a threat (Tarpagnan being shot himself), but it can also be seen as proportionate for the death of Pouffard: an example of the tit-for-tat sub-strategy. More often, however, Communard violence is only told, not shown. Behind the barricades, for example, Tarpagnan explains someone how to use a cannon, but it is not shown that this lesson has been put into practice as well.[154] This way, the perpetrator role of the *Communard.e.s* is not denied, but rather downplayed through a lack of representation. The focalisation of the story only shows *Communard.e.s* as victims, not the victims of the *Communard.e.s,* even when the focus is on a non-Communard character.

Conclusion

Overall, *Le cri du peuple* does not deny Communard violence, but all instances are legitimised either implicitly (in the construction of the narrative) or explicitly. While there is some downplaying by only presenting the effects of violence on the side of the *Communard.e.s* when it comes to fighting the Versaillais and setting buildings on fire, none of the hotspots are completely omitted. The main strategy that is used is the reactive one, in which the Versaillais violence is always mentioned first to emphasise that they provoked the actions of the *Communard.e.s*. As such, the agency of the *Communard.e.s* is in this respect largely taken away, since they only *react* violently. The only *act* of violence initiated by the Commune is thus the destruction of the Vendôme column, which is legitimised by the column being an icon of the oppressive system (symbol-strategy) and there not being any victims of this destruction.

Blamed for most of the violence is Thiers. In the novel, he ordered the cruel massacre of civilians ("Des centaines de cadavres fédérés racontaient la sauvage férocité des bouchers de Monsieur Thiers")[155]. He also signed the fate of Archbishop Darboy and the other hostages by refusing to exchange him for Blanqui because that would not fit the anti-Commune narrative he wanted to propagate. Lastly, he caused much of the destruction of the city by allowing his army to bomb it extensively. As such, the forced-hand-strategy is omnipresent in the entirety of *Le cri du peuple*. Even when *Communard.e.s* commit violent deeds, they are not ultimately to blame, because they acted in unwilling but necessary self-defence.

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[153] Vautrin, p.544.

[154] Vautrin, p.603.

[155] Vautrin, p.490.

It is clear who is to blame, though: not only Thiers, but also the class he represents. The bourgeoisie are represented so negatively that they "deserve what was coming to them", for they could have expected that their exploitation of the working class would have *represailles* (the expectation-strategy combined with the reaction-strategy), and what happens to them is not nearly as bad as what happens to the *Communard.e.s* (downplaying-strategy). Lastly, the text itself also demonstrates that the bourgeoisie is hypocritical in claiming the predicate of "civilisation" but showing that their capacity of cruel bestiality far exceeds that of the *Communard.e.s* (othering-strategy). As such, the novel as a whole works to establish a positive image of the Commune and the *Communard.e.s*. The Commune is rehabilitated to be admired rather than shunned.

In conclusion, various affordances of the medium of the novel and the genres of historical fiction and the feuilleton murder mystery are effectively employed. The novel's linearity allows contemporary events to be presented in the desired order, enabling strategies such as the reactive one and its tit-for-tat sub-strategy. The authority of the narrator is supplemented by the establishment of historical authority, making the audience more receptive to the narrative that is overall sympathetic to the Commune. The division of the work into seven parts and a hundred chapters enables the use of cliff-hangers, and in extension support the speed of the narrative. The reader is sucked into the story and less inclined to ponder every sentence and judge its merit. On the whole, the narrative is likely to be successful in what Vautrin has elsewhere stated as his goals: writing "un grand roman populaire", "faire revivre le Paris de la Commune, ses joies, ses exactions, ses excès, ses amours, ses énergies refoulées", bringing this overshadowed episode back into the light, and holding the torch of the *Communard.e.s*.[156] The lively novel generates sympathy for the main characters, but also for what they stand for: a more equal and just society. *Le Cri du peuple* does not explicitly draw parallels with the present nor does it tell its audience what to do, but it does transmit the values of equality, solidarity, justice, dignity, and *fraternité*. That is what the story is ultimately about: showing people working together to achieve something greater than themselves – an admirable goal.

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[156] Vautrin, "Preface" in Tardi, p.3.

II : *Le Cri du peuple* – Jacques Tardi

Le Cri du peuple by Jacques Tardi is a remediation of the novel by Jean Vautrin of the same name (see previous chapter). It first appeared in four volumes in 2001-2004 and has been combined into one volume for the 150th anniversary of the Commune in 2021. Like Vautrin's novel, it follows the rise and fall of the Paris Commune through a murder mystery: a woman is found dead in the Seine. The main characters are Horace Grondin, a detective, Hippolyte Barthélemy, a police officer, and Antoine Tarpagnan, a soldier who deserted the French army on the Butte Montmartre to join the *Communard.e.s*. The storyline of the Commune intertwines with the murder mystery that Grondin and Barthélemy try to solve and the love story between Tarpagnan and Caf'conc, a prostitute.

In contrast to Vautrin, however, Tardi's remediation places the Commune more in the background in favour of the story of Grondin and Barthélemy. The plot is roughly the same, although Tardi's version ends on a more hopeful note (two minor characters survive and express their unbeaten combative spirit in the Blanquist expression "**NI DIEU ! NI MAÎTRE !**"). In many other respects, moreover, the genre of the graphic novel changes the way in which the story is told, and in consequence, the story itself. Critically, the omniscient narrator of the novel, who Vautrin gave almost its own personality, has largely disappeared, because a graphic novel affords a visual representation of dialogue and action and thus does not need as much description as a novel does. Through speech, thought and dream balloons that offer direct speech, the reader has access to the experiences and words of the main and minor characters.[157] The panels are mostly at eye-level, adding a sense of realism.[158] Additionally, random people in the panel can say something relevant to the story, yet remain nameless and only appear once, without being confusing to the audience. The illustrations make that emotions, locations, movements, sounds, physical characteristics and attire, quantities, tones of voice, *et cetera* do not need to be narrated in text but can be shown to the readers. As such, the drawings do not merely illustrate the textual narrative, but form an integral part of it.[159] Dialogue and drawings are the main forms of narration, but they are supplemented by tiny squares of information (such as dates) in the corners of the panel and explanatory footnotes at the bottom of the page – the

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[157] Achim Hescher, *Reading Graphic Novels: Genre and Narration* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), pp.149-50.

[158] Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith, "How the Graphic Novel Works" in Stephen E. Tabachnick, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Graphic Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp.42-43.

[159] Michael Pagliaro, "Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words? Determining the Criteria for Graphic Novels with Literary Merit" *The English* Journal 103, no. 4 (March 2014), p.33; Jeanne C. Ewert, "Reading Visual Narrative: Art Spiegelman's *Maus*" *Narrative* 8, no.1 (Jan. 2000), p.87.

"captions".[160] The reading direction is left-right and top-bottom, and the panels are usually rectangular, separated by white spaces ("gutters"), and in three rows of one to four panels per tier, but this does vary: faces are shown in small rectangular or (when giving an opinion) round panels, while panoramic views of crowds and landscapes are in bigger panels, with the occasional splash (full-page panel). The effect is that one feels immersed in the story and gets a feeling of urgency and action, befitting the action-packed story of Tardi's Commune.

Most importantly, these affordances make the graphic novel more focused on movement and dialogue than the novel: the consequence is that the murder mystery plays a larger role, instead of the story of the Commune. While the Commune is definitely present, it is mostly so in the drawings, and less so in the dialogue, making it more a setting that could easily be a different revolution. The genre thus has its trade-off: affording action and dialogue means that the time rarely stands still to deliberate, provide history, and explain the context. However, it is better suited to express some degree of simultaneity in one panel. Multiple things can be shown to happen at once thanks to the variability in size of the panels and the difference between the foreground and the background. The strictly linear genre of the novel does not afford such nuanced simultaneity.[161]

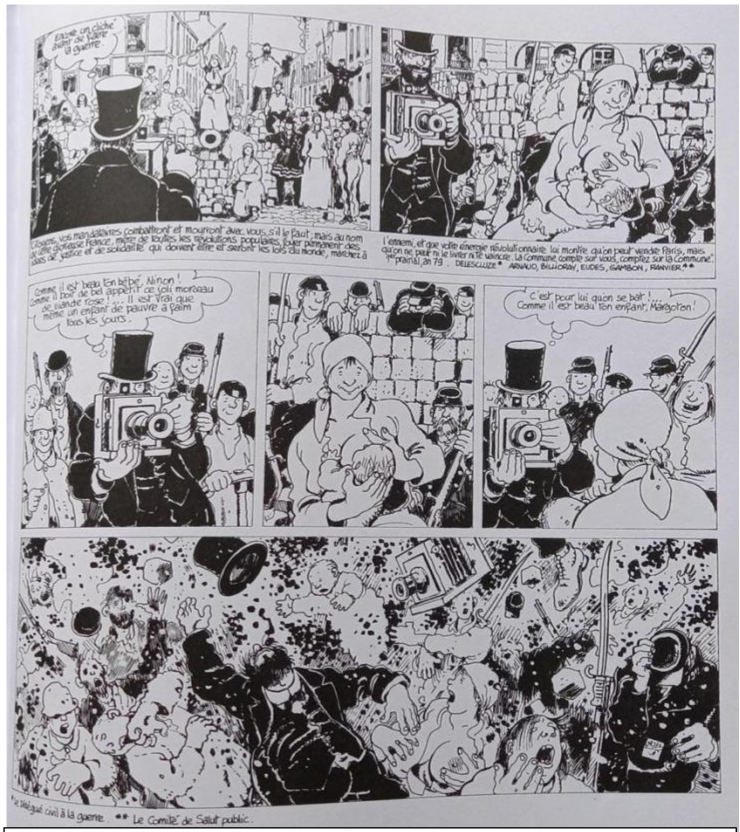
Encore un cliché avant de faire la guerre.
Citoyens, vos mandataires combattront et mourront avec vous, s'il le faut ; mais au nom de cette glorieuse France, mère de toutes les révolutions populaires, foyer permanent des idées de justice et de solidarité qui doivent être et seront les lois du monde, marchez à l'ennemi, et que votre énergie révolutionnaire lui montre qu'on peut vendre Paris, mais qu'on ne peut ni le livrer ni le vaincre. La Commune compte sur vous, comptez sur la Commune. 1er prairial, an 79. DELESCLUZE* ARNAUD, BILLIORAY, EUDES, GAMBON, RANVIER.**
Comme il est beau ton bébé, Ninon ! Comme il boit de bel appétit ce joli morceau de viande rose ! ... Il est vrai que même un enfant de pauvre a faim tous les jours.
C'est pour lui qu'on se bat !... Comme il est beau ton enfant, Margoton !
* Le délégué civil à la guerre. ** Le Comité de Salut public.

Figure 2: Tardi, p.133.

Yet the graphic novel does afford, as the name implies, a more graphic depiction: blood, pain, dead bodies, explosions and destruction can be seen, and do not need to be imagined. For example, see the scene in figure 2 in which Tarpagnan's photographer friend Mirecourt dies. We see Mirecourt think about why he is taking a picture, how the baby needs food even though his mother is poor, and why the Commune is so important. The peaceful and hopeful scene is brutally disturbed by an explosion: people, blood, clothing, bricks and body parts fly around. On the next page (figure 3), the fallout of these "canons Versaillais" is seen: the happy mother and child are dead, as are all the people around them. With

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[160] Jan Baetens, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.104-5.
[161] Robert Petersen, *Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Narratives* (Westport: Praeger, 2010), p.253.

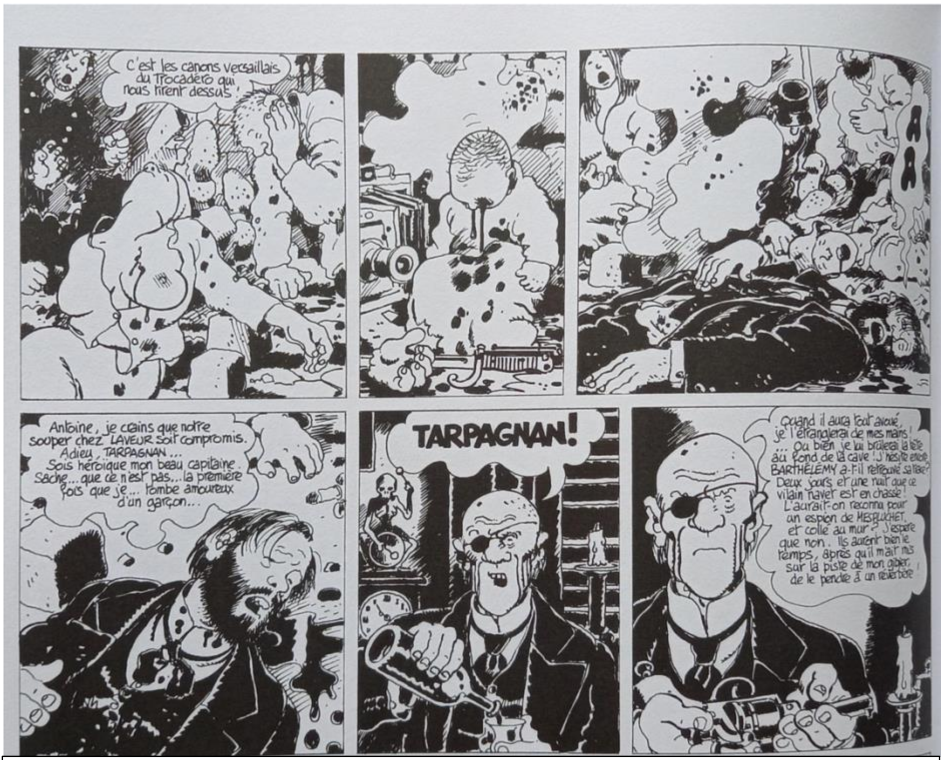
C'est les canons versaillais du Trocadéro qui nous tirent dessus !
Antoine, je crains que notre souper chez LAVEUR soit compromis. Adieu, TARPAGNAN... Sois héroïque mon beau capitaine. Sache... que ce n'est pas... la première fois que je... tombe amoureux d'un garçon...
TARPAGNAN!
Quand il aura tout avoué, je l'étranglerai de mes mains ! ... Ou bien je lui brûlerai la tête au fond de la cave ! J'hésite encore. BARTHÉLÉMY a-t-il retrouvé sa trace ? Deux jours et une nuit que ce vilain navet est en chasse ! L'aurait-on reconnu pour un espion de MESPLUCHET, et collé au mur ? J'espère que non. Ils auront bien le temps, après qu'il m'ait mis sur la piste de mon gibier, de le pendre à un réverbère !

Figure 3: Tardi, p.134.

his last thought, Mirecourt expresses his amorous love for Tarpagnan: doubly tragic because of his death and Tarpagnan's love for Caf'conc. For some people, this graphic depiction of violence may be more affective than the same scene in Vautrin's novel (in which the narrator counted down the seconds until the bomb would fall). Although there are no written sounds on this page (other pages feature sounds like the "bong" of a clock, the "toc" of the impact of an object in a human, or the "pan" of a gunshot), the reader can imagine the sound through the way the image is drawn. Similarly, basic emotions like surprise are expressed by a single question mark and laughter is marked by multiple renditions of the word "ha!". The tone of the voice can vary through capitalisation, size, exclamation marks, and bold text ("sound-effects lettering"): the "**TARPGAGNAN!**" in the image above is understood as very loud, while Mirecourt's last words are soft, a mirage.

In the graphic novel, authority is established in a slightly different way than in Vautrin's novel. As said earlier, it is not suited for extensive displays of historical context, although some distance to the events is taken in the rectangular text boxes at the corners of some panels (the "captions"). The footnotes at the bottom of the page explain who the people mentioned or referenced are, and the affiches that feature several times in the narrative. In the example shown above, for instance, an affiche by various leaders of the Commune is first shown, and then cited. The use of quotation marks signals that it is an historical document rather than a fictional interpretation. A final way to make the reader trust the narrative to be historically authentic is via the use of language. Even more than in Vautrin's novel, the characters use words that were used by ordinary Parisians around the time of the Commune, which gives an impression of authenticity. As these have largely disappeared from the French spoken in 2021, Tardi has provided a glossary, which of course adds an aura of historical linguistic research and, by extension, reliability.

Considering Tardi's graphic novel *en relief*, then, shows a Commune that is not too grounded in one single struggle. As the Commune is featured more as a background than as an important part of the plot, the general idea and the aesthetics of a progressive and popular revolution appear to be more important than the specifics of the Commune. Like in Vautrin's version, the *Communard.e.s* are shown to be brave and admirable, albeit less strongly than in the novel. The altered ending is also an interesting one. The slogan "Ni Dieu Ni Maître" postdates the Commune and is thus anachronical, but it is universally recognised as an anarchist and left-wing motto. By ending with it, Tardi reinforces the idea that this revolution may have failed, but that future ones may just succeed. Lastly, the idea of the general popular revolution is reinforced by the focalisation through two enemies of the revolution, Grondin and Barthélemy.

Hotspot: Fire and Destruction

One affordance of graphic novels and films is that they enable a background and is therefore more spatial than a novel.[162] This background can be purely visual and does not need to be commented upon in the text, as would be necessary in a novel. In *Le Cri du peuple*, the background is recognisably Paris, where all of the action takes place. Over the course of the book, typically Parisian buildings (post-Haussmann, that is) are shown to have been destroyed or be in the process of destruction: a bomb hitting a building and debris flying around, a building on fire, or the carcass of a building. The characters do not need to comment upon this destruction: seeing it, even when not consciously noticing it, is enough for the reader to understand that the city is turning into a ruin. Figures 4-7 are showing the impact of bombs, buildings in various states of destruction, and finally the full destruction of the city, with only fire, smoke, darkness, and some wooden beams remaining, as the book continues.

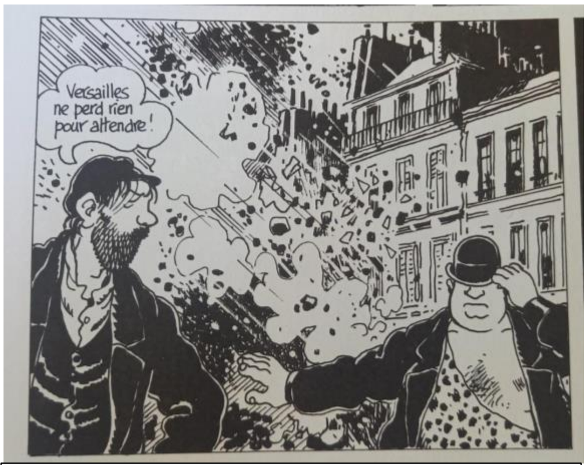
Versailles ne perd rien pour attendre !

Figure 4: Tardi, p.110.

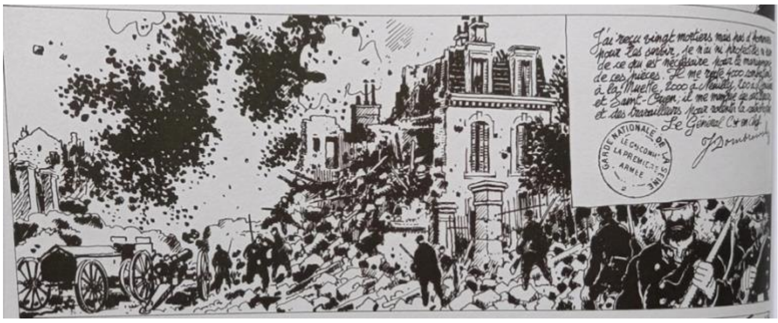
J'ai reçu vingt mortiers mais pas d'hommes
pour les servir
de ce qui est nécessaire pour la
de ces pièces. Il me reste 4000
à la Muette, 2000 à Neuilly,
et Saint-Ouen; il me manque
et des travailleurs pour
Le Général Cᵗ en Chef
GARDE NATIONALE DE LA SEINE

Figure 5: Tardi, p.118.

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[162] Baetens, *The Graphic Novel*, p.167.

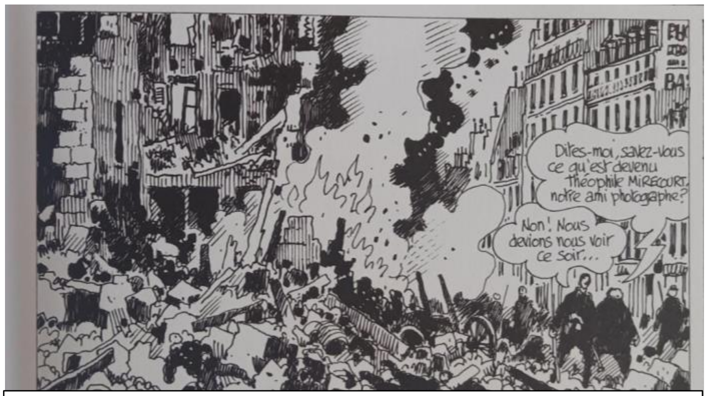
Dites-moi, savez-vous ce qu'est devenu Théophile MIRECOURT, notre ami photographe?
Non! Nous devions nous voir ce soir...

Figure 6: Tardi, p.179.

Frequently, the shelling that destroys buildings is depicted in tandem with wounded or killed people, like in figure 6. Figure 7 even shows how the demolishing of the city makes the rape of its inhabitants invisible: if the woman had not screamed, Grondin would not have noticed her. The proximity of the two (destruction and people being hurt) implies that there is a causal relation: the people are suffering from the shelling as well. The victims in the narrative are therefore not those who own the buildings, i.e., the bourgeoisie, but the *Communard.e.s*. Victimhood is therefore more complex than it may seem at first.

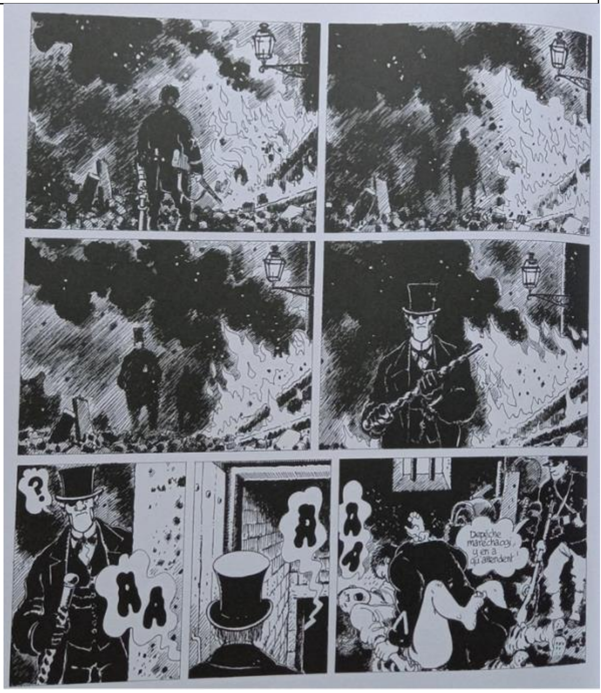
?
AA
AA
AA
Dépêche maréchaussée, y en a qui attendent!

Figure 7: Tardi, p.190.

The actions of Amélie la Gale provide another illustration of the complex character of victimhood, who is an even more minor character in Tardi's remediation than in the novel. Undercover police officer Barthélemy visits her to gather information, but finds her next to the bloody corpse of her partner Fil-de-Fer (figure 8). After giving Barthélemy the information he needed, she says that she now sees it clearly: "puisque les soldats du petit goret m'ont dépiauté mon Emile, je veux foutre le feu partout!".[163] The actions of the soldiers of Versailles thus prompt her to act (reactive strategy in the form of tit-for-tat). Additionally, she is a grieving woman ("veuve depuis deux heures"), who was introduced as a prostitute connected to the criminal gang (marginalised-strategy), of which the reader is reminded through a visual and textual analepsis. The focalisation through Barthélemy means that it is unclear whether Amélie has actually set fire to any buildings, because he does not follow her. Although we

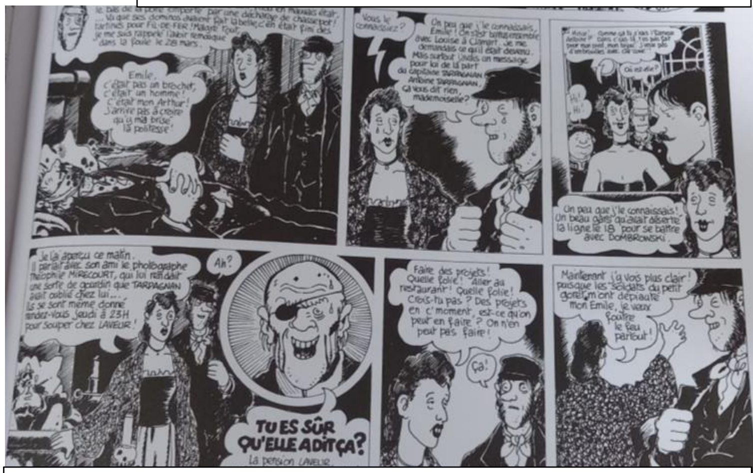
Emile, c'était pas un brochet, c'était un homme! C'était mon Arthur! J'arrive pas à croire qu'il m'a brisé la politesse!
Vous le connaissiez?
Un peu que j'le connaissais! Un beau gars qu'avait déserté la ligne le 18 pour se battre avec DOMBROWSKI.
Où est-elle?
Hi! Hi!
Je l'ai aperçu ce matin. Il parlait avec son ami le photographe Théophile MIRECOURT, qui lui rendait une sorte de gourdin que TARPAGNAN avait oublié chez lui... Ils se sont même donné rendez-vous jeudi à 23H pour souper chez LAVEUR!
Ah?
TU ES SÛR QU'ELLE A DIT ÇA?
La pension LAVEUR
Faire des projets! Quelle folie! Aller au restaurant! Quelle folie! Crois-tu pas? Des projets en c'moment, est-ce qu'on peut en faire? On n'en peut pas faire!
Ça!
Maintenant j'y vois plus clair! Puisque les soldats du petit goret m'ont dépiauté mon Emile, je veux foutre le feu partout!

Figure 8: Tardi, p.151.

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[163] Tardi, p.151. The "petit goret" (little swine/misbehaving child) is Adolphe Thiers, according to the footnote.

later meet her again, now focalised through Grondin, who shoots her, it is still unclear whether she has actually torched anything:

> Au moment où j'allais allumer un feu pour retarder la ligne ... Y sont au bout d' la rue... C'est pas du vin d' la vierge Marie qu'y a dans mes flatteuses.... C'est du pétrole ! T'as vu les deux chaudronniers dans leur sang ? Eh bien c'est moi ! Y z'ont sabré le p'tit môme, comme ça, pour le plaisir ! Tu trouves que c'est des manières civilisées?[164]

While she does admit to having killed two *chaudronniers*[165] in reaction to them slashing a child for fun (reaction-strategy), it is still unclear whether she actually started any fires. In the next panel, she repeats her grief and intention to commit arson: “THIERS m’a dépiauté mon Émile au moment où y se battait comme un lion avec la Louise … Ça m’a donné des envies d’incendie, mais tu peux pas comprendre ! Va, finis-moi avec ton gourdin !”.[166] At the same time, she creates a contrast between Grondin and the *Communard.e.s*, consisting of herself, Fil-de-Fer/Émile and Louise (Michel). Grondin, as a bourgeois police officer on the side of the Versaillais, cannot understand the pain and sadness that make her not want to live anymore.

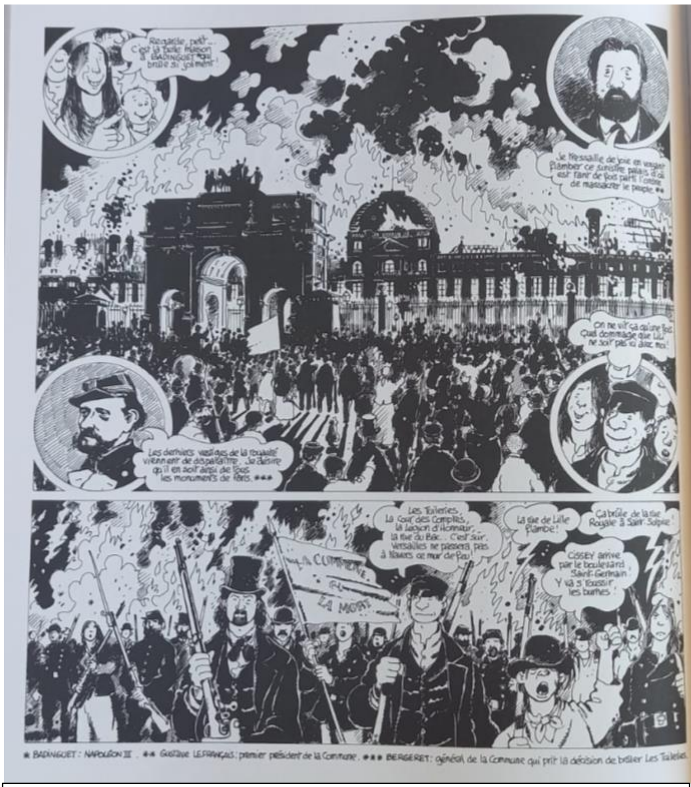
Regarde petit... C'est la belle maison à BADINGUET* qui brûle si joliment !
Je tressaille de joie en voyant flamber ce sinistre palais d'où est parti l'ordre de massacrer le peuple **
On ne vit ça qu'une fois. Quel dommage que Lili ne soit pas ici avec moi !
Les derniers vestiges de la royauté viennent de disparaître. Je désire qu'il en soit ainsi de tous les monuments de Paris ***
Les Tuileries, la Cour des Comptes, la Légion d'Honneur, la rue du Bac... C'est sûr, Versailles ne passera pas à travers ce mur de feu !
La rue de Lille flambe !
Ça brûle de la rue Royale à Saint-Sulpice !
CISSEY arrive par le boulevard Saint-Germain. Y va s'roussir les burnes !
LA COMMUNE OU LA MORT
* BADINGUET : NAPOLÉON III . ** GUSTAVE LEFRANÇAIS : premier président de la Commune . *** BERGERET : général de la Commune qui prit la décision de brûler Les Tuileries

Figure 9: Tardi, p.158.

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[164] Tardi, p.184.
[165] According to Tardi’s glossary, “chaudronniers” are cuirassiers, heavily armed cavalry.
[166] Tardi, p.184.

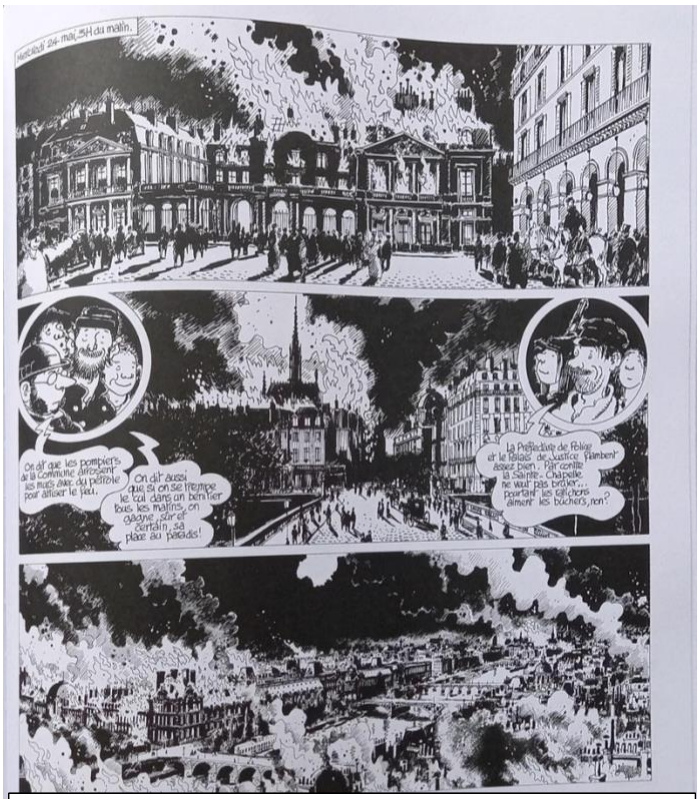
Mercredi 24 mai, 5H du matin.
On dit que les pompiers de la Commune arrosent les murs avec du pétrole pour attiser le feu.
On dit aussi que si on se trempe le cul dans un bénitier tous les matins, on gagne, sûr et certain, sa place au paradis!
La Préfecture de Police et le Palais de Justice flambent assez bien. Par contre la Sainte-Chapelle ne veut pas brûler... pourtant les calotins aiment les bûchers, non?

Figure 10: Tardi, p.159.

Since the sole representative of the mythical group of *pétroleuses* is a grieving widow, the reader is inclined to generalise this to the instances of fire that are shown in the book (see figure 9 & 10). They put the thoughts of various participants in the spotlight through the small circles with their faces in them. The speech balloons are accompanied by footnotes explaining who they are referring to (adding authority to the statement). In the first panel of figure 9, where we see the Tuileries on fire, the people comment that it is the palace of Napoleon III. Not only is this an icon of the monarchy and empire (symbol-strategy), then, it is also the location from which “tant de fois parti l’ordre de massacrer le peuple”.[167] Burning it to the ground then becomes a reaction from *le peuple* (reactive tit-for-tat). General Bergeret, “qui prit la décision de brûler Les Tuileries”, expresses his hope that other symbolic Parisian monuments will disappear as well (symbol-strategy).[168] In the next panels, this hope is realised: a Communard says “Les Tuileries, la Cour des Comptes, la Légion d’Honneur, la Rue du Bac. C’est sûr, Versailles ne passera pas à travers ce mur de feu !”, whilst others tell us where other fires are.[169] This action is framed as taking down symbols of the enemy, but also as an attempt to halt their invasion (symbol-strategy). In other words, they try to defend the Commune against the Versaillais attack (reactive strategy).

When it comes to the fire and destruction, Tardi’s *Le Cri du peuple* largely follows Vautrin’s text. However, the medium of the graphic novel makes it easier to bring across that the city is being destroyed: this can be done in the background next to being part of the narrative text. The responsibility for these acts of destruction is mostly placed on the Versaillais, and most of the destruction is caused by shelling, which is also shown to lead to death and pain under the *Communard.e.s*. Even if the Versaillais did not themselves set the fires at the Tuileries, it was a necessary defensive strategy to halt their invasion of Paris. Furthermore, the buildings convey a strong symbolism: of the monarchy and their sympathisers, the bourgeois government in Versailles.

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[167] Tardi, p.158.
[168] Tardi, p.158.
[169] Tardi, pp.158-9.

Hotspot: Hostages

Tardi's *Le Cri du peuple* spends more time on the hostages than Vautrin's: they figure more frequently in the narrative. The events are thrice told and focalised through two different people: detective Grondin and police officer Barthélemy (neither is Communard, both are members of or work for the bourgeoisie). This repetition allows for, and perhaps necessitates, more strategies of legitimisation, to ensure that the reader does not sympathise with the Versaillais. Some of these are taken from the Vautrin original, but some are added. The graphic novel slightly alters the way in which they are set up and presented.

As stated, the graphic novel affords simultaneous expression through multiple speech balloons by various figures. This increases the number of possible strategies of legitimation per page, since different viewpoints can be expressed in the same panel. As an example, take these two panels for the first mention of the execution of hostages, in figure 11:

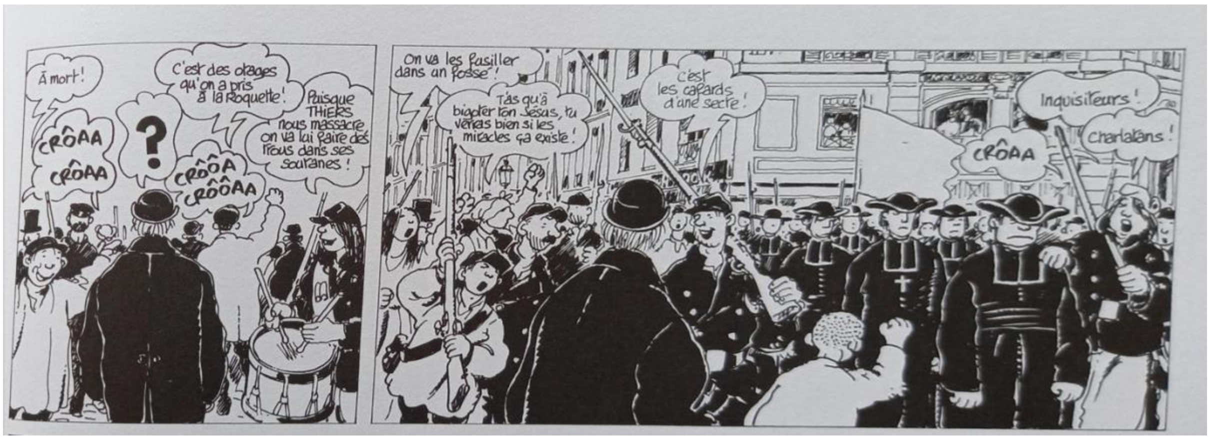
À mort!
CRÔAA CRÔAA
?
C'est des otages qu'on a pris à la Roquette!
CRÔÔA CRÔÔAA
Puisque THIERS nous massacre on va lui faire des trous dans ses soutanes!
On va les fusiller dans un fossé!
T'as qu'à bigorer ton Jésus, tu verras bien si les miracles ça existe!
C'est les cafards d'une secte!
CRÔAA
Inquisiteurs!
Charlatans!

Figure 11: Tardi, p.111.

In the first panel, three things are established at once: that the crowd is excited (shouting "crôaa"), that Grondin (in the bowler hat) is surprised at what he sees, and that the hostages that were taken at la Roquette will be put "à mort". The reason for is is also clear: "puisque THIERS nous massacre on va lui faire des trous dans ses soutanes."[170] In the second panel, the excited crowd, dressed in white, is depicted next to a procession of dark-clothed men, one of whom wears a cross. Reading from left to right, the plan to execute them is repeated, as well as that they only have to blame "their" Jesus if they are not saved by a miracle. Further to the right, and closer to the men, are insults: that they are cockroaches, inquisitors, and charlatans. Grondin's reaction is absent: he is seen from the back during the executions and the buildup, and the thought balloon affordance is not used either. In this way, there is no emotional counterweight to the executions, except the downturned mouths of the parade of hostages.

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[170] Tardi, p.111. "Soutanes" are cassocks, traditionally worn by Catholic clergy.

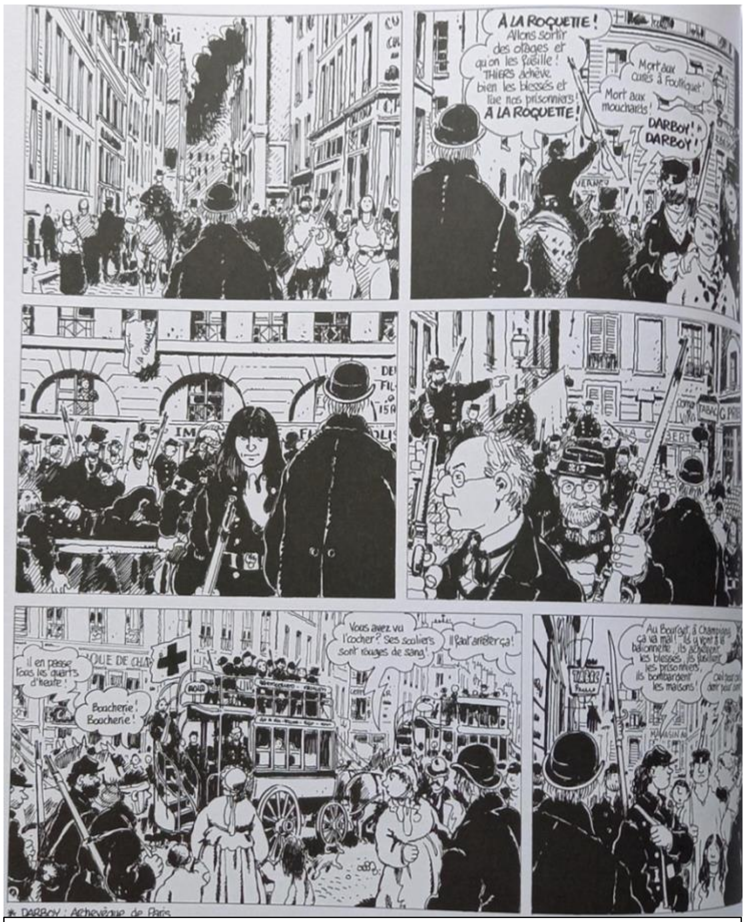
À LA ROQUETTE ! Allons sortir des otages et qu'on les fusille ! THIERS achève bien les blessés et tue nos prisonniers ! À LA ROQUETTE !
Mort aux curés à Foutriquet !
Mort aux mouchards !
DARBOY !* DARBOY !
Il en passe tous les quarts d'heure !
Boucherie ! Boucherie !
Vous avez vu l'cocher ? Ses souliers sont rouges de sang !
Il faut arrêter ça !
Au Bourget, à Champigny, ça va mal ! Ils y vont à la baïonnette, ils achèvent les blessés, ils fusillent les prisonniers, ils bombardent les maisons !
* DARBOY : Archevêque de Paris

Figure 12: Tardi, p.110.

The emotions of the *Communard.e.s* are depicted and explained on the preceding page (figure 12). The bold, capitalised sound-effects lettering in combination with exclamation marks show anger. The causes for this anger are shown as well, spread out along the page: the smoke from fallen bombs in the first slide, the wounded boy in the second, a dead man on a stretcher in the third, an ambulance carriage filled with people in the fifth. These panels do not necessarily have to be in this order: if the last two had been the first two, for instance, the reader would not have lost the plot. Yet the order is not arbitrary: by showing victimhood, victimhood (displayed) + violent intentions (in text), victimhood, victimhood, victimhood (in display and text), and then victimhood again (in text), the violent intentions are sandwiched between information about how the Commune has enough reason to want revenge. While we do not see any red blood, we are told that it is everywhere, even on the shoes of the coachman of the ambulance that passes every fifteen minutes; and therefore we can imagine how many people are wounded and dying. It is then in the last panel that the reader is ready for the reactive strategy in the form of a tit-for-tat argument, expressed literally: "Œil pour œil, dent pour dent !".[171] The reasons for the Communard anger that is expressed through the execution of hostages are thus depicted both visually and textually throughout the two Pages, while the hostages themselves do not speak or are shown to think.

In fact, the only hostage that speaks more than a few words is the fictional Abbé Ségouret, who is guilty of committing the gruesome murder of a young woman and her unborn child (like in Vautrin's text). Police chef Mespluchet finds this hard to believe, but the *petit peuple* are shown to have little reason to trust the good intentions of the Catholic priests.[172] The Church's faults are shown on multiple occasions, from their stealing from the people (as expressed by La Chouette, who calls them hyenas) to general MacMahon being a "fervent catholique et non moins criminel" who does not show a shred of "clemence" or "charité chrétienne" to the *Communard.e.s*, not even on Pentecost Sunday, showing how much worth these "Christian values" truly have.[173] The clergy are thus made into an icon (symbol-strategy), an Other (othering-strategy), and their grievability is subsequently reduced (downplaying-strategy), both in text and in the way they are presented.

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[171] Tardi, p.110.

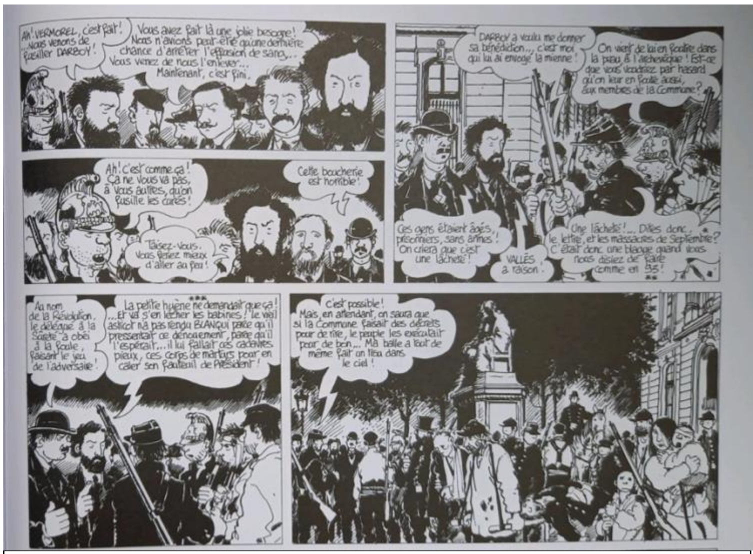
Ah! VERMOREL, c'est fait! ...Nous venons de fusiller DARBOY!
Vous avez fait là une jolie besogne! Nous n'avions peut-être qu'une dernière chance d'arrêter l'effusion de sang... Vous venez de nous l'enlever... Maintenant, c'est fini.
DARBOY a voulu me donner sa bénédiction..., c'est moi qui lui ai envoyé la mienne!
On vient de lui en foutre dans la peau à l'archevêque! Est-ce que vous voudriez par hasard qu'on leur en foute aussi, aux membres de la Commune?
Ah! C'est comme ça! Ça ne vous va pas, à vous autres, qu'on fusille les curés!
Taisez-vous. Vous feriez mieux d'aller au feu!
Cette boucherie est horrible!
Ces gens étaient âgés, prisonniers, sans armes! On criera que c'est une lâcheté!
VALLÈS a raison!
Une lâcheté!... Dites donc, le lettré, et les massacres de Septembre? C'était donc une blague quand vous nous disiez de faire comme en 93!
Au nom de la Révolution, le délégué à la Sûreté a obéi à la foule, faisant le jeu de l'adversaire!
La petite hyène ne demandait que ça! ...Et va s'en lécher les babines! Le vieil asticot n'a pas rendu BLANQUI parce qu'il pressentait ce dénouement, parce qu'il l'espérait... il lui fallait ces cadavres pieux, ces corps de martyrs pour en caler son fauteuil de Président!
C'est possible! Mais, en attendant, on saura que si la Commune faisait des décrets pour de rire, le peuple les exécutait pour de bon... Ma balle a tout de même fait un trou dans le ciel!

Figure 13: Tardi, p.171.

And still, the people are hesitant to execute the *décret des otages*: "même dans sa colère, le Peuple abhorre le sang."[174] However justified their anger may be, and however legal the decree is, the *Communard.e.s* are shown to have the moral high ground by not immediately implementing the decree and killing prisoners. In the scene in which the archbishop is executed, this act is immediately shown to have been on the authority of one man (Théophile Ferré) and that the rest of the Commune condemns it (figure 13). They call it ironically "a good job" (as the hostages were the last chance to negotiate with the Versaillais for an end to the bloodshed), a "boucherie", a "lâcheté", an imitation of the strategies of the opponent (which the Commune should be above), and playing right into Thiers' hand by giving him a martyr (marginalising-, forced-hand and othering-strategies). This accusation is countered by the executioners, who are made to repeat the reactive and tit-for-tat strategies. Overall, the effect is that the executions are seen as the actions of a minority and as an excess (marginalising- and one-off-strategies), since it clearly has not happened before and is not supported by the leaders of the Commune. Lili repeats this statement at the end of the book, as she testifies having seen Vallès and Varlin attempt to stop the execution at Rue Haxo.[175]

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[172] Tardi, p.206.
[173] Tardi, p.113; 167; 204.
[174] Tardi, p.112.
[175] Tardi, p.202.

The visual nature of the graphic novel ensures that the suffering of the *Communard.e.s* cannot be ignored, which makes the sandwiching easier and more effective. Any mention of the hostages is either preceded or followed by the horrific deeds of the Versaillais. Take, for instance, the scene in which guardian Gavin McDavis (a Scot, like in Vautrin's novel) pesters the prisoners. As a foreigner, he does not represent the Commune and can thus be meaner (marginalising-strategy).[176] Yet the imprisonment of the clergy is contrasted with one of the most tragic scenes from *Le Cri du peuple*: when Mirécourt photographs a mother feeding her baby at a barricade, but they all get torn to shreds by Versaillais shelling (see figures 2 and 3). The scene is a very affective one. Firstly, it is very graphic: the bodies are covered in blood, limbs have been torn off, and Mirécourt uses his last breath to express his love for his friend (or more than friend) Tarpagnan. Secondly, the narrative is highly charged due to the swiftness of the change from happiness to tragedy and the display of love between main characters. As such, the reader will be less inclined to feel sorry for the prisoners who are held in rather good conditions. As McDavis says, they could even be freed, had Thiers been willing to trade hostages instead of coldly sacrificing the archbishop so that he has a martyr to avenge (forced-hand and othering-strategies).[177] As such, while the hostages are far from absent from the novel, their deaths are depicted as less grievable (because they are a symbol for the Catholic church and one of them is a murderer: the symbol and higher-justice-strategies) and could have been expected, because Thiers was willing to sacrifice them to have a martyr (forced-hand and othering-strategies), the Versaillais killed hundreds of Communard hostages first (reactive and tit-for-tat). Still, the executions are an excess, done by marginalised people and not condoned by the Commune (one-off and marginalising-strategies), like in Vautrin's text. The visual format of the graphic novel is very suited to sandwich the hostage scenes between scenes of Versaillais bloodlust, and to circumvent the necessity to give the hostages a voice.

Hotspot: *Semaine Sanglante*

Overwhelmingly, it is *Communard.e.s* whose deaths are shown and told, both anonymous men, women and children, and named or even focalised characters. However, on three different occasions, a non-Communard is victim of Communard violence, more often than in the other case studies of this project.

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[176] McDavis is paid by Abbé Ségouret to help him in his flagellation, perhaps in reference to the stereotype about Scottish people being obsessed with money (cf. Scrooge McDuck) to further emphasise the difference.

[177] Tardi, p.135.

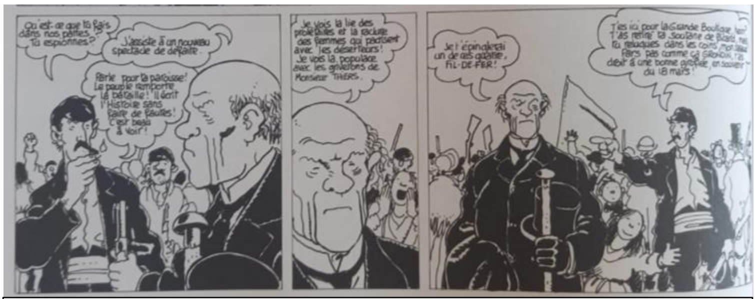
Qu'est-ce que tu fais dans nos pattes? Tu espionnes?
J'assiste à un nouveau spectacle de défaite.
Parle pour ta paroisse! Le peuple remporte la bataille! Il écrit l'Histoire sans faire de fautes! C'est beau à voir!
Je vois la lie des prolétaires et la raclure des femmes qui pactisent avec les déserteurs! Je vois la populace avec les grivetons de Monsieur THIERS.
Je t'épinglerai un de ces quatre, FIL-DE-FER!

Figure 14: Tardi, p.26.

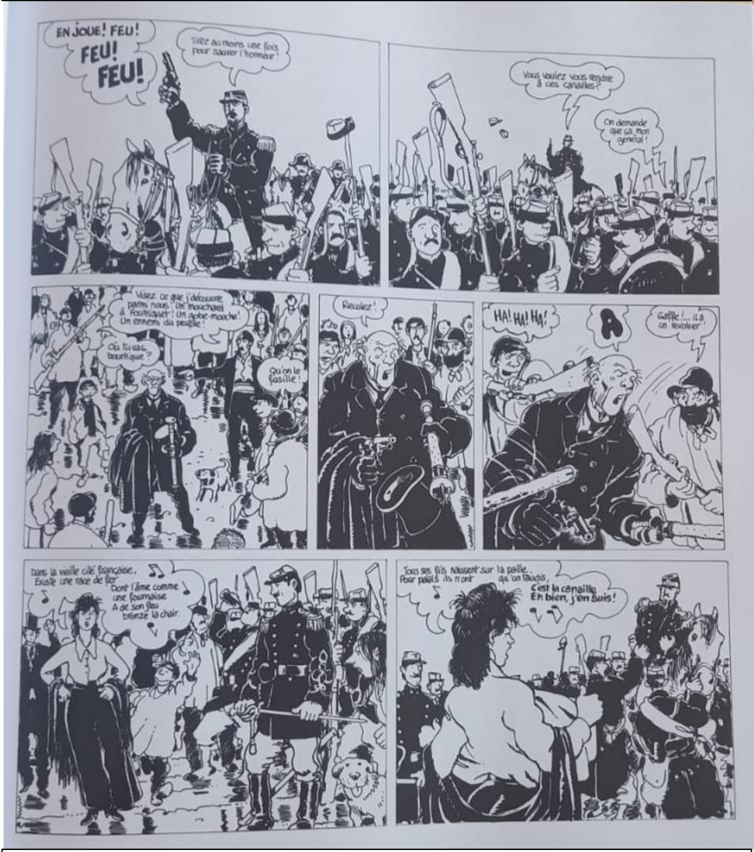
EN JOUE! FEU! FEU! FEU!
Tirez au moins une fois pour sauver l'honneur!
Vous voulez vous rendre à ces canailles?
On demande que ça, mon général!
Visez ce que j'découvre parmi nous: Un mouchard à Foutriquet! Un gobe-mouche! Un ennemi du peuple!
Où tu vas, bourrique?
Qu'on le fusille!
Reculez!
HA! HA! HA!
Gaffe!... il a un revolver!
Dans la vieille cité française, Existe une race de fer Dont l'âme comme une fournaise A de son feu bronzé la chair.
Tous ses fils naissent sur la paille, Pour palais ils n'ont qu'un taudis,
C'est la canaille Eh bien, j'en suis!

Figure 15: Tardi, p.27.

The first one (in the narrative) is at the Butte Montmartre, where Grondin is beaten up by the crowd just after the 88th battalion under leadership of Tarpagnan refuses to fire on the people. Grondin is recognised by Fil-de-Fer as a police officer and suspected of spying (figure 14). Instead of denying this allegation, he says : "Je vois la lie des prolétaires et la raclure des femmes qui pactisent avec les déserteurs. Je vois la populace avec les grivetons de Monsieur Thiers", effectively insulting the people who have just had a victory over the army (othering-strategy).[178] He thus strongly escalates the stituation and when a man suggests "Qu'on le fusille !", Grondin pulls his gun (figure 15). This startles the people, who hit him on the head, causing Grondin to drop his revolver. This could be interpreted as self-defence on the part of the people to a direct threat (reaction-strategy). Caf'conc starts to sing Le Canaille, with her breasts exposed, in defiance of the Versaillais general, starting off a section in which the singing of Caf'conc is alternated with Grondin being hit. Fil-de-Fer says "C'est un condé à THIERS qui veut du mal aux pauvres !".[179] Grondin is thus shown as a threat to the poor people, who are experiencing a moment of pride in their identity due to the victory and the singing, and who combine forces to get rid of this threat to their self-as-poor-people. However, they do not kill Grondin, because he is not considered worth it. In short, Grondin is presented as a threat, symbolic of the Thiers government, neutralised by the crowd (symbol- and reaction-strategies). Still, the *Communard.e.s* are shown to be merciful, as they do not kill Grondin: they thus keep the moral high ground.

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[178] Tardi, p.26.
[179] Tardi, p.28.

The other instances of Communard violence against non-*Communard.e.s* also depict these actions as reactive and morally better. Both are in response to Versaillais violence (reaction-strategy). Like in Vautrin's novel, Tarpagnan shoots a bourgeois sniper who killed Tarpagnan's horse and multiple *Communard.e.s* from his balcony. He says that this man is "Un pantre qui veut se glorifier d'avoir dégommé un communard depuis son balcon, planqué derrière sa persienne."[180] It is thus implied that the man is a coward, who does not meet his victims face-to-face but instead hides in his luxurious apartment so that he can gloat about being a brave fighter after the Commune has been defeated. After killing the man to whom Tarpagnan was talking about his love for Caf'conc, the shooter then steps out on the balcony, showing his fat belly and expensive clothing, proudly saying "J'en ai eu un !" (figure 16).[181] Tarpagnan shooting him is thus a reaction to a threat as well as revenge for the *Communard.e.s* who were killed (reaction-strategy with tit-for-tat and self-defence). The episode is also sandwiched in between tableaux of wounded and dead *Communard.e.s*.

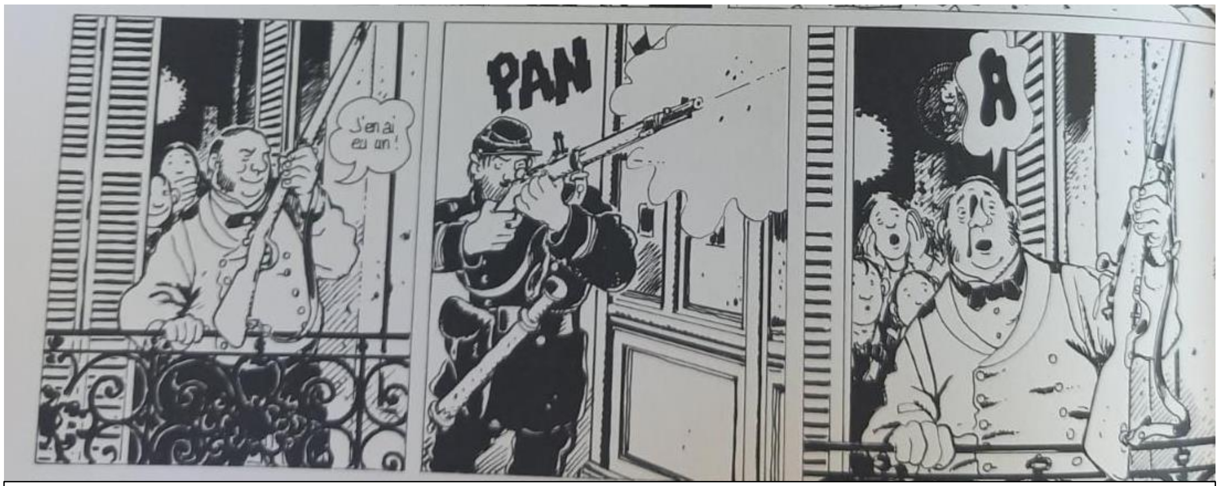

Figure 16: Tardi, p.140.

This theme of self-defence returns in an interesting way in the last depicted instance of *Communard.e.s* killing their opponents, namely during a long scene about the fighting on the barricades in Paris, in which members of the National Guard, women, and Italians work together.[182] The *Communard.e.s* are shown to be killed by bullets and cannonballs, in graphic scenes, and thus losing the battle. When the Versaillais mount the barricade, coming down on the *Communard.e.s,* Tarpagnan is shooting at them with his revolver (figure 17). When they get closer to him, however, the sound "CLIC ! CLIC !" replaces the "**PAN PAN**", indicating

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[180] Tardi, p.138.

[181] Tardi, p.140.

[182] The Italians are likely to be *Garibaldiens*, showing the international character of the Commune.

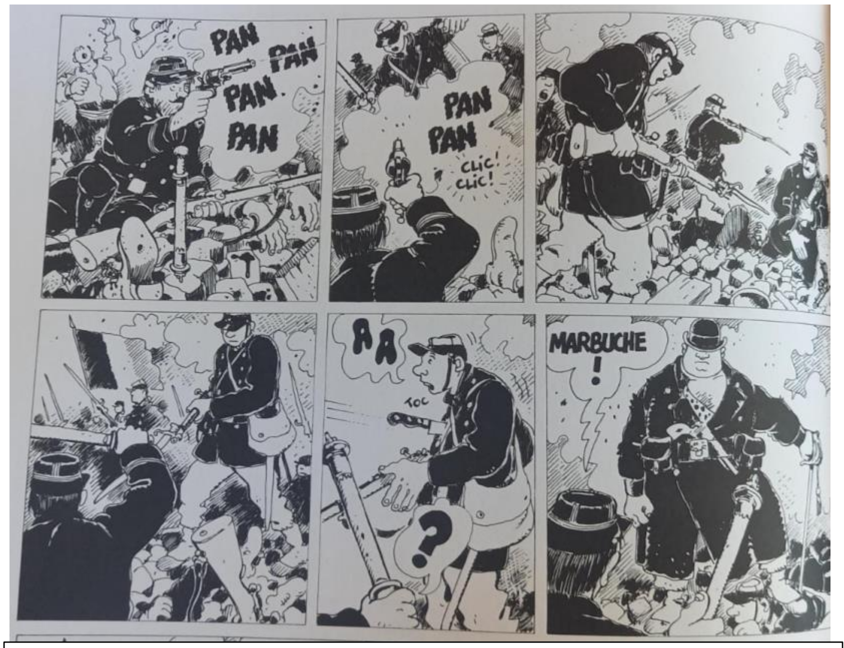

Figure 17: Tardi, p.148.

to the reader that Tarpagnan is out of bullets. He holds up a bar to try to protect himself against the oncoming soldier, who points a rifle at him. In the next panel, the soldier has a knife in his chest, which is accompanied by a "TOC" indicating impact and three little bars indicating movements. The soldier expresses "**A A**", which the book uses for the screams of dying people, and in the bottom half of the panel, Tarpagnan's hand with the bar is visible, as well as his "**?**" of surprise: it is immediately clear that he did not throw the knife. The next panel solves this mystery: it is Marbuche, Tarpagnan's friend from the circus, who saved his life. Marbuche is a figure from the margins of society, who is first encountered at the brothel of the criminal gang as a rather simple giant, who saves Tarpagnan's life when he is attacked by members of said gang and brings him to the circus where he works (also a marginal place, at the outskirts of the town). As such, this violence is committed by a marginalised figure (marginalising-strategy). Since Tarpagnan is practically unarmed (a bar is no match for a gun), he cannot defend himself against the Versaillais soldier. Shooting an unarmed person is generally regarded as cowardly, so the Versaillais are made into an Other (othering-strategy). While the soldier does not appear to have noticed Marbuche, he is hit in the chest, which is "acceptable" – the *Communard.e.s*, then, are not like the Versaillais (othering-strategy).

The killing of the Versaillais soldier, however, is an interesting case in the question of how far self-defence goes. In the previous example, Tarpagnan killed because his own life was directly threatened. In this example, Tarpagnan's life is again threatened, but he does not do the killing. His life is saved by his friend Marbuche, who then says "Tarpagnan, tu viens avec Marbuche! Tu réfléchiras et moi, je cognerai sur les lignards de Monsieur Thiers."[183] This emphasises once more how thinking is not Marbuche's strong suit (he asks Tarpagnan to do the "réfléchir" and refers to himself not as "me" but as "Marbuche", i.e., in the third person). On top of that, it expresses his animosity towards the Versaillais soldiers ("les lignards de

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[183] Tardi, p.148. The names are capitalised in the original.

Monsieur Thiers), showing that Marbuche belongs to the Commune. In killing the Versaillais soldier, then, Marbuche is acting on behalf of the Commune. On top of that, he is saving a friend. The combination of this could indicate that Marbuche considers Tarpagnan as part of the self, and is thus acting in self-defence, because Tarpagnan is also a part of the political (Communard) and social (friendship) group to which Marbuche belongs.[184] The text does not explicitly argue so in the text, but Marbuche grabbing Tarpagnan's hand does signal a close connection between the two. On the other hand, Marbuche not using the first person singular to indicate himself, but the third person singular, might indicate that he does not have a clear conception of what a "self" is.

Looking at the background of the pictures further complicates the issue. A barricade is by definition defensive, not offensive, so the Versaillais are the attacking party (reactive strategy, self-defence). Furthermore, in the first panel of the page, a man in a white shirt is shown throwing his head backwards, mouth open in a wordless scream, and his hand raised in the air: the impression is that this man is a Communard who has just been killed. In the top three panels, first we can see two hands and a leg that seem unattached to any character, then we see a shoe next to Tarpagnan's elbow, and in the panel after, the drawings reveal that there is a body lying on the barricade, presumably dead. By showing loose limbs rather than full cadavers, it is not clear how many dead people there are exactly, but it is clear that these limbs are from victims of the Versaillais invasion. They serve both to remind the reader of the omnipresent violence of the Versaillais (othering-strategy) and to show what might happen to Tarpagnan, the protagonist, too. The violence by Marbuche is therefore also a reaction to Versaillais violence (reactive strategy, tit-for-tat and self-defence substrategies).

To conclude, the violence by the *Communard.e.s* is mostly depicted as responding to Versaillais/bourgeois violence or threats of violence (reaction-strategy). It is always shown alongside or sandwiched between images of Communard victims. The perpetrators of Communard violence are also "punished" in the long run: Fil-de-Fer, Marbuche and Tarpagnan are all killed. Grondin, however, survives thanks to *Communard.e.s* nursing him back to health (although he is later killed by Versaillais soldiers). The question of whether these are instances of self-defence is left for the reader to answer. The narrative nudges the reader towards accepting self-defence as a legitimation, but Tardi does not explicitly posit this.

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[184] Cf Butler, p.21.

Conclusion

The affordances of the graphic novel genre thus create their own way to display and (de)legitimise violence. Whereas in Vautrin's novel the topos of violence mostly serves to demonstrate the difference between the Versaillais and the *Communard.e.s*, Tardi, while mostly following this method of the othering-strategy, shows some instances of Communard violence with remarkably few strategies to legitimate it. He mostly relies on the reactive and simultaneous nature of the violent deeds, which is enabled by the medium of the graphic novel affording a changeable background to the action. Although the reader can ultimately decide for themselves whether the actions of the *Communard.e.s* are self-defence or not in that they are not told explicitly what to think, through all violence being portrayed as reactive, they are rather nudged in that direction. In the scene where Marbuche saves Tarpagnan's life, the Self of Marbuche is enlarged: Marbuche and Tarpagnan belong to the same Self. If the reader can accept Marbuche helping Tarpagnan as self-defence, they will be more willing to consider other violent actions by *Communard.e.s* as self-defence too.

Through the affordance of the background, a graphic novel can show the damaging effects of the shelling by the Versaillais more frequently and more subtly. If no further elaboration is given, an image of a destroyed building is more affective than only the sentence "The building was destroyed", because the reader can see it for themselves and does not have to imagine it. Remarkably, this graphic novel does not use colour, an affordance of the medium. The cover does show that colour could be used to emphasise fire, blood, and the red flag of the Commune, but for the rest of the book, the reader has to imagine the colours. Perhaps the use of colours would have made the graphic novel too expensive, where Tardi and Vautrin wanted that a wider public would have access to "un épisode crucial de notre histoire, un épisode ébréché, "oublié" dans les manuels, ou tout simplement passé sous le boisseau des pudeurs et dénigrements des héritiers de M. Thiers".[185] An expensive book would impede this project. Another option is that, like in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, the black and white is used because it is reminiscent of newsprint, and therefore better suited to depict heavy real events than bright colours that may be too frivolous.[186] The black and white colourning thus supports the narrative.

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[185] Vautrin, "Preface" in Tardi, p.3.

[186] Stephen Tabachnick, "Of Maus and Memory: the Structure of Art Spiegelman's Graphic Novel of the Holocaust." *Word and Image* 9, no. 2 (April-June 1993), p.155.

This graphic novel can thus attract a different audience than the other works studied here: seemingly less interested in the why and how of the Commune, more so in its spectacle, they are lured in by the mystery of the murder and end with sympathy for the children who have survived the horrors and now proclaim that they want neither gods nor masters, using an anachronistic anarchist slogan that has since been used by many who strive towards a more equal world. By providing historical people and events and explicitly naming them in the footnotes, it does work to incite curiosity, and can thus serve as a first entry into the Commune for a 21st century audience. As it depicts the Commune as a rather generalised revolution, it can also attune the readers to socially progressive ideas.

III : *Les Damnés de la Commune* – Raphaël Meyssan

Les Damnés de la Commune, or *Die Verdammten der Pariser Kommune*, is a 2021 animated documentary film produced by French-German public service channel ARTE. It is a reworking of the graphic novel series *Les damnés de la Commune* by Raphaël Meyssan (2017-2019), who was also the film director of this project. The story is based on the memories of Victorine Brocher. The visual narration, i.e. the drawings and animations, are in black and white, based on illustrations and etchings made during and around the Paris Commune,[187] and supplemented with maps. The auditory narration is done through sound effects, music, and voiceover. The two main voices are those of the narrator, an adult man about whom one does not learn any personal details, and of "Victorine", through whom the story is focalised.

Victorine Brocher was a historical person, but the viewer does not learn until the very end that this story is based on her memories. In the documentary, Victorine is a member of the working class, who runs a cooperative *cantine* with her husband. Just before the start of the Commune, her toddler son dies of illness and exhaustion caused by the Prussian siege of Paris and the lack of governmental support. Towards the end of the Commune, her husband dies while fighting for the *Garde Nationale*, and after the Commune's fall, she is left believing her mother was killed in the Versaillais bombardments. During the Commune, Victorine joins the *bataillon des enfants perdus* and works with them on the barricades and in the distribution of food. She is the only survivor of the battalion and manages to avoid arrest and flee to Switzerland, where she meets Gustave. Together they adopt children who were orphaned in the *Semaine Sanglante*, and they are the reason she tells the story. The life of the historical figure Victorine Brocher is quite similar, but two differences are here important: her first husband survived the Commune but was imprisoned for three years before dying in 1880, after which Victorine met Gustave Brocher; the second difference is that the historical figure Victorine Brocher was arrested and sentenced to death for setting fire to the *Cour des comptes* (the Court of Audit), but she managed to escape to Switzerland.[188][189] As such, the narration contrasts the sympathy-inducing voice of a woman who loses her child and husband and speaks about her own experience with an unnamed male voice who provides historical context and facts. By juxtaposing the neutral and the personal, the documentary uses the patriarchal expectations about men and women to tell a story with an emancipatory message.

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[187] It is unclear how strongly the drawings are based on contemporary *gravures* (etchings), since the wording in French and German is slightly different: "Ce film s'inspire des souvenirs de Victorine Brocher. Les dessins sont des gravures de l'époque de la Commune de Paris" and "Victorine Brochers Erinnerungen sind die Basis der Narration dieses Films. Die Gravierkunst des späten 19. Jahrhunderts ist Vorbild der Animation." "sont" is a lot stronger than "ist Vorbild der".

[188] The authorities thought she had been successfully executed because her mother had identified her supposed remains.

[189] See "BROCHER Victorine (née MALENFANT, épouse ROUCHY puis BROCHER)" on *Maitron*, https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article154273 and "ROUCHY Jean, Charles » on *Maitron*, https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article70135, accessed 5 May 2022.

With the focalisation through Victorine, central to the documentary are *le petit peuple*, the ordinary citizens of Paris, with whom the audience is expected to sympathise. Their abhorrent living conditions figure prominently in the story and explain the desire (and desperate efforts) of ordinary Parisians to improve their daily lives. The big contrast between the *petit peuple* and the bourgeois government, in terms of wealth, safety, and power, but also cruelty, is expressed through a use of "nous" for the *Communard.e.s* and "ils" for the Versaillais. The poor standard of living also serves to establish a link with earlier revolutions, notably those of 1789 and 1848. Like in those revolutions, the government is not regarded as representing the people nor as caring for them. This legitimises the existence of the Commune, and the voiceover also mentions multiple times that the Commune was legally elected by the Parisians. However, the *petit peuple* are not completely sanctified by the narrative, for they did not yet allow women to vote for this Commune. The documentary does demonstrate how women played many important roles in the Commune: from caring for wounded soldiers and distributing food to fighting on the barricades (with Louise Michel) and rallying the people (with André Léo). These themes of poverty and exploitation, revolutionary efforts, and women's involvement are explored in a film that spends most of the running time of 1,5 hours on the build-up to the Commune (the first 40 minutes) and the defeat (the last 45 minutes). The documentary does thus not show much about life in the Commune, the ideas of the *Communard.e.s*, or the aftermath of the Commune.

As *Les Damnés de la Commune* presents itself as a documentary, it commands authority from the start: a documentary *documents*, it *records* what it is witnessing, and therefore implies unaltered transmission. However, as discussed, narratives, including visual ones, are always mediated and thus altered by their medium, and can never simply transmit. Yet the documentary tries to come close to the history *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, by basing itself on original engravings and contemporary sources, following the precise dates of the Commune in roughly chronological order, and citing historical figures such as Courbet and Vallès. The use of an omniscient (male) narrator who details numbers, maps, dates, persons and other verifiable facts, in conjunction with and contrast to with Victorine, who tells the audience about her experiences, gives the audience the idea that they are experts, respectively through research and experience. Extra *cachet* is given to the documentary by the name of ARTE, a trusted source, and the bilingual display of texts on the screen (French and German): translation gives authority (if it is translated, it must be important) and the repetition of information (in two languages) makes it appear truer.

Naturally, a disinterested and neutral story about a past event is impossible. The Commune is portrayed positively in this documentary because of its humane and emancipatory nature, and its bloody defeat is presented as a cruel injustice, which makes it a quite outspoken documentary. The choice of medium enables and shapes the narrative: a book simply cannot slowly zoom in on the sad face of a small child, accompanied by sorrowful music, and shake the frame when a loud crash signals the impact of a bomb, like this documentary does. Similarly, the affordances of the medium and genre enable various methods to legitimise Communard violence, which I will cover per hotspot.

A visual medium is ideally suited to show movement, development and contrasts. Documentaries often feature multiple people and viewpoints but tie them together in one "neutral" persona of the narrator.[190] A documentary is further seen as reliable: the people in it are not acting and the facts that are shown are supposed to be truthful.[191] This impression of trustworthiness is strengthened by the persona of the interviewer or narrator: they can ask questions and provide explanations, but they usually do not overtly interfere with the actions they are recording.[192] In *Les Damnés de la Commune*, this function is taken by the nameless voice-over, who does not talk *with* Victorine, but alongside her. They do not interact: he asks her no questions, she does not acknowledge his existence. The result is that Victorine and the other characters of the story appear to speak for themselves and either during or shortly after the events, and the voice-over comments on the events at a later date, perhaps even in the 21st century. A documentary can have a message, or a moral, already by simply selecting a certain topic and thus giving it significance.[193] This documentary goes further than that: it makes a judgment of the Commune and in particular of the governments of the Third Republic and the Second Empire, criticising their treatment of the inhabitants of Paris.

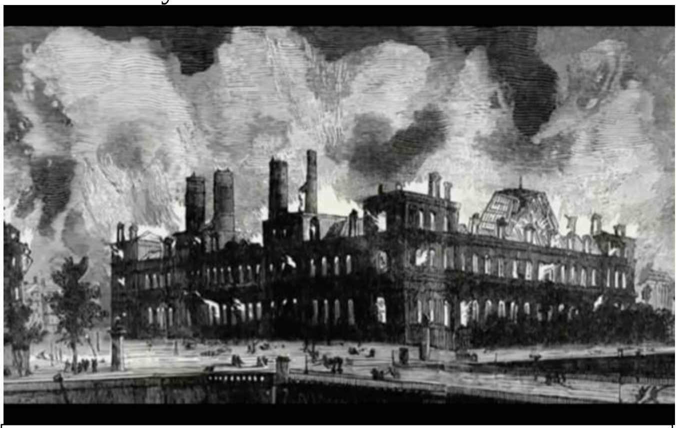

Figure 18: Meyssan, ca. 1.04.30.

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[190] Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, pp.17-18.
[191] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp.7-14.
[192] Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, p.172.
[193] Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*, p.117.

As an animated film based on a graphic novel, the immediacy and rapidity of an ordinary film needs to be achieved in other ways than fluid changing frames. *Les damnés de la Commune* solves this through a combination of zooming techniques (slowly or quickly zooming in on a face or figure, for instance), movement over a tableau (changing the focus slowly or quickly from one character to another), cutting techniques (such as changing the frames in rapid succession), and adding partially moving elements to the tableau (usually smoke, fire, bombs, bullets, snow, cinders; nothing that is too complicated to animate such as moving people). In figure 18, for instance, the smoke is slowly billowing and the fires coming from the windows are flickering, like flames do. These visual effects are then combined with a musical score and audio effects, such as the sounds of crackling fire, dropping bombs, gunshots, and the cries of people. Together this results in a highly dynamic creation, that is superbly suited for the depiction of fires and the destruction of infrastructure, but also to depict the horrors of the *Semaine Sanglante*.

Overall, Meyssan's documentary employs these affordances in order to show the Commune as a response to systemic injustice or slow violence. The long build-up (about half of the film) combined with the extensive treatment of the *Semaine Sanglante* (almost half of the film as well) leaves little room to explore the ideas of the *Communard.e.s*. Instead, the reader is mostly attuned to sympathise with Victorine, who represents the Commune as an ordinary and brave woman who loves her family and simply desires a world in which she does not have to work so long for so little pay.

Hotspot: Fire and Destruction

In *Les damnés de la Commune*, the audience is rarely told that something is destroyed: more commonly, it is shown visually and supported audibly. The scene in which the Vendôme column is taken down is a good example of this (figure 19-22). First, it is shown standing upright, and its height is emphasised by the "camera" slowly panning down the length of the column and various crowing crows (symbols of death) flying past it. The narrator explains that painter Gustave Courbet had suggested already six months ago to replace this column erected for the glory of the Napoleonic wars with a monument for "la fraternité", even writing to the Prussian enemies to leave them their cannons so that they could be melted in order to create one monument together, for the people, for France, and for Germany. Courbet's writing is read by a different actor, and a drawing of his face is slowly zoomed in on, accompanied by rising music. Then, the column is shown from its shadowed side (figure 19), suggesting its darkness, while the voiceover says how all the other countries of Europe are observing the struggle. The next image (figure 20) is the column being pulled downwards, with the various fragments slowly moving towards the ground at the sound of breaking and falling stones, until with a loud crash it hits the ground and the frame shakes as if the camera has felt the impact as well. The next image (figure 21) is the column lying on the ground, with sand clouds billowing up to emphasise its impact. The music turns heroic while the voiceover says that the entire world is watching Paris turn this square into the "Place de l'Internationale". The last image (figure 22) is one of men climbing the former foot of the column, with flags and hats in their hands, raised joyfully. The whole scene takes about one minute and presents the taking down of the column as a symbolical act. The past is destroyed, literally and figuratively, and the freed-up space is now oriented to an idealistic future of international solidarity (symbol- and omelet-strategies). By sandwiching the scene in between a scene in which Victorine, grieving for her son, is consoled by her mother and a scene in which the Versaillais are bombing the place where her husband is stationed, the destruction of the Vendôme column becomes a well-deserved moment of hope and victory for the *Communard.e.s* against a background of fear, loss, and death caused by the Versaillais government.

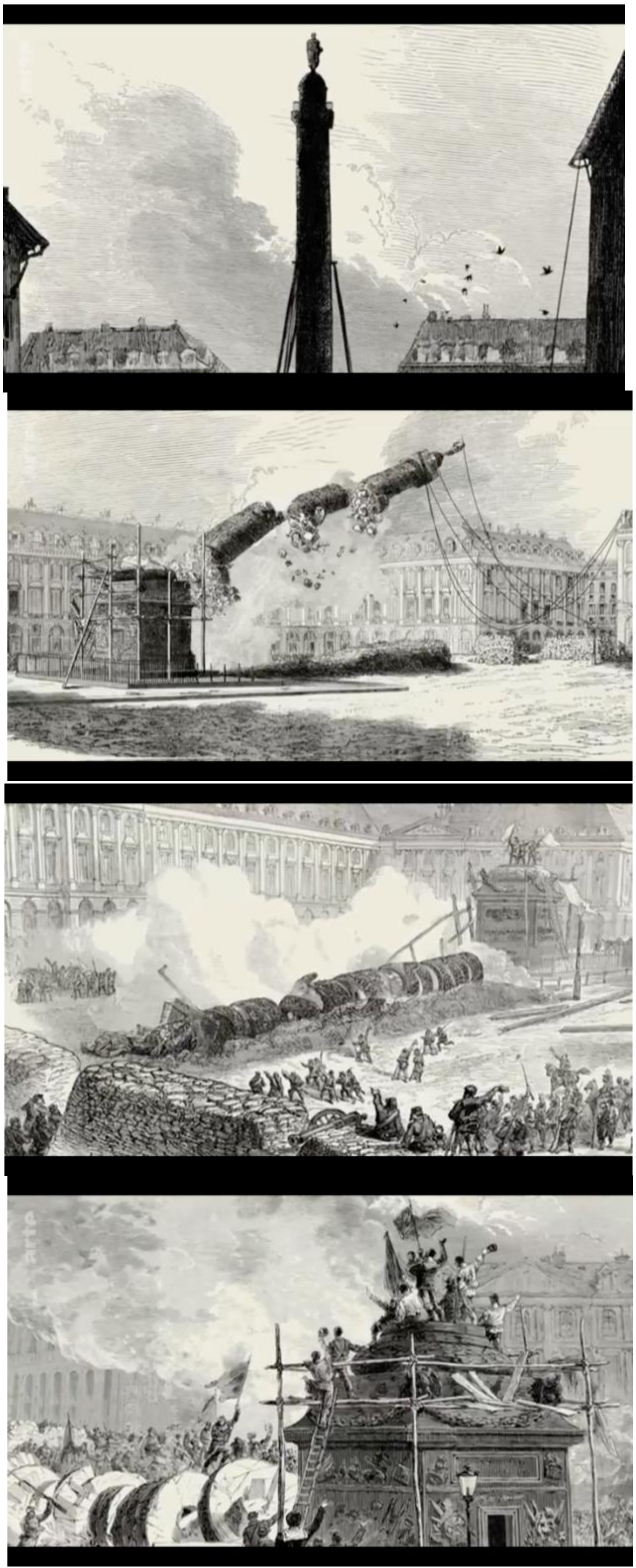

Figure 19-22: Meyssan, ca. 0.58.45-0.59.15.

The choices of the Versaillais government and the actions of their army are held responsible for most of the destruction in the narrative of this documentary. The audience is constantly reminded of the bombardments of the city: they are told about them by the voiceovers of the narrator and Victorine, they are repeatedly shown on

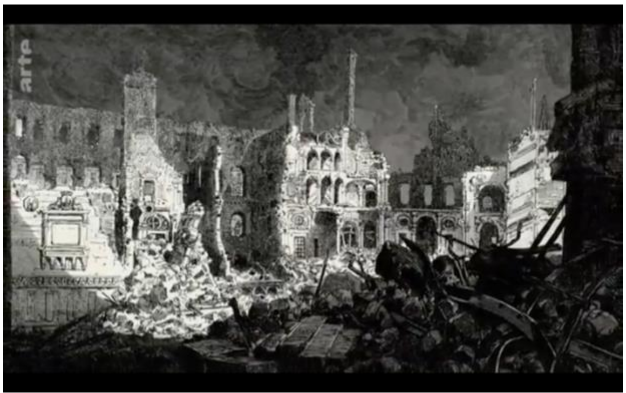

Figure 23: Meyssan, ca.1.18.15.

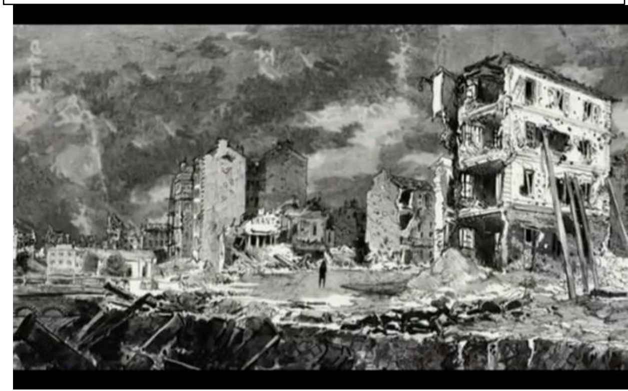

Figure 24: Meyssan, ca. 1.20.45.

the screen, and the sound of dropping bombs frequently can be heard in the background. The destruction caused by these shells is immense, as shown on screen (see figure 23 and 24). In the story, Victorine's mother is killed by a bombardment of her housing block. Showing the targeting of innocent bystanders of the Commune helps to further vilify the Versaillais, on top of their cruelty in executing prisoners as well as children and elderly people. The camera slowly zooms out from the lone figure standing in between the ravaged buildings, under which her last family member's corpse lies (figure 24). The combined effect is that the audience will feel sympathy for Victorine who, despite her active part in the fighting, is primarily a victim.

It is therefore interesting that the documentary completely omits the accusation of arson of the Cour des comptes wielded against historical figure Victorine Brocher. The entire figure of the *pétroleuse* is absent, although Victorine mentions that they torched the Tuileries and the Palais-Royal (both palaces and thus representations of the old imperial regime – and, importantly, empty of people so that there are no human victims) in order to slow down the Versaillais (downplaying- and reaction-strategies). Of course, the *pétroleuse* is largely a fiction, but even that is not argued by the documentary which simply omits the topic.

The fire in the Hôtel de Ville is particularly interesting, since *Les Damnés de la Commune* presents it differently from the other cases. From the beginning of the documentary, the Hôtel de Ville is taken as belonging to the "Ville", Paris, and by extension its inhabitants. When the Commune is established, it is seen as natural that "nôtre Hôtel de Ville" is where it should be seated (rightful-owner-strategy). It is taken over without violence as former mayor Jules Ferry flees (after having asked, in vain, for a *mitrailleuse* to shoot into the crowd to make them leave), and the centrality of the Hôtel de Ville for the city of Paris is confirmed in the elections that make the council a legal one. The Hôtel de Ville then turns into a site where the Commune shows its best side: council members discuss and implement reforms that benefit the *petit peuple* and a food kitchen is set up besides the building, so that the most destitute people of Paris do not go hungry. When the Versaillais invade, then, the *Communard.e.s* try to *defend* the Hôtel de Ville against the *attack* by the government. It is presented as a devastating loss for the Commune when the Versaillais troops set the “cœur de la cité” on fire. While the Hôtel de Ville is thus represented as “theirs to begin with”, its destruction was not their choice.

Instead, the destruction of the Hôtel de Ville is placed in a larger narrative in which the *Communard.e.s*, the Parisians, and the city of Paris are merged into one entity. The Versaillais – who are themselves very much identified as not-from-Paris-but-from-Versailles through their appellation and the showing of the palace of Versailles whenever the story is about the French government – are said to want to “écraser Paris”, to crush not just the Commune, but also the city, which is demonstrated by their destructive invasion in terms of both infrastructure and human lives.[194] The city responds: “Paris organise sa défense”, and *Communard.e.s* such as Victorine’s husband are “tué en defendant Paris”. Often, the burning buildings on the screen turn out to be the background to Communard cadavers, as in the opening scene of the documentary. The camera pans over the burning Hôtel de Ville (figure 25, shown with animated flickering fires, cinders, and smoke rising up) accompanied by crackling sounds, dramatic music and a female voice (later identified as Victorine) saying how “ils” have effaced “nous” from history: “hommes, femmes, enfants, vieillards” (whilst showing their dead bodies, see figure 26), all massacred, imprisoned, and deported. This already sets the expectation that the primary victims of the damages are not the owners of the buildings who lost their economic investment, but the Parisians who lost their lives. The blame is put on the Versaillais, both explicitly through the narration and implicitly by the emphasis on the shelling of the city, and the *Communard.e.s* are shown to have acted in self-defence against this destructive invasive force (reaction-strategy, see also *Semaine Sanglante*). On top of that, he buildings that were destroyed by the Commune were symbols of the imperial system that exploited them for decades and tries to destroy them now. The Hôtel de Ville is presented not as a target but rather as an asset of the Commune, that also suffers from the destruction by the Versaillais who refuse

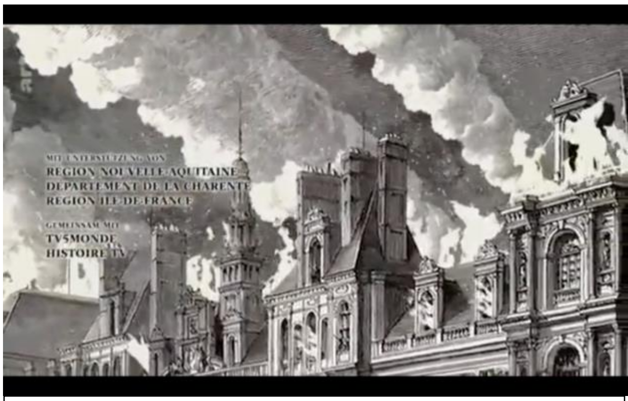

Figure 25: Meyssan, ca. 0.00.30.

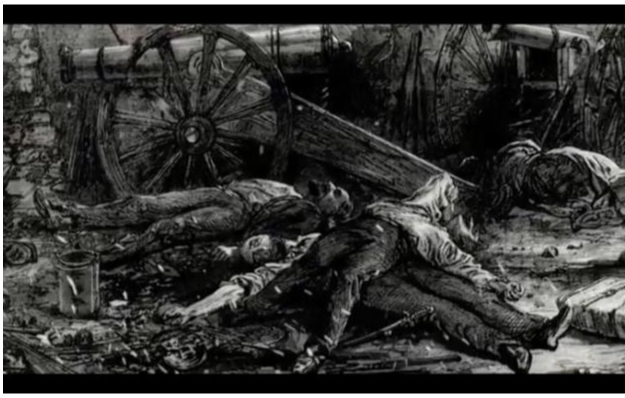

Figure 26: Meyssan, ca. 0.00.45.

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[194] The possibility to include maps, which are then coloured in (the only use of colour in the entire documentary) with Versaillais gains, exacerbates these topographical differences.

to acknowledge the legal election of the council in Paris. In short, the destruction of Paris is shown by *Les Damnés de la Commune* to primarily hurt the Parisian *petit peuple* who defend Paris, rather than the bourgeoisie who left the city and are now attacking it from the outside.

Hotspot: Hostages

As the focalisation of the story is through Victorine (fixed and homodiegetic), all information on specific actions by specific *Communard.e.s* comes through her. The omniscient, unnamed narrator floats above the story (often also visually, through maps and illustrations with a bird's eye view) and provides summarising information about general developments and events outside of Paris (in Versailles and the rest of France), but does not speak about individuals, as he is a heterodiegetic narrator who does not interact with the characters he describes. The consequence is that Victorine needs to be present at an action for the audience to *experience* it. While she is on scene for many of the main events of the Commune (from the attempted seizing of the cannons to the last fighting in Belleville), she does not attend the execution of the hostages, nor the battle at Père Lachaise or the meetings of the Central Council. While this omission is a logical consequence of a limited point of view, it also happens to make it easier for the narrative to not pause for too long on the execution of the hostages, which is, as said, one of the Commune's most controversial deeds today.

However, the event is far from omitted from the story. The viewers first learn about the existence of hostages about halfway through the documentary, just after they have been told by the voice-over that the Versaillais are executing prisoners *en masse*. As a measure of *représailles*, the Commune's police chef Raoul Rigault is said to implement a decree: for every executed Communard who had been taken prisoner, the Commune will kill three of the prisoners they have made. Rigault is thus responding to Versaillais violence (reaction-strategy) but not 1:1, which would fit in the ancient trope of an eye for an eye. Yet as Versaillais are "in the lead", having already killed many *Communard.e.s*, 3 for 1 may even the scores, making it the tit-for-tat substrategy. Furthermore, the decree is not implemented immediately. Instead, Rigault is shown to be making clear to archbishop Darboy that he should tell "ses amis de Versailles" about this new decree. If Thiers were to stop the executions of *Communard.e.s*, Darboy would not be harmed: the ultimate perpetrator is thus Thiers. After this scene, the refusal of Thiers to stop the killings is both expressed in words and shown several times: many *Communard.e.s*, including Victorine's husband, have been taken hostage and executed by the Versaillais. The eventual news brought by an unnamed Communard who Victorine passes in the street that about fifty hostages are killed by some members of the *Garde Nationale* then pales in numerical comparison to the victims of the Versaillais firing squads.

In addition to that, Victorine tells the audience that Rigault may have announced this decree, but that the *peuple* demonstrated their disagreement by taking the guillotine from the La Roquette prison and burning it on the Place Voltaire, which is a highly significant deed: the guillotine was the official method for capital punishment, and Voltaire was known for being against the death penalty.[195] As such, the narrative presents the plan to kill the hostages as one by a minority (only Rigault is shown in favour, the *peuple* are against it: the marginalising-strategy). To add to that, the actual killing of the hostages is done by a “petit groupe des fédérés”. Furthermore, they are “très excités” – possibly because they have been fighting for days on end, with little rest and food, in their city that is being bombed and burned by the Versaillais, as the narrative shows and tells us just before we hear about the hostages being executed. Similarly, the mental capacities of Rigault are also put into doubt: the voiceover says that he is very dogmatic and only twenty-four years old. In short, both the proposal to kill the hostages and the execution of this plan are presented as being advanced by somewhat marginalised figures within the Commune.

Only the archbishop is named, and he does not get a voice: it is unclear in the documentary whether he actually tried to convince Thiers or not. However, Thiers is shown not to have listened or cared enough to attempt to save Darboy: the Versaillais keep shooting prisoners, both before and after the archbishop and other hostages die. The hand of the *Communard.e.s* was thus forced to tit-for-tat (forced-hand and reaction-strategies). The executions happen off screen, with none of the visual or auditory effects that the medium of an animated documentary affords: they are thus not omitted, but neither does the film highlight them. It was a minority of the leadership of the Commune who wanted to execute them, the *peuple* demonstrated that they were against capital punishment and were not involved in the acts of execution (marginalising-argument). The impact of the executions is further downplayed by not showing the victims and sandwiching the act in between instances of extreme violence by the Versaillais, of which the victims are shown on screen, described by the voiceover, and accompanied by sad music.

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[195] See Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique* (Geneva: Grasset, 1764) and *Candide, ou l’Optimisme* (Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey, 1759).

Hotspot: *Semaine Sanglante*

The *Semaine Sanglante* takes up much of the running time of the documentary (about half an hour, or one third). It is preceded by a very short section in which the actions of the Commune are detailed (such as reforms of workers' rights, feeding the population, and the role of women) and is followed by the treatment of Communard prisoners by the Versaillais (execution, imprisonment, exile). The fighting of the *Communard.e.s* is prominently put on display and legitimised through two interlinked strategies: emphasising the defensive nature of the Communard reaction to Versaillais violence and presenting the two parties as qualitatively and quantitatively unequal (in favour of the *Communard.e.s*).

The self-defence argumentation is supported by various strategies, beginning with the emphasis on the legitimacy of the Paris Commune as governing the city. Firstly, is compared to earlier revolutions, claiming their established legitimacy for this popular uprising as well. Secondly, the documentary covers the election, showing how the decisions were made slowly and with care: as deliberation and disagreement are essential parts of the democratic process, that autocracies do not need to concern themselves with, the Commune is presented as democratic. Thirdly, the exclusion of women from the voting process is criticised, yet women's approval is shown through their actions. Lastly, the narrator mentions multiple times that the Commune was "legal". As such, the Versaillais claim to Paris is weakened, since it goes against the wishes of the Parisian people. This notion is compounded by the government's demonstrable lack of care about the Parisians, allowing them to starve, be exploited, and die, before, during and after the war with Prussia. Then, there is the collaboration of the Versaillais government with the invading Prussian force, the continuous betrayal of the Parisian and other French citizens. They are presented as having provoked the war in order to distract the *peuple* from their anger over their miserable living conditions, allowing the troops to be massacred before pushing for a peace agreement with Prussia that includes a sacrifice of Alsace-Lorraine (without taking their wishes into account), not being democratically elected (neither the emperor nor his successors), promising *sur l'honneur* to hold elections and then not holding them, starving the Parisians during the siege while the rich are enjoying the meat of the zoo animals, capitulating to the Prussians and allowing them to march victoriously through Paris, quickly suppressing all the measures that kept ordinary Parisians afloat such as rent moratoria, and then trying to disarm them of the weapons that were paid for by the people of Paris – all before the Commune has even begun. All this is in stark contrast with the Commune, who do hold democratic elections, fight against the Prussians, feed the *peuple,* protect the workers, and keep their word. Subsequently, the Versaillais are presented as cruel and unreliable for their merciless and illegal shooting of prisoners, including women, children, and elderly. The Commune is thus presented as legitimate because of its popular support (both in votes and in actions), its attention for the needs of those who are placed in its care, and in having the moral high ground, by not killing children.

The fight is thus represented as a Versaillais *attack* ("assaults Versaillais") versus a Communard *defence*. The *Communard.e.s* defend not only their form of government (i.e. the Commune), but also their own lives, those of their fellow Parisians, their ideology of democracy, Republicanism, and freedom, and the city of Paris itself. Yet they are overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of Versaillais troops. Although they are shown to be qualitatively better (i.e., morally better and having something to fight for (higher-justice-strategy)), they are doomed against an army that is their superior in manpower and weaponry. The Commune is thus the underdog. The deaths of the Versaillais are never shown or mentioned (downplaying-strategy), but Communard deaths are shown and grieved. Victorine stays with a dying *compagnon* of her battalion, comforting him, and she also mourns the deaths of the rest of her batallion of lost children. Most Communard victims are not named: although Victorine is named, her husband, son and mother remain only presented in relation to her. Some famous *Communard.e.s* are named, such as Louise Michel, Gustave Courbet, André Léo, and Raoul Rigault; but with the exception of Jarosław Dombrowski and Charles Delescluze, their deaths are not a part of the narrative.[196] Yet by showing falling bodies, zooming in on cadavers and crying and fearful faces, and sound effects of cries of "Vive la Commune" that are cut off halfway, combined with the voiceovers detailing how many people have died, the audience is made aware of the losses of Communard lives. They are primed to sympathise with the Commune, through demonstrations of the injustice and betrayal committed against the *Communard.e.s* in combination with their own bravery, solidarity and humanity, and y the sad music that plays when *Communard.e.s* die strengthens this sentiment. As such, various affordances of the documentary medium work together with those of the animated film, resulting in a narrative in which the *Communard.e.s* fought, but bravely so, and in self-defence, against a far stronger opponent (reaction- and underdog-strategies). On top of that, they are engaged in a revolution, fighting not for power over others, but over themselves, in an attempt to create rather than destroy: a combination of the higher-justice and omelet-strategies.

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[196] Of course, the first three survived the Commune, but that is not information that the documentary provides.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the medium and genre of the animated documentary enables the argumentation of self-defence, since the fighting parties can wordlessly convincingly be divided in those who attack and those who defend, by virtue of the possibility to jump through time and space without confusing the audience too much, the addition of sound effects, voices and music, the authoritative enumeration of facts, the use of the first person plural in contrast with the third person plural, and the option to zoom in slowly and pan away quickly. The *Communard.e.s*, who are the true Parisians and owners of the city (rightful-owner-strategy), are continuously shown to react to Versaillais violence, even trying to get them to stop killing (Rigault telling Darboy to inform Versailles about the decree, a procession of freemasons trying to get the French army to stop shooting but getting gunned down). As such, when they do have to be violent, they have to *resort* to it in order to defend themselves: it is an example of the reaction-strategy, and any victims would be legitimated by the tit-for-tat sub-strategy, because Thiers forced their hand. By focalising through Victorine, it is very easy to omit certain parts of the historical events, to marginalise certain ideas and actions, and to downplay the damage done by Communard violence. Since the omniscient narrator does not have access to the thoughts and feelings of the individuals, if Victorine does not hear about or see something, it does not have to be in the story. The consequence of this narrative choice is that the viewer gets a one-sided view of the Commune.

For *Les Damnés de la Commune*, then, the affordances of the animated documentary medium play a vital role in the audience’s experience of the narrative. The music supports and enlivens the voiceover, the visuals bring the story to life, the audio effects underscore the visual effects, and all work together to create a moving story of an ordinary Parisian woman, brave and loving, of whom the Versaillais took everything she held dear: her child, her husband, her mother, her friends, her city; and who despite it all tries to make the world a better place whilst honouring those she lost. The unmoving, unblinking drawn faces make the viewer project their own feelings on the animated characters perhaps more than would be possible with human actors, and these feelings are shaped by the music, sound effects, and voiceover. The viewer is put in a position to sympathise with Victorine and, in consequence, her cause (the Commune). Although (and perhaps precisely because) the actual screentime given to the “content” of the Commune is very limited, the aesthetic of emancipation, revolution, and camaraderie in combination with the thoroughly negative portrayal of the Versaillais opponents compel the audience to side with the Commune. One does not have to think deeply to understand the pain and injustice felt by the *Communard.e.s*: we are made to feel it, differently than in *Le Cri du peuple*. Because where the main characters in the books of Vautrin and Tardi are fictional, Victorine is a historical figure. As the audience is made aware of this at the very end, it sticks in the memory, due to the recency-effect. [197] The documentary thus appears and feels more real than the novels, and as a result, the Commune feels more real and terrible.

Violence does play a large role in *Les Damnés de la Commune*, albeit mostly the violence that is done *to* the *Communard.e.s* and the ordinary Parisians in general. The Commune itself actually barely gets any attention: almost the entire first half of the documentary is about what happened before the Commune, and almost the entire second half is about the *Semaine Sanglante*. Combining this with the focalisation through a woman who loses everything she holds dear (including her husband, an alteration made in this narrative), Meyssan shows the *Communard.e.s* primarily as victims of their injust circumstances. Their attempts to improve their lives are briefly described rather than expanded upon, so that the audience cannot possibly critically engage with it. What the audience is thus left with is the idea that the *Communard.e.s* were right to try to change their lives, and that the state's suppression of the Commune was wrong. The medium of the animated film is very affective and the genre of documentary primes the audience to consider the story as truthful. Unlike in the other cases, parallels with the present are largely absent, but by extensively depicting the power abuses of the government, the viewer can imagine the parallels themselves. *Les Damnés de la Commune* is not subtle in its siding with the *Communard.e.s*, but perhaps precisely because of that, it can be effective to make people compare their own situation with that of 19th century Parisians. Since Meyssan's Commune is strongly linked with the concept of injustice and slow violence, viewers may be more willing to react to injustices and instances of slow violence that they encounter in their own society. Additionally, as the Commune itself is highly condensed (roughly five minutes of screentime), there is little space to disagree with the ideas of the *Communard.e.s*.

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[197] Rigney, *Historical Representation*, p.69.

IV : *La Commune au présent : Une correspondance par-delà le temps* – Ludivine Bantigny

French historian Ludivine Bantigny, *maîtresse de conférences* at the University of Rouen, published *La Commune au présent : Une correspondance par-delà le temps* in March 2021, for the 150th anniversary of the Commune. It is a history book in an epistolary form, consisting of 62 letters to famous and unknown *Communard.e.s*. As such, it combines a personal and somewhat informal style (addressing the recipient of the letter with the informal "tu") with rigorous historical research based on both archival sources and historiography. Writing a history rather than a work of fiction, Bantigny is bound by the events as found in the sources, yet writing letters specifically grounded in the present rather than a survey of past events, she is free to insert her own reflections.[198]

The letters are all titled and directed to a different *Communard.e*. Where an epistolary novel is usually a correspondence between two or more main parties, Bantigny addresses 61 different people (Louise Michel twice) but does not receive a single reply.[199] They are subdivided into ten themed sections of each a handful of letters. Most letters follow a similar pattern: they start with a description of the addressee to introduce them to the reader, and then take one of those elements as a hook for a larger theme, such as a particular event (such as the capture of the cannons on the Butte Montmartre or the destruction of the Vendôme column), a feature of the Commune (like its organisation, ideas, or projects), or French society in the decades leading up to the Commune (including its inequalities, education system, and political history). They roughly follow the chronology of the Commune, but as it is not the goal to provide a timeline of the Commune, there are many instances of "anachrony" (Genette).

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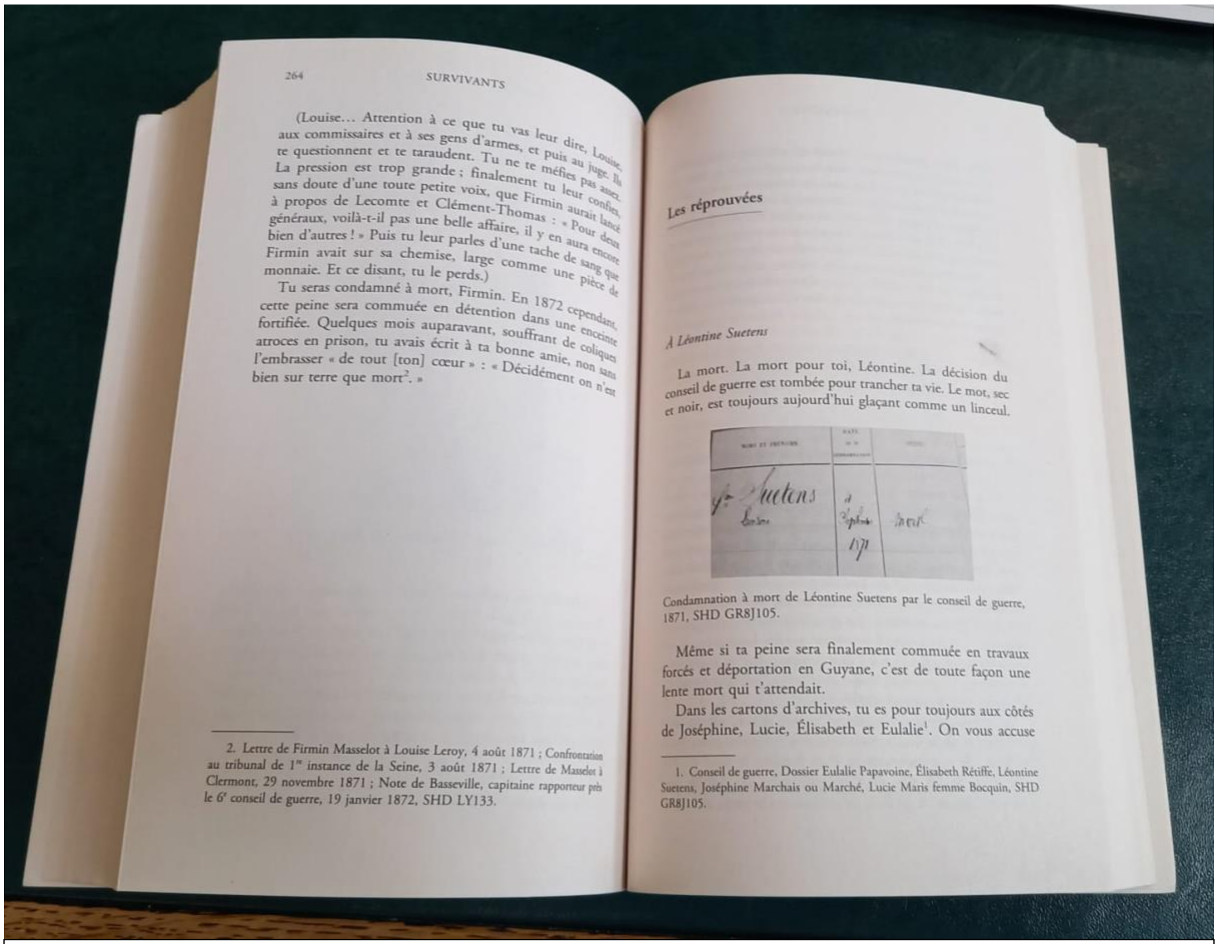
[198] Compare, for instance, how Bantigny describes her mission ("Ce livre est une pierre ajoutée à l'édifice patiemment construit, dans cette œuvre collective-là. Il veut contribuer à vous redonner vie – avec à l'esprit ce que disait Hugo et que tu aurais pu tout aussi bien écrire : « Les morts sont des vivants mêlés à nos combats »." (Ludivine Bantigny, *La Commune au présent: une correspondance par-delà le* temps (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2021), p.16)) with John Merriman's *Massacre* : "I decided to research and write a book about the life and death of the Paris Commune, focusing on the representative experiences of Communards, but also some of those who opposed them" (12); or Robert Tombs' *The Paris Commune 1871* "The following chapters try to explain different aspects of this unique episode, the biggest popular insurrection in modern European history, and which came to epitomize 'revolution' as a spontaneous popular act." (12). Bantigny is firmly grounded in the present and makes it personal by using "tu" and imagining what Louise Michel could have said, yet she also acknowledges earlier research; Merriman avows his own interest in the matter but emphasises how he tries to be balanced in his portrayal; Tombs attempts to completely efface himself but reveals how he is biased in seeing the Commune as a "popular insurrection" that teleologically became interpreted as the epitome of revolution as a "spontaneous popular act". None of these historians is neutral about the Commune –objective historiography is impossible. The historian is free to decide how obvious they want to be in their work, but this is a stylistic choice. It does not mean that someone who hides themselves from their book is a better historian purely for doing so.

[199] Thomas O. Beebee, "The Epistolary Novel", p.1.

Instead, Bantigny can engage with the lived experience and ideas of the Commune, as well as with the circumstances of its conception and its afterlives. Often, interspersed in these letters are images of people, written notes, affiches, buildings, signs, paintings, et cetera. The images are accompanied by a short description featuring the source of the picture. Quotes are used extensively, as well as numbers (dates, mostly), and properly referenced in a footnote. This gives authority to the claims that are being made and give the reader the chance to verify them, but also enables the narrator to postulate opinions. For instance, see figure 27, of page 264-5 of *La Commune au présent*:



264 SURVIVANTS

(Louise… Attention à ce que tu vas leur dire, Louise, aux commissaires et à ses gens d'armes, et puis au juge. Ils te questionnent et te taraudent. Tu ne te méfies pas assez. La pression est trop grande ; finalement tu leur confies, sans doute d'une toute petite voix, que Firmin aurait lancé à propos de Lecomte et Clément-Thomas : « Pour deux généraux, voilà-t-il pas une belle affaire, il y en aura encore bien d'autres ! » Puis tu leur parles d'une tache de sang que Firmin avait sur sa chemise, large comme une pièce de monnaie. Et ce disant, tu le perds.)

Tu seras condamné à mort, Firmin. En 1872 cependant, cette peine sera commuée en détention dans une enceinte fortifiée. Quelques mois auparavant, souffrant de coliques atroces en prison, tu avais écrit à ta bonne amie, non sans l'embrasser « de tout [ton] cœur » : « Décidément on n'est bien sur terre que mort[2]. »

2. Lettre de Firmin Masselot à Louise Leroy, 4 août 1871 ; Confrontation au tribunal de 1re instance de la Seine, 3 août 1871 ; Lettre de Masselot à Clermont, 29 novembre 1871 ; Note de Basseville, capitaine rapporteur près le 6e conseil de guerre, 19 janvier 1872, SHD LY133.

Les réprouvées

À Léontine Suetens

La mort. La mort pour toi, Léontine. La décision du conseil de guerre est tombée pour trancher ta vie. Le mot, sec et noir, est toujours aujourd'hui glaçant comme un linceul.

Condamnation à mort de Léontine Suetens par le conseil de guerre, 1871, SHD GR8J105.

Même si ta peine sera finalement commuée en travaux forcés et déportation en Guyane, c'est de toute façon une lente mort qui t'attendait.

Dans les cartons d'archives, tu es pour toujours aux côtés de Joséphine, Lucie, Élisabeth et Eulalie[1]. On vous accuse

1. Conseil de guerre, Dossier Eulalie Papavoine, Élisabeth Rétiffe, Léontine Suetens, Joséphine Marchais ou Marché, Lucie Maris femme Bocquin, SHD GR8J105.

Figure 27: Bantigny, pp.264-5.

On the left, we can see how the author offers advice to Louise Leroy, a historical person who figures prominently in the letter: “Louise… Attention à ce que tu vas leur dire, Louise, aux commissaires et à ses gens d'armes, et puis au juge. Ils te questionnent et te taraudent.”[200] She usually employs first names and the informal “tu”, putting herself on equal footing with her correspondents (as the *Communard.e.s* would have appreciated), forming affective ties with them and increasing accessibility for her 21st-century readers.[201] As a historian narrating *post rem*, Bantigny cannot be surprised by the events as they come to pass: being an omniscient narrator, she knows what happened next, which is usually not the case in epistolary novels.[202] The epistolary form is thus secondary to the historical dimension. Frequently, Bantigny uses her knowledge to tell the addressee about their future: "Tu seras condamné à mort, Firmin."[203] As a result, the audience is aware that this letter is written from the future to the past; yet by writing as if the recipient is still alive and has a personal future filled with life events, Bantigny creates a sense of simultaneity for her audience. The distance between the present and the past feels reduced, both by transporting the reader to the past and bringing the future to the addressee via anachronisms: for instance, Bantigny tells Octavie Tardif about Mai '68, Elizabeth Dmitriev about *Le Mouvement de libération des femmes* of March 1971, Alix Payen about the Nuit Debout (2016), and Louise Michel about present-day (2021) inequalities and demonstrations.[204] As said, the letters are organised by theme, and within the themes they are often linked to one another by the letter starting with specific words or phrases from the preceding letter – in the example above, "[la] mort".[205] This gives a sense of continuity and connectedness between the many different actors of the Commune.

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[200] Bantigny, p.264.

In the first letter, Bantigny writes that she initially intended to write only one long letter, to Louise Michel, but that "peu à peu, au fil des archives, j'ai noué des liens avec celles et ceux, célèbres ou pas, qui ont fait et qui sont cette révolution, la Commune incarnée : son corps, son âme, ses visages et ses bras."[206] She thus establishes a connection between her own physicality (sitting in the archives) and that of the *Communard.e.s*, already bringing the recipients of her letters to live before they have been introduced properly to the reader. Furthermore, the mention of the archives reminds the reader that letters are an appropriate form for the end of the 19th century, when they were the main carriers of interpersonal communication.[207] The format of writing letters to many correspondents means that Bantigny can not only tell the audience about ordinary people doing extraordinary things, but that she can also show both the normality of the actors and their surprising, weird, impressive actions, as she does not have to limit herself to their role in a larger history, but can focus on them as human beings. All these humans work together to create a bigger story: a history. Rather than following the 19th-century prerogative of "Great Man Theory", however, Bantigny uses more recent perspectives such as microhistory and social history. By linking the various blocks of the story together, often referring to other addressees in letters and discussing the relationships between the *Communard.e.s*, Bantigny shows precisely how in the Commune, it was not kings, generals, and popes who determined the course of history, but a network of many ordinary citizens working together, fleshing out the Commune.

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[201] Beebee, p.3.

[202] Beebee, p.5.

[203] Bantigny, p.264.

[204] See Bantigny, p.147; p. 154; p.13.

[205] Bantigny, pp.264-5.

[206] Bantigny, p.7.

[207] While the genre of the epistolary novel is considered to have peaked in the 18th century, letters were still dominant in the 19th, and epistolary literature was still published. Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), pp.3-4.

Bantigny then contrasts this Commune with the Versaillais government, as it was before, during, and after the Commune. What unites these three time periods is attitude of the government, which is not representative of the people they are supposed to represent and does not act to protect or help them. Over the duration of the Commune, the government is depicted as turning from indifferent and callous to bloodthirsty, not only massacring the *Communard.e.s* on the barricades but also afterwards, without due process. In contrast, the Commune is shown to care for the citizens by providing them with food, housing, their pawned belongings, good education for the young, pensions for the widows (married or not) and children (paternally recognised or not) of men who died in combat, rights and opportunities for women, and more. The idea that a government is supposed to care for the people they are responsible for is one that is widely accepted in France in 2021, as demonstrated by the *securité sociale*. Still, Bantigny explicitly emphasises it, thereby showing the similarities between the Commune and her own time. Similarly, other themes in the book are also influenced by a 21st-century set of values: democracy, the Republic, the emancipation of workers, women, and minorities, having peace and a greener world as the ideals, whilst condemning authoritarianism, monarchism, colonialism (and the combination of those three in imperialism), xenophobia, sexism, and racism. Bantigny criticises the Commune for not being anticolonial,[208] but beside that, the Commune seems to match perfectly with these values, while their opponents represent all that is opposed to this value set. As such, Bantigny explicitly applies 21st-century values to this 1871 event, and because she cannot receive a response, this anachronism goes unchallenged. For the 2021 reader, however, the Commune becomes consequently more accessible and its relevance is clearer.

The epistolary genre enables the candid portrayal of one's values as it is a very personal one, where the author does not have to hide behind a persona of objectivism, as in traditional scientific writing.[209] As said, Bantigny uses her own experience in the present to connect with the *Communard.e.s*: not only does she regularly refer to herself ("je", "moi"), she also refers to her own experiences doing research (as seen above), uses pictures that she has taken (crediting "LB"), and sometimes even speaks of her own emotions ("comme je regrette que tu n'aies pas vu tout cela…").[210] While this could be considered unprofessional in traditional historiography, it does establish a sense of closeness, both between the narrator and the addressee and the narrator, the addressee and the audience.[211] This closeness enhances the affective impact of the events, for instance in the letter to Eugène Jumeline ("Vos corps morts"): describing the photographs of the dead bodies of the *Communard.e.s*, Bantigny remarks that "sur l'une des photos, j'ai l'impression de voir mon petit garçon".[212] Bantigny then does not show the picture in question because it would be a breach of taste, leaving the audience to imagine the massacred body of their own "petit garçon". The overall effect of a strong presence of the narrator in a historical work is that the reader is engaged more, following the research trail and the thought process of the author, and can more clearly see the position of the writer in the historical debate than when he or she is effaced (see footnote 216). In writing letters to specific people, furthermore, it is seemingly they who decide what will be the content of the letter, affording multiple viewpoints: it makes sense to write about women's rights to a feminist, about the misdeeds of the Versaillais to someone who was shot without trial and thrown into a mass grave, and about ecology to someone who was very interested in that topic.[213] The large number of letter recipients suggests that most major participants in the Commune got a letter, especially because it is stated that less well-known people also received one. It is thus a useful way to "justify" the selection of topics, in a more upfront and also more aesthetically pleasing way than usually done in popular history books, where the selection of people and events is rarely justified. Still, as the letters are all directed to *Communard.e.s,* none of the letters is dedicated to archbishop Darboy, for instance, and in consequence, the violence committed by *Communard.e.s* is less of a topic than the other things they did. The letters come from a place of compassion and understanding and are thus not accusatory or condemnatory in tone. The violence is muted, so to say, but not wholly absent from the narrative. The letters aid her to present the positive aspects of the Commune, in the sense of what they *did* rather than what was done *to them*. Through the consistent use of direct address, the *Communard.e.s* become primarily active agents, who would have something to say if they had not been dead, rather than primarily victims of violence and injustice.

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[208] Bantigny, p.92: "vous demeurez assez indifférents au soulèvement de Kabylie, qui a lieu exactement au même moment. L'anticolonialisme n'est pas votre cheval de bataille."

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[209] Beebee, p.1.
[210] Bantigny, p.53.
[211] Beebee, p.3.
[212] Bantigny, p.233.
[213] Cf. Beebee, p.1.

Hotspot: Fire and Destruction

Throughout the narrative, Bantigny repeatedly reminds the reader that all the thinking, organising, caring, and creating happened whilst the Commune was under a near-constant bombardment by the Versaillais: "Vous êtes sous le bruit permanent des canons de Versailles", "tandis que les obus font rage", and also during the fighting at the outposts "Les bombes avaient endommagé les tombes : les obus creusaient des caveaux et les hommes s'y abritaient comme ils pouvaient, en pleine nuit, pour tenter de dormir un peu".[214] The bombs form a backdrop to the actions on the centre stage, that in turn become more heroic and noble. Somewhat surprisingly, the effects of these bombs are barely mentioned: none of the letters are addressed at someone who would lose their house, life or loved ones to the shelling of the Versaillais. The homeless created by these bombs are only mentioned in passing in the letter to André Léo, when Bantigny details how the council was reluctant to commandeer the empty apartments left behind by the departed bourgeoisie, but eventually did so only to house the people who lost their home because of the bombings (reaction-strategy). As such, the mentions of destruction mostly serve to show the *Communard.e.s* as having the moral high ground over the Versaillais and determining their own path, rather than depict them as victims of external violence, befitting Bantigny's project to focus on the people themselves.[215]

Similar agency is portrayed in the *Communard.e.s'* taking down of the Vendôme column: long a symbol of "ce que vous rejetez. Napoléon : un tyran ; les guerres : la mort et la misère ; les victoires : l'asservissement des peuples ; la gloire : leur odieux écrasement. Cette colonne est faite de canons ; ces canons sont pétris de cadavres."[216] Showing both the "good" and the "bad" sides of the column, but showing the bad side of these "good" things (victories, glory), Bantigny presents the column as something whose destruction would not be undeserved. Sandwiched between reminders of the Versaillais' bombs damaging the entire city and its inhabitants, Gustave Courbet's plan to replace the monument with one that depicts (and therefore, promotes) international *fraternité* is discussed in a letter to Maxime Vuillaume, in a display of the omelet-argument describing the Commune *en relief*. Furthermore, after describing the victims of the *Semaine Sanglante*, Bantigny tells Courbet that "cette satanée colonne" has been rebuilt as soon as the Commune was crushed.[217] In between those two letters, Bantigny describes in a letter to Jules Fontaine how she visited the Hôtel Thiers, the mansion where Thiers lived. The Commune had decided to replace with a children's playground but did not have the time, and as a result, "L'hôtel particulier impose son fronton altier, sa ferronnerie, ses baies vitrées, place Saint-Georges comme si rien ne s'était passé".[218] The implication is that any damage done to buildings and monuments was not permanent, but the damage done to people was – which makes the violence inflicted upon people worse (a form of the underdog-strategy).

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[214] Bantigny, p.184; 207; 313.

[215] Perhaps this could be compared to narratives about the London Blitz, that tend to focus not on the terrible destruction, but rather on the "character" and perseverance of the Londoners.

[216] Bantigny, p.188.

The idea that damage to people is worse than damage to property is taken up again in the letter to Léontine Suetens, who was sentenced to death for being a *pétroleuse*. Bantigny hints that she doubts the official story: she writes that Léontine and the four women who were in the same dock were "emportées dans le tourbillon de la Semaine de Mai, quand autour de vous les bâtiments cossus d'institutions distinguées ont commencé à brûler : la Cour des Comptes, la Légion d'honneur et des hôtels particuliers, ceux de Chabrol et de Béthune. On a prétendu vous y avoir vues."[219] The subjectivisation of the buildings ("les bâtiments … ont commencé à brûler") denies the agency of these women, which is compounded by Bantigny putting into question the reliability of the witnesses: "on a prétendu vous y avoir vues". She then continues to show how the women were depicted as devils and immoral women instead of given a neutral, court-appropriate description, putting doubt in the minds of her audience about the intentions of the accusers (othering-strategy). Then, the narrative turns towards how these were perfectly ordinary women shamed for living with their lovers whilst unmarried and having to resort to stealing and prostitution to stay alive. They were thus condemned on "moral" grounds, what is more, on the basis of "une morale de magistrats qui, pour certains, à n'en pas douter, fréquentaient quelques courtisanes dans des alcôves plus huppées."[220] After demonstrating the hypocrisy of condemning women for providing a service that the accusers use as well, Bantigny has inserted a picture of Joséphine Marchais, who "semble si loin de ces "mauvais instincts" qu'on a voulu lui accoler".[221] In short, the narrative that the *pétroleuses* were devilish and whorish arsonists is thoroughly deconstructed and replaced by one in which the women tried to live their lives as washerwomen, seamstresses and maids, but were victims of their circumstances.

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[217] Bantigny, p.285.
[218] Bantigny, p.209.
[219] Bantigny, p.266.
[220] Bantigny, p.267.
[221] Bantigny, p.268.

Hotspot: Hostages

The question of the execution of the hostages is the main topic of the letter to Auguste Blanqui. Blanqui was imprisoned by the Versaillais during the Commune because he was known as a revolutionary icon, having participated in earlier popular uprisings and written extensively on the topic and his theory ("Blanquism"). As Bantigny writes in the first line of her letter: "Pour rien au monde ils ne t'auraient libéré", immediately introducing the refusal of the Versaillais to exchange prisoners, in particular archbishop Darboy (othering-strategy).[222] She then offers an explanation as to why they refused: "c'est triste à dire et très cynique, mais ça les arrange de se faire un martyr".[223] By adding the qualifications of "triste" and "très cynique", Bantigny both clearly flags that this is her own interpretation and simultaneously makes it hard to argue the opposite. The blame for the death of archbishop Darboy is thus immediately placed on Thiers, whose reasoning is demonstrated as faulty by stating that Blanqui (an old man) would barely be "un corps d'armée" for the Commune (forced-hand-, othering- and underdog-strategy).[224]

After further introducing Blanqui and his intellectual and inspirational importance for the Commune, the *décret des otages* is introduced:

> La Commune a résisté longtemps avant de voter son décret des otages. Elle l'a pris le 5 avril, juste après la mort de Duval, Flourens et tant de fédérés sommairement exécutés par l'armée versaillaise, dans les combats ou au Mont-Valérien. Les bombardements sur Paris ont alors déjà commencé et sont « de froide cruauté ». La Commune juge que « le gouvernement de Versailles foule ouvertement aux pieds les droits de l'humanité », que sa pratique des « horreurs » dépasse celle des envahisseurs. Il faut tenter d'arrêter cette profusion de morts[225]

In this short passage, the Commune is shown as hesitant to implement the decree, yet also that this implementation would be completely legitimated for revenge reasons (reaction-strategy, tit-for-tat sub-strategy) but is implemented for a higher goal (omelet-strategy, further strengthened by the impersonal “Il faut” making it into a moral prerogative). At the same time, the cruelty of the Versaillais is emphasised (othering-strategy): not in Bantigny’s own words, but in citations from the Décret de la Commune, as the footnote shows. And yet, despite this evident legitimation and the Versaillais ignoring the threat that hostages will be killed if the executions continue:

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[222] Bantigny, p.248.
[223] Bantigny, p.248.
[224] Bantigny, p.248.
[225] Bantigny, p.252.

> La Commune n’applique pas le décret – même à l’annonce, le 17 mai, de la mort d’une ambulancière, fusillée d’atroce manière, rien : pas de vengeance ni de représailles. Durant sept semaines, Versailles continue de faire des victimes mais les otages restent en sûreté.[226]

The Commune thus has the moral high ground, refusing the simplistic justice of revenge, even while the other kills medical personnel (which Bantigny’s readers will recognise as a war crime after the 1949 Geneva Convention) (othering- and underdog-strategies).[227] Next is a section in which the hostages are named and otherwise humanised, especially Darboy, and their hope of survival is repeatedly shattered by Thiers’ refusal to save them. Swiftly, then, the episode is detailed: “la Commune en tant que telle n’a jamais, jamais autorisé l’exécution des otages. Pour ce qui est de Darboy et des prêtres, seul Théophile Ferré, comme délégué à la Sûreté générale, en prend la décision.”[228] Only Ferré is to blame, who had earlier been presented as very young, Blanquist, and, together with police chef Rigault, “assez autoritaires”.[229] The perpetrator is thus marginalised, because “Beaucoup le condamnent et le regretteront amèrement.”[230] The Commune on the whole is not to be blamed for the actions of an individual. In their condemnation and regret, the Commune shows once more that they have the moral high ground.

As a historian is expected to do, Bantigny then puts the event into its chronological context. The executions of Darboy and five others happened on the same day as Blanqui’s arrival in another prison (where he was “en quelque sorte enterré vivant”), and “le carnage versaillais a commencé trois jours plus tôt : déjà des centaines et des centaines de vies fauchées.”[231] Numerically, the Versaillais exceed the *Communard.e.s*, and in addition to that, they started it, a combination of the reaction- and underdog-strategies. The second round of executions of hostages happened two days later at Rue Haxo, and "entre-temps, il y a eu tellement d'autres morts", implying a tit-for-tat legitimation.[232]

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[226] Bantigny, p.252.

[227] See United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, “War Crimes” https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/war-crimes.shtml, accessed 15 May 2022.

[228] Bantigny, p.253.

[229] Bantigny, p.81.

[230] Bantigny, p.253.

[231] Bantigny, p.253.

Furthermore, Bantigny considers the aftermath of the executions, inserting a picture of the heavy dossier for the court case against those accused of the Rue Haxo executions. This demonstrates her authority as a historian, and it thus provides a step up to a more personal interpretation: "Et pourtant c'est comme s'il ne servait à rien : comme si les condamnés l'étaient d'avance."[233] She then backs this statement up by a verifiable claim: "il n'a en réalité aucune preuve tangible de leur participation",[234] and followed by an enumeration of the condemned, including personal details such as their occupation and their age ("beaucoup ont tout juste vingt ans"), creating sympathy. The letter ends with a criticism of a Versaillais song stating nobody grieves the death of Darboy: "comme si la mort d'un homme pesait plus lourd que celle de milliers d'autres."[235] In other words, one person is not more grievable than another, and especially not more than thousands of others.[236]

Besides sandwiching the execution of the hostages between deaths of *Communard.e.s*, Bantigny also shows the mistreatment of the Parisians at the hands of the Catholic Church in an implied reaction- and symbol-argumentation. Scattered throughout the book, but before the letter to Blanqui, are various examples of the Church displaying unethical behaviour. They are shown to profit from poor people, the pope is cited congratulating "grand ordonnancier du massacre" Thiers for "son beau travail contre l'Internationale et la Commune" (the "beau travail" being the massacre), and Bantigny describes a "bon chrétien" whose only wish is that "la Commune soit écrasée" and writes at the end of the *Semaine Sanglante* that "Il reste bien des infâmes à punir".[237] All of these serve to demonstrate that the Church as an institution does not care about ordinary Parisians and even teaches people to hate the *petit peuple*. Not only is this an example of constructing an Other, it also makes the head of this Church an emblem for all that is wrong with it, and his execution a reaction against the slower violence (of which the slowness is emphasised by the scattering of examples through the letters) committed by the Church (so a combination of othering-, symbol-, and reaction-strategies).

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[232] Bantigny, p.253.

[233] Bantigny, p.254.

[234] Bantigny, p.254.

[235] Bantigny, p.257.

[236] This argumentation is also used in the context of the deaths of army generals Lecomte and Clément-Thomas.

[237] Bantigny, p.102; p.116.

Hotspot: *Semaine Sanglante*

The Commune is presented as fighting an enemy that does not care about the lives of their opponents: the cruelty of the Versaillais is repeatedly demonstrated by addressees being killed without trial, judged in a trial without evidence, or witnessing the murder of women, children and elderly. In contrast, the deaths of Versaillais are not discussed at all. Again, this omission is understandable in the epistolary genre: letters, especially personal ones, are often written out of sympathy with the addressee, and do not commonly confront someone with their crimes.[238] Nevertheless, there are some ways in which the violence inflicted by *Communard.e.s* is justified in the text.

The main argument is that of self-defence. The Commune is said not to want war and also demonstrated as such, as the letters hardly deal with military strategies and rather with Communard ideas and plans. The Versaillais then attack, and the Commune has no other choice than to respond : "Vous ne voulez pas verser le sang mais Versailles se charge de faire couler le vôtre."[239] The repeated demonstrations of Versaillais cruelty and the abovementioned refusal to stop executing prisoners make it hard to sympathise with their cause, especially because they started it by trying to take away the cannons: "[le peuple] se sent attaqué par l'armée qui vient lui prendre toutes ses défenses" (othering- and reaction-strategies).[240] Additionally, the Commune is shown to fight for a higher purpose (omelet- and higher-justice-strategies), in a reflection on the use of the word "extreme":

> Pour ma part, je n'aime pas cette expression qu'il nous arrive pourtant de reprendre, l'« extrème gauche ». Je n'ai jamais compris ce qu'il y avait d'extrême à défendre, comme vous, la dignité, la justice et l'égalité. L'épithète est bien pratique pour qui voudrait les dénigrer, comme idéaux utopiques, au mieux, ou menant au crime, au pire. Curieusement, les mêmes ne disent jamais « extrême » pour les ravages de la colonisation, les millions de morts de leur guerre mondiale dont ils prônaient l'Union sacré, toute l'inhumanité des déstructions et le désastre frappant le vivant.[241]

This fragment is clearly marked as an opinion ("pour ma part") and works through comparing the "extremity" of the Left with the policies that have been enacted by the Right. The Left is presented as defending dignity, justice, and equality, "comme vous" (i.e., the Commune), and a continuation is implied between the *Communard.e.s* and the current left. Bantigny posits that these are not extreme goals and that it is strange ("curieusement") that the deadly and destructive policies by the Versaillais are not considered "extreme" (othering-strategy). This gives the Commune once more the moral high ground and extends their sense of "self": in the self of the Commune, these values are included, and an attack on them is an attack on the Commune – next to the actual massacre of the *Communard.e.s*, of course. But these values have been disrespected for decades if not centuries, as Bantigny shows in her descriptions of the living conditions of the Parisian poor.

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[238] Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-collections* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), p.11.
[239] Bantigny, p.223.
[240] Bantigny, p.60.
[241] Bantigny, p.195.

Conclusion

In short, in *La Commune au présent*, the Versaillais started the violence, were more deadly (numerical) and more cruel, forcing an unwilling Commune to defend themselves and their values (higher goal): reaction-, underdog-, othering-, omelet-, and higher justice-strategies. Any instances of Communard violence, like the execution of the hostages and the taking down of the Vendôme column, are singular (one-off-strategy) and sandwiched in between instances of Versaillais violence. This would of course not have been possible had the Versaillais not constantly been engaging in extreme violence, which was a deliberate policy of the government headed by Thiers. Furthermore, the consequences of the actions of the Versaillais and the *Communard.e.s* are presented, although not wholly equally. The deaths of Versaillais caused by Communard fighting are not a part of the narrative, and while the death of a soldier is not the same as the death of a civilian, they are still victims of the conflict.[242] On the whole, though, many more *Communard.e.s* lost their lives. The loss of life is throughout the book presented as worse than the loss of property, all the more because the buildings and monuments were rebuilt. Even the hostages who were killed by the Commune are shown as having in fact died because Thiers' government refused to save them multiple times (othering- and forced-hand-strategies).

Together, the hotspots contribute to the idea that the *Communard.e.s* were engaging in violence solely to defend themselves, not to attack others. Violence is not the most important theme of the book. It is not analysed extensively and mostly serves to distinguish between the *Communard.e.s* and the Versaillais Other. Partly enabled by the epistolary genre, more attention is given to the actions of the *Communard.e.s*, their hopes, dreams, and lives, whether they were ordinary or extraordinary. Bantigny prefers to show the Commune as what they were

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[242] Many "ordinary" histories of the Commune also do not include details on the losses of the French army.

(for her, people trying to improve their lives and the world) rather than what they were not. Because the letters are written a hundred and fifty years after the Commune, the filling in of the time that passed in between seems natural, which allows Bantigny to incorporate the afterlives of the Commune and the *Communard.e.s* and demonstrate how they still "haunt" the present. The form and the content reinforce each other: this book could not have been written in another genre, or in another year, for that matter: the COVID-pandemic is not only present in that it is mentioned in the letter to Nathalie Le Mel, but the practice of writing letters also made a comeback when people could not meet in person due to lockdowns and were sick of being in online meetings every day.[243] This common experience makes the reader feel more connected to Bantigny and in extension the recipients of her letters. By starting explicitly in the present (of 2021), rather than in the 19th century, the connections between the present and the past immediately take the spotlight. In this way, the ideals of the *Communard.e.s* (republicanism, women's emancipation, secularisation, workers' rights, a democratic society in which everyone is cared for, opposition to authoritarianism, militarism, and monarchy) that align with the ideals of many French people today are highlighted. Unlike in Meyssan's documentary, where injustice binds the people of the past and the present, in *La Commune au présent*, positive connections are made.

It is important to note that at no point does Bantigny pass off her own opinion as historical fact. While the style may be that of an epistolary novel, this serves more as a framing device and it allows Bantigny to clearly flag her own opinions, which histories directed towards a general public often neglect. Like in every text, the author's opinions and values trickle down into the construction of the book, and in this case that leads to a text that is largely sympathetic of the *Communard.e.s*, yet also criticises them. Conventions of historiography demand contextualisation, which is generously provided, and citing one's sources, which Bantigny does. The added images and footnotes not only serve to instil a sense of authority, they also actually provide it by enabling verification of the claims made in the text. *La Commune au présent* thus works with the historiographical and epistolary genres and legitimates Communard violence within the frameworks that they impose, whilst also showing the *Communard.e.s* as more than what was done to them. The focalisation allows Bantigny to let the people she writes to determine what she writes, rather than the well-known story of the Commune.

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[243] Tove Danovich, "Snail Mail Is Getting People Through This Time" *New York Times*, 24 June 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/24/style/mail-letters-coronavirus.html, accessed on 1 July 2022.

V: Conclusion: Comparison and Reflection

The question asked in this research project was "How do recent narratives about the Commune use the affordances of medium and genre to present Communard violence?". Looking at the four case studies, it becomes clear that recent publications all predominantly rely on the invocation of self-defence and often use the same narrative techniques to communicate this argument, although the specifics vary per hotspot as well as per genre/medium. Most striking is that all of the cases cover all of the hotspots, even when the focalisation of the narrative would have allowed for an omission, such as in *Les damnés de la Commune*, where the hostage situation could have been left out by simply not having Victorine encounter the executioners. Omitting Communard violence could have made the project of portraying the Commune as an injustice easier, but this route was not chosen. Nearly all of the hypothesised strategies have been used in one or more case studies, except the expectation-strategy that stated that the victims knew what they were getting into. This absence is reflective of a wider societal trend that rejects victim-blaming – see for instance #MeToo or the French equivalent #BalanceTonPorc.[244]

Frequently, the structure of the narrative supports the explicit argument that is being made, and sometimes even replaces it. For instance, the reactive nature of an action is emphasised by placing that to which it reacts before it. In a context that is not related to violence, this is often simply the clearest way to demonstrate cause and effect: the light turned red, the traffic stopped. But when the action is a violent one, it also turns into an argument of self-defence: the man hit the woman, the woman hit the man. When the narrative then does not challenge the assumption it created, it will likely stick in the mind of the audience. The phenomenon that I have called "sandwiching" is a more complex example of this process. "Sandwiching" puts the "incriminating" event, such as the execution of the hostages, in between two scenes that incriminate the opponent and display the *Communard.e.s* as the victims. As a result, not only is the incriminating event perceived as an instance of self-defence, it is also cancelled out numerically (2 to 1), and the last part will ordinarily remain most firmly lodged in the mind of the audience.[245] What further complicates this phenomenon, however, is that historically there were relatively so few examples of Communard violence that it is difficult to say whether sandwiching is a deliberate narrative strategy or simply the consequence of the disproportionate massacring by the Versaillais. I therefore only speak about the effect, rather than about the intention. However, I do speak about observable patterns and their underlying logic. For instance, the explicit argument and narrative techniques do not coincide randomly: as said, the self-defence strategy is often paired with reaction and sandwiching. Similarly, the downplaying-strategy, marginalising-strategy and one-off-strategy are often paired with a compression of the narrative (that is, no extensive descriptions) and the symbol- and forced hand-strategies are paired with (earlier) othering strategies. For the rightful owner-strategy, the other potential owners are either othered, or almost completely omitted from the narrative.

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[244] Interesting in the juxtaposition of these two is that the English version keeps the narrative close to the victim who has suffered something *as well*, while the French version focusses on the perpetrator (the "porc") who needs to be punished.

[245] See Rigney on recency effect, *Historical Representation*, p.69.

While these occur across the genres and media that the case studies feature, there are also some notable differences. Although all cases cover the fall of the Vendôme column with similar explicit and implicit strategies, emphasising its symbolic value and what it will be replaced with (omelet-strategy), the more general coverage of fire and destruction differs between the primarily textual cases (Vautrin + Bantigny) and the more visual ones (Tardi + Meyssan). For the latter two it is possible to afford a "background" to the events, showing destruction while not discussing it, while the former two need to explicitly describe the destruction. As a result, the destruction plays a larger but more implicit role in the Tardi and Meyssan graphic cases. To counter the narrative that the *Communard.e.s* deliberately destroyed as much of Paris as possible,[246] Tardi and Meyssan have to show the *Communard.e.s* as victims of the shelling rather than destroyers of the city. Therefore, they both show families that are broken because of the bombs and barely mention arson, and then only in a reactive, self-defensive way: "dans l'espoir de ralentir l'avance versaillaise". Tardi briefly references the symbolic value of the buildings, but Bantigny and Vautrin do so more extensively, and they also spend more time examining the figure of the *pétroleuse*. Amélie la Gale is present in both the Vautrin and Tardi texts, but figures more prominently in the novel, and does not seem to be successful in arson in either. Bantigny, however, writes a letter to convicted *pétroleuse* Léontine Suetens, whom she rehabilitates by challenging the judgement. None of the focalised characters in the other cases are *pétroleuses*, but the epistolary form enables Bantigny to briefly cover this topic.

Whereas the fire and destruction hotspot is, simply put, characterised by attempts to portray the *Communard.e.s* as non-perpetrators, it is harder to do so regarding the hostages. As a consequence, this hotspot features most of the strategies. More than a reaction to and an attempt to ward off mass executions by the Versaillais (i.e. a self-defence argumentation), all cases emphasise how the archbishop was, as head of the Church in Paris, a symbol for the oppressive clergy and marginalise those who commit his eventual execution. The forced hand-strategy is also strongly present in this hotspot: by refusing to exchange the hostages for Auguste Blanqui, Thiers signed their death warrant – according to all but Meyssan, purely because he needed a martyr to justify the later massacre. By sandwiching the episode between examples of executions by the Versaillais (of which there were of course many, many more), the explicit argument is aided by the narration. A major difference between the cases, however, is the degree to which the hostages themselves take part in the narrative. In Vautrin and Tardi, one of the hostages, an invented character, plays a role in the plot surrounding the murder mystery, and as a consequence, the hostages are initially humanised by getting to speak, but when it turns out that this priest is a violent murderer, the hostages are dehumanised again, and their deaths are treated summarily (compression). The death of the clergy is thus framed as a higher form of justice. It may or may not have been legitimate to execute them in the historical Commune, but in the Commune of *Le Cri du peuple*, they are complicit in a murder and to kill them is a form of revenge. In both the Meyssan documentary and Bantigny's book, the hostages themselves do not speak at all, because the focalised characters do not interact with them: the focalisation aids the argumentation. At the same time, all of the cases make clear that the ordinary *Communard.e.s* were not involved in the killing, nor did they approve of it, thus marginalising the executioners. Of the three hotspots, this is the most difficult one to defend: the hostages were unarmed, their deaths did not accomplish anything, and some of them were clergy, who are generally considered more grievable than police officers and soldiers. Despite their extensive use of legitimising strategies, most of which also attempt to remove the perpetrator role from the Commune, none of the cases voice approval of the executions.

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[246] Bos, p.20.

Similarly unanimous are the cases in their condemnation of the massacre of the *Communard.e.s* during the *Semaine Sanglante*. Any instances of Communard violence against the Versaillais is framed as reactive and often literally called self-defence. The sandwiching is again quite easy and seemingly natural, as the Versaillais killed thousands, not only in battle but also immediately after in executions without trial. This numerical imbalance is mentioned in all cases except the Vautrin novel, but whereas the deaths of the *Communard.e.s* are usually told in at least some level of detail (age, gender, occupation, familial relationships), the deaths of the Versaillais soldiers are compressed into these numbers. Vautrin and to a greater extent Tardi do expand the deaths of the Versaillais, notably in the case of Arnaud Désetoiles, who becomes a symbol for the bourgeoisie, and the similarly symbolic bourgeois sniper, who is killed by Tarpagnan in reaction to his killing of a Communard and his attempt to shoot Tarpagnan as well. The deaths of these men mostly serve to flesh out the characters on the side of the Commune: it transfers to them qualities of bravery, honour, and solidarity, by contrasting them with opponents who possess none of these. Yet more often in all of the narratives, the bullets are only fired by the *Communard.e.s*, their impact is not included. The French soldiers are thus considered less grievable than the Parisian men, women and children.

In conclusion, do medium and genre matter for the portrayal of violence? On the argumentative side, they do not seem to make too much of a difference: all cases used roughly the same strategies, with differences in degree rather than in kind. Techniques such as reactive violence, mentioning numerical inequalities, and sandwiching can be and have been used in all the genres and media studied in this project. However, the exact implementation and the effect on the audience vary. A strategy like the symbolic is highly dependent on the audience's recognition of the symbol. In the more graphic cases, Tardi and Meyssan, the significance of the Vendôme column is only briefly mentioned: the spectacle of the grand pillar being torn down takes precedence over the precise connotations, that can be expanded on in a less action-focussed and more textual medium. Similarly, marginalisation of viewpoints is easier if the sentiment is expressed by a person who only appears once and does not have to be introduced in narration. For instance, in *Les damnés de la Commune*, some ideas are expressed only by unnamed voices, or in Tardi's *Le Cri du peuple*, unnamed characters that are only drawn once say something less easily defensible such as "Regarde, petit … C'est la belle maison à Badinguet qui brûle si joliment !" when the Palais Royal is on fire.[247] The consequence is that the effect the narratives have on the reader differs per medium and genre. The graphic novel of Tardi is the most accessible for its plot that does not only revolve around the Commune but foregrounds a murder mystery, the visual and action-focused story, and the presence of explanatory footnotes and a glossary explaining the language used by the characters. It is also the least explicit about the parallels with the present: these are only mentioned in the preface and epilogue by Vautrin. As such, it could function as a first taste of the Commune, offering pointers to the readers for further research by featuring historical characters alongside the fictional ones, and a final message that will be recognisable and memorable, Blanqui's "Ni Dieu! Ni Maître!". Vautrin's novel is quite similar, but at more than 600 pages and without any images or explanatory notes, it can be less appealing to readers, although the short chapters and cliffhangers of the feuilleton-form do make it more readable than most 600-page novels. However, readability is cannot be deduced from the cover. The intertextuality with Jules Vallès' *L'Insurgé* can work to make readers curious to read that novel as well, but it can also be off-putting. Like the Tardi text, the parallels with the present are mostly implicit, which makes Vautrin's novel appear less partisan to the uninformed reader. In stark contrast with this is the film by Meyssan, that immediately begins with an incendiary monologue and a burning building, and states that it is "en hommage aux révoltés de la Commune". *Les damnés de la Commune* will be less appealing to people who are less sympathetic towards the Commune. However, through its framing as a documentary, its appearing on ARTE, and the reminder at the end that the film is based on a true story, it can appeal to people who are simply watching television and do not know much about the Commune. The use of music, sound effects, and beautiful drawings make it a gripping experience to watch and can ease the viewer into accepting the thesis. Of these four cases, *La Commune au présent* is the least accessible, for it assumes basic knowledge of the Commune. However, when comparing it to other history books about the Commune, it is very accessible due to its epistolary form and the sparse use of jargon. It would be the logical follow-up to any of the other cases, giving the authority of a history book, the pleasure of a literary form, and the explicit political and moral messages about the current state of the world.

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[247] Tardi, p. 158. Badinguet = Napoleon III.

However, as said, Communard violence tends to play a minor role in all four cases. Each finds another aspect of the Commune more important: Vautrin shows an admirable Commune, Tardi displays the Commune as a general progressive revolution, Meyssan focusses on the injustice, and Bantigny is more interested the people and ideas of the Commune. The Communard violence thus has a slightly different function in each of the narratives. In Vautrin, the cruel and cowardly way in which the Versaillais use violence is contrasted with the courage and honour of the *Communard.e.s*, thus ameliorating their admirability. In Tardi, where Communard violence is most prominent, it serves to show how each revolution has people with different views in it, which is in turn influenced by their experiences in said revolution. The hostage hotspot shows that some approve of violence to others, others commit it, but also, many (honourable people) are against it; the fire and destruction hotspot shows the complexity of victimhood; and the *Semaine Sanglante* hotspot demonstrates how participation in a revolution works to enlarge the sense of self. Meyssan also employs the violence committed by the *Communard.e.s* to sketch out the differences with the Versaillais, emphasising the injustice of their extreme use of violence. In each case of violence, he demonstrates, the *Communard.e.s* eventually suffer the most. Lastly, Bantigny spends the least words on violence. It features only in a handful of letters, mostly working to show that the *Communard.e.s* did not choose violence out of their own volition, but purely in response to Versaillais attacks. As such, the topic of violence in *La Commune au présent* seems to function mainly to show why the ideas and dreams of the *Communard.e.s* did not come to full fruition: the French government forced them in a certain position, out of which they could not come without resorting to violence. As such, for Bantigny, the ideals of the Commune (equality, democracy, solidarity) are more important than their actions.

To convince the audience of these various versions of the Commune, medium and genre do play a minor role. All four of the cases make sure to establish their authority from the beginning, using the various affordances that are readily available to them, such as captions in a graphic novel, a male voiceover in a documentary, and footnotes and archival material in a history book. In this way, the audience is more likely to accept the version of the Commune that they are presented with by the author. Then, again, the affordances aid to establish a certain version. The admirability of the Commune is supported by the drawn-out establishment of characters as done in a novel, while the general aesthetics of a popular revolution are easily transmitted in a graphic novel. An animated documentary can use sound and imagery for dramatic effects, personally affecting the viewer who is made to feel the injustice of the situatiom. An epistolary history book, finally, is convincing by its rigour and affective by the personal nature of the letters, which furthermore enable the author to put people and ideas before events and places.

To sum up, the affordances of the different media and genres allow to present similar information in slightly different ways, leading to rather different impressions in the audience. Central in all of the cases is the argument of self-defence and it is worth it to dive a bit deeper into that before zooming out to place this project in a larger framework. The self-defence in these cases is a defence of the Communard self against a double attack. Most direct is the immediate military and physical threat that the Versaillais government poses by attempting to take control of the city in a violent manner, not only killing during the battles, but also executing prisoners of war *en masse* and without trial. The consequence, the cases demonstrate, is that for a *Communard.e*, death seemed certain; if not in battle, then they would be killed directly after if the Versaillais won. They thus defended themselves against imminent death and destruction. Not only did they defend their own body, but also those of others: for instance, Marbuche killing a soldier who is about to shoot an unarmed Tarpagnan in *Le Cri du peuple*.

The second sense is a defence of the self against the way the government in Versailles wanted society to function: capitalistic, hierarchical, catholic, imperialistic, perhaps even once again as a monarchy, in a continuation of earlier decades and centuries. For the *Communard.e.s*, the prospect of a return to this system that oppressed and exploited them was an attack on their newfound freedom. They did not want to return to a society in which their time, body, mind and spirit were shackled. In other words, they also tried to defend their selves in a more metaphysical sense than the purely bodily one.

In the physical sense, their self-defence failed: many *Communard.e.s* were killed, imprisoned, or exiled. But in the metaphysical sense, they did not fully fail: their ideas still live on, as my case studies show: the ideas of the Commune are kept alive by writers who are willing to "ramasser la torche jamais éteinte" and write about the self-defence of the *Communard.e.s*.[248] So what does it mean to write about self-defence? First of all, it can be a way to legitimate one's own self-defence: logically, if A:B, and A is self-defence, then B must also be self-defence. But I would argue that it is also an attempt to participate in the defensive act, to join the barricade and add oneself to the Self that is defended. By invoking self-defence for the *Communard.e.s,* and defending the Commune, one can join the Communard Self. The Commune is not dead, so she can still be joined and defended. The Self is expanded over time and potentially, place, although that is not the case in these four texts. In consequence, the Other against whom this Self is defending itself, also becomes one's own Other. In the case of the Commune, this Other is not only Thiers and his government and army, but also his ideology. Yet these can no longer be beaten with arms, only with ideas. By creating a novel, a documentary, a graphic novel or a history book, the authors are defending their chosen Communard Self; and in sharing this *autodéfense* with the world through mediatising it, they are convincing and collecting allies. For some, the immersive animated documentary will be most affective (and effective), for others, standing next to a historian and reading her correspondence will be more convincing; some may want the individuality of a novel while others prefer the common watching experience of a televised film. What matters most for the defence of the Commune is that the story is told in many different ways, to appeal to as many as possible: only in this way can awareness and recognition be spread. Writing self-defence is thus not a disinterested act: whether intentional or not, it forces one to confront their own identity and their own self, and by publishing this, it impacts the identity-formation and -alteration of the audience as well. If readers accept the self-defence legitimisation, they can essentially accept the Communard Self as related to their own Self.

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[248] Vautrin, "Preface" in Tardi, p.3.

However, this does bring up the question as to whether the Commune always is on the defensive. Vautrin, Tardi and Meyssan do seem to follow this idea: as the Commune was ultimately defeated, it can no longer be on the offensive – ergo, it needs to be defended. Yet Bantigny's focus on the positive side of the Commune – i.e. the people and their ideas and goals rather than what happened to them – appears to be more on the offensive. Furthermore, she assumes that the Commune is "haunting" the present, which is an offensive act. At the same time, Bantigny does rely on ideas of self-defence, as the other three. For the time being, then, it seems that the Commune is still considered in need of defending, although positive engagement with it is increasing.[249]

To end this discussion on self-defence, let us return to Butler's idea that the definition of violence "is subject to instrumental definitions that serve political interests and sometimes state violence itself", which seems very much applicable to the Commune.[250] The labelling of the *Communard.e.s* as violent has served the ruling classes well. However, as these case studies demonstrate, the most prominent new works on the Commune are redefining "violence". Most cases barely use the word and then only to describe the Versaillais. Bantigny states it most explicitly: "La violence n'est pas seulement ni d'abord du côté des peuples qui se soulèvent : elle est dans la répression qui s'abat pour les faire taire."[251] The violence is thus literally shifted to the other side: violence is not in people standing up, it is in repressing their voices, as the state did in 1871. However, the fact that this discourse can exist (and go largely unchallenged) does not mean that it is dominant. Although the mayor of Paris attended multiple events that commemorated the Commune in 2021, the man who now has Thiers' function, president Macron, did not publicly acknowledge the existence of the Commune. There thus seems to a disconnect between the cultural and academic discourse, ordinary people's ideas about the Commune, and the actions of those in power. This disconnect could be researched further: if all cultural products argue that the *Semaine Sanglante* was an unacceptable massacre, what needs to happen to align the minds and actions of those who hold the power?

That brings us to the question of "why bother?". The Commune happened more than 150 years ago, and everyone involved with it is now dead. Yet all of the cases attempt to make the Commune relevant in 2021, creating their own version of the Commune. How do they do so? First of all, together they work to give a story of the Commune that is fitting for the early

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[249] See also for instance Kristin Ross' analysis of the Commune's political imaginary and Ann Rigney's analysis of how the Commune was used in the *Nuit Debout*.

[250] Butler, p.30.

[251] Bantigny, p.173.

21st century. The Commune is presented as a significant historical event in both French and international history, that has intentionally been written out of many history books. It needs to be reclaimed from these shadows in order to be used as a positive example and an inspiration for current struggles. These struggles resemble the problems that the *Communard.e.s* were facing, and are often a difference in degree rather than in kind: huge and increasing inequality between social classes that leads to many having trouble to find adequate and affordable food and housing while others have too much, a widespread and simmering distrust of the national government, outbursts of civil unrest that are quickly and sometimes violently suppressed.[252] The cases demonstrate that potential solutions may be lying latent in the Commune's ideas: radical equality and democracy, reduction of working hours, a government that provides food and housing to those in need, solidarity and *fraternité*, emancipation of women and marginalised groups, progressive education methods, and opposition to oppressive systems of authoritarianism, militarism, clericalism, and capitalism.

In the works examined here, these parallels, struggles and ideas figure prominently, both in terms of the narratives showing them in action (for instance, showing people working together, helping one another, but also how tired, hungry, and afraid they are) and in the narrators telling them explicitly, using words such as "oppression", "exploitation", "misère" and also "solidarité", "émancipation", "égalité". In *Le Cri du peuple*, even bourgeois characters such as Mespluchet and Grondin explicitly acknowledge the inequality of society. Compared to "inequality", the violence of the *Communard.e.s* is a minor topic.

But it is still acknowledged and legitimised – why? Potentially to be truthful to history, and/or to be ahead of criticisms that accuse the author of not being truthful to history. Another reason could be to show that the *Semaine Sanglante* was incredibly disproportionate to what the *Communard.e.s* had done: these small deeds, done unwillingly and understandably, should not have met such bloodshed. It may also be that the authors show violence as a lesson: learn from the past, avoid this in future struggles.

For these struggles, as said, have their parallels today. That is why for the authors of these cases, this particular episode from the past resonates with the present. To bring out that resonance, the authors take out the past from the suppression and bring it to life. All authors mention that they feel a duty to give a voice to the *Communard.e.s*, to "faire revivre la Commune".[253] The Commune "haunts", as Bantigny puts it, not only because the dead have never received justice (the perpetrators were never punished), but also because the Commune still has something to say. By reviving the *Communard.e.s,* as all four cases do, the audience can sympathise with them and their cause: they become more grievable and relatable, particularly when narrativised as in these cases. Therefore, the *Communard.e.s* have to be humanised: the audience learns about their names, their faces, their hopes, their fears, their dreams, but also, importantly, their flaws: perfection is not relatable. Amélie la Gale wants to commit arson, grieving her partner; a man who just lost his brother to the Versaillais death squads volunteers to kill the hostages: these are all flaws, but the audience understands them, because of how the narrative has built them up. Omitting the violence would actually dehumanise the *Communard.e.s* that the authors try to honour.

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[252] The top 10% of French citizens hold approximately 60% of the wealth, while the bottom 50% hold 5% ("France" in *World Inequality Database*, https://wid.world/country/france/). About 4 million people are poorly housed (Iona Lefebvre, "Understanding French Housing Policy (and its Challenges)" *Institut Montaigne*, 15 December 2021, https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/understanding-french-housing-policy-and-its-challenges) and homelessness has doubled between 2020 and 2021 ("Number of people without a home in France from 2017 to 2021", *Statista*, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1085952/number-homeless-france/.) The popularity of anti-establishment parties such as the Front National, Reconquête, and La France insoumise indicates discontent, as do movements such as the *gilets jaunes* and anti-vax and anti-pass sanitaire groups.

Reviving the *Communard.e.s* is thus not only a deed of restitutive recognition, but also one to make the Self of the Commune vivid and accessible. Celebrating the life of the Commune then becomes not only a coping strategy to redeem the violence by making it meaningful, but also an active move to keep the spirit alive, to defend the Communard Self. Commemorating the Commune with grief and sadness would be to agree that it is wholly over, that it is dead and finished. But commemorating the Commune in a festive manner is a way to honour the dead, yet also continue their project. The torch is taken over, not extinguished. If the Commune is alive, she can be defended, and the audience can feel connected to and even part of the Self. They create their own identity alongside the characters of the stories: they too want "une vie meilleure". And if they were to go out and fight for this, they would be defending themselves, and the Commune. Ultimately, then, all the cases contribute in their own particular way to the long-lasting project of keeping the Commune alive and relevant for new generations.

Via the combination of the cultural memory perspective and the method of narratology, I have been able to analyse these cases in depth on their own, in comparison to each other, and in their historical context. For this, I was greatly aided by the strategies of legitimisation based on my theoretical framework. By using violence that is uncomfortable for the authors as a key, I could unlock the broader effect of the stories. Writing about self-defence turns out to be more than simply writing about a topic: it is in itself an act of defence of the enlarged Self. To come to this conclusion, the framework of cultural memory studies, theories on violence and narratology was fundamental. I think, however, that the self-defensive act of writing does not only play a role in the case of the Paris Commune: other narratives featuring self-defence would need to be studied to see whether this hypothesis is correct. For the field of Commune Studies, the critical perspective provided in this thesis is also valuable, for it contributes to a more complete picture of the subject at hand. With some exceptions, I think that many who dedicate their time and energy to the Commune come to be fond of it – like Bantigny, they form connections to the *Communard.e.s*. As Commune scholars, it is thus important to remain as aware as possible of the full range of Communard actions, not only those that suit what one hopes the Commune was like.

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[253] More on this idea of the aliveness of the Commune can be found in Rigney forthcoming.

For ultimately, my research project has shown that there are many possible ways to deal with stones that do not fit the story that one is constructing. The intellectually honest way is to not conceal the uncomfortable parts, but deal with them. However, due to the constraints of a narrative, it is impossible to present the information in a way that is completely unbiased. A heavy topic such as historical instances of violence compounds the difficulty: as the past and present are in a dynamic relationship, altering one can also alter the other. Through cultural memory, the Commune still influences the present in France and elsewhere in the world. Changing its story thus holds the potential to change the world to some degree: whether we should strive to be more like the *Communard.e.s*, as especially Vautrin implies, whether we should use their example, as Tardi implies, whether we should also stand up against injustice, as Meyssan implies, or whether we should consider them and others primarily as people, as Bantigny implies; all these ideas could change the way in which one approaches and interacts with the world. My thesis has demonstrated that there are multiple ways to deal with stones that do not fit the story one wants to build, and that none of them are inherently superior to others. The only thing one should not do is attempt to sweep them under a rug: that will only lead to questions about what is hidden under that bump in the carpet.

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